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**THE PASTORAL EPISTLES:**

“False Teachers,  
Contentment and Fighting  
the Good Fight” (1 Tim. 6:3–21)

2018–19 LCMS Circuit Bible Studies

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**PARTICIPANT GUIDE**

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# THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

A STUDY FOR DISCOVERY, MEDITATION AND CASUISTRY OF THE BROTHERS.

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Every pastor strives to do as Paul exhorts Timothy, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

This series of studies has been designed to walk through the Pastoral Epistles in support of your striving toward these ends. Each study will work through these familiar texts with a search and discover mission through self-examination. To facilitate your searching and discovery in self-examination, each text will follow with a template of questions drawn and structured according to Luther’s “A Simple Way to Pray.”<sup>1</sup> “I divide each commandment into four parts, thereby fashioning a garland of four strands.”<sup>2</sup> These four strands are:

1. **Instruction** – What is God teaching me in these verses about the Pastoral Office and me as one called to this office? (e.g., “What have I learned ... ?”)
2. **Thanksgiving** - What is there in these words of God for which I get to give thanks to the Lord of the Church as I serve in the Office of the Ministry?
3. **Confession** - In light of what I have learned in these words of God, how have I fallen short in fulfilling my responsibilities in the Pastoral Office?
4. **Prayer** - Are there things I need to change/improve in fulfilling my responsibilities in the Pastoral Office?

Following the template of questions, there is an opportunity to turn what is discovered into prayer.

While this is a time of searching the Scriptures and reaffirming the Lord’s will for the Pastoral Office and those called to this Office, it is hoped that the questions will facilitate a time of casuistry among the brothers. Listening and learning according to Luther’s four strands will also hopefully foster a sharing of struggles and the mutual support and consolation of the brothers in light of God’s Word, of which we are servants and servers.

**Sequence of this Series:** This series begins with 2 Timothy. While this is the last of Paul’s letters, it is foundational in that it addresses the Pastoral Office more holistically, as well as the means God provides for it and the holder of that office. Second in the series will be Titus, which addresses many aspects of exercising the Pastoral Office in the context of the congregation. Lastly, the series will then look at 1 Timothy as it addresses exercising the Pastoral Office in the midst of a hostile culture and its influences on the congregation.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 43, *Devotional Writings II*, eds. Gustav K. Wiencke and Helmut T. Lehmann, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 193–211.

<sup>2</sup> LW 43:200.

# INTRODUCTION: 1 Timothy from *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*

## 1 Timothy Introduction

Paul, on his way to Macedonia, has left Timothy at Ephesus with instructions to “charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine” (1 Ti 1:3). Paul does not describe this “different doctrine” systematically; but from his attacks on it in 1:3–7; 4:1–3, 7; 6:3–5, 20–21 and from the tenor of his instructions for the regulation of the life of the church, it is clear that Timothy must do battle with a form of “Gnosticism,” an early stage of that heresy which was to become in its fully developed form the most serious threat to the church in succeeding generations. Gnosticism is not so much a system as a trend or current of thought which produced a great variety of systems, often by combining with some already existing religion. It was therefore present and active as a corrupting force long before the great Christian-Gnostic systems of the second century appeared; we have already seen one example of it in the heresy which threatened the church at Colossae.

Basic to all forms of Gnosticism is a dualistic conception of reality, that is, the view that what is spiritual, nonmaterial, is of itself good and what is material or physical is of itself bad. This view affects man’s whole attitude toward the world of created things. The dreary details of Gnostic speculation on the *origin* of the material universe need not concern us here. It may suffice to note:

