

Today's Light Discussion Questions for January–March 2015

The material here is linked to the January–March issues of *Today's Light*, a quarterly magazine designed to lead God's people as they read through the Bible in two years.

We've tried to include enough discussion starters for about 45 minutes of study. Feel free to duplicate the questions and use them with *Today's Light* readers.

Suggestions for Using *Today's Light* Discussion Questions

- You could gather a group of *Today's Light* readers during Sunday morning Bible class time.
- You could invite all *Today's Light* readers in your congregation to a midweek home discussion.
- You could make the questions available to all *Today's Light* readers and encourage them to partner with one or two other people over lunch once a week.

To subscribe to *Today's Light*, contact Concordia Publishing House via e-mail at cphorder@cph.org, via phone at 1-800-325-3381, or via fax at 1-800-490-9889.

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January Week 1

January 1–4; Isaiah 1–6

1. Review Isaiah 1:3. As you stand at the threshold of the new year ahead and take stock of yourself and your situation, what would God have you know about Himself? What would He have you understand about your relationship with Him in Christ Jesus?
2. Review Isaiah 2:1–22. What situations and conditions in your life and in the world around you remind you of your need for your Savior's help? How does His presence comfort and encourage you?
3. Read Isaiah 6:1–13. After confessing his sins and receiving God's forgiveness and absolution, Isaiah offered, "Here am I! Send me." Reflect on your relationship with God in Christ Jesus. What opportunities for service to Him are you anticipating in this new year?

January Week 2

January 5–11; Isaiah 7–29

1. Despite political unrest and turmoil, God reminds the people of His faithfulness toward them in the words of Isaiah: “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:13–14). Isaiah’s words also refer to God’s gift of His Son, God with us, as the Savior of the world (see Matthew 1:23). In what ways do people today try the patience of God regarding this great gift?
2. Reflect on Isaiah 9:1–7. When have you experienced “the dark night of the soul”? How did Jesus bring you through it?
3. Isaiah describes the amazing transformation that the power of God can bring. What examples can you give of the wolf and the lamb living together (Isaiah 11:6) through the transforming power of the Good News of Jesus?
4. Apply the following words to Jesus our Savior. Explain Law and Gospel in connection with the final judgment. “And I will place on His shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and He shall shut, and none shall open.” (Isaiah 22:21–22).
5. Review Isaiah 25:6–9. What aspect of this picture of heaven do you find especially comforting and appealing today?
6. Explain Isaiah’s reference to God’s judgment as His “strange deed” and “alien work” (Isaiah 28:21–22).

January Week 3

January 12–18; Isaiah 30–46

1. Reflecting on the words of Isaiah 32:3–4, how has the Holy Spirit worked in your life to enable you to see and hear and understand?
2. Why were the promises of God recorded in Isaiah 33:17–19 especially encouraging to those in the days of Hezekiah? Why are they especially meaningful to you today?
3. Isaiah 36–39 records God's grace in the life of Hezekiah. God delivered him from the dreaded armies of Sennacherib when the angel of the Lord put to death 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. God also delivered him from an illness that brought him to the point of death, after which God added 15 more years to Hezekiah's life. What acts of deliverance has God worked in your life?
4. Apply these words to your life as you think about it today: "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever" (Isaiah 40:8).
5. Explain how Jesus served you and all people as both the mighty Warrior (Isaiah 42:13) and the meek Servant (Isaiah 42:3).
6. What do God's words recorded in Isaiah 46:3–4 say to those who doubt the value of human life before birth and after productive work years?

January Week 4

January 19–25; Isaiah 47–57

1. Isaiah 48:17 records, “Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: ‘I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go.’” What teachings and guidance have you received from God? What do you think He is teaching you right now?

2. Explain the freedom from darkness that belongs to all who trust in Jesus as their Savior. See Isaiah 49:9.

3. Isaiah 50:4–11 describes our Savior’s loving acts of servitude on our behalf. Verse 7 references His devoted determination to save us. Nothing could divert Jesus from this primary task. When is devoted determination also an important characteristic in the life of those who follow Jesus?

