

Series 1: Living in Christ Going Deeper (Participant Resources)

Focus: Living in Christ **Key Takeaway:** I am loved. I belong.

Week 1: United in Baptism

For Further Reflection

- **Luther's Small Catechism Connection:** In the section on Baptism, Luther asks: *What does such baptizing with water indicate?* He answers: "It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever."
 - *Reflection:* Baptism isn't just a one-time event from your past; it is a daily reality. Every morning, you can remember that you belong to Christ.
- **Other Scripture to Read:** Galatians 3:27, Titus 3:5.
- **Thought for the Week:** We often feel we need to "rededicate" ourselves to God to really belong. But the truth is, **God rededicated Himself to you** in your Baptism. Your belonging is based on His promise, not your intensity of feeling.

Week 2: Christ in Me

For Further Reflection

- **Luther's Small Catechism Connection:** In the explanation of the *Creed (Second Article)*, Luther writes that Christ redeemed us "not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood... **that I may be His own** and live under Him in His kingdom."
 - *Reflection:* We don't just copy Jesus; we are possessed by Him. He lives in us so that we truly belong to Him.
- **Other Scripture to Read:** Colossians 1:27, John 14:23.
- **Thought for the Week:** It is easy to turn "Christ in Me" into a burden (e.g., "I need to act perfect because Jesus is in me"). Try to see it as a comfort: "Because Jesus is in me, I have a strength that isn't my own, even when I feel weak."

Week 3: The Vine and the Branches

For Further Reflection

- **Luther's Small Catechism Connection:** In the *Lord's Prayer (Third Petition)*, we pray "Thy will be done." Luther explains this happens when God "strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die."
 - *Reflection:* "Abiding" in the vine is exactly what we pray for here. We don't hold onto the Vine by our own strength; the Vine holds onto us through the Word.
- **Other Scripture to Read:** Psalm 1:3, Jeremiah 17:7-8.
- **Thought for the Week:** The "fruit" in John 15 isn't just big accomplishments; it is often the quiet "Fruit of the Spirit" (love, patience, peace). Abiding in the Word *will* produce fruit, even if it grows slowly like an oak tree.

Week 4: Free from Guilt

For Further Reflection

- **Luther's Small Catechism Connection:** In the section on *Confession*, we are taught to ask: "Do you believe that my forgiveness is God's forgiveness?" When we say Yes, the Confessor says, "As you believe, so let it be done to you."
 - *Reflection:* When the Bible says "No Condemnation," it means it. God's forgiveness is as real and certain as if Jesus stood in your living room and said it to your face.
- **Other Scripture to Read:** Psalm 103:12, 1 John 1:9.
- **Thought for the Week:** Sometimes we hold onto guilt because it makes us feel like "serious" Christians. But clinging to guilt when God has promised forgiveness is actually a refusal to believe Him. Real faith accepts the freedom to belong to Him fully.

Week 5: Free from Fear

For Further Reflection

- **Luther's Small Catechism Connection:** In the *Creed (First Article)*, Luther writes that God "defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy."
 - *Reflection:* We don't need to fear death or life because the Creator is also our Defender.
- **Other Scripture to Read:** 2 Timothy 1:7, Psalm 27:1.
- **Thought for the Week:** Fear is a natural human emotion, but it doesn't have to rule us. Because of Easter, the worst thing that can happen to us (death) has been turned into the best thing (entrance to heaven).

Week 6: Freedom to Love

For Further Reflection

- **Luther's Small Catechism Connection:** The *Table of Duties* sums up our life in this rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

- *Reflection:* Our freedom in Christ is the fuel for our love. We are not free to sin; we are free to serve.
- **Other Scripture to Read:** 1 Peter 2:16, 1 John 4:19.
- **Thought for the Week:** We don't serve our neighbor to get God to love us (He already does!). We serve our neighbor because God's love is spilling over in us.

Series 2: Serving with Joy Going Deeper (Participant Resources)

Focus: Serving with Joy **Key Takeaway:** I will serve. My daily tasks are to glorify God.

Week 1: Unity and Encouragement

For Further Reflection

- **Luther's Small Catechism Connection:** In the **Introduction to the Lord's Prayer**, we say "Our Father." Luther explains this means God wants us to believe we are His true children and ask Him confidently.
 - *Reflection:* Because we share one Father, we are truly brothers and sisters. Unity isn't just about getting along; it's about family resemblance. When we fight, we forget who our Father is.
- **Other Scripture to Read:** Ephesians 4:1-6 (One Lord, one faith, one baptism).
- **Thought for the Week:** It is impossible to serve the world effectively if we are tearing each other down in the church. Unity is the launchpad for mission.