- a. that the world is no longer viewed as God’s good creation, as the Scriptures view it (that is, a world which God created, fallen with fallen man but redeemed with man and destined to be transfigured with him, Ro 8:19–22); rather, the created world is viewed as in itself alien and hostile to God because it is matter and not spirit;
- b. that man’s desperate predicament, his alienation from God, is no longer seen as being due to his sinful rebellion against God, but to the fact that he is entangled in the world of matter;
- c. that redemption consists in being freed from the material world in which man dwells and is entangled. This liberation can come about only by knowledge (Greek, *gnosis*, hence the name of the heresy); this knowledge must be imparted to man by revelation from a higher world;
- d. the mission of the Savior-God is to impart this knowledge not to all men, but to a select few who will pass it on to those who are “worthy”;
- e. that those who have knowledge, the “gnostics,” must free themselves from the influence of matter by abstaining from certain foods and from marriage. (Sometimes the negative attitude toward things physical and material had the opposite effect and led to a supreme indifference to things physical and material, so that, for instance, the sexual life of man was considered to be morally indifferent.)

Such a trend of thought would lead inevitably to an utter distortion of all that “the glorious gospel of the blessed God” (1 Ti 1:11) proclaimed. God the Creator disappears—all the good gifts of food and drink which He gives are suspected and feared; all the salutary orders which He has established in this world (marriage, family, government) are despised and ignored. The Old Testament, which rings with glad adoration of the God who made the heavens and the earth and blesses man within the orders of this world, must either be ignored or have its obvious sense interpreted away by allegorizing “myths and endless genealogies.” The Law becomes the arena of speculation and vain discussions, not the voice of God which calls the sinner to account and condemns him. In terms of this kind of thought, there can be no real incarnation of the Son of God; for how can the divine, which is spiritual, enter into union with matter, which is of itself evil? And when sin is not recognized as man’s guilt, there can be no real redemption either.

Where knowledge is made central in the religious life of man and self-redemption by way of ascetic exercise is made the way of salvation, there is no possibility of that pure Christian love that “issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith” (1 Ti 1:5). A narrow and sectarian pride takes its place (1 Ti 6:4, 20; cf. 1:3–7). Where the teaching office becomes a wordy, speculative, disputatious purveying of “knowledge” to a select coterie of initiates, it is bound to become corrupted; it appeals to the pride, selfishness, and mercenary instincts of men, and the teacher becomes that ghastly, demon-ridden caricature of the true teacher which Paul has described in 1 Ti 4:1–2.

Timothy’s task will be to let the fresh and wholesome winds of “sound doctrine” into the house of God, whose air has been infected by the morbid and infectious mists of this *gnosis*. To the demonic denial of God the Creator and the rejection of His good gifts he must oppose the glorious Gospel of the blessed God “who gives life to all things” (1 Ti 6:13), the God whose every creation still has on it the mark of His primeval “Very good!”

(Gn. 1:31) and is even in its fallen state “consecrated by the word of God and prayer” (1 Ti 4:5). To “godless and silly myths” he is to oppose the grateful adoration of the Creator. To the Gnostic misuse of the Law he must oppose the right and lawful use and let the sinner hear the fearful verdict of God in order that he may give ear to God’s acquittal in His Gospel (1:8–11).

To the rarefied and unreal Christ of Gnostic speculation he must oppose “the *man* Christ Jesus” (1 Ti 2:5), the Christ Jesus who really entered into history under Pontius Pilate (1 Ti 6:13) and died a real death on the cross for the sins of all men (1 Ti 2:6). He must present this Christ as the whole content of the truth which the church upholds and guards, the mystery of God “manifested *in the flesh*” (1 Ti 3:16). To Gnostic self-redemption by means of knowledge and ascetic self-manipulation he must oppose redemption as the sole act of the Christ who came into the world, not to impart higher knowledge but “to save sinners” (1 Ti 1:15), the Christ “who gave Himself as a ransom for all” (1 Ti 2:6). To Gnostic exclusiveness he must oppose the all-embracing grace of God, and to their narrow sectarian pride he must oppose the Gospel of universal grace (1 Ti 2:4) and thus make of the church a church which can pray wholeheartedly for *all* men (1 Ti 2:1), a church which lives in the “love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith” (1 Ti 1).

