



# Grace Alone

## Lutheran in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Looking for a confirmation curriculum that focuses on discussion and Bible study, but isn't stuck in the past? Hoping to explore the deeper topics of how faith comes up in our daily decisions with students entering adulthood, rather than running a program that over-simplifies everything and glosses over the hard stuff? This 38 lesson curriculum can form an instant 2-year program! Each student just needs a copy of Grace Alone & an Augsburg Fortress Lutheran Study Bible, along with a copy of the Small Catechism.

### Scope & Sequence:

Each lesson includes 3-5 discussion questions, followed by a Bible study, and if you have time, a related hymn to look at from the ELW. Depending on how you structure your sessions, each lesson can take from 45-90 minutes.

Five Solas: Lutheran Basics

#### **Ten Commandments:**

Why Have Commandments?  
Commandments about God  
Commandments about Relationships  
Commandments about Community

#### **Apostles' Creed:**

Creator Almighty  
Jesus Christ  
Holy Spirit

#### **Lord's Prayer:**

Teach Us to Pray  
Addressing God  
Our Needs

#### **Sacraments:**

Communion: What God Does  
Communion: What We Do  
Baptism: What God Does  
Baptism: What We Do

#### **Church History:**

Early Church to Great Schism  
Reformation  
Lutherans & WWII

Slavery and the Bible  
ELCA History

#### **Faith Structure:**

ELCA Structure & Ministries  
Career Ministry  
Other Lutheran Denominations  
Other Christian Denominations  
Other Religions

#### **Church Calendar:**

Season of Pentecost Holidays  
Seasons Related to Christmas  
Seasons Related to Easter

#### **Faith Life:**

Priesthood of All Believers  
Spiritual Disciplines  
Stewardship  
Worship Whys  
Special Services

#### **Special Topics:**

Lutherans & the Bible  
The End of All Things  
Spiritual Self Defense  
Oppression in the Bible  
Science & Faith

## What are the goals of Grace Alone as a Confirmation curriculum?

As many curriculums rely more heavily on technology use, congregations that cannot or choose not to do so are struggling. Grace Alone is easy to use and doesn't require a lot of technology use, but also acknowledges that we don't live in the 1950s either.

Also, while Confirmation has traditionally been meant as preparation for an adult life in faith, many curriculums do not address the questions of middle and high school students about how their faith impacts their life that is growing more complicated every day, and the increasing amount of nuance they're beginning to see in the world as they grow older. This is the time to acknowledge and address their questions; before they dismiss faith and the church as irrelevant.

So Grace Alone focuses on discussion & Bible study. The discussion questions acknowledge that not every conversation about faith is simple or easy. You might say the focus of every lesson is "What does this mean? For me, today?" It turns out that the struggles the church has faced in the past still have a lot to teach us, and the spiritual disciplines and liturgy practiced by Christians for millennia still have a lot to offer us.

## What are the Bible studies geared towards?

The goal is that the students will start reading the Bible more deeply than, "And so this story tells us that God wants us to be nice to each other, the end." They will come to see that different people will read the Bible differently, that not every question about the Bible has a simple yes-or-no answer, and that the Bible has a wide variety of authors, goals, and genres within it.

The Bible studies are not meant to be a tour through the Bible that will teach the main characters and story arcs. (Augsburg Fortress's Echo the Story works well for that!) That said, if you keep adding context to each Bible study as you go, they will have read a lot of important Bible passages by the end of the program and should be more familiar with finding things in their Bible.

## Which version of the Lutheran Study Bible should I suggest my students use?

Really any of the editions will work, though some of the Bible Study Appendix directions include page numbers which may not be accurate in the Enlarged Print and Ebook editions. The hardcover edition are nice and sturdy. Just make sure your students are getting the Augsburg Fortress Bible, and **not** the Concordia Publishing Bible! Blue cover, not brown.

## What does "An unofficial resource for the ELCA" mean?

Grace Alone is not created or published by the ELCA, but is written by an ELCA pastor (Rev. Katherine Rohloff) and is intended for use by congregations and members of the ELCA.

## Who wrote Grace Alone?

Rev. Katherine Rohloff is an ordained pastor in the ELCA. She lives in southern Minnesota, and enjoys cohosting the podcast HP@Church, where she and Rev. Emily Ewing discuss the scripture readings for each week (Revised Common Lectionary) and how they relate to themes found in the Harry Potter series. She has also written about her recent ADHD diagnosis for Sparkhouse and enjoys sharing other resources for ministry she's created online.

## Commandments About God

Reading: 1 John 4:7-16

Hymn: Great is Thy Faithfulness ELW 733

### No Other Gods

We read in Exodus 20 that the commandments were given to Moses on Mount Sinai by God, after God had led Moses and the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, as they made their way to Israel. Given that background, the 1st Commandment makes a lot of sense: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, you shall have no other gods before me.” It also makes sense that Moses was horrified and embarrassed when he returned down the mountain to his people, only to find that they had created a golden calf and were worshiping it. In his anger, Moses broke the stone tablets he’d written the 10 Commandments on and had to return to the mountaintop for God to share them a second time. To no one’s surprise, the commandment spells out that *idols* (false gods) and idol worship are not allowed.