Week 2: The Count

For Further Reflection

- **Luther's Small Catechism Connection:** The **Fifth Commandment** says, "You shall not murder." Luther explains this means we should "help and support [our neighbor] in every physical need."
 - *Reflection:* "Counting others significant" is the positive side of this commandment. We don't just avoid hurting people; we actively look for ways to lift them up and support their needs above our own comfort.
- **Other Scripture to Read:** Romans 12:10 (Outdo one another in showing honor).
- **Thought for the Week:** Service is a math problem. The world says *You = #1*. The Gospel says *Neighbor = Significant*. How can you change the math in one relationship today?

Week 3: The Descent

For Further Reflection

- **Luther's Small Catechism Connection:** In the **Second Article of the Creed**, we confess that Jesus "was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried."
 - *Reflection:* This is the "Descent." God didn't stay comfortably in heaven; He came down into the messy, painful reality of human life to serve us.

- **Other Scripture to Read:** 2 Corinthians 8:9 (Though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor).
- **Thought for the Week:** We often think "moving up" in the world brings joy. But Jesus found joy in "moving down" to serve. Is there a task you feel is "beneath you" that you can reclaim as a way to be like Jesus this week?

Week 4: The Exaltation

For Further Reflection

- **Luther's Small Catechism Connection:** The **Second Article** continues: "The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God."
 - *Reflection:* The story didn't end in the grave. Because Jesus humbled Himself, the Father exalted Him.
- **Other Scripture to Read:** 1 Peter 5:6 (Humble yourselves... that at the proper time he may exalt you).
- **Thought for the Week:** You can serve in the "darkness" (unnoticed, unthanked) today because you know the end of the story. Your service will be honored by God, even if your boss or family ignores it.

Week 5: Joy in the Home

For Further Reflection

- **Luther's Small Catechism Connection:** In the **Table of Duties**, Luther lists specific Bible verses for "Husbands," "Wives," "Parents," and "Children." He doesn't invent new rules; he points us back to our stations in life.
 - *Reflection:* You don't need to leave your house to find holy work. The most "spiritual" thing you might do today is change a diaper or listen patiently to your spouse.
- **Other Scripture to Read:** Ephesians 5:21-6:4 (The Household Codes).
- **Thought for the Week:** Caring for your family is a way to **glorify God**. When you love the people under your roof, you are doing the work God gave you.

Week 6: Joy in the Workplace

For Further Reflection

- **Luther's Small Catechism Connection:** The **Fourth Commandment** ("Honor your father and your mother") teaches us to honor all authority figures. In the *Large Catechism*, Luther explains this extends to masters and civil rulers.
 - *Reflection:* Your boss or teacher is an authority placed there by God to keep order. By serving them with integrity, you are actually honoring God.

- **Other Scripture to Read:** 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 (Work with your hands... walk properly before outsiders).
- **Thought for the Week:** Your work is "God's Mask." He is feeding, healing, helping, or organizing the world *through* your hands. You are His coworker today.

Week 7: Joy in the Church

For Further Reflection

- **Luther's Small Catechism Connection:** The **Third Article of the Creed** says the Holy Spirit "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."
 - *Reflection:* The Church isn't a club we formed; it's a body the Spirit gathered. Your specific gifts are part of how the Spirit keeps the body functioning.
- **Other Scripture to Read:** Romans 12:3-8 (Gifts of grace).
- **Thought for the Week:** Joy comes from staying in your lane. You don't need to have *every* gift; you just need to use *your* gift to build up the person next to you.

Week 8: Joy in Society (The Outsider)

For Further Reflection

- **Luther's Small Catechism Connection:** The **Seventh Commandment** ("You shall not steal") is explained by Luther as meaning we should "help [our neighbor] to improve and protect his possessions and income."
 - *Reflection:* We serve the poor and the outsider by actively helping them protect what is theirs and improve their lives. We treat them with the dignity of someone created by God.
- **Other Scripture to Read:** Proverbs 22:2 (The rich and the poor meet together; the Lord is the Maker of them all).
- **Thought for the Week:** True service is blind to status. Watch yourself this week—do you treat the CEO differently than the cashier? Try to see both as people you are called to serve.

Week 9: When Joy Fades (Burnout)

For Further Reflection

- **Luther's Small Catechism Connection:** In **Baptism (Fourth Part)**, Luther says the Old Adam must be "drowned and die" daily, and a new man arise.
 - *Reflection:* Burnout often comes from trying to carry yesterday's burdens. The remedy isn't just "working harder"; it is returning to your Baptism, letting the Old Adam drown, and starting fresh with Christ's forgiveness.
- **Other Scripture to Read:** Matthew 11:28-30 (Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden).

- **Thought for the Week:** You can only pour out (service) if you are being filled up (Gospel). If you are empty, stop and rest in God's Word.