

In honor of Annette,
who showed me
what "Bible study" means.

First caller!

—cak—



Copyright © 2015 Concordia Publishing House

3558 S. Jefferson Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63118-3968

 $1\text{-}800\text{-}325\text{-}3040 \cdot www.cph.org}$

All rights reserved. Unless specifically noted, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Concordia Publishing House.

Scripture quotations are from the ESV Bible $^{\circ}$ (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version $^{\circ}$), copyright $^{\odot}$ 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Dictionary definitions are from *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate** *Dictionary*, 11th edition © 2003 by Merriam-Webster, Inc., Springfield, MA. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cover and interior art: iStockphoto.com

Manufactured in the United States of America

Table of Contents

How to Use This Book	7
Prologue	8
Session A: Responsibility "With great power comes great responsibility" God calls us to bear the weight of responsibility in legal, moral, family, civic, spiritual, and personal areas of life. Being an adult is hard! Hear God's expectations and what He does to help us along.	11
Session B: Respect Raise your hand if you agree with Aretha! Engage in a basic discussion of respecting others and in a deeper probe into the kind of respect God expects. Explore the meaning behind respecting a name and the power behind God's name.	23
Session C: Compassion Are you in the "Me" generation?	33
See through God's Word that we are a people in great need of a compassionate God. Through examples of Jesus' healings and the parable of the Good Samaritan, realize the links between needing compassion, receiving it from God, and showing it to others.	
Session D: Peace One of Frank Costanza's memorable lines	43
Peace can sometimes be a quaint consideration, an ideal everyone wants but believes to be unattainable. Peace is possible! This session discusses the six types of peace as written about in God's Word: peaceful relationships, rest, security/safety, a peaceful heart, reconciliation, and a peaceful conscience.	
Session E: Service 'Tis better to give than to receive	53
Our self-serve world is the reality we live in, but the "terms of service" as written in the Bible are clear. Hear God's instruction for serving Him and serving others; then hear the Gospel message of Christ coming just to serve us.	
Session F: Cooperation Better to bend than break	63
See examples in God's Word of His plan for teamwork: Moses and Aaron, the disciples, and more. Be bolstered by Scripture's references to cooperation in marriage and family. We are all one in Christ Jesus.	
Session G: Perseverance Carry on!	73
We are called by God to endure. This session focuses on His directive to persevere in our worldly pursuits and in our faith. The best payoff is the crown of life Jesus gives!	
Session Notes	85



how to use this book



Work in Progress: A Scriptural Course toward Self-Improvement is appropriate for any small group, high school age and up. Each of the seven topics covered here is designed to be discussed during a forty-five- to sixty-minute session.

Each Bible study group is unique; therefore this book is intentionally adaptable. Your group may have one dedicated leader, for example, who guides everyone through each session, keeps discussions on track, and leads the group in prayer. An alternative approach is to have group members take turns leading a session (or two). Or perhaps one person guides the group's discussions while another leads everyone in prayer.

You are encouraged to read each session on your own before your study group meets. Take time for personal reflection—your thoughts matter! Working individually, you have an opportunity to think at your own pace, dwelling on the parts that are meaningful to you. This is the time to answer the questions from *your* point of view. At the group study, answers become collaborative. Participants will recognize varying perspectives and hear how others understand the topic. In contemplating the thoughts of others, participants will discover more richness in God's Word.

For each session, you are directed to go to your Bible to read God's Word and then talk about that session's emphasis. Questions are designed to keep group members engaged in personal reflection and in group discussion so the topic is addressed completely. There are a few blanks to fill in along the way. Space is allowed in the margins for noting wisdom gained during group discussions.

There is guidance for life application at the end of each session. Use these opportunities to set small goals for personal betterment—after all, we are all works in progress!



Teacher.

That is God so frequently!

He taught Pharaoh some lessons, taught the Israelites His commandments, taught Joshua to trust Him, and taught Zechariah that He is in charge.

He taught Nicodemus the necessity of being born again (John 3). He taught the Samaritan woman about living water (John 4) and taught His disciples about the bread of life (John 6). He taught the Pharisees the greatest commandments (Matthew 22) and taught the disciples how to pray (Matthew 6).

