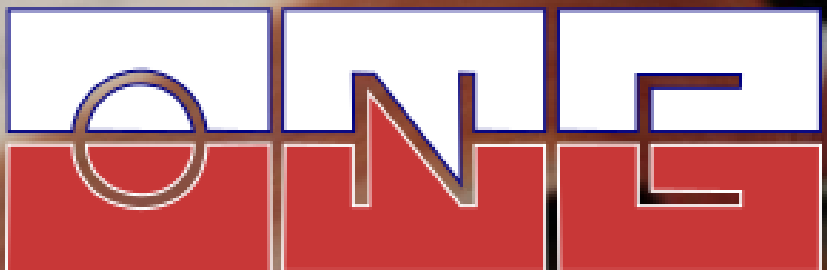


**“WE MUST MAKE A STUDY
OF [GOD] IF WE WANT TO
BECOME LIKE HIM.”
— JEN WILKIN**

INSIDE:

**+ Our writers' favorite
Bible studies**



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Ellis County Ministerial Alliance

ONE is the official publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance (ECMA) which guides its mission, content, and theme. The ECMA encourage submissions from ECMA congregations. Photographs, stories, testimonies, and other submissions should be directed toward your church leaders or sent via email to

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Editor's Note:

This month we asked our writers what the best Bible study was they have participated in.

The Sound of Silence

Written by:

Anna Towns

At Trinity Lutheran Church, we decided to mix up our regular Sunday School set-up. We now call our Bible Study time at Trinity "Faith and Fun." We are divided by ages: potty trained to 2nd grade is called "Spark!"; 3rd-5th grade, "Shine!"; middle and high school, "Fired Up!"; college on up, "Living in the Light!".

I have been privileged enough to lead the "Living in the Light!" group, and we have been practicing Lectio Divina every Sunday at 9:30 for over a year now. Lectio Divina is a spiritual practice comprised of four parts: read, meditate, pray, and contemplate. These are sometimes called the four Rs and are interpreted

as reading, reflecting, responding, and resting. Basically, you read a phrase through four times, focusing on something different each time through.

I was first introduced to this concept via a podcast called "Harry Potter and the Sacred Text" -shoutout to Rev. Shay Craig for bringing this to an "Us 4 U" meeting. Visit www.harrypottersacredtext.com to read how this got started or to listen to the podcast. This highlights how you can find God's message for you in unexpected places and helped me understand how to use Lectio Divina.

Each week I select what text we will use. Usually, it is a verse or two from that week's Gospel reading or one of the other weekly

lessons, but we have also done a line or two from a hymn. We take turns reading through the phrase. As a group, we discuss what stands out, how a passage might have meaning for our particular lives, what God is calling us to do and how we might respond to God. Finally, remaining in silent contemplation for one, whole, long, excruciating minute-can you tell I kind of hate silence?

A minute of silence probably does not sound too bad to you, but I am "quiet-averse". I like to have music on when I'm writing, NPR plays in the background while I work, I have a sound machine lull me to sleep, and I even listen to podcasts and audiobooks while I shower and get ready for the day.

The Sound of Silence (Continued)

That seemingly brief sixty seconds is very difficult for me, but it is getting better.

As the leader, I like to close our time with a brief prayer. I use that time of silence to recall what we touched on as we talked and to review the important takeaways from the passage. This helps me stay focused during the silence and not mentally track my to-do list for the day, etc. It is a nice way to focus in on the time we have spent together and go out to the rest of my week.

At first, you may think that it would be hard to fill an hour or so with

conversation about just a sentence or two, but most weeks we have good dialogue, debate, and discussion. We share stories from our lives as individuals and as a church family. We reminisce about experiences in Sunday School as children or times when our faith led us through difficulties. Sometimes it takes more prompting and prodding, but even on weeks when we get off topic and talk about a tangent for 20 minutes, we are in fellowship together. We are spending time focusing on our faith and having some fun with our fellow believers.

The best part is that we do not need a special spiritual retreat, an expensive series with flashy videos, or even a trained Pastor to lead "Faith and Fun.". We make our own fun and grow our faith by being in community with one another, by focusing on the word of God, and by looking for and listening to God who calls us every day—if we can be quiet long enough to hear it.



Anna Towns serves in many capacities as a lifelong member of Trinity Lutheran Church, ELCA, in Hays.

Community Study of Spiritual Disciplines

Written by:

Rev. Cana Moore

For my undergraduate degree, I went to a Christian school in Arkansas. I was far from my parents, but my grandparents lived nearby, as well as a great-aunt who lived just across the campus from me. It is during this time in my life that I went to what is likely

my most memorable bible study.

My freshman year, I had a teacher for my Bible course that I really liked learning from. He left the school to finish his doctorate, but returned my senior year to teach again. During the fall semester, he taught a Wednesday night Bible study at a church in town. It was not the church I

attended, but I knew that there wouldn't be an issue with me visiting every week for this study.

During this study, we met in a big fellowship hall (not always conducive for a bible study), and we had rows of chairs facing in a rectangle forward, slightly curved. It was an echoey room, and the chairs were just folding chairs, not

Community Study of Spiritual Disciplines (Continued)

overly comfortable. The setting was certainly not what made the study. What distinguishes this study in my mind is the content, the community in the study, and the way that my professor brought the material out and pushed us to learn from it.

We covered Spiritual Disciplines, and I have carried a lot of this class with me since that time. Every week we would begin in the text of the scripture, to see what some of the biblical examples were, before discussing what Early Church leaders or more modern theologians had to say about that given discipline. We would also have a time of discussion, where we would posit important elements that we thought were relevant.

The class had a wide mix of people in it including grayheads, middle-aged parents, students like me, to a few who were in high school. This also meant we had a wide variety of perspectives. Some of us had been believers all our life, some had been

baptized within the last year, and some were not even sure if they believed in God. However, even in a room with many people that echoed if you spoke too loudly, there was a great sense of community and of mutual education. I never felt at risk to bring up an idea or question, and I felt like my professor managed the class well to help everyone engage without making anyone feel discouraged or left out. Over the weeks we studied together, I found myself making friends with many who would often sit near me and often those of us who came to the study would stay around and debrief afterwards for twenty or thirty minutes past the end of class.

The content of course was the most central element, though the way my professor taught made a difference as well. Studying something so practical at a point in my life when I needed concrete ways to express my faith was hugely formative. Being able to take in the text of the scripture alongside the teachings of the Early Church was also important,

as it gave a historical perspective that I often miss in other studies. One week I remember clearly was the week we studied “silence plus solitude.”

Solitude was hard to come by in a class of that size, but we sat in silence for ten minutes as part of our time studying together. It was excruciating- until it wasn't. I found myself able to meet with God in that time of quiet. The class was over when we finished our time of silence. You could feel us treating the moment as we all came up out of that quiet with a reverence for the space that had been created. What a moment of communal peace! I am grateful for many of the studies I have been able to participate in over the years, but studying Spiritual Disciplines with this community was a deeply formative time for me, and I am especially thankful for this study.



The Rev. Cana Moore is the pastor of Hays Christian Church

Using Lectio Divina in Bible Studies

Written by:

Cody Marintzer

Bible studies can be instrumental to our faith life. This is because we as Christians have something no other faith has: the living Word of God! There are many books we can draw inspiration from; however, the Bible is not like any other book. Historical books can help us learn lessons from the past. Fiction books can open our imagination and help us to think more creatively. Textbooks teach us skills we need to be productive members of society.

We will never grow in our relationship with Christ through His Word if we treat it like any of those other books. The Bible is Christ speaking to us in our daily lives. Not as an author removed from his audience, but as our Savior who loves us and speaks to us now. It is for this reason that the Bible, and study of it, should be the primary library in our lives.