4. What do the “spoils of war” from the greatest conflict of all time mean to you? to all people? See Isaiah 53:11–12.

5. Consider the promises of God to His people recorded in Isaiah 54:7–17. Which of these promises is especially comforting or encouraging to you today?

6. Explain the meaning of these words of God recorded in Isaiah: “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isaiah 56:7c).

January Week 5

January 26–31; Isaiah 58–66

1. According to Isaiah 58:1–11, in what ways does God's Spirit move us to demonstrate His power in our life?
2. Review Isaiah 60. In what ways is the light of the Gospel shining through the thick darkness covering our world today?
3. Provide examples of how Jesus our Savior binds up the brokenhearted (Isaiah 61:1).
4. Isaiah 64:8 records: "But now, O LORD, You are our Father; we are the clay, You are our potter; we are all the work of Your hand." How does God shape and form His people?
5. Apply the following words from Isaiah (65:8) to your life: "Thus says the LORD: 'As the new wine is found in the cluster, and they say, "Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it," so I will do for my servants' sake.'"
6. What messages of joy and concern are implicit in the last two verses of Isaiah?

February Week 1

February 1–8; Jeremiah 1–15

1. Reflect on the “Get the Big Picture” section for February 1 concerning Jeremiah 1. What are the constants in your life? What things do you want to change?
2. How do our sins make of us broken cisterns incapable of holding God’s abundant, life-giving waters (Jeremiah 2:13)?
3. What are the dangers of following the “relative morality” crowd (Jeremiah 5:31)?
4. Read Jeremiah 8:1–22. What signs do you note in the world around you of the rapidly approaching end of all things? See also Matthew 24:4–14.
5. Review Jeremiah 9:1–26. What evidence of both God’s kindness and also His justice and righteousness do we find in the life and work of Jesus?
6. Reflect on Jeremiah 11:1–23. At times serving God in obedience to His will sets us up to be regarded as unpopular or makes us susceptible to rebuke or criticism. Give an example from your knowledge or experience.
7. Read Jeremiah 14:1–21. Is it possible to push God’s grace to the limit? Explain.

February Week 2

February 9–15; Jeremiah 16–28

1. See Jeremiah 17:7–8. As God's Spirit works in your life through the means of grace, which fruit of the spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control—would you most like Him to develop in you at the present time?

2. How is clay in the hands of a potter like people in the hands of almighty God (Jeremiah 18:1–10)? The Book of Jeremiah includes numerous object lessons to help us understand God's judgment and mercy. Think of an object lesson of your own to underscore these same concepts.

3. When did God use His strong arm “in anger and in fury and in great wrath” (Jeremiah 21:5) against all people because of our sin? See 1 Peter 2:24.

4. When are the words we hear like straw? When are they like grain? (See Jeremiah 23:28.)

5. Read Jeremiah 26:1–3. What characteristic of God do these verses illustrate?

6. Review the devotion for February 15 in light of Jeremiah 27:1–22. Explain the danger in forming alliances with those outside of the faith. Why, however, is relating to those outside the faith essential?

February Week 3

February 16–22; Jeremiah 29–42

1. Jeremiah 29:11 holds the promise: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” What plans do you know God has for you?
2. Compare Jeremiah 31:31–34 with Hebrews 8:1–13. What is the new covenant to which Jeremiah is referring?
3. Review Jeremiah 34:1–19. True obedience begins not with the hands but with the heart. How does God bring to our hearts the desire to serve and obey? See 1 Corinthians 3:16.
4. Read and reflect on the activities recorded in Jeremiah 36:1–32. Give an example of when we despise or reject God’s Word by regarding ourselves as better than others.
5. Review Jeremiah 39:11–18. Why is it dangerous to disregard the coming of God’s judgment?
6. Read Jeremiah 42:1–22. When it is especially difficult for you to submit to God’s authority and obey Him?

