

ADULT STUDY GUIDE

This is the adult component of the Enduring Faith Bible Curriculum. This piece follows the **same scope and sequence** as the other levels: **Early Childhood, Elementary, and Youth**. This alignment presents some amazing opportunities.

- First of all, it helps all ages speak a **common theological language**.
- Second, it helps God’s people build an understanding of the **lifelong nature of learning God’s Word**—that we don’t just learn the narratives once or twice before moving on to other matters.
- Third, and critical to this curriculum, it helps **equip households** to teach the faith at home.

If parents and other adults spend time meditating and discussing the narratives of the Bible while the younger generations in the congregation study the same narratives, then there will be greater opportunity throughout the week to **reflect together** upon what the narrative says and what it means. In other words, studying the narratives of the Bible as adults is a blessing in and of itself, but it also helps **equip parents and faith leaders** to be more confident and feel empowered to extend those conversations into the household.

FEATURES OF THIS STUDY

This study guide is meant to provide some guidelines and springboards for discussion in your Bible study groups.

- The **first page** of each lesson provides the central focus statements, not only for the Adult level, but also for the other levels. Use this as a way to orient yourself to the **main themes and goals** of the lessons across all levels. You’ll also find helpful **tips for preparation**.
- The **middle two pages** begin with an introductory “**Launch**” section, which provides prompts for beginning the study and an open-ended reflection question to kick off group discussion. The following “**Learn & Live**” section breaks down the text into three to five narrative sections. Each one of these sections has some additional commentary, a reflection question, and some helps to better understand possible answers to the reflection question. The “**Leave**” section provides prompts for a final reflection question and some other considerations to close the lesson. The **sidebars** include leader tips and bonus activities to help you think through options for extending the lesson.
- The **final page** of each lesson is the student piece. Copy one lesson handout per learner, and distribute this at the beginning of class.

TIPS FOR USE

This study guide is designed primarily to help give you, the leader, some thoughts and prompts to help guide and assist facilitation of the class. Below are some tips for how to use it.

- This is meant to be a Bible study, so each learner will need access to a Bible. Encourage your learners to bring their own to class.
- Don’t neglect the lesson handout. The primary reason for this page is to create some space for each learner to reflect and engage the questions on his or her own. Often, any given group will have one or two vocal learners and others who may not speak up. Consider using techniques to help engage all learners in the process, such as having each learner write down his or her reflection privately before sharing, having each learner share with a partner before opening up discussion, or changing the seating arrangements to create small groups.
- Use the opening reflection question as a time to build community. Adult learners, generally speaking, desire to share their experience with one another, and this lesson starter provides an opportunity for this.
- For each narrative section, ask volunteers to read the text aloud while the rest follow along. Don’t force anyone; adults, like children and youth, may be self-conscious about their reading or public speaking ability.
- Download the Enduring Faith Page from the online digital resource center and hand out copies to your learners. Near the end of the lesson, talk through the prompts, which help the learners extend the lessons in their households throughout the week. Encourage learners to take this page home along with the lesson handout to be used throughout the week.

THE GENTILE CAUSE

The Jerusalem
Council
Acts 15:1–14, 22–35
AD 49

BIBLE TRUTH

The Gospel is for everyone.

LEARNER GOAL

I can identify how the early Christians resolved the controversy in the text, and I can consider how their approach to teaching that the Gospel is for everyone applies today.

BIBLE VERSE

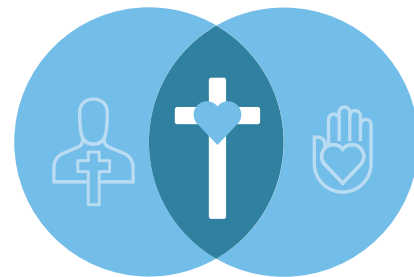
For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Romans 3:28

LAW & GOSPEL

I sin when I think that I must do something, however small, to contribute to my salvation. **Jesus has done it all perfectly for me. In Him, my salvation is complete.**

SCRIPTURE SNAPSHOT

A disagreement arises in the Church concerning the Gentile believers. Some want to make the Gentiles follow the Jewish laws. Peter, Paul, and Barnabas give testimony to the Jerusalem Council concerning their work among the Gentiles. The council sends a letter to the Gentile believers, encouraging them and welcoming them as God's chosen people.



CONNECTING IDENTITY & CALLING

IDENTITY: WHO AM I?

