

The Narrow Lutheran Middle
Reader's Guide and Bible Study
Leader's Guide

by
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Note to Leaders

This guide was written to facilitate a study and discussion of Daniel Deutschlander's book *The Narrow Lutheran Middle: Following the Scriptural Road*. To participate in this study, the students will need their own copies of the book. They will also need Bibles to look up and read various passages and sections of Scripture. It will also be helpful for the students to read the chapter of the book to be discussed prior to coming to class each time. The questions are designed to help the students zero in on what the author is saying in the book. Questions are also included to help students apply the truths of the book to their own lives.

May the Lord bless your efforts as you lead your class in a study of the scriptural truths presented in *The Narrow Lutheran Middle*.

Dedicated to the glory of God
and
with thanks to the Wednesday Bible class
at St. Paul Lutheran Church
Lake Mills, Wisconsin

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The Narrow Lutheran Middle

Preface

Preface, pages v-viii.

1. About what are some people both right and wrong regarding the Bible?
Saying the Bible is too hard to understand, page v.
2. Explain the danger of thinking that we can “grasp” with human reason the mind, heart, and will of God revealed in the Bible.
Like Eve, we may think that we are equal to God, page v.
3. In what sense, then, is the Bible difficult to understand?
It shows us God's being and wisdom, which are unfathomable, page v.
4. Read 1 Corinthians 13:12 and Romans 11:33-36. Explain what two things these verses tell us about our knowledge of God through the Scriptures.
(1) Our knowledge is incomplete and (2) yet it causes us to praise God, page v.
5. Read Isaiah 55:8,9. What does God say about our ability to fathom fully his divine mind and way of thinking, especially regarding his plan of our salvation?
We are not able to fathom God's plan of salvation because it goes beyond our reason, page vi.
6. In what sense are people wrong in saying that the Bible is too difficult to understand?
It really is so simple that a little child may know it, page vi.
7. Explain the paradox about the simplicity and profundity of the gospel message.
It is so simple that a child can grasp it and yet so profound that only by the miracle of the Holy Spirit working through those simple words can we believe, page vi.
8. What are the two extremes to which some may go in trying to reconcile what they consider to be contradictions in the Bible?
The two extremes are dismissing the Bible altogether as simply a work of man or denying some truths and/or overemphasizing others so that they become errors, pages vi,vii. Examples might be denying the creation account, denying marriage as a holy institution established for one man and one woman, and defending God's love by denying that God would condemn homosexuality.
9. What is the common error of those who say the Bible contradicts itself?

They don't believe that the Bible was verbally inspired, page vii.

10. Read 2 Timothy 3:10-17, and explain how you have become convinced that the Bible is profitable for doctrine, for faith, for life, and for eternal life. Consider also Matthew 16:13-20.

God the Holy Spirit convinces us through the truths of the Bible, page vii.

11. What is the intent of the author in writing this book?

To show how God himself in his Word balances truths and does so to our advantage, page vii.

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Chapter One

So What's the Problem?

Introduction, pages 1-4.

1. According to the Greek philosopher Aristotle, where are most virtues found and what's the key to happiness in practicing those virtues? Give examples.

They are found in the middle of two opposite vices, and the key is to find the golden mean in the middle. Examples would be generosity and stinginess, page 1.

2. What is the parallel in religion to Aristotle's search for the middle road between two false alternatives?

Overemphasizing some aspect of some truth at the expense of the rest of the truth, pages 1,2.

3. How does the devil cleverly manipulate our struggle to stay on the narrow middle of the road of truth?

He doesn't openly attack God's Word, but he distorts it, page 2.

4. On the basis of Matthew 4:5-7, discuss how the devil used this ploy with Jesus and how he failed.

He distorted God's Word by overemphasizing how God will fulfill his promise to protect his people, page 2.

5. To what error does overemphasizing the grace and love of God lead?

It leads to a denial of hell and to the error of universalism, that all people will be saved, pages 2,3.

6. To what error can overemphasizing the justice and power of God lead?

It can lead to limiting God's saving grace, page 3.

7. To what two ditches (errors) does the limiting of God's grace lead?

The ditch of despair or the ditch of self-righteousness, page 3.

8. How are despair and self-righteousness the same?

They are both opposites of saving faith, page 3.

9. What's the narrow truth in the middle that keeps us from despair or self-righteousness?

The truth in the middle is that we don't have to despair because Christ has done everything we need for our salvation. This truth shows that our lives of good works are a joyful response to salvation, not an effort to complete it, page 4.

Why do so many end up in the ditches? pages 4-13.

1. What's the short answer to the question of why so many end up in the ditch?

They listen to their reason, letting reason take control when the Word of God should be in control, page 4.

2. Why is human reason such a blessing?

It provides order in life by helping us make reasonable decisions in secular matters, page 4.

3. Where else can reason be helpful?

It is helpful in studying Scripture, in comparing passages, in studying the biblical languages, etc., page 5.

4. What role must reason have in the study of theology, and why it is difficult for reason to accept that role?

It must have the role of servant/scullery maid to the Word of God, page 5. Human reason doesn't want to accept that role because it is corrupted by sin.

5. How can reason be kept in the role of "maid"?

Reason is kept in the role of handmaiden by the Christian's converted will and by the Word of God, pages 5,6.

6. What happens when reason is enthroned and the Word of God is dethroned?

It leads to unbelief and the dread consequence of spiritual death, page 6.

7. Where is the sharpest conflict between fallen reason and the Word of God?

The sharpest conflict is in the doctrine of salvation, page 6.

8. What foolishness of God destroys the wisdom of the wise and frustrates the intelligence of the intelligent? How?

The message of the cross destroys the wisdom of the wise and frustrates the intelligence of the intelligent by proclaiming the way to eternal life, which man in his wisdom and intelligence could never figure out, pages 6,7.

9. How did Paul show he understood the gift of reason in Romans 3:5-8?

He used reason to put reason in its place, page 7.

10. What role had human reason taken in the church in Luther's day?

It had become queen, pages 7,8.

11. How did Luther work at putting reason in its proper place?

He made reason subject to God's Word, page 8.

12. Describe/explain Satan's blatant attacks on the Word of God regarding:

- a. the Ten Commandments. *Examples cited on page 9.*
- b. doctrine. *Example of the Lord's Supper, page 9.*
- c. ignoring God's Word altogether. *Purgatory, immaculate conception, praying to saints, page 10.*

13. What three attributes do all errors share that spring from reason separated from God's Word?

(1) They are contrary to the clear Word of God in the Bible; (2) they rob Christ of his glory as the perfect Savior; and (3) they deprive the Christian of certain comfort, page 11.

14. How does Dame Reason act more subtly?

She pretends to defend one truth of God's Word in order to dismiss another, page 11.

15. Explain how Calvin fell in the ditch of enthroning human reason.

He came up with his false teaching of double predestination, page 11.

16. Explain how Arminius also fell into this ditch.

Since he didn't like Calvin's double predestination, he gave man credit to choose salvation, pages 11,12.

17. What are the tragic consequences of following the reasoning of Calvin on the one hand and that of Arminius on the other?

Their errors can lead to pride or despair, page 12.

18. How did Luther avoid the ditch into which Calvin and Arminius fell?

He took the narrow Lutheran middle road laid out in the Bible by subjecting his reason to God's Word, page 12.

Discussion:

What are some teachings of God's Word that are under attack by human reason today?

Agree or disagree. In almost every false doctrine there is some grain of truth.

One of the foundational truths of the Reformation is *sola Scriptura*, which means "by Scripture alone." Discuss how this Reformation truth helps keep us on the narrow Lutheran middle road when it comes to the use of reason in the interpretation of Scripture.