To the imposing picture of the Gnostic teachers, these brilliant, speculative, disputatious, and mercenary men, he must oppose the picture of the true teacher. He must, first of all, himself *be* that picture; he dare not let himself be drawn down to the level of his opponents and fight demonic fire with fire; he must do battle, “holding faith and a good conscience” (1 Ti 1:19); he must, as a good minister of Jesus Christ, not allow himself to be infected by what he opposes but must continue to be “nourished on the words of faith” (not knowledge) “and of the good doctrine” which he has followed hitherto. He must train himself, athlete-like, in godliness (1 Ti 4:6–7). Thus he will be able to fight the good fight of faith as a “man of God,” standing in the succession of Moses and the prophets, singly devoted to God’s cause (1 Ti 6:11–12; cf. 6:3–10), taking hold even now of that eternal life which shall be his in fullness at the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Ti 6:11–15). He must himself be all that the Gnostic teachers are not; and he is to see to it that the men who oversee the church’s life and administer the church’s charity, the bishops and deacons, are men of like character. They need not be brilliant men; they must be good men. It is enough if a bishop be “an apt

teacher” (1 Ti 3:2); he need not be a brilliant speaker or a captivating personality. The qualifications which Paul sets up for bishops and deacons are singularly sober and down to earth; but the moral standards which he sets up for them are awesomely high (1 Ti 3:1–13). Paul wants men whom the grace of God has “trained,” as he puts it in his Letter to Titus (2:11–12), seasoned, selfless, wise, and gracious men whose faith has borne fruit in their homes, in their marital fidelity, and in the training of their children (1 Ti 3:2, 4, 12).

Timothy had a great piece of work assigned to him. And he was a good man for the task. He was both Jew and Greek (Acts 16:1). He had lived with the Old Testament from childhood (2 Ti 3:15). Prophetic voices had assigned him to this “good warfare” (1 Ti 1:18). God had given him the requisite gifts for it (1 Ti 4:14), and his whole history had been one that fostered those gifts. He had been Paul’s almost constant companion for a dozen years (Acts 16:1 ff.). The apostolic “pattern of sound words” (2 Ti 1:13) had become a part of his makeup, and the apostolic example had been constantly before him (2 Ti 3:10, 11, 14). Paul had employed him as his emissary before this, though never for so extended and difficult a mission as this one. When Paul was prevented from returning to Thessalonica, he sent Timothy to the young and troubled church to establish the believers in their faith and to exhort them (1 Th 3:1–2). He had sent Timothy to Corinth during that troubled period when the Corinthians were becoming drunk on the heady wine of the new teaching, to remind them of the apostle’s “ways in Christ” (1 Co 4:17; 16:10).

He had sent him to Philippi from Rome during the time of his imprisonment and had commended him to the Philippians with the finest tribute that can be paid to a servant of God in the Gospel: “I have no one like him, who will be genuinely anxious for your welfare. They all look after their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But Timothy’s worth you know, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel” (Ph 2:20–22).

If Paul was a fond father to Timothy, he was not a blind one. He knew his beloved child’s weaknesses: Timothy was still young and apparently conscious of it as a handicap (1 Ti 4:12). He was inclined to be timid (cf. 1 Co 16:10–11; 2 Ti 1:7). Besides, his health was not of the best; his stomach troubled him, an ailment not uncommon among sensitive and conscientious young men of God (1 Ti 5:23).

Therefore Paul writes Timothy a letter which sums up once more the oral instructions already given him (1 Ti 1:3). This letter will give his work the sanction

and authority of Paul, “an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope” (1 Ti 1:1). Paul is in effect telling the church of Ephesus what he had once told the Corinthians: “He is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. So let no one despise him” (1 Co 16:10–11).<sup>3</sup>

## God’s Grace in 1 Timothy

Paul had left Timothy at Ephesus to proclaim God’s grace. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul reminds him of the essential elements of this message. “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men” (2:5–6). “He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory” (3:16). “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1:15) and is “the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe” (4:10).

Paul himself found the gospel of God’s grace to be the source of spiritual strength, faith and love (1:12–14). He

encourages Timothy to put his trust and hope in the same message.<sup>4</sup>

## Luther on 1 Timothy

“This epistle St. Paul writes in order to provide a model to all bishops of what they are to teach and how they are to rule Christendom in the various stations of life, so that it may not be necessary for them to rule Christians according to their own human opinions.

