

Personal Bible Study - Turn and Live

A Lutheran Bible Study on Repentance, Love, and Restoring the Wandering

Opening Prayer

O Lord, teach me Your statutes. Incline my heart to Your testimonies. Turn my eyes from worthless things, and give me life in Your ways. Put on me Your Son, Jesus Christ, that I may live as a child of the light and speak the truth in love to my brothers and sisters. Amen.

Theme

God does not take pleasure in the death of sinners. He sends His Word to call us to repentance, gives us new life in Christ, and makes us ambassadors of restoring love to one another.

Scripture Focus

Ezekiel 33:7–11 — The watchman’s warning and God’s desire for the sinner to live, **Psalm 119:33–40** — The prayer for God to teach us, turn us, and revive us, **Romans 13:8–14** — The debt of love and clothing ourselves in Christ, **Matthew 18:15–20** — Brotherly admonition, forgiveness, and the presence of Jesus

Summary

These four passages work together as Law and Gospel, warning and promise, judgment and mercy.

In Ezekiel 33, God appoints a watchman to warn Israel of danger. But the deepest danger is not a foreign army—it is sin and unbelief. God speaks the stunning words: “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.” This is the beating heart of God.

Psalm 119 is the believer’s honest reply: “I cannot keep Your commandments on my own. Lord, teach me, turn my eyes away from worthless things, and incline my heart to Your testimonies.” The Law commands, but only God can give the desire and strength to walk in it.

Romans 13 explains what the Christian life looks like after God has done that work. Because Christ has justified us, we no longer live in the dark. The night is almost over; the day is at hand. So we “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” and love our neighbors, not to earn salvation, but because we are already saved.

Matthew 18 then gives us a practical picture of the church in action. When a Christian wanders into sin, we do not gossip, ignore, or condemn. We go in humility. We try to restore the brother or sister. The goal is reconciliation. And Jesus promises that when His people gather in His name—even two or three—He is present with His forgiving, life-giving Word.

Key Points

1. God’s ultimate will is life, not death. (Ezekiel 33:11)

God swears an oath: “As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.” We often imagine God as eager to punish, but Scripture reveals His heart. He pleads through the prophet: “Turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die?” He does not enjoy the judgment He threatens. He speaks the warning so the sinner will run into His mercy. This is true even for you, even in your present struggles.

2. A watchman is someone who faithfully speaks God’s Word.

Ezekiel is told that if he fails to warn the wicked, the wicked may still die in sin, but their blood will be required of the watchman. That responsibility is serious. In the church today, pastors are called to be watchmen. Parents, teachers, and friends also serve as watchmen when they speak God’s truth in love. The temptation is to stay silent because we do not want to offend people. But a true watchman loves his neighbor enough to warn them about real danger—not with self-righteousness but with urgency.

3. The Law commands more than we can perform; therefore, we must pray.

Psalms 119 is full of pleas: *Teach me*, *give me understanding*, *lead me*, *incline my heart*, *turn my eyes*, *revive me*. The psalmist knows his heart is not naturally inclined toward God’s ways. He cannot turn himself. This is the Lutheran view of the Law: the Law shows us that we are sick, so we cry out to the Physician. If you feel the weight of God’s holy commands, do not despair. That feeling is meant to send you to Christ.

4. Christian freedom produces love, not license.

In Romans 13, Paul says, “Owe no one anything except to love one another.” Love is a debt you never fully pay off. Every day, you still owe love to your neighbor. But Paul is not talking about mere feelings. He is talking about concrete obedience to the commandments: do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not covet. Love does no wrong to a neighbor. So when you are in Christ, you are free from trying to save yourself—and free to serve your neighbor without selfish motive.

5. To “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” is to live in your Baptism.

Paul says: “The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” And then, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” In Baptism, you have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27). Sanctification means daily returning to that identity. You are no longer defined by your old sinful self. So do not make plans for the flesh. Do not feed the desires that lead you back into darkness. Live as one who already belongs to the day.