February Week 4

February 23–28; Jeremiah 43–52

1. Explain the meaning of the phrase “remnant of the remnant” in light of Jeremiah 44:1–28. See also Matthew 7:13–14.
2. Read Jeremiah 45:1–5. Think for a moment about your life. What blessings from God bring you joy? What aspects of your life cause you to feel discontented or fearful? What promises of God do you find especially comforting as you reflect on these questions?
3. Read Jeremiah 47:1–7. Give an example of how God works in the events of life and history to bring the Good News of Jesus to those who would not otherwise receive it.
4. Babylon shall suffer the vengeance of the Lord. It becomes the subject of an extended prophecy (Jeremiah 50–51). This nation had served as the last of the Lord’s scourges for His people and had made the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem total. So it would likewise be totally destroyed (50:39–40). What is the significance of the reference to Babylon in Revelation 14:8 and Revelation 17–18?
5. Review Jeremiah 51:1–19. God’s Word reminds us that those in authority are God’s representatives to us. How can even unbelievers in authority be God’s representatives? See Romans 13:1–4.

March Week 1

March 1–8; Lamentations 1–5, Ezekiel 1–5

1. Skim the first chapter of Lamentations. What results of sin do you find described there?
2. According to Lamentations 2:14, what is at least one characteristic of spiritual leaders who are false and misleading?
3. What cause for disgrace can we find in our nation? with our people? in ourselves? What does it mean to you that God's mercies are new each and every morning (Lamentations 3:23)?
4. The Book of Lamentations ends with the plea, "Restore us to Yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored! Renew our days as of old" (Lamentations 5:21). What realization on the part of God's people in exile has led up to that prayer? When have you found yourself at a similar point in your life?
5. The Book of Ezekiel begins with a vision of the glory of the Lord. When have you caught a glimpse of what heavenly glory must be like?
6. At God's command, Ezekiel ate the scroll of God's Word and filled his stomach with it. Ezekiel 3:3 records that the scroll tasted as sweet as honey in his mouth. God would have His people consume His Word so that it becomes a motivating, focusing, guiding influence in our lives. What portion of God's Word is especially meaningful to you as you have learned it?
7. God desires always to rescue and save His people. Yet Ezekiel records these words of God: "I, even I, am against you. And I will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations" (Ezekiel 5:8). How can we reconcile these words with God's merciful and gracious qualities?

March Week 2

March 9–15; Ezekiel 6–19

1. God is always calling people to repentance so that He might receive, save, and forgive them. When disasters come, it's as if God is saying, as He did to the people in Ezekiel's day, "Then you will know that I am the LORD" (Ezekiel 7:4). What experiences in your life have caused you to make a similar observation?
2. Ezekiel records God's judgment against the wicked idolaters. Yet God protects those who belong to Him by placing a mark on them so that they will not be destroyed (Ezekiel 9:4). Describe God's judgment and grace as you see them evidenced in our nation today.
3. God spoke the following to describe His working in the lives of His people: "And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 11:19). What evidence of single-mindedness and soft-heartedness has God worked in you?
4. When might we be guilty of saying "peace" when there is no peace or of covering a flimsy wall with whitewash (Ezekiel 13:10)?
5. According to the allegory of Ezekiel 16, God found us abandoned shortly after we were born, and He says to us, "Live." He made us to flourish like a plant of the field, and we grew up and became tall and arrived at full adornment (Ezekiel 16:6–7). Apply this allegory to what God has done in your life.
6. Ezekiel 18 concludes: "Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live" (Ezekiel 18:30b–32). What do these words tell you about God? How can you apply them to yourself?

March Week 3

March 16–22; Ezekiel 20–34

1. Ezekiel 20 records: “On that day [that God chose Israel] I swore to them that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands. And I said to them, Cast away the detestable things your eyes feast on, every one of you, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God. But they rebelled against Me and were not willing to listen to Me. None of them cast away the detestable things their eyes feasted on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt” (Ezekiel 20:6–8a). Apply Ezekiel’s words to your life and situation.

2. Ezekiel 22:30–31 talks about looking for a man to stand before Him for the land so God should not destroy it. God says, though, that He found no one. Reflect on what Jesus has done for us in light of these verses. How did Jesus serve as such a man? From what dreadful consequences did He deliver us?

