

Life Together in Christ: God's Call to Love, Warn, and Restore

A Lutheran Bible Study Lesson for Small Groups

Theme; God calls us—His Church—to be faithful watchmen who speak His truth in love, to live by His Spirit in wholehearted obedience, and to confront and restore one another in mercy, all because He desires the repentance and life of all people through Christ Jesus.

Scripture Focus; Ezekiel 33:7–11 – The Prophet as Watchman, Psalm 119:33–40 – A Prayer for Faithful Obedience, Romans 13:8–14 – Love Fulfills the Law, Matthew 18:15–20 – Restoring a Brother in Love

Opening Prayer (for leader)

Heavenly Father, open our ears to hear Your Word, our hearts to receive Your promise, and our wills to respond in faith and love. In the name of Jesus, our Shepherd, who is present with us by Your Spirit. Amen.

Introduction

Dear friends, as we gather together in the name of our Lord Jesus, we come to hear what God reveals about our life together as His people. We live in a world full of distraction, sin, and division—but also a world that God so deeply loves that He sent His Son to seek and save the lost. In this session, we will look at four brief passages that, together, shine a light on how God wants us to relate to one another: with truth-telling, personal integrity, love, and a commitment to restoration. And above all, we will be reminded that God takes no pleasure in the death of anyone but desires repentance and life.

Let's begin by reading each passage aloud, perhaps around the circle.

Summary of the Passages

Ezekiel 33:7–11

God tells the prophet Ezekiel that he is appointed as a ****watchman**** for Israel. If the watchman sees the sword coming and does not warn the people, he is accountable for their blood. But if he faithfully warns them, he has done his duty—whether they listen or not. Significantly, God reveals His own heart: “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.” God commands the prophet to call people to repentance, not as an angry judge, but from God's merciful desire for their salvation.

Psalm 119:33–40

The psalmist prays for God to ****teach him His statutes****, to give understanding, to lead him in the path of His commandments. The heart of the prayer is a longing for wholehearted, joyful obedience. But it also recognizes that such obedience is a gift: “Incline my heart to Your testimonies... Turn my

eyes from looking at worthless things.” He pleads for God’s Word to be his treasure, so that he may live with integrity and not be put to shame.

Romans 13:8–14

The Apostle Paul summarizes the Christian ethic in one word: **love** – “Owe no one anything except to love each other. For the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” All the commandments are “summed up in this word: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” He then awakens urgency: the hour has come; the day of salvation is near. So we are to “cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light,” literally “put on the Lord Jesus Christ,” making no provision for the flesh.

Matthew 18:15–20

Jesus teaches the community of disciples how to deal with sin among them. The goal is always **restoration**. If your brother sins, go and tell him privately; if he listens, you have gained your brother. If not, bring witnesses; if still unrepentant, tell the church; and if he refuses to listen to the church, treat him as an outsider. Then Jesus gives a stunning promise: whatever you bind or loose on earth is bound or loosed in heaven. And wherever two or three gather in His name, He is there in the midst of them.

Key Points for Discussion

1. God’s Desire Is Repentance and Life, Not Punishment

Ezekiel receives a heavy calling—to speak God’s warning to rebels. But notice God’s own testimony: “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.” In Luther’s terms, this is **Law and Gospel** in balance: the Law warns of the sword, the Gospel shows God’s saving will. As a church, we are not called to angrily condemn others but to faithfully declare the truth, so that the repentant might find life. Our watchman role begins in our own hearts, then extends to our neighbors.

Reflection on Lutheran teaching: We are **simultaneously saints and sinners**. We don’t warn others as those who have all the answers, but as fellow beggars pointing to the Bread of Life.

2. Obedience Is the Prayed-For Gift of a Transformed Heart

Psalms 119 is not a legalistic list of do’s and don’ts; it is a loving prayer for God to **incline** our hearts. Without God’s work, we are like Ezekiel’s stubborn people. But with the Holy Spirit, we begin to desire His commandments. In the Small Catechism, Luther teaches that the First Commandment encompasses this entire attitude: we fear, love, and trust God above all things. That trusting heart is precisely what the Spirit creates.

We can ask: Do our daily lives reflect a longing for God’s Word that we ask for, or do we rely on our own determination?

In our study, see how the psalmist asks for understanding (v. 34), for direction (v. 35), for a pure heart (v. 36), and for strength (v. 37) – all signs that obedience remains a dependent gift.

3. Love Is the Complete Fulfillment of the Law

Paul's command to "love your neighbor as yourself" echoes the Old Testament. Lutherans believe that we are justified by faith alone, not by fulfilling the law. But as believers filled with the Spirit, we now love—not to be saved, but **because** we are saved. Paul grounds this love in baptism: "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." In his explanation to the Third Article of the Creed, Luther says that God calls, gathers, enlightens, and **sanctifies** the church. Love for neighbor is the fruit of sanctification.

This love isn't a warm feeling; it's active: not owing anything but love to God and others. It seeks good for the other, even when difficult.