One format I have found that opens God's Word to me is called Lectio Divina, which is Latin for "Divine Reading." To break it down simply, you read a passage

the first time to get the content. You then re-read it slower to let it sink in and hear Christ speak. You may catch one word or phrase that sticks out to you. It is not some sort of magical formula that promises you a certain thing, but instead is you opening your heart to whatever Christ wants to speak to you. Don't force a thought, but let God do the speaking.

You then sit with that word or phrase and ask God to open your heart as to why He is speaking that to you. When God has spoken and you have sat with it, move on to giving God thanks for the time spent with Him in His Word and ask Him to help you carry it throughout your day. If there are other words or phrases in the reading of the day, then spend time with them also.

Some of you may ask, where do I start? My advice is to not treat it as Divine roulette and randomly flip to a page, but maybe choose one of the Gospels and do a chapter, or a portion of a chapter every day. My favorite is to use the Gospel of the day that is being proclaimed at Mass. It

is very easy to look up the daily Mass reading online, or order one of the daily readers like "Magnificat" or "Word Among Us," which gives you the scripture readings for the entire month.

In some of the Bible studies I have been a part of, we have went through all the readings for the upcoming Sunday. The beauty of using this method is you can get insight from others and hear what God is speaking to them in their lives also. Since God speaks to all of us, you will find that some people will be struck with the same words or phrases as you are, and some will be struck with others. It is then a wonderful thing to be able to be open with others who share our faith in Christ as to why He is speaking that to you. God never intended us to be secluded on an island, but instead wants us as His children to grow in love and faith together.

We must remember that we are not trying to come up with our own doctrines (public revelation). Public revelation (that which must be held regarding salvation) is what was given to the

Using Lectio Divina in Bible Studies (Continued)

apostles by Christ and then handed down through the ages from them. Private revelation is how God is speaking to us through His Word in our daily lives. Private revelation can never contradict public revelation. It is the way we humble ourselves to the

truth of Christ's Words and open ourselves up to them. That should be the goal of any Bible study: to be open to the truth and let Christ be our guide, no matter where it may lead. May we all grow in the love of our Lord and one another through divine

conversations with Him through His Word!



Cody Marintzer is the parish life coordinator at St. Nicholas of Myra Church.

The Bible Filled a Void Within Me

Written by:

Esther Courtney

What should we look for in a Bible study? In the 80s, when I was a "baby Christian", I participated in a Bible study where the facilitator ordered books, dispersed them, and we would meet in a home setting. It was all new to me, and I loved it! I remember saying, as we were dispersing for the evening to go home, "I feel so good... I wish I could carry this feeling with me through the week." For you see, other than a Sunday service once a week for an hour, I had no means of exchanging or importing information about Jesus or the Bible.

I have to say, though, that very first Bible study I

attended was my favorite. It was the beginning of me getting to know the Lord. This weekly Bible study filled an empty spot inside me—something that I needed and obviously yearned for.

These meetings continued for a period of time (I do not remember how long.) Eventually, my husband and I hosted Bible studies weekly in our home in the evening. At one point, it was with a group of women, and another time it was with another couple (men, too, like Bible studies!). Bible studies have been a huge part of my life!

It is amazing what God has stored up for us in His Book, His Guide to life. One can read a passage in the Bible and get direction which way to go. One can

open the Bible, and if there is sincerity and commitment to really wanting to know God, He will guide your eyes to the right word, sentence, or paragraph. God will never leave you in the lurch.

God looks at our heart and knows when we are sincere. God looks at our circumstance, and says, "I can help you with that." God looks at our commitment and says, "I will send a Helper, an Encourager, a Comforter"—that being His Holy Spirit. Every day we need to enlist God's help and direction and ask the Holy Spirit into our lives. The Holy Spirit will inspire, ignite, cleanse, whisper, and heal!!

Esther Courtney is a 7th day Adventist in Hays.