3. At God’s direction the prophet Ezekiel was to show no grief or mourning at the death of his wife—the delight of his eyes (Ezekiel 24:15–27). By his actions Ezekiel pictured for the people their own denial of sin and its results. What examples of a denial of sin and its results can you describe?

4. Ezekiel 28:1–26 describes sinful human pride. Is all pride sinful? If not, what is godly pride? See 1 Corinthians 1:27–31.

5. The people of Israel in the days of Ezekiel sought to strengthen themselves through an alliance with Egypt rather than turning to the Lord as their source of strength (Ezekiel 29:1–16). When or in what situations do God’s people of today seek unhelpful alliances rather than going to God for help?

6. Ezekiel 34:11–16a provides a beautiful picture of our God, the Good Shepherd. How does our God search for the lost, bring back the strayed, bind up the injured and strengthen the weak (v. 16a)?

March Week 4

March 23–29; Ezekiel 35–45

1. Through the prophet Ezekiel, God promised to bless Israel rather than punish them as they deserved. He explained: “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came” (Ezekiel 36:22). Explain how God saved His people through Jesus according to His holy name.
2. Review Ezekiel 37:24–28. What features of the holy Christian church are pictured here?
3. Ezekiel’s 38th chapter ends with a description of turmoil and natural catastrophes through which God will show His greatness and holiness and make Himself known in the sight of many nations. What conditions at the present time suggest that this is already happening, at least to some degree?
4. The temple of the Lord prophesied by Ezekiel in chapters 40–42 represented God’s presence among His people. In what ways is God present among His people today?
5. Ezekiel 43 and Revelation 21:1–4 provide us with a glimpse of the life in heaven that awaits us and all who trust in Jesus as their Savior. What aspect of heaven do you most look forward to?
6. Compare Ezekiel 44:28 with Revelation 5:6–10. How have all believers become priests? What is our inheritance?

March Week 5

March 30–31; Ezekiel 43–48

1. Ezekiel 46:16–18 speaks of an inheritance for God's people, which will be received by the sons of the prince from the prince himself. 1 Peter 1:3–9 describes the inheritance of those who will receive eternal life. Summarize this inheritance.

2. In the last part of his vision (recorded in Ezekiel 48), Ezekiel saw the division of the land of Israel into portions for each of the 12 tribes. Then he saw the 12 gates of the city of Jerusalem, each named for one of the tribes. (These gates were also seen by John in his vision of the new Jerusalem [Revelation 21:12-14]). In a grand finale, Ezekiel was shown the name of the city from that time on: "The LORD is there" (Ezekiel 48:35). Why is this a fitting ending to Ezekiel's vision and his book? Compare Revelation 21:1-4.

Leaders Notes

Many of the questions call for group participants to share personal insights, examples, or life experiences and applications. Answers to these questions will vary. If no one answers right away, allow a moment or two of silence so that everyone has time to think through the question. Other questions call for specific factual or analytical responses. Suggested answers for these appear below.

January Week 1

1. God desires all people to know His justice and mercy. God is holy; He punishes sin. Each of us must recognize our inability to keep God's commandments. But God is also a God of love. He sent His only Son to earn our forgiveness and eternal salvation. Through Jesus, God welcomes us into His family. As the Holy Spirit works through the means of grace, He empowers us to live our lives for Jesus. The beginning of a new year provides the opportunity for us to reflect on our sinfulness, but also to rejoice in the forgiveness Jesus earned for us through His life, death, and resurrection and to rededicate ourselves to God through the power of His Spirit.

2. Encourage participants to share situations and conditions that remind them of our need for the Savior. Stress that God's people will always be aliens in a hostile world. Jesus' loving, forgiving presence encourages, strengthens, and directs us to the life He would have us live.

3. Point out that God has made us His own so that we might live for Him—eternally. Encourage participants to share the opportunities for service in which they will involve themselves during the year ahead.