Jesus' friends called Him "Teacher." His opponents called Him "Teacher." Those who merely knew *of* Him called Him "Teacher." Certainly, today we think of God as our teacher. But let us be careful not to pigeonhole God; He does more than teach! We can look more closely at other Bible stories and discover more potential titles for God:

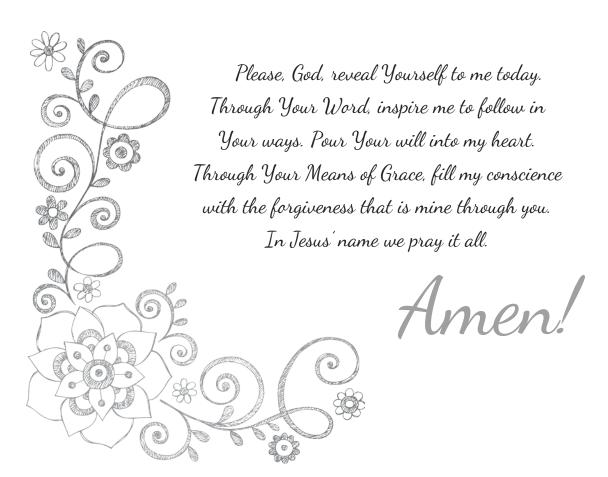
- 1. Commander. Noah, in Genesis 6, heard quite a list of directions from God: Build an ark! 450 feet long! Door in the side! And we read in verse 22 that "Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him."
- **2. Leader.** The children of Israel, while in the desert after their escape from Egypt, were in serious need of direction. "And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light" (Exodus 13:21).
- **3. Provider.** The desert-dwelling Israelites were in serious need of sustenance too. God to the rescue! They received "bread from heaven" every day (Exodus 16:1–30).
- 4. Guidance Counselor. Psalm 73:24 points out that God guides us with His counsel. John 16:13 says "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth."
- 5. Back-up. "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Romans 8:26). The Spirit covers for us, just like a friend who knows us well.
- **6.** Companion. Psalm 51:11 says, "Cast me not away from Your presence, and take not Your Holy Spirit from me."

"Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God!" —a prayer of King David, Psalm 143:10 Teacher, Commander, Leader, Provider, Guidance Counselor, Back-up, Companion: these are all characteristics of our loving God. And He teaches, directs, provides, guides, counsels, defends, and accompanies.

Hmm. It sounds like an all-encompassing descriptive title for God could be Coach! He helps, guides, and shapes us each and every day, all day long. He coaches us through highs and lows, joys and sorrows, and everything in between.

But unlike game day, there is no relaxing after the contest is over, and there is no finish line to coast across. In life, we as Christians cannot fight hard for a while and then relax in the shade. We cannot grow to be perfect, then coast through our remaining days. Life is a relentless series of constant personal adjustments. Each of us, as sinners struggling to model Christ, is always a work in progress.

"You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am." —Jesus, when speaking to His disciples, John 13:13







Session A

A Work in Progress: Responsibility

"With great power comes great responsibility."

Introducing ...

Toddlers have none, children get some, teens want more, and adults accumulate exponentially increasing amounts. Responsibility increases with age. But what about the almighty God? He is as old as time and has no superior. What is His responsibility? Does He owe anything to anyone? Is He accountable to anyone?

This session will explore answers to these questions. As you explore the topic of responsibility, you will see our God's commitment to His creation. (Is that salvation we see arriving on the horizon?)

The session then details six categories of responsibility that God has unpacked for us in His Word. Responsibility can be shouldered or shirked, accepted or ignored. Here we will hear the directives God gives for His people. These expectations, combined with knowledge that God acts responsibly for us, will lead us to act responsibly for ourselves and for others.

Get Going!

Do you know the source of the quote used for the title of this session: "With great power comes great responsibility"? Think a minute.

When your group meets, find out how many initially thought, "Spider-Man!" The quote is, in fact, directly from the 2002 movie "Spider-Man." Earlier comics often credit Parker's Uncle Ben, who either spoke or implied the sentiment. But Spidey is a quote thief. Nineteenth-century French philosopher Voltaire should also get a nod because he expressed these words when he put pen to paper in his 1832 *Œuvres de Voltaire, volume 48*. Our French buddy, Voltaire, just may have been inspired by Luke 12:48, where the following is found: "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required."



What does it mean to be responsible?

Think about this question in terms of generalities. Add more examples to the following list:

- Take care of duties.
- Answer for actions.
- Endure consequences.
- Be trustworthy.

Next, approach the question from a different angle. List some more possible endings to this sentence: "When I show responsibility, I . . . "

- Plan ahead.
- Have what I need when I need it.
- Meet timelines and deadlines.
- Stay safe.
- Help others do all of these things, too.



What are we responsible for?

We mow the grass we grow, feed the children we birth, carry liability insurance for accidents we cause, and mop up our spills. Society expects people to be responsible for what they have and what they make. And this leads us into:

Society's expectation of God



He is almighty God, with no superior, so He is responsible *to* no one. But we certainly can talk about what God is responsible *for*. See how He fully accepts the responsibility for the creation that He made:

Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Matthew 6:26

Cast your burden on the LORD, and He will sustain you; He will never permit the righteous to be moved. Psalm 55:22

God provides for our earthly needs of both body and spirit. But wait! There's more!

Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by Me from before your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am He, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save. Isaiah 46:3–4

Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you, and lick the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the LORD; those who wait for Me shall not be put to shame. Isaiah 49:23

In these two Isaiah passages, the Lord makes promises to the nation of Israel. He shows His commitment to upholding His responsibility: "I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save." Yes, He did make, bear, carry, and save Israel, didn't He? And what about "those who wait for Me"? Were they put to shame? No, those who long waited for the Messiah were able to say, "Here He is! Just as He said! See? My forefathers were not crazy!" He was faithful to Israel, just as He promised. He did what He said He would. And because God has proven Himself faithful to His past promises, we, too, can have confidence in His faithfulness to us.

Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word. Ephesians 5:25–26

"Look at the birds of the air: they neither reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them."

-Matthew 6:26

_			
_			
_			
_			

In this verse, "the church" is defined as all believers in Christ throughout all time and space. In other words, Jesus Christ loved the whole Christian population, past, present, and future. Here we see God's great display of responsibility: God the Father has made something (humanity!) and is taking care of it. He knew Jesus would defeat the devil from the moment that humanity was created. Genesis 3:15 tells us "[God] will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." This is the prophecy of Jesus defeating Satan, and *that* is some advance planning! God proved Himself trustworthy—He kept His promise to send the Messiah. And sending the grace of Jesus is the epitome of taking care of what He made.

Yes, God's Word proves that society can expect God to be responsible.

God's exp At the creation (aspects of verse and For e The six ca 1. Legal Exodus Let eve no aut ed by 0 Then [are Cac Refer Catechism God and to response we God's Law

God's expectation of us

At the time of creation, God appointed us to be the caretakers of His creation (Genesis 1:16–28). And He calls each of us to be responsible for all aspects of our earthly life. That call is summarized in the following single verse and expounded upon in the six subsequent categories.

For each will have to bear his own load. Galatians 6:5

The six categories of responsibility

Exodus 20; The Ten Commandments

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Romans 13:1

Then [Jesus] said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Matthew 22:21

Refer to the explanation of the Fourth Commandment in the Small Catechism. We have a responsibility to uphold the laws established by God and to respect both natural and instituted authorities. So, what is our response when a governing authority establishes civic law that is contrary to God's Law? That debate always ends with God's Law superseding man's law.



Summarize what God expects our legal responsibilities to be:

2. Moral

Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest. Proverbs 6:6–8

God's directive for us is clear: Plan ahead!

* * * * *

It is required of stewards that they be found faithful. 1 Corinthians 4:2

A trust is something that one hands over to another with the expectation that it will be well cared for. It is as if one says, "Here. This is mine, but I would like for you to have it for a while; please take good care of it." That is exactly what God does when He gives each of us physical blessings. "Our" children are really *His* children, whom He asks us to care for and love. Our country is His country that we need to respect. Our yard is His creation for which we are responsible. When the Bible study group gathers, work together to see how many "entrusted items" you can list. Count them as you go!

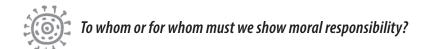
* * * * *

To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Matthew 25:15

This verse is the summary of the parable found in Matthew 25:14–30. In Jesus' story, the master was going on a journey and entrusted his three servants with money. A *lot* of money. When he returned, the master held each accountable for the wise use of his money. Jesus makes a point through this parable, showing that we all are accountable for using our blessings responsibly! After all . . .



Whom do our "talents" (money or skills) benefit?



3. Family

Family members are part of our legal and moral responsibility, but now we focus on family as a responsibility category of its own. These verses will zero in on God's directive to treat our family with respect and honor.

Honor your father and your mother. Exodus 20:12

This is a popular verse for parents of toddlers and teens!



What does honor mean?

Write your thoughts below to help guide your thoughts later during the group discussion:



Do you consider respect to be a synonym for honor?

Take some time to compare and contrast *honor* with *respect*. List similarities and differences between the two concepts.

The words are similar in that they both indicate holding someone in high regard. Yet the words are different in that *respect* acknowledges someone's position, while *honor* acknowledges their worth. This subtle difference makes it easy for us to see far beyond simply obeying mom and dad. We are responsible for treating them as the God-established assets they are. They receive their greatest worth from the fact that God established them.

* * * * *

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. Deuteronomy 6:6–7

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it. Proverbs 22:6

In addition to the responsibility of feeding their children, God has charged parents with teaching their kids how to be faithful and responsible adults! That is some heavy stuff and perhaps the weightiest task felt by parents.

* * * * *

Let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Ephesians 5:33

Proverbs 22 may tell of parents' weightiest task, but Ephesians 5 summarizes one of the most *challenging* tasks for some married people. To show this love and respect at all times can be difficult. Yet, clearly, it IS God's expectation of us.