4. Confronting Sin Is an Act of Love, Not Condemnation

In Matthew 18, the common approach to sin in the church today is either gossip, avoidance, or harsh judgment. Jesus gives a better way: go directly, in humility, with the goal of **gaining your brother**. The steps show progression: one-to-one, then with witnesses, then before congregation. This is not a legalistic process, but a careful path of restoration. Luther referred to this process as the proper use of what he called the **keys**: "binding and loosing." Pastors publicly forgive the repentant; they also retain sins for the unrepentant. And the whole structure exists to bring to repentance and restore to grace.

Note: if the person still refuses, the church treats them as "a Gentile and a tax collector." How did Jesus treat Gentiles and tax collectors? He ate with them, loved them, and called them to repentance. So even excommunication is not meant to condemn, but to indicate that the person has separated themselves—and it's a call to pursue them in a different way.

5. Christ Is Present in the Midst of the Gathering

Jesus closes with the promise: "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." This assures that our prayers for one another, our confrontations, and our common life are not done in our own feeble strength. And "two or three" is not about numbers but unity. This promise applies not only to church discipline but to all our prayer and worship. In fellowship, Christ is present with His Word and Sacraments, knitting us into a community of forgiven sinners.

A Lutheran note: We don't always agree on how exactly church discipline applies today, but we always do it with the warning that we might ourselves be the ones in need of correction (Galatians 6:1). In Christ, God's final Word to us is not a warning but the Gospel.

Discussion Questions

1. Ezekiel 33: Often we feel unworthy or unwilling to speak truth to a friend or family member who is living apart from God. How does remembering that God takes “no pleasure in the death of the wicked” change the way you approach that conversation?
2. In Psalm 119, the writer asks God to “incline” his heart, “turn my eyes from looking at worthless things,” and “give me life in your ways.” Which of these requests is most needed in your walk with Christ right now, and why?
3. The law is summed up as love for neighbor. What does it mean practically to “love” without being permissive about sin? How do we hold together truth and love, responsibility and compassion?
4. Paul says “the hour has come for you to wake from sleep.” How does living in the light of Christ’s coming affect the way you live your daily life—your work, family, or freedom?
5. Matthew 18:15–20 calls us to confront rather than gossip. What stops us from going directly to a brother or sister? How would the church be different if we practiced this Jesus-given pattern faithfully?
6. Reflect on the promise that “whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.” Is that a comforting or frightening promise? How does it strengthen your confidence in the ministry of reconciliation given to the Church?
7. Why is it important that God’s heart is for repentance, not punishment? In what ways might this truth relieve our fears about our own sins, yet motivate us to turn from them?

Application

Live the Word

1. Become a Watchman in Prayer. This week, intentionally ask God to bring to mind one person you know who is wandering from the faith. Pray for them daily, and consider how you might graciously speak truth to them—not as a nagging prophet, but as a humble servant of Christ.
2. Pray Psalm 119 Daily. Take five minutes each morning or evening to read Psalm 119:33–40 as your personal prayer. Ask God specifically to show you where your desires are out of line with His Word, and trust that He will grant you a willing spirit.
3. Practice Direct Reconciliation. Is there a minor offense or misunderstanding between you and someone in your congregation, family, or workplace? Instead of venting to others, commit to a one-on-one conversation this week, determined not to accuse but to *gain the person* in compassion.
4. Reach Out to a Wayward Brother. If you know someone who has lapsed from church attendance or faith, think of a way to extend love—a note, a call, a meal—without shaming them, because God’s mercy is always meant to lead to repentance (Romans 2:4).

5. Use the Promises. Whenever you gather with brothers and sisters in Christ—even two or three—remember that Christ is there. Bring your concerns for weaker members to Him in prayer, and ask Him to bless your shared fellowships with a spirit of true reconciliation and forgiveness.

Closing

A Word of Comfort - In all the warnings of these passages, the ultimate message is not fear but a gracious invitation. God does not want any to perish, but He has arranged His church as a place of truth-telling, discipline, and love, so that we might all be restored to Him and to each other. And through the cross of Christ, all our sins—even the ones hidden in our hearts—are forgiven. So we can courageously come to our Lord, call on the Spirit for obedience, and love each other without pretense.

Closing Prayer

Merciful God, You sent Your Son to be our teacher, our judge, and our savior. We thank You that You desire our repentance and not our death. Strengthen us by Your Spirit to live lives of love, and grant us the grace to speak truth to one another in patience, correcting and restoring with humility, always remembering that we are forgiven sinners who serve a risen Lord. Send us to watchmen, that we may be equipped for every good work. Keep us watchful in prayer, anchored in Your Word, and united in Your love. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Leader's Note: If time permits at the end of your session, ask each participant to share one simple takeaway—something they intend to carry with them for the coming week. Then personally encourage them that God's listening ear is turned toward them because of Christ's finished work.

He who calls you is faithful, and He will surely do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:24)