6. Church discipline is a ministry of restoration, not a weapon.

In Matthew 18:15–20, Jesus gives His church a way to deal with sin. If a brother sins against you, you go to him privately. You do not talk about him to others. The goal is to “gain” your brother. If he will not listen, you take one or two others with you. Eventually, it may need to go before the church. But every step is designed to rescue the sinner. Even the final step—treating an unrepentant person like

a “Gentile and tax collector”—is not permission to hate them. Think of how Jesus treated tax collectors: He called them to repentance and ate with them in mercy. The ultimate purpose even of severe discipline is repentance, forgiveness, and restoration.

7. Where God’s people gather in Jesus’ name, Jesus is present.

Matthew 18 ends with one of the most comforting promises in the Bible: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them.” This promise is tied to binding and loosing—forgiving and retaining sins. When the Church speaks Christ’s forgiveness through the Office of the Keys, it is as certain as if Christ Himself spoke. So when you are burdened by a relationship that needs correction, or when you need to hear your own sins forgiven, do not try to carry it alone. Bring it into the fellowship of the Church, where Jesus is present with His Word and Absolution.

Questions for Individual Reflection

1. Ezekiel 33:11 — God says He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Are there people you dislike, resent, or have written off? How does God’s heart toward sinners challenge the way you view them?

2. Ezekiel 33:7–9 — As a watchman, who is God calling you to speak a truthful word to this week? What fear keeps you from speaking?

3. Psalm 119:36–37 — “Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to selfish gain. Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things.” What worthless things are competing for your heart? Why do we need God to turn our eyes, not just try to look away?

4. Romans 13:8–10 — “The one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” How does love actually fulfill the specific commandments, instead of excusing us from them? If love does no wrong to a neighbor, where is your love being tested right now?

5. Romans 13:14 — What does it mean to you to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” in your daily life? What provision for the flesh do you need to stop making this week?

6. Matthew 18:15 — Jesus says, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.” Why is it easier to share someone’s failure with others instead of speaking to them personally? How does that cause harm and avoid love?

7. Matthew 18:18 — In the Lutheran Church, we speak of the Office of the Keys. Jesus gives His church the authority to forgive sins and, when necessary, to retain them. How do you need to hear the gifts of *loosing*—forgiveness and release—in your life today?

8. Matthew 18:20 — Jesus promises to be present where two or three gather in His name. Where have you found it difficult to believe that He is present in your church’s ordinary Word and Sacrament life? What might change if you trusted this promise more fully?

Application

For this week, do the following:

1. Pray the Psalmist's prayer every morning.

Before you read Scripture or begin your day, pray from Psalm 119:36–37: “Lord, incline my heart to Your testimonies. Turn my eyes from worthless things. Revive me in Your ways.”

2. Receive your Baptism by “putting on Christ.”

When you get dressed in the morning, remember that you are clothed in Christ. You do not have to prove yourself. Live like someone who has been washed, forgiven, and raised to walk in newness of life.

3. Seek one reconciliation.

Think of a relationship where there is an unresolved offense. Pray about it, then go—privately, humbly, and calmly—to speak truth in love. The goal is not to win or to be proven right, but to *gain your brother*.

4. If you have been avoiding God's call to repentance, hear it now.

God does not want you to die in your sin. Turn back to Him. If you are weighed down by guilt, confess your sin to God and, if helpful, speak to your pastor. Hear the words of forgiveness and trust that Christ's absolution is yours.

5. Practice the love of Romans 13 in one concrete act.

Choose one neighbor—in your household, at work, in your congregation—and perform one specific act of love this week. No one needs to know. Let it be a small way of owing nothing except love.

Closing Prayer

Faithful God, You have made me a watchman and saved me by Your grace. Teach me Your statutes. Incline my heart to You. Turn my eyes away from worthless things so that I may live in the light of Christ. Give me courage to speak the truth in love, humility to go to my brother, and patience to restore the wandering. And when I have fallen, let me hear Your call: turn back, and live. In Jesus' name. Amen.