


THE 
PRESENT
WORD

ADULT BIBLE LESSONS

PARTICIPANT'S BOOK

WINTER 2020-2021

CALL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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Introduction

As disciples, a key element of our discipleship is to discern what God is calling us to be and do. When we make a commitment to follow Jesus Christ, it is not enough to simply respond with words. We embark on a lifelong journey in which we are continually seeking God's will for our lives. As we grow and change, we may discover new ways to be faithful, more complex challenges to which we must respond, and new partners for ministry. Together with other brothers and sisters in Christ, we experience the Spirit moving in and through us as we seek to hear God's voice and respond.

In this study, participants have the opportunity to experience God's call by exploring New Testament texts together. First, we encounter the witness of Jesus' heritage and those persons who were faithful to God's call before and at Jesus' birth. Then we explore Jesus' call to ministry and his response through the accounts of the Gospel writers. Finally, we are introduced to faithful women who persevered as disciples despite the context in which they lived and worked.

As you examine the testimony of the New Testament about God's call as revealed in the life of Jesus Christ, may your own sense of call become more clear, and may you commit yourself anew to live faithfully as Christ's disciple.

The Uniform Series

The Present Word quarterly Bible study is based on the Uniform Series, a plan for reading and studying the Bible. The objectives of the series are to help persons increasingly:

1. to know the content of the Bible,
2. to understand the message of the Bible in light of their experiences and relationships, and
3. to be aware of God's self-disclosure, especially God's redeeming love as revealed in Jesus Christ, that they may respond in faith and love—to the end that they may know who they are and what their human situation means, grow as the children of God rooted in the Christian community, live in the Spirit of God in every relationship, fulfill their common discipleship in the world, and abide in the Christian hope.

The emphasis in these objectives is on the Bible as the record of the revelation of God in Christ as the primary source of understanding the meaning of the Christian faith and as the most effective means of confronting persons with the significant concerns of the gospel. These concerns include personal faith, values, human relationships, social responsibility, Christian hope, and the implications of Christian discipleship under the lordship of Christ and in the fellowship of his Spirit.

One of the distinctive features of the Uniform Series is the collaborative process through which denominational partners engage in the common task of developing the Lesson Guides. The development process begins with a Scope and Sequence subcommittee whose work sets a framework for the biblical themes of each six-year cycle. The Scope and Sequence team for Cycle 23 (2016–2022) chose themes that are creatively expressed in this statement of Christian faith:

The God of the Bible, the source of creation, loves us and calls us in covenant through our faith to worship and to do justice.

The underlined words in the statement compose the eight recurring themes throughout each quarterly segment of *The Present Word*.

Quarter in Brief

This quarter examines God's call in stories from the New Testament. The greatest call came to Jesus. Other calls in the New Testament led to the extension of Christian ministry into the known world.

Unit I, "The Beginning of a Call," includes four sessions from the Gospel of Matthew. Session 1 highlights the heritage of Jesus. Session 2 tells the story of Jesus' birth. Session 3 speaks of the witness of the Magi to Jesus' call as the Messiah. Session 4 tells of the call of John the Baptist.

Unit II, "Jesus and Calls in His Ministry," presents four sessions about Jesus' ministry. Luke emphasizes Jesus' call to proclamation and ministry and identifies Jesus as one who calls followers. Mark speaks to Jesus' call to a ministry of healing. John gives us a look at Jesus' call as the intercessor for those who follow him.

Unit III, "The Call of Women," is a five-week study highlighting women in ministry. The first session focuses on prophesying women mentioned in the New Testament. The second session centers the Samaritan woman's evangelistic ministry. Session 3 explores Mary Magdalene's call to unwavering discipleship. Session 4 gives an opportunity to study the impact of Priscilla's ministry. The final session focuses on Lydia's call to service and hospitality.

CALLED THROUGH HERITAGE

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Matthew 1:1-17;
Hebrews 1

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

In these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. (Heb. 1:2)

Daily Bible Readings			
M	Nov. 30	God's Anointed Ruler of All Nations	Psalms 2
T	Dec. 1	Blessed and Chosen in Christ	Ephesians 1:1-14
W	Dec. 2	Christ, Head over All People/ Things	Ephesians 1:15-23
Th	Dec. 3	In the Family Line of David	Matthew 1:6b-15
F	Dec. 4	God Anoints Jesus King	Hebrews 1:6-9
Sa	Dec. 5	Jesus, Creator and Eternal Ruler	Hebrews 1:10-14

STEPPING INTO THE WORD

Our identity is shaped in part by where we think we came from. My father's first name was Ross, named after his grandmother, Anna Ross. In my family of origin, we always assumed that Anna Ross was Scottish. We joked about inheriting frugal habits from her.