God welcomes all into His family without placing qualifications on them.

CALLING: WHY AM I HERE?

I can share my faith with others no matter their background.

GROWING IN FAITH FOR LIFE

See how this lesson builds on previous learning for each age.

ADULT

I can identify how the early Christians resolved the controversy in the text, and I can consider how their approach to teaching that the Gospel is for everyone applies today.

YOUTH

I can show how conflict resolution in the text informs Christian debate today and reminds us that the Gospel is for everyone.

ELEMENTARY

I understand that the Good News that Jesus is the Savior is for all people everywhere.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

I know God loves me just as I am and forgives my sins for Jesus' sake.

LESSON PREP

BASIC Read the narrative and study notes in *The Lutheran Study Bible (TLSB)*.

MORE TIME Read Acts 15:15–21 and 36–41 in *TLSB* with study notes for more context.

IN DEPTH Read the article “Conflict among Christians” on page 1867 of *TLSB*.



LEADER NOTE

This is meant to be a wide open question, and reflections will vary based on your congregational context and makeup. Though good to discuss, a question like this can lead to tension among learners, so it will be important for you to serve as a facilitator, disarming and redirecting learners as needed. The point, ultimately, is to get your learners considering what makes controversies or debates within the Church important or not and why. After a brief time of discussing the question, direct your learners to the text, where you will investigate how the early Christians identified and resolved a controversy in a peaceful and beneficial way.



BONUS ACTIVITY

For more on the opening reflection, consider looking over together, or directing your learners to, the article “Conflict among Christians” in *The Lutheran Study Bible*, page 1867.

LAUNCH

WELCOME

Welcome the group, and open in prayer. It may be a good time to take prayer requests and pray, either now or at the conclusion.

REVIEW

Review the Bible Truth, Bible Verse, and Learner Goal. Then, begin with the opening question.

OPENING REFLECTION

Make a list of different controversies, big or small, in the Church today. Rank them from most to least important, and discuss why you ranked them the way you did.

LEARN & LIVE

ACTS 15:1–5

BIBLE COMMENTARY

Paul and Barnabas return from their missionary journey to their home congregation in Antioch. While there, some men come from Judea (though Antioch is north of Jerusalem, one always travels “down” from Jerusalem), teaching that one must conform to the Mosaic Law of circumcision to be a Christian. The Judaizers’ teaching, which spread in Antioch, implies that Jesus has not completely fulfilled the Law for all believers, and that some or all of the ceremonial and civil laws of the Old Testament are still in effect. This, no doubt, leads to great unrest and doubt in the minds of the believers in Antioch, especially uncircumcised converts, as to their salvation. Paul and Barnabas debate these new teachers extensively and are appointed with others to go to Jerusalem to discuss the controversy. On their way, they share how they had witnessed God working among the Gentiles. We can learn from their example of going about resolving controversies in an ordered way with the best interest of the overall Church in mind rather than going at it alone.

REFLECTION QUESTION

How did the congregation in Antioch deal with the controversy, and how did they go about bringing this to the attention of the Church? What can we learn from this in the Church today?

REFLECTION HELPS

Paul and Barnabas went as delegates to the main congregation in Jerusalem to work to resolve the controversy. In the Church today, we should always measure any teaching against God’s Word and work in an orderly way for peace and unity.

ACTS 15:6–14

BIBLE COMMENTARY

A lively debate ensues in Jerusalem. The Judaizers likely did not come with the delegation from Antioch, indicating that there were others in Jerusalem who shared their views. Finally, Peter stands up, advocating for the testimony of Paul and Barnabas. Peter points to God’s own revelation among them that the Holy Spirit was for all who received and believed the Gospel of Christ. He calls the renewed emphasis on circumcision and the Mosaic Law a yoke that none have ever been able to bear. Salvation has always come by God’s grace through faith in God’s promises, first to Jews but also to the Gentiles.

REFLECTION QUESTION

How did Peter go about resolving this issue? What’s one word or phrase from this section that sticks out to you, and why do you think it sticks out to you so much?

REFLECTION HELPS

Peter allowed people to debate first, then resolved the debate by pointing people to God’s grace to the Gentiles and focusing on Christ. Today, in all our doings, we are to cling to the Word of God and the Gospel of Christ above all.