January Week 2

1. Despite the fact that God has given His only Son to rescue fallen humanity, many stubbornly resist His great free gift of grace. Yet God is patient. He withholds the end of all things so that more and more people have time and opportunity to come to faith through the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. Encourage participants to share their “dark night of the soul” experiences and how Jesus brought them through. Stress that God doesn't promise to remove troubles, pain, and suffering from our lives. Rather, He walks with us to strengthen, support, and encourage us each step of the way.
3. Affirm participants in their responses. Share examples of your own knowledge and experience. History is replete with “wolves and lambs” coming together at the foot of the cross to receive the healing, reconciliation, and restoration won there for us and for all people.
4. At the final judgment the door of heaven will be open to all who trust in Jesus as their Savior. Nothing, not even the grossest of sins, will keep those who belong to God through faith from entering. Similarly, the door of heaven will be permanently closed to those without faith; no claims of worthiness, qualification, or merit outside of Christ Jesus will gain anyone access.
5. Participants are likely to choose from among the following images depicting the happiness and bliss of eternal glory: a banquet complete with the best of food and beverage; a picture of peoples of all nations freed from the shroud of death; the wiping away of all tears and sadness; the removal of the disgrace of God's people; and joy in the salvation that God has provided us through faith in Christ Jesus (Isaiah 25:6–9).
6. God's desire to save all people makes His acts of judgment upon those without faith His strange and alien work. We can find comfort in the knowledge that God's love reaches out with a desire to save all people through Christ Jesus our Lord.

January Week 3

1. Encourage participants to share. Stress that God's Spirit brings to all who have come to faith the ability to see and hear spirit things and to understand, recognize, and appreciate God's power and grace in their life.
2. Suffering and persecution are only temporary annoyances for the people of God. Ultimately God's saving strength and power will rescue us, just as they did God's people in the days of Hezekiah. "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning" (Psalm 30:5b).
3. Encourage students to share the acts of deliverance that God has worked in their life. Underscore the concept that all good things originate from the hand of our loving and gracious God.
4. Despite the ups and down of life, with its moments of despair, ecstasy, and everything in between, God is faithful to the promises of His Word. On Him we can ever depend.
5. Like a mighty warrior, Jesus boldly and confidently resisted the devil and his temptations. As a humble servant, Jesus willingly took our punishment in our place, suffering and dying for all of our sins.
6. God upholds and loves all lives for whom His Son died, including those of persons not yet born and those very advanced in age.

January Week 4

1. Stress that God desires to work through the situations and experiences of our life to bring us closer to Him. Our loving, heavenly Father disciplines and guides us in order to teach, mold, and shape us so that we may produce a harvest of righteousness (Hebrews 12:7–11).
2. Sin, death, and the devil's power no longer hold any power over those who trust in Jesus as their Savior. Though we must contend with these three powers of darkness until we go to live with Jesus in heaven, Jesus has freed us from their control and domination in our life.
3. Empowered by God's Spirit through the means of grace, God's people follow our Savior's example, enduring hardship and persecution in order to remain true to our Lord and to His will for us. The writer to the Hebrews encourages, "let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking for Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted" (Hebrews 12:1b–3).
4. Among the spoils Jesus' victory brings to us are forgiveness, salvation, and a new and eternal life in His name. Together with these three we have joy, increased knowledge of God and His will, and the blessings of an ever-growing relationship with both God and those others who are members of Christ's body.
5. Participant responses will vary but may focus on God's everlasting kindness, compassion, unfailing love, covenant of peace, strength, and protection.
6. The blessings that God provides to all people through the Messiah are for all people—people of every nation. He desires for all to be saved (1 Timothy 2:3–4).

January Week 5

1. God's power moves His people to serve others, including those suffering the effects of injustice, oppression, and poverty.
2. Improvements in travel and communication technologies are helping to advance the spread of the Gospel throughout the world. Ask participants to share specific examples.
3. Jesus binds up the brokenhearted in that only He can remedy the pain, brokenness, and other devastating consequences of sin. Encourage participants to cite passages of Scripture that "bind up the brokenhearted" in various situations.
4. God's Spirit nurtures, sustains, and encourages God's people through Word and Sacraments. As we experience the daily challenges, struggles, and joys of life, through His Word He shapes us into the kind of individuals He would have us become for His glory and the blessing of those touched by our life and witness.
5. God never gives up on us. He continually works to restore, uphold, mature, empower, and embolden those who belong to Him.
6. The concluding verses of Isaiah reference the final judgment. The coming of the end can bring joy to believers in the sure and certain knowledge that soon we will live forever in glory with our Savior; the coming of the end can also lead believers to an urgent concern for the eternal welfare of those who do not yet know and believe in Jesus as their Savior.

February Week 1

1. Affirm God's power and love and grace as constants in the life of every believer. Invite those who are comfortable in doing so to share about things they would like to change. Do not force anyone to share. Stress that each of us has particular sins that continue to nag us throughout our life.
2. Persistent and unrepentant sin keeps people from enjoying the full and complete life that God intended for those He created, since sin separates us from our holy God. However, as baptized children of God, we can rejoice because our Baptism 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."
3. Those who seek to accept the values and beliefs of those around them in a desire to fit in might remain connected to the Word and Sacraments as long as they are surrounded by those who love and serve the triune God. However, God would have each individual grow in grace and courage so that he or she is able to stand strong against those influences that compromise or contradict the Word of God.
4. Responses may vary somewhat. Signs of the approaching end of all things include the coming of one claiming to be the Christ, wars and rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes, persecution of God's people, false prophets, an increase of wickedness, and the preaching of the Gospel extending to all nations.
5. God's Son Jesus came to earth to become one of us. In an attitude of extreme kindness and benevolence He lived a perfect life and died, bearing the curse of death in our place in payment for all sins. At the Last Day, however, Christ will come to judge the living and the dead. At the judgment unbelievers will be banished to eternal punishment.
6. Examples of the isolation, rebuke, or ridicule associated with following God will vary according to participants' experiences. Stress Jesus' promise to sustain and remain with us to strengthen and uphold us during these difficult times, fortified with His Word and promises.
7. Although Jesus has earned forgiveness, new life, and eternal salvation for all people, the Bible teaches that those who reject His free gifts and blessings will not receive them. Such is the limit of God's grace.

February Week 2

1. Comment that at times we especially appreciate certain of these Spirit-brought blessings in our life. Affirm participants' comments.
2. God continually works to mold and shape the lives of those who belong to Him. As the Holy Spirit strengthens and motivates us through the means of grace, God uses the external circumstances of our lives to make us into His vessels. See also 2 Corinthians 4:7–12. Other object lessons might include a growing plant, a continually remodeled house, or the preparation of a special meal.
3. God unleashed His anger and fury and great wrath against all people when Jesus took our place in order to die for our sins at Calvary.
4. Expressions of any belief system apart from the teachings of the Word of God are straw instead of wheat. Other words may fill, temporarily satisfy, and even delight those who receive them, but only God's Word provides true and lasting benefit.
5. God patiently works through His Word, calling sinners to repentance so that He may forgive and restore them. God's words, spoken in the time of Jeremiah, echo the same call to people today.
6. The influence of the ungodly can subtly lead believers into abandoning the one true God. Nevertheless, only by reaching out to unbelievers can we bring the saving Gospel to them.

February Week 3

1. From God's Word we know of His plans to forgive and save us through the merits of Christ. We also know that He plans to equip and empower us for a life of service to Him.
2. The new covenant of which Christ is the mediator between God and people is superior to God's covenant with His Old Testament people. God's people will delight in serving Him as a Spirit driven response to what they have freely received through God's saving work, which has been fully revealed and completed for us by Christ on Calvary's cross.
3. God's Spirit changes and then nurtures the human heart. He does this work through Word and Sacrament.
4. God's Word reminds us that we are all sinners (Psalm 14:3). Participant examples will vary. Any action or attitude by which we regard ourselves as superior to others or by which we distance ourselves from those in need goes against the teachings of God's Word.
5. Disregarding God's coming judgment is dangerous because the time available to us is short and many remain in ignorance of the one true God and the free gift of forgiveness, new life, and eternal salvation available through His Son.
6. Responses will vary. Most of us find it difficult to submit to God and His authority during times of abundance and success.