Five years ago, my aunt commissioned some genealogical research, and we found out that Anna Ross's parents immigrated to the United States from Germany. On my father's side of the family, we didn't have a single drop of Scottish blood identified in that genealogy. And in my mother's background, as far as we can tell, there are also no immigrants from Scotland.

I'm still fairly frugal, but now I see it comes from lessons learned as a child and perhaps from some inborn careful approach to life. I've had to change my perception of how my heritage influences the way I live.

Who am I? What shapes my perception of my identity? And how does that understanding of my identity shape what I'm called to be and do?

In this quarter, we focus on the nature of our call, where it comes from, and how it shapes us. In this lesson, we consider

the heritage of Jesus. Our two passages present two vivid and distinct ways of looking at his genealogy. In the first five verses of the letter to the Hebrews, we see Jesus as the Son of God—Creator and Redeemer—who reflects the very nature of God. In the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, we see Jesus’ earthly heritage.

We have an opportunity to consider our own identity and heritage in the light of these two different ways of looking at the way Jesus is described.

O God who made us and gave us identity, help us see and enjoy the significance of Jesus’ heritage as fully human and fully God. Help us hear Jesus speak to us about who he is and how he wants us to view him and enable us to grow into our call to be his disciples. Amen.



SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 1:1–5, Matthew 1:1–6, 16–17

1:1 Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. ³He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. ⁵For to which of the angels did God ever say,

“You are my Son;
today I have begotten you”?

Or again,

“I will be his Father,
and he will be my Son”?

Matthew 1:1 An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

²Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, ⁴and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab,

and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶and Jesse the father of King David.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah . . .

¹⁶And Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

¹⁷So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

Note: Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.

JESUS' HERITAGE

The first five verses of Hebrews describe God's son, Jesus, in vivid and powerful terms, giving us a great deal of information to help us understand Jesus' nature and work. Jesus speaks to us in the same way as the prophets spoke God's word to the people of Israel (vv. 1-2). Through Jesus, all the worlds were created: he is the heir and sustainer of all things (vv. 2-3). Jesus reflects God's nature precisely. After he purified the sins of humanity, he now sits at God's right hand in majesty (v. 3).

Someone reading this description might come to the conclusion that Jesus is an angel, and the writer of Hebrews addresses that perception. No angel is qualified to sit at God's right hand, and God has never called an angel "my son" (vv. 4-5).

This description roots Jesus' heritage firmly in his identity as the Son of God: creator, sustainer, and redeemer; one who speaks with a prophetic voice; and one who reflects the very nature of God. Scholars do not know who wrote the letter to the Hebrews, but the writer clearly knew how to draw on images and quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures in order to establish the identity of Jesus. Our verses for this week are the opening lines of an extended argument throughout the book of Hebrews about the importance of Jesus as the one who brings God's grace to us, and these opening verses start with Jesus' relationship to the God of the Old Testament.

The description of Jesus' heritage in Matthew chapter 1 starts from a very different place. Jesus is named the Messiah and identified as the son of David and the son of Abraham (v. 1). The specific names listed in the first five verses evoke some of the fascinating stories described in books of the Hebrew Scriptures between Genesis and Ruth: Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Tamar, Boaz, Ruth, Jesse, and David.

Scholars note that Matthew quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures and alludes to them much more often than the other Gospel writers. He was likely writing for a Jewish and Jewish Christian audience, so he would have wanted to show Jesus' connections with Jewish heritage. This genealogy establishes that connection, placing Jesus solidly within the lineage of Abraham and David.

Jews in Jesus' time expected their Messiah to come from the line of David. They based their prophecy on 2 Samuel 7:12–16, Isaiah 11:1, and Jeremiah 23:5–6. For Matthew's Jewish audience, this genealogy helped establish the idea that Jesus could be the long-awaited Messiah.

 **What key components of Jesus' identity do you think Christians today fail to emphasize?**

SON OF GOD AND HUMAN ONE

Hebrews points out that the earth where Jesus was born, lived, and died was created through Jesus and is sustained by him. Therefore, a part of Jesus' call as the son of God involves intimate relationship with creation. The Apostle Paul writes that “in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17).