“... he charges that a bishop keep true faith and love and resist the false preachers of the law who, beside Christ and the gospel, would also insist on the works of the law. In a brief summary, he comprehends the entire Christian doctrine concerning the purpose of the law and the nature of the gospel.

“... he gives orders as to how widows and young women should be looked after, and which widows are to be supported from the common funds; also how godly bishops or priests are to be held in honor, and blameworthy ones punished” (*LW* 35:388).<sup>5</sup>

## READ: 1 Timothy 6:3–21

**Commentary Excerpts:** 1 Timothy 6:3–21 from *Reformation Heritage Bible Commentary: Timothy / Titus / Philemon*<sup>6</sup>

**6:3 sound words.** The Greek term for “sound” is *hygiainō*, which means “whole, healthy.” (It underlies our English word, “hygiene.) Paul expressly has Timothy stay in Ephesus to deal with those who were teaching unsound, unhealthy words in regard to Christ and our free salvation through faith in Him. These false teachers may well quote and mention Christ, but the words they use deny and undermine Him and His substitutionary life, death, and resurrection for a salvation freely given to all through faith. Lacking the healthy and wholesome Word of Christ, Christ can become little more than a friend, a life coach, an example, or even a despotic master, demanding that you save yourself. Saving faith comes from hearing, and hearing from the whole Word of Christ (Rm 10:17).

**6:4 controversy.** This word in the Greek is understood as “questionings.” This type of person has a sick love for controversies for two primary reasons. First, they generate disagreement and quarrels. Second, only in this way does such a conceited individual have a chance in such quarreling, which was usually public, to gain possible notoriety and a following. The sad thing is that because it is all born of sin and a desire for self, it also separates and divides what Christ united. See the notes for 1:4.

**6:10 pierced themselves.** The Greek term Paul uses for “pierced” is used only here in the New Testament and had limited use in classical Greek. It’s a simple verb that was used when referring to preparing a piece of meat to be put on a spit for roasting. As such, it does not simply refer to creating a hole, like the piercing of an ear, but to piercing into something so as to hold it in place. Through their love of money, they had inflicted themselves, their thoughts, their living, and the like with all manner of evil. These evils caused pain and held them captive in this pain.

<sup>3</sup> Walter R. Roehrs and Martin H. Franzmann, *Concordia Self-Study Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 2:216–18.

<sup>4</sup> *Concordia Self-Study Bible: New International Version*, Robert G. Hoerber, ed., (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 1847.

<sup>5</sup> *Concordia Self-Study Bible*, 1847.

<sup>6</sup> Mark W. Love, *Reformation Heritage Bible Commentary: 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 80–91.



**6:11 man of God.** While this could be said of any believer born of God, Paul uses this title as it was used in the Old Testament to refer to men whom God chose to speak His Word to His people, (i.e., the prophets) (1Sm 2:27). This title simply refers to Timothy as the man that God has called into the Office of the Public Ministry that He created to preach and teach His Word to His people. As such, a pastor is understood as a “servant of the Word.”

**6:11 flee these things.** See vv. 2–10.

**6:12 Fight the good fight.** The image here is better understood as “contend” in the sense of competing in Greek athletic games, rather than “fight” in the sense of a battle scene. Paul is telling Timothy, and every other pastor, to continually contend for the substance of holy Christian faith against all competitors through the full and faithful teaching and preaching of God’s Word, which is the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17). In this way, the Church herself does not win the victory, but through His Word, we have the victory already won for us, and for all who would believe in Christ.

**6:12 Take hold of the eternal life.** The only way a victorious Greek athlete could obtain the crown of victory was to receive it. The victor never took the prize in his own hands and put it on his own head, but received it on his head by the hand of another. The same is true when it comes to the prize of eternal life. Paul is telling Timothy and every believer to be always receiving the free gift of eternal life through faith. Confessing this faith and contending for this faith are the results of having already received (believed) it. We do not contend for the faith in order to obtain it, but we contend for the faith because through it, we have already received the gift of eternal life from the One who has conquered for us, Jesus Christ.