February Week 4

1. Matthew's Gospel reminds us that many choose the broad and easy road traveled by those who fall into the ways of the world, leading ultimately to eternal destruction; few remain on the narrow road that leads to life eternal. Underscore the concept that by God's grace through the working of the Holy Spirit we can remain faithful to the end and reach our heavenly goal (Philippians 1:6).
2. Stress God's promises always to love and forgive and sustain us in the true faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Encourage participants to share the promises of God most important to them as they reflect upon their current issues of concern.
3. Examples will vary. Acts 8:1 records: "And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." Acts 8:4 provides information about how God's church grew even as the result of the persecution: "Those who were scattered went about preaching the word."
4. People, as well as nations, have always attempted to act in such a way that future generations would place good connotations upon their names. But God sees fit that Babylon is not only destroyed, but that the term "Babylon" is used in Revelation as the very embodiment of all that is evil.
5. God blesses His people through the authorities He provides for us in the government, even when such authorities are unbelievers. God uses these rulers to bless His people through the maintenance of order, the administration of justice, and the protection of human rights.

March Week 1

1. Words from Lamentations 1 describing the results of sin include, but are not limited to, the following: lonely, widow, weeps, tears, treacherously, exile, affliction, hard servitude, no resting place, overtaken, distress, mourn, desolate, groan, suffers bitterly, enemies, captives, without strength, none to help, mocked at her downfall, filthy, despise, uncleanness, fall, enemy has triumphed, sorrow, yoke, strength to fail, rejected, crush, perished, heart is wrung, bereaves, death.
2. One characteristic of false and misleading spiritual leaders is that they ignore or gloss over sin. Without a realization of our sinfulness, our hearts are not ready to receive the comfort and restoration of the Gospel.
3. Affirm participants' examples of greed and selfishness. Stress God's great unending love and faithfulness. "His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22b–23). Refer participants to page 210 of Luther's Small Catechism and the following question and response: What does such baptizing with water indicate? 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. Emphasize God's willingness always to forgive and restore us and His desire daily to empower and nurture us for the new life through His Word.
4. The prayer of which Lamentations 5:21 is a part recognizes our hopeless condition outside of God's grace and pleads for His intervention and restoration. Invite participants to share a time when they may have felt similarly defeated or weary in their stubborn resistance to God's grace and power in their life.
5. Ezekiel 1 offers a fascinating account of the glory of God. Participants may suggest that they have experienced a glimpse of God's glory when they receive the Lord's Supper, witness a birth of a child or a Baptism, or hear beautifully rendered music such as Handel's Messiah.
6. Encourage participants to share those portions of God's Word that they have committed to memory and that are especially meaningful to them as they live each day.
7. In this clear statement of Law, God pronounces His judgment against sin. Only when we repent of our sin does God's Spirit forgive and restore us as God's people. God is loving and gracious, but He does not take sin lightly, as the writings of the prophet Ezekiel clearly point out.

March Week 2

1. Natural or other disasters remind us of the awesome power of the creator and preserver of all things. Encourage and accept any examples that participants may contribute.
2. Although our nation allows for the free exercise of religion, our popular culture increasingly downplays, mocks, scorns, or desecrates things sacred to believers. God blesses our nation and its people, allowing us to enjoy freedoms and prosperity. Yet the difficulties, attacks, and troubles that befall us, either individually or as a nation, serve to remind us of the sinful world in which we live and from which God continually calls, forgives, and empowers a people dedicated to Him.
3. Encourage participants to share how God has changed them through the power of His Word and Sacraments. His Spirit works in us so that we may “put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator” (Colossians 3:10).
4. God’s people become guilty of saying “peace” when there is no peace or of covering a flimsy wall with whitewash when we ignore, wink at, or seek to cover up sin and its consequences.
5. Each of us was born in sin, an enemy of God. But God in Christ rescued us. Even when we were His enemies, Christ loved us. He died on the cross to earn our salvation for us. In His gift of faith He says to each of us, “Live.” Through Baptism He welcomes us into God’s family where He strengthens, encourages, and nurtures us in His Word. Through the forgiveness He provides us each time we repent, He enables us to keep on living for Him each new day of our lives.
6. God desires to forgive, save, and restore all people, including you and me. He desires those who belong to Him not to forsake and abandon Him.