ACTS 15:22–35

BIBLE COMMENTARY

After Peter, Barnabas, Paul, and James speak on the matter (Acts 15:12–21), the Jerusalem Council comes to a decision. Though unclear as to the manner of the decision, be it by vote or some other method, the unified decision is clear. The Judaizers who put undue burden on circumcision and other civil and ceremonial laws above the Gospel are corrected, and their poisonous message is to be abolished throughout the Church. The Gospel is for Gentiles as well as Jews. The council is directed by the Holy Spirit, and we are left without further detail as to how the Spirit conveyed this information. Regardless, the inclusion of the Gentiles by faith into the Church is not up for debate. The council does put several restrictions in place. The first is avoiding anything associated with idolatry, a practice not only offensive to God but offensive to the consciences of many Jews. The next is sexual immorality, a common practice among the Gentiles that needed to be emphasized as going against God’s will. The last restriction is eating animals with blood still in them, further emphasizing the precious role of blood in God’s plan of salvation and avoiding the likelihood of offending Jews. This message goes forth to Antioch and then to other corners of the Church. Accompanying the Antioch delegation are Judas and Silas, elders and prophetic teachers from Jerusalem. They aid the congregation in Antioch for a time before returning to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas continue their ministry to the Antioch congregation, refreshed in the resolution of the Church.

REFLECTION QUESTION

Looking deeply at the text, identify the different ways the Church resolved and chose to move on from the controversy. What can the Church today learn from their example?

REFLECTION HELPS

The Jerusalem Council came to a unanimous decision and sent respectable elders back to Antioch with Paul’s delegation to affirm their teaching. In addition, they sent a letter to Antioch with their decision with the intent of making this letter widely distributed. Their decision, by the will of the Holy Spirit, put certain restrictions only on practices that would offend specific Jewish customs. This well-thought-out response was accepted with joy in Antioch. Today we, too, can learn from the Jerusalem Church to work toward unity of belief, acknowledging diversity among congregations but being mindful to not burden the consciences of others as we proclaim the Gospel.

LEAVE

FINAL REFLECTION

Identify how the early Christians resolved the controversy in the text, and consider how their approach to teaching that the Gospel is for everyone applies today.

TAKE HOME

Equip your learners with ideas for taking the lesson into their households by giving them access to the Enduring Faith Pages.

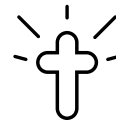
CLOSE WITH PRAYER

If you haven’t yet, take prayer requests, or encourage a volunteer from the class to pray as you prepare to leave.



BONUS ACTIVITY

If you have time, consider also reading through **Galatians 3:15–4:7**, where Paul elaborated on the theme of the role of the Law from Abraham to Moses to Christ, especially the ceremonial and civil laws. Discuss the role of God’s Law during this period, how it served as a guardian until the coming of Christ and the gift of Baptism. Then discuss the use of the moral law in the lives of Christians today, how God’s Law still serves as a curb, mirror, and guide in the life of the Christian.



CHRIST CONNECTION

Christ came to be the Savior of the world, to Jew and Gentile alike.



LEADER NOTE

They debated but worked toward unity and resolution. They sought to listen to and align with God’s Word. Today we are to likewise listen to God’s Word and work toward unity and the proclamation of the Gospel to all.

THE GENTILE CAUSE

BIBLE TRUTH

The Gospel is for everyone.

LEARNER GOAL

I can identify how the early Christians resolved the controversy in the text, and I can consider how their approach to teaching that the Gospel is for everyone applies today.

BIBLE VERSE

For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Romans 3:28

ADULT
Unit 9
LESSON HANDOUT
Lesson 7

The Jerusalem Council
Acts 15:1–14, 22–35

REFLECTIONS

OPENING REFLECTION Make a list of different controversies, big or small, in the Church today. Rank them from most to least important, and discuss why you ranked them the way you did.

ACTS 15:1–5 How did the congregation in Antioch deal with the controversy, and how did they go about bringing this to the attention of the Church? What can we learn from this in the Church today?

ACTS 15:6–14 How did Peter go about resolving this issue? What’s one word or phrase from this section that sticks out to you, and why do you think it sticks out to you so much?

ACTS 15:22–35 Looking deeply at the text, identify the different ways the Church resolved and chose to move on from the controversy. What can the Church today learn from their example?

FINAL REFLECTION Identify how the early Christians resolved the controversy in the text, and consider how their approach to teaching that the Gospel is for everyone applies today.

NOTES

A series of horizontal dotted lines for taking notes.