4. Community

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work. Titus 3:1

Initially, being "submissive to rulers and authorities" sounds restrictive. After all, our rulers have a list of things we cannot do. But then again, there is this document called the Constitution of the United States. In it, the rulers and authorities clearly delineate a list of things that we, as citizens, *can* do: worship our chosen deity, speak our mind, assemble at will, bear arms. Gerald W. Johnson, a noted journalist and historian (1890–1980), once remarked on how the gift of a right also saddles a man with responsibility. A right to free speech does, technically, give you a pass to speak harshly, speak critically, and speak, as some might say, "without a filter." But what Mr. Johnson points out is that speakers have a duty to act with the interest of the community in mind. Speak to build up, not to tear down. Use freedoms wisely. God says it this way:

For each will have to bear his own load. Galatians 6:5

A Work in Progress

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

-Ephesians 2:10

But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Hebrews 3:13

God calls us to encourage everyone not just in our own home or with our own friends but also in the community at large. We have a responsibility for ensuring that our public actions, overheard discussions, and social media posts are all edifying to the society in which we live.



In summary, our community responsibility includes wise use of our what?



5. Faith

Matthew 25:1-13

While studying on your own, grab your Bible and read the parable. It is the parable of the ten virgins, each girl being responsible for her own lamp while awaiting the bridegroom's arrival. Be careful! You might miss the show if you aren't prepared! Likewise, each of us has a responsibility to guard our heart's faith. The alternative is to be caught with an empty heart and not be prepared for Jesus' second coming on Judgment Day.

* * * * *

Acts 18:1-6

In these verses, Paul is preaching Christ as Messiah and the listening Jews get abusive. Paul, obviously frustrated, says he is *done* with these people: "I have fulfilled my responsibility!" What does this story indicate that *our* responsibility is? It is each Christian's responsibility to witness to Jesus' work and promise of salvation, to testify that Jesus is the Christ.



6. Personal

Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more. Luke 12:48

You are the only one who can fulfill your potential. And did you notice? This is not a request. Fulfill your potential!

* * * * *

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10

God is our Creator. He is the one who gives us our potential. He knows what we are capable of and has prepared the way for us to be able to fulfill it!

Make note of one way that you will, today, fulfill the potential God gave you. Make note of one way that you will decide what type of person you will be today. It may be the same answer!

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. 1 Corinthians 15:58

Often, our work is satisfying and we feel good about it. But other times, our work time feels like wasted time, wasted effort; there is not a big enough payoff for anyone. In those times, how can we know that our labor is not in vain? We know because all of our work is labor in the Lord. Our work is to fulfill responsibilities big and small to ourselves, our families, and our neighbors. Even if we see little payoff, our work is not in vain, for it gives glory to God. Our work then attests to our joy in God's promise of our salvation.

You may have heard people push the notion of works righteousness, that is, the idea that we do good things in order to earn God's favor. One might interpret 1 Corinthians 15:58 that way. It could be read from the perspective that our "work of the Lord" will earn us "points" with God. Alas, that is far from the truth! Jesus works redemption based on faith alone, not on works (Romans 8:1). His mercy and grace come to us through His Word, through the Lord's Supper, and through Baptism. God does not need our good works.

In addition to grace, God has also given us a free will. It is God who chooses us, brings us to faith—not the other way around. But outside of spiritual matters, we are free to choose our actions. The beauty of God's system is that we are not required to do good for our own benefit, but we freely choose to serve God and others *because* of His love for us. Our actions are a byproduct of our faith.

Work in Progress: Taking It Home

During your group study session, wrap up by giving one another a chance to say any final comments or ask final questions. Review the categories of responsibility spoken of in this session: legal, moral, family, community, faith, and personal responsibilities. Discuss the following questions.



Which category do you feel you could give more attention to?



How will you try to increase your show of responsibility this coming week or month?

Now encourage one another to share goals with the rest of your group. Sharing answers aloud adds a bit of accountability and gives people the courage to follow through on their thoughts!

Before closing with prayer, be reminded of God's loving grace—that we do not have to be perfect, for He freely forgives us for not upholding our responsibilities. God took on responsibility by creating us: He has promised to care for us, His people, and He sent His Son, Jesus, to hand us all salvation!

Have the group leader or a volunteer close the session with prayer. Include prayer requests from group participants, or say the following prayer together:

Heavenly Father, it is so easy to get weighed down and feel burdened by the list of responsibilities we have. There are so many! Help us to be wise in evaluating our duties. Help us each to manage our list according to Your will. Let each of us know that You have fulfilled Your responsibility to us in sending Jesus to be our Savior. And help us to feel the warmth of Your providence as You continue to fulfill Your responsibility of carrying us. It is in Jesus' name that we pray.

And all God's people say,



Session Notes

Session A—Responsibility

We are responsible for guarding our own faith and the faith of others as well.

Community: Rights and freedoms.

Faith: Our faith and the faith of others. We guard your own belief in Jesus and witness it to others.

Personal: I am the only person who decides what type of person I am.