

Great Christian Literature: 12-Lesson Course Outline

For Senior Adult Sunday School Class

Lesson 1: The Foundation of Faith

Primary Texts: Luther's *95 Theses* (1517) and Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536) **Supporting:** Campbell's *The Christian System* (1839)

Overview: Begin with the Reformation's call back to Scripture as our authority. Luther's revolutionary challenge to church corruption, Calvin's systematic theology establishing core Protestant doctrine, and Campbell's restoration plea for New Testament Christianity. Show how these reformers laid groundwork for returning to biblical simplicity.

Key Themes: Sola Scriptura, justification by faith, church restoration **Context:** The courage required to challenge established religious authority

Lesson 2: Knowing the Character of God

Primary Texts: Tozer's *The Knowledge of the Holy* (1961) and Packer's *Knowing God* (1973) **Supporting:** Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* (selections on God's attributes)

Overview: Explore the attributes of God through the eyes of three different eras. Aquinas' medieval scholastic approach, Tozer's mystical reverence, and Packer's evangelical clarity all affirm the same truth: God is both knowable and beyond full comprehension.

Key Themes: Divine attributes, reverence, the balance of God's transcendence and immanence **Context:** How each generation has sought to understand God's nature

Lesson 3: The Journey of Conversion and Confession

Primary Texts: Augustine's *Confessions* (397-400 AD) and Edwards' *Religious Affections* (1746)

Overview: From the father of autobiography to America's greatest theologian, examine authentic spiritual experience. Augustine's raw honesty about his spiritual journey contrasts with Edwards' careful analysis of true versus false religious emotion, yet both affirm that genuine faith transforms the heart.

Key Themes: Authentic conversion, the role of emotions in faith, spiritual introspection **Context:** The timeless struggle between head and heart in Christian experience

Lesson 4: The Cost of True Discipleship

Primary Texts: Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship* (1937) and Platt's *Radical* (2010)

Supporting: Chan's *Crazy Love* (2008)

Overview: Separated by 70 years, these authors challenge comfortable Christianity. Bonhoeffer wrote against "cheap grace" while facing Nazi Germany; Platt confronts American prosperity gospel; Chan calls for passionate devotion. Their unified message: following Christ demands everything.

Key Themes: Sacrificial discipleship, cheap vs. costly grace, radical obedience **Context:** How cultural comfort can dilute Christian commitment

Lesson 5: The Pursuit of God's Presence

Primary Texts: Tozer's *The Pursuit of God* (1948) and Brother Lawrence's *The Practice of the Presence of God* (1692) **Supporting:** Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ* (1418)

Overview: Three centuries of seeking God's presence. Brother Lawrence found God while washing dishes; Thomas à Kempis in monastic solitude; Tozer in 20th-century evangelicalism. Each discovered that God desires intimate fellowship with ordinary believers.

Key Themes: Contemplative prayer, finding God in daily life, spiritual intimacy **Context:** The mystical tradition within Protestant Christianity

Lesson 6: The Reality of Spiritual Warfare

Primary Texts: Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters* (1942) and Edwards' *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (1741)

Overview: Two approaches to spiritual danger: Lewis' witty but sobering look at demonic strategy, and Edwards' fire-and-brimstone warning about divine judgment. Both reveal the spiritual battle for human souls and the urgency of salvation.

Key Themes: Temptation, divine judgment, the reality of hell, spiritual vigilance **Context:** How different generations have warned against spiritual complacency

Lesson 7: Defending the Faith

Primary Texts: Chesterton's *Orthodoxy* (1908) and *The Everlasting Man* (1925), Lewis' *Mere Christianity* (1952)

Overview: The golden age of Christian apologetics. Chesterton's paradoxical brilliance and Lewis' logical clarity both demonstrate Christianity's intellectual credibility. Show how they answered the skepticism of their age with wit, wisdom, and wonder.

Key Themes: Rational faith, Christian apologetics, the uniqueness of Christ **Context:** Responding to Enlightenment and modern skepticism

Lesson 8: The Christian Worldview and Society

Primary Texts: Augustine's *The City of God* (413-426 AD) and Chesterton's *Orthodoxy* (selections on social implications)

Overview: How Christians should engage the world. Augustine wrote as Rome fell, creating a theology of history and politics. Chesterton wrote as modernity rose, defending Christian social vision. Both show faith's relevance to public life.

Key Themes: Church and state, Christian influence on culture, theology of history
Context: Christianity's role in civilizational challenges

Lesson 9: The Pilgrim's Journey

Primary Texts: Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) and Dante's *Divine Comedy* (selections, 1308-1320) **Supporting:** Sheldon's *In His Steps* (1896)

Overview: The Christian life as journey. Dante's cosmic vision of sin, purification, and glory; Bunyan's everyman allegory of salvation; Sheldon's practical question "What would Jesus do?" All portray life as movement toward God.

Key Themes: Spiritual progress, allegory and symbolism, practical sanctification **Context:** How literature has shaped Christian imagination

Lesson 10: Faith, Reason, and Wonder

Primary Texts: Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* (selections, 1950-1956), Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (selections, 1954-1955), and Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* (selections on faith and reason)

Overview: Christianity engages both mind and imagination. Aquinas shows faith's rational foundation; Lewis and Tolkien demonstrate faith's imaginative power through fantasy literature. The Inklings' friendship produced two of the greatest Christian fantasy works, showing how subcreation reflects the Creator. Together they reveal Christianity's appeal to the whole person—intellect, emotion, and wonder.

Key Themes: Faith and reason, Christian imagination, truth through story, subcreation and mythology **Context:** How Christianity has inspired both systematic theology and creative literature; the Oxford literary circle's impact on Christian imagination

Lesson 11: Purpose and Meaning in Life

Primary Texts: Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life* (2002) and ecclesiastical wisdom from various authors **Supporting:** Selections comparing with earlier authors on life's purpose

Overview: The search for meaning spans centuries. Compare Warren's contemporary approach to purpose with insights from Augustine, Aquinas, and others. Show how the question "Why am I here?" has consistent biblical answers across time.

Key Themes: Life's purpose, calling and vocation, meaning in suffering **Context:** How each generation rediscovers timeless truths

Lesson 12: The Unity of Christian Truth

Primary Texts: Synthesis of major themes from all previous lessons **Supporting:** Brief readings from multiple authors showing theological consistency

Overview: Demonstrate the remarkable unity of Christian truth across 1,600 years of writing. From Augustine to Warren, from medieval mystics to modern evangelicals, the core message remains: God loves humanity, Christ saves sinners, and faith transforms life.

Key Themes: The consistency of Christian truth, the communion of saints across time **Context:** How we stand in a great tradition of faithful witnesses

Course Goals

- Appreciate the intellectual richness of Christian tradition
- Understand how great minds have grappled with timeless questions
- Gain confidence in Christianity's rational and spiritual foundation
- Connect with the "great cloud of witnesses" across history
- Apply ancient wisdom to contemporary challenges