**6:12 called.** The work of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God that enabled Timothy, as He enables all believers, to hear and believe the glorious message of the Gospel as God’s saving Word to and for him. This calling takes place through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and the proclamation of the Gospel.

**6:12 good confession.** As this confession is tied to his receiving the gift of eternal life, it refers to Timothy’s public confession of faith in Christ according to the Word of God. Paul calls this confession good because it is the work of God the Holy Spirit to the eternal good of all who believe and confess Jesus Christ as Lord (cf. Mt 10:32).

**6:13–16** As Paul begins to conclude his letter, the Holy Spirit has Paul remind Timothy that his calling and charge are from God, and are to be carried out according to the work and purposes of God the Father and God the Son.

**6:13 charge.** See exposition of 5:21.

**6:13 God, who gives life.** Paul here names God and then identifies what God does. A better rendering of the Greek would be “God, who generates and sustains/preserves life.” All of life and its continuance is solely the gracious work of God for the sake of the life He creates. Follow the sequence of His creating work in Genesis 1–2; everything He does, He does for the sake of what He is about to create. Even when Adam and Eve sinned and brought their lives to an end, the God of life steps in to preserve their earthly and eternal lives (Gn 3). Paul testified to this truth before the Areopagus in Athens (Ac 17:25).

**6:13 testimony before Pontius Pilate.** This refers to what Jesus said as He stood before Pilate for judgment (Mt 27:11; Jn 18:33–37; 19:8–11). Unlike the Gnostics, who confessed a heavenly Christ, too spiritual to appear in human flesh, Paul proclaimed that Christ appeared bodily before a Roman governor.

**6:13 good confession.** See notes on 3:16. What we believe, and confess that we believe, is the substance of what Jesus confessed, or bore witness to, before Pilate. Cf. Rv 1:5; 3:14.

**6:14 command.** This refers not to the Gospel but to the command given the apostles, and therefore the Church, to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything Christ has commanded them (Mt 28:19–20).

**6:14 appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.** This command is to be observed by the Church until the “end of the age” (Mt 28:20). This is when Christ will return visibly and every eye shall see Him, coming on the clouds (Rv 1:7).

**6:20 guard the deposit.** The “deposit” is the same substance of “the faith” (1:2; 3:9, 13; 4:1, 6; 5:8; 6:10), and the “good confession” (v. 12)—the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. The imagery of guarding this deposit likely tends to evoke, to a modern reader, the idea of a bank deposit safely locked away and guarded. But this interpretation runs contrary to how this deposit, how the Gospel, is guarded. The only way to “guard” or “protect” the Gospel is to proclaim it fully, faithfully, and

without apology. The Gospel is Jesus Christ. He has met all attackers and detractors and has come out the victor. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, the only way to guard it, believe it, confess it, teach it, preach it, and share it faithfully in all its saving fullness.

**6:20 irreverent babble and contradictions.** Paul began this letter telling Timothy to charge certain people to stop teaching myths, genealogies, and the like that promoted contradiction and speculation (1:3–4). Now he concludes the letter, telling Timothy not to get caught up in what they are saying by debate and the like; to do so would be to lend credence to their irreverence. The refutation of their babble comes from the fact that they contradict themselves, and this becomes evident to all. Cf. 1:6–7; 6:3–5.

**6:20 knowledge.** This is used to refer to the sum of what someone has come to know. The means by which people come to know is through observation and speculation, based upon what has been observed and upon the fragments of God’s Law still written on their hearts. What makes this knowledge false is that it lacks the knowing and knowledge of creation and mankind according to God’s revelation through His Word in Jesus Christ. As such, this false knowledge will fall on itself (i.e., create its own contradictions as experiences change). When this happens, those who trust in this

false knowledge move more and more into the realm of abstract and divorce the real from the spiritual. This is the heart of what became Gnosticism. Those who claim such “knowledge” remind me of know-it-alls. Such people will never claim that they know it all, but they do believe that all they do know is all there is to be known, and the babbling and contradictions begin.