In addition, Hebrews 1 describes Jesus as standing firmly in the prophetic tradition. The prophets spoke to the people of Israel throughout their history. Now the Son of God speaks. His identity and call are closely tied to his role as the One who speaks God's truth to us through the Holy Spirit. Right before the last supper, Jesus tells his disciples, “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (John 14:25–26).

Hebrews 1 describes Jesus as having “made purification for sins” (v. 3). This language evokes purification in the Hebrew Scriptures. (Num. 8:67 and Mal. 3:3 are two of many examples.) The phrase “purification for sins” is seldom used to refer to Jesus' death on the cross in contemporary Christian settings. Sometimes using different language brings out new nuances of meaning, and in this instance Jesus' role as redeemer of all people is highlighted as the step that precedes his sitting at the right hand of God in glory.

Unlike the genealogies laid out in Genesis 4, 5, and 11 and the genealogies common in Jesus' time, Matthew's genealogy includes women. Jesus' human ancestry includes a prostitute (Rahab), a woman who prostituted herself for a just reason (Tamar), a woman who is described as having committed adultery (Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah), and a foreigner (Ruth). The genealogy in Matthew indicates that Jesus' human heritage includes the outsiders and outcasts he came to reach and love.

Over the 2,000 years of Christian history, Christians have often had a hard time affirming Jesus' humanity and divinity with equal emphasis. Many heresies have stressed one over the other, such as Arianism, which emphasized Jesus' humanity and viewed the title "Son of God" as honorary only.

Overemphasis on Jesus' deity continues to influence Christians today by negating the significance of the human body and the physical creation. Jesus' heritage as descended from Abraham and David shows him to be grounded in Jewish tradition, a man living in a physical place in a physical body. Yet he is also the Son who reflects God's glory.

? Of all the components of Jesus' identity presented here, which are hardest and easiest for you to grab hold of: creator, sustainer, redeemer, one who speaks for God, or Jewish man? Why?

STEPPING INTO THE WORLD

Our call is related to our heritage, just as we have seen in Jesus' life. We have a human heritage that goes back generations, and we are influenced by the people who raised us. To a lesser or greater extent, all of us are shaped by this human heritage, and today's Scriptures encourage us to consider the ways our human heritage influences our daily lives.


As Christians, we have a faith-based heritage that shapes us as we seek to live as Christ's disciples. Our call as Christians is rooted in Jesus, the one who reflects the very image of God to us. The aspects of God's truth presented in Matthew 1 and Hebrews 1 provide specific challenges.

Matthew 1 stresses Jesus' Jewish heritage by naming his Jewish ancestors. Many of the stories of these people's lives are recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures. We can study them and learn from them. We can ponder the significance of the outcasts and foreigners who are a part of Jesus' lineage.

Jesus' role as the son of God presented in Hebrews 1 also contains numerous truths that encourage us to examine our daily lives. Jesus is involved in the creating and sustaining of the physical creation, which is also his inheritance. Are we willing to honor and care for this physical world that we hold in trust for its true owner? Our own bodies are part of the physical creation, and Jesus' intimate involvement with the creation indicates his concern for our physical bodies as well. Because Jesus is the sustainer of the entire physical creation, we can look to him for guidance and strength as we seek to live faithfully in our bodies and on this fragile earth.

Jesus speaks God's truth to us through the Holy Spirit and through the Bible. We experience challenges as we listen to his voice and try to follow him. We must make space in our lives to hear to God's voice, and we can't do it alone. We need the support of other Christians as we try to listen and obey.

Jesus our redeemer, the one who purifies us from sin, invites us to view him as our only redeemer. The advertising industry, social media, and many other societal factors pressure us to believe that our salvation rests in our next purchase or in looking good to others. Instead, God calls us to place our identity in Jesus and look for redemption only in Christ.

 **When and where do you hear Jesus' voice most easily? Who are the people who help you discern what Jesus is saying and give you support as you seek to obey what you hear from Jesus?**

SCRIPTURE NOTES

The following notes provide additional information about today's Scripture that may be helpful for your study.

1. Biblical Christology pictures Jesus as not only in the image of God, as was the first Adam (Gen. 1:26–27), but also as being the exact likeness, the complete image of God (Col. 1:15, 19; Heb. 1:3). As stated in early creeds, Jesus was both fully human and fully God.
2. The idea of inheritance (Heb. 1:4) is a key concept in Hebrews. Since Jesus is the Son of God, he passes an eternal inheritance to those called to follow him (9:15).
3. The term *father* is often used in Scripture to denote an ancestor, not necessarily a direct, biological predecessor or parent (1 Kgs. 15:11; 2 Kgs. 18:3; 22:2).