March Week 3

1. Even though God in Christ has freed those who love and trust in Him from the punishment and consequences of sin, the temptations and desires of the devil, the world, and our old sinful nature continue to tug and pull at each of us. We continue to fall into comfortable sins and patterns of sinfulness that wage spiritual warfare against us.
2. Jesus stood between the holy and just God and humanity and pleaded the case of those who lost the image of God at the fall into sin and who, by virtue of sin, deserved nothing but eternal damnation. Through the innocent life He lived and the death He died at Calvary, He paid our penalty in full.
3. We deny our sin when we rationalize that our behavior is just as good as that of others or that we are not breaking any of the civil laws by our behavior, even if God's Word clearly tells us that what we are doing is wrong. The devil disguises truth in a variety of ways, just as He did in his conversation with Adam and Eve in Eden.
4. Pride in our individual or collective merit or worthy behavior is sinful. However, pride in God and His grace in our life gives glory and honor to Him and is not wrong. Quoting from Jeremiah 9:24, Paul wrote, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:31).
5. In all instances and situations God would have His people come to Him first and primarily for the help, healing, or protection that only He can provide. Though He often uses the professional skills or kindness of others, all assistance and relief ultimately originate from His good and gracious hand.
6. The terms "the lost," "the strayed," "the injured," and "the weak" adequately describe our neighbors, co-workers, and friends. Perhaps one or more of these terms accurately describes us. God promises always to help, forgive, restore, and strengthen. Jesus our Good Shepherd demonstrated on Calvary's tree the extent of His great love for us and for all people. He said, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out" (John 6:37).

March Week 4

1. God saved us not because of our worthiness to be saved, but because of His great mercy and faithfulness. Refer to the First Petition of the Lord's Prayer. Jesus hallowed God's name perfectly in our place. The Savior taught complete truth and modeled that truth perfectly in the life He lived in our place.
2. The reference to God's servant David ruling over God's people points to David's descendent Jesus, the author, Lord, and shepherd of the church. Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus brought us a covenant of peace that will endure forever. Jesus has made His dwelling among His people, promising never to leave us (Matthew 28:20). One day He will take us to live with Him in the happiness and bliss of heaven.
3. Participants will cite current conflicts and natural catastrophes affecting nations of people.
4. God remains present among His people through the means of grace—His Word and the Sacraments. These are His great gifts to the church.
5. Participant comments are likely to focus on the complete happiness of heaven, which we are able to relate to most closely through the things that we do not find there. Among these are tears, death, mourning, crying, and pain. Instead we will live in the presence of the God who has created, redeemed, and sanctified us for this eternally blissful existence.
6. Like the Old Testament priests who served God in a life of dedication, all who had gained heaven through faith in Christ Jesus will be a kingdom and priests, dedicated to God and able to serve Him perfectly, unhindered and unencumbered by sin and its effects.

March Week 5

1. Our God has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. In Him we have an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. Our God also keeps us in faith until we receive our salvation. Though God's people may endure grief and trouble for a time, through the means of grace our God will strengthen us through these trials and bring us inexpressible and glorious joy because we are receiving the salvation of our souls.

2. Ezekiel's vision dealt with the return of the Lord to dwell among His people and what that would mean for them. The name of the city summarizes this all-important theme: the presence of God with His people. In the beginning of his ministry, Ezekiel was called to proclaim to the people that the Lord could no longer dwell in their midst because of their divided loyalty, their unfaithfulness to him with other gods. In a vision, Ezekiel saw the withdrawal of the Lord's glory from the temple and the city. But after their destruction, Ezekiel was called to proclaim that the Lord would cleanse His people from their idolatry and make it possible for them to enjoy full fellowship with Him forever. Thus the name of the city is a fitting ending to Ezekiel because it reveals the essence of God's message through Ezekiel: that the Lord desires to dwell among His people and bless them with His presence. In Revelation 21 John also saw a similar finale to his vision: he saw the coming of the heavenly Jerusalem, where God will make His dwelling directly among His people and will bless them forever.