**6:21 swerved from the faith.** Paul states the real consequences of trusting in these false teachers and their equally false knowledge. When a believer begins to trust in any kind of false knowledge, no matter how profound it may sound or seem, they have left the revealed knowledge God has given through His Word in Jesus Christ—which is the Gospel. Having left the Gospel, their salvation is in serious jeopardy.

**6:21 Grace.** In short, “the favor of God.” This word refers to God’s merciful attitude toward undeserving people (Rm 5:12–21; Ti 3:3–7), God’s undeserved saving work in Jesus Christ for sinful humanity and His gift of the Holy Spirit who calls, enlightens, and keeps us in the true faith.

**6:21 you.** In the Greek, this is plural and would be heard as “you all.” While this letter was addressed to Timothy, the plural blessing indicates that Paul meant Timothy to share this letter with fellow pastors and believers in the various congregations in Ephesus.

## CITATIONS:

### 1 Timothy 6:3–21 in *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*<sup>7</sup>

#### 1 Timothy 6:8:

##### The Lord’s Prayer: The Fourth Petition

272. *For what, then, do we pray in this petition?*

We pray that, in humility,

C. we would find contentment with what we have received.

907 1 Timothy 6:8 If we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

#### 1 Timothy 6:8–10:

##### The Ninth Commandment/The Tenth Commandment

89. *How do we fear and love God in keeping the ninth and tenth commandments?*

*Second*, we fear and love God by *being satisfied* with what God has provided us and others. This includes

A. being thankful for all that God has given us;

Read Proverbs 30:8–9; 1 Timothy 6:8–10; and Philippians 4:11–13.

#### 1 Timothy 6:17–19:

##### The First Article (Part 3)

147. *What are some of our stewardship responsibilities?*

B. We are to care for our possessions and finances.

See Ephesians 4:28; Hebrews 13:16; and 1 Timothy 6:17–19.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 2017).

# FOR REFLECTION & MEDITATION

## What is God teaching?

1. What is God teaching me in these verses about the Pastoral Office and me as one called to this Office?
  - a. About Himself – Father/Son/Holy Spirit?
    - › About His work?
    - › About His promises/gifts?
  - b. About me/others?
    - › What have I been given?
    - › What I am supposed to do/not do?
    - › How am I to do what is given me to do?
  - c. About faith/belief/unbelief/doubt?
    - › What is it that I am given to trust in about myself?
    - › What is it that I am given to trust in as I serve in the Pastoral Office?
  - d. About the Pastoral Office?
  - e. About the congregation I serve?
  - f. About engaging the communities (civil/cultures) in which I serve?

### Praying God's Word

*Lord of the Church, grant that I may be mindful of ...*

## Thanksgiving

2. What has the Lord told me for which I can give thanks to the Lord of the Church as I serve in the Office of the Ministry?

### Praying God's Word

*Lord of the Church, I thank you for ...*

## Reflection and Repentance

3. In light of what I have learned, how have I fallen short in fulfilling my responsibilities in the Pastoral Office?
  - a. Is there something God would have me to do that I have failed to do?
  - b. Is there something God would not have me do that I have done anyway?

### Praying God's Word

*Lord of the Church, I confess to You that ...*

## Petitions in Prayer

4. In all that I have learned, what needs to change/improve in fulfilling my responsibilities in the Pastoral Office?
  - a. What have I been thinking, saying or doing that I need to change/improve?
  - b. What have I been thinking, saying or doing that I am able to rejoice in having done well?

### Praying God's Word

*Lord of the Church, grant the work of Your Holy Spirit that I may ...*

*“This the Spirit will grant us and continually instruct us in when, by God’s word, our hearts have been cleared and freed of outside thoughts and concerns.”<sup>8</sup> May it ever be so Lord! Amen.*

<sup>8</sup> LW 43:209.