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GERD ALTMANN, PIXABAY

Dive Into the Bible



Essay by Pastor Jeff Blain

One of my favorite things as a pastor is seeing people get excited about digging into their Bibles! It's a delight to watch as the Holy Spirit opens people up to God's Word, and they start making everyday connections between faith and life.

It is not uncommon for many Christian people to have tucked away in their heads a veritable potpourri of Bible stories — many learned as a child in Sunday School. However, what is not nearly as common is for those same people to have those stories stitched together in a unified, coherent way from Genesis to Jesus.

In Luke 24, we read about the risen — but unrecognized — Jesus walking along the road to Emmaus with two previously unknown disciples who are so confused and discouraged by all that had taken place in Jerusalem that the only thing they can do is leave it behind and go elsewhere. The events of Good Friday had taken all the wind out of their sails. And even though they just heard that morning from the women about the miracle of Easter, they still couldn't make sense of things.

But as Jesus begins to interpret the Scriptures to them — and Scripture here means what we call the Old Testament! — their hearts begin to burn and the connections begin to be made. By the end of that seven-mile walk, many of those dots had been lined up and the picture of the Jesus story had come alive for them.

They were so excited and overwhelmed by what they had heard that they hurried back to Jerusalem — in the dark! — to tell their friends that the Good News of Easter is true: Jesus is alive. Death is defeated. God is faithful to his promises!

Many of the [Crossways Bible Study materials](#) are written to help people to take their own Emmaus journey to meet the risen Jesus. Using a combination of words and illustrations, each study offers a different opportunity to dig into the Bible's big story.

"See Through the Scriptures" is written to help people begin to scratch the surface by providing an overview or survey of the narrative from Genesis to Jesus. This course can typically be taught in six to eight 90-minute sessions.

The course "The Divine Drama" is a bit more in-depth. There are 16 sessions on the biblical narrative and then 14 more on some of the central teachings of our faith such as the Holy Trinity, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Prayer, Salvation by Grace, and our Spiritual Battle.

"Crossways" goes deeper still, with 40 sessions on the Old Testament and Intertestamental writings followed by 20 more sessions on the New Testament. In this course, you will spend some significant time in every book of the Bible. And while you have done some digging, you will know that there is still more to do! (Just like those travelers to Emmaus!)

There are several topical studies as well. You can spend 10 weeks looking at some of Jesus' well-known parables. You can take a Lenten journey following Jesus to his "coronation" on the cross. You can dig into the "real" Christmas story or look more deeply at the Apostles' Creed. You can engage in a study of stewardship or learn how to pray like Jesus.

While the studies are designed for a small group setting, you can do them on your own. Each comes with a leader's guide and other helps. And as you have probably experienced before, those who set out to lead the study will probably feel like they learn the most as they prepare themselves for each of the sessions.

I have been using these materials for over 35 years and they are still the best thing I have found to help adults make the connection between the Bible, faith, and life.

Do consider giving it a try!

Jeff Blain is pastor at Ascension Lutheran Church in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Learn more about Crossways at solapublishing.com/crossways.

Journey Through the Psalms

Mini Bible Study Installment



PSALM 4:1,4-8

Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness!
You have given me relief when I was in distress.
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!
Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. *Selah*
Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the LORD.
There are many who say, "Who will show us some good?
Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!"
You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.
In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

Everyone I know has been hurt by gossip. Maybe the playground chant that “sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me” lulled us into a false sense of security, but words hurt. Maybe it’s carelessness or misunderstanding or maybe it’s easy to paint an uncharitable picture of our neighbor when we’re looking for someone to blame, but words cause the type of damage that’s harder to heal than any broken bone. Words can prick at hearts, damage relationships, and leave reputations battered and bruised.

When King David first penned this psalm, he was experiencing his own barrage of gossip. He cries out that his honor has been “turned to shame” and even takes time to acknowledge the righteous anger he feels towards those who disparage him, but this psalm is written primarily to give thanks for the security the Lord has provided David during these attacks. David has prayed for deliverance from his enemies, and now he praises God because the Lord has provided him with the wisdom to know that David’s honor is not found in his crown, or in his earthly reputation, or in his ability to defend these things. His honor is found in the God’s love for him.

As the faithful, God provides us comfort in the knowledge that no matter what this world may try to say to us or about us, all honor and justice is found in our God who is faithful to us until the end.

FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Read the psalm and reflect upon the following questions provided for personal devotions or a short Bible study session with group discussion.

1. Why are we so quick to hurt one another with our words? Does our culture encourage it?
2. David says to “be angry, but do not sin” (v. 4). Do you find comfort in the permission to be angry? How do we honor our emotions without sinning?
3. David says the Lord has put more joy in his heart than “grain and wine” (v. 7). What does God say about his people in scripture? How does this give us joy?
4. The Psalm ends with David laying down for a peaceful night’s sleep. How does trusting in the Lord provide us with this peace when the world seems unkind or chaotic?

PRAYER

O Lord, who spoke the world into being, we give thanks for the relief you have given us in our distress. Guard our mouths and the mouths of our neighbors. Help us to entrust our honor and justice to you. Provide peace in our relationship with your people and joy in our relationship with you. Amen.

The author of this installment, **Rev. Taylor Rister-Stempniak** of Fresno, California, is pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in the community of Easton.

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Blessman International



Sharing Christ's Love in South Africa — Ministry Partner Focus by Brett Hendrickson

LEARN MORE

Brett Hendrickson serves as Executive Director of Blessman International, leading the organization's mission to share God's love in South Africa. With a background in ministry and nonprofit leadership, Brett previously served as Director of Church Relations, where he helped congregations engage in global missions. His passion for discipleship and community transformation makes him an invaluable leader as Blessman International continues to grow. [Brett is eager to connect](#) with churches and mission-minded individuals.

For more than two decades, Blessman International has been transforming lives in South Africa through Christ-centered humanitarian work. Founded by Dr. Jim and Beth Blessman, the ministry provides food, clean water, educational support, and discipleship to vulnerable children.

A core part of our mission is nutrition, with Blessman International serving over six million meals each year to hungry children through our network of feeding hubs. Through partnerships with churches and donors, we help ensure that children receive the nourishment they need to grow and thrive.

Blessman International also provides clean water and safe sanitation. We have drilled over 70 freshwater wells, bringing safe drinking water to rural communities. Our efforts to provide dignity through the installation of proper sanitation facilities help prevent disease and tragic accidents involving pit toilets.

Another key focus is discipleship and education. We partner with schools and churches to provide Bible lessons, leadership training, and academic resources, equipping young people with knowledge and spiritual growth. In addition to these partnerships, we operate two churches in South Africa — Lighthouse Christian Church and Mountain View Hope Christian Church — where communities gather for wor-



To learn how you can partner with Blessman International, email brett@blessmaninternational.org or call 515-343-5920.

ship and outreach.

Mission trips are an essential part of our ministry, allowing volunteers from around the world to serve in South Africa firsthand. Team members participate in outreach activities such as shoe distribution, serving meals, optical outreach, and connecting with children. Female volunteers can also distribute reusable feminine hygiene kits to girls in need.

Blessman International invites churches, individuals, and organizations to partner in this life-changing work.

To learn more about mission trips, child sponsorships, and giving opportunities, visit BlessmanInternational.org.

Brett Hendrickson is the executive director of Blessman International and serves in its Iowa office.

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