Most of us aren’t going to create a statue and begin worshiping it. What would breaking the 1st Commandment look like for us? There are a lot of ways we do this, but three ways stand out as the most common and obvious. First, we tend to put other people on a pedestal and imagine that they are perfect. In our hearts, we may long to be that person, or to be with them, beyond everything else. The problem with worshiping a person, is that they are not, ever, perfect. None of us are. While crushes and youthful infatuation are stages which many people go through, that is not a model for a healthy relationship. Part of a mature friendship or romantic relationship is recognizing one another’s flaws.

The second way we put something ahead of God in our lives is addiction. Often addiction isn’t something chosen on purpose, studies show there are genetic and environmental factors in how addiction works. Yet it is still putting one thing, an imperfect thing, at the center of your life, where God should be. When God is at the center of our lives, we are drawn to generosity, compassion, justice, and mercy. When an addiction is at the center of our lives, we are drawn to selfishness, envy, heartlessness, and cruelty.

Third is the most common of all addictions, which is money. We fool ourselves into believing that if we just have enough money, all our problems will go away. While there are certainly a lot of problems that money can help, it is still not something we can fully put our trust in. A health crisis, a job loss, or identity theft might all make very fast changes to a person’s financial stability. Also, when we focus entirely on money, we tend to become more selfish and stop working for justice for others.

1. What’s the difference between enjoying something, and worshiping (or being addicted to) it?

### Wrongful Use of the Name

In the “Addressing God” lesson we read about the first phrase of the Lord’s Prayer, “Our Father, hallowed be your name.” To hallow a name is to treat it as holy. But the 2nd Commandment has a slightly different spin, now we’re talking about using God’s name wrongly. In older Bible translations, this was often called “taking the Lord’s name in vain,” which is a vivid way to put it. To take God’s name in vain means to use it lightly, without purpose or meaning, as though it, or God, doesn’t matter.

However, the full translation from ancient Hebrew is to say, “You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord.” Luther gives a list of examples of what not to do in the Small Catechism. We are not to use God’s name to try to curse people or practice magic, as God is not a bully who is at our beck and call. We are not to use God’s name in order to lie more convincingly, as though God would encourage us in the attempt. We can probably also come up with additional ways that using God’s name

would be wrong. We should not use God's name to be cruel to others, or to encourage or increase suffering in other's lives. We should not use God's name for our own ambition, to get ahead.

What does using God's name well look like? One way to think about this is to ask ourselves how our friends and family would feel about our using their names. They would probably be happy if we used their names while talking to them, or telling other people good things about them, right? Using a person's name to ask them for help is perfectly reasonable, or to say thank you. If you're talking about something you've learned, it's good to give credit to the person who taught you. And if you have something difficult to say to someone you love, even if you're not sure how they'll take it or if they'll thank you for it, they'll probably appreciate that you trusted them enough to be honest with them, and using their name then makes sense as well. So, we use God's name when we pray, evangelize, ask for God's help, give thanks, talk about what we've learned, or have difficult conversations with God.

1. Has your name ever been used in a way you didn't appreciate? How so?

### **Remember the Sabbath**

And on the seventh day, God rested. The idea of a sabbath, or a day of rest, comes from the very beginning of Genesis. When Christianity began, we moved our day of rest from the seventh day, Saturday, to the day Christ rose from the dead, Sunday. Over the years this commandment has been understood in different ways. In the Bible we read of those who wanted Jesus to get into trouble and tried to enforce this rule on him in ways that would have hurt others (Luke 6:1-11 has two examples). But this Commandment is not a rule we follow from fear, but a gift we've been given from God. In Biblical times and for thousands of years afterwards, it made sure that even the poorest laborers had a day of rest once a week. This commandment isn't about forcing people to do nothing, but a gift of rest that we need!

We keep a day of rest because we need one. We can't work 7 days a week, 365 days a year, or our bodies break down. We don't just need to sleep at night, we need time to relax, time not taken up by work or chores or activities. That day doesn't necessarily have to be Sunday, as there are some jobs that have to have someone on call every day, such as emergency services. But as anyone who has worked a swing shift can tell you, having a full day off of work is very different than having a few extra hours here or there. Being away from work for a full day allows for a much deeper rest.

This day of rest also gives us the time to worship God. Ideally, worship is a daily activity, but on our busy days we can only devote a few moments here and there to asking God to be with us and guide us. On a day of rest, we can devote more time and concentration to worship, learning more about our faith, trying new spiritual practices, and nurturing the faith of others while being nurtured ourselves.

This is why having a religious community is so vital to our faith lives. Christianity is by its nature community based. Our faith may be in our individual hearts, but faith always leads us towards others, over and over again. By discussing our faith with others, hearing ideas that are new to us, and discovering that the way that we are used to doing things is not the only way, our faith grows and becomes more vibrant. A faith community gives us encouragement, reality checks, lovingkindness, and guidance.

1. When have you received a reality check or helpful advice from another person? What might have happened if you hadn't received it?

This week I will pray for: