

Spirit & Truth Publishing- Theological Guidelines

Introduction

The following document is a summary of the theological guidelines used by writers of *Living the Word* and future materials to understand the theological perspective or standards which are expected of materials published by Spirit & Truth Publishing. For the detailed guidelines, please contact the publisher.

Bible and Interpretation

The Bible is the most important library of texts for Christians throughout history. As the focus for our *Living the Word* series, our theological guidelines related to the Bible are paramount.

- The Bible is a collection of ancient writings from different cultures and times. Understanding the literary, historical, and cultural contexts are essential for properly understanding the texts.
- The individual books of the Bible were written by people within their own contexts and for specific purposes, the understanding of which helps us to understand the texts.
- All acts of translation, reading, and teaching of Scripture are done through an individual interpretative lens. It is impossible to interact with the Bible without interpreting it.
- We encourage leaders and participants to wrestle with Scripture, especially when they encounter confusing or unpleasant passages.
- We seek to present the Bible as it is, teaching the stories within the Bible's overall narrative framework, without commentary on the factuality of the stories or narrative.
- We deny the theological assertion that Scripture is without error and/or that it should be read literally.
- We assert that the Bible is unique and inspired by God. The Bible is somehow both a set of human-written books and the means by which God reveals God's love and mission for the world. How the inspiration of Scripture "works" is a mystery and subject to multiple interpretations best left to individual congregations and denominations.

Theological Neutrality¹

Our *Living the Word* resources are designed to be used by congregations across the denominational and theological spectrum. Therefore, we strive to avoid the main theological arguments that cause division within the greater Christian Church. We do this by:

- Focusing on what unites us, not what divides us.
- Seeking to use theologically neutral vocabulary as we teach the biblical stories.

Primacy of Love

We see the primary story of the Bible to be the story of God's love for humanity. The central aim of God's story is to renew the whole world, torn by selfish violence, to become perfectly the kingdom of God, in which God's ways of love, justice, joy, and peace are supreme. For each individual story, we

¹ Our *Spirit & Truth: Kids* resources are written from a Lutheran (ELCA) perspective. For contracted work, we are willing to accept jobs specific to mainline Christian theological traditions that follow all other of our theological guidelines.

seek to ask how it communicates God's unconditional love for us and all of creation, as well as how it calls us to love God and others, with a focus on those who are oppressed and at the margins of society.

Faith Formation

We see "faith" in several different ways.

- Faith is a relationship of trust with God.
- Faith is how we view the world.
- Faith, the loving and trusting relationship with God, is a gift from God.
- Faith is a responsibility to be engaged in God's mission of love and justice in the world.
- We do not receive faith fully mature, but it must be formed through intentional actions, experiences, and relationships that nurture a relationship of trust with God and shape the way we see and interact with God's world.
- The purpose of faith formation is to equip followers of Jesus Christ and send them out into the world to spread God's kingdom of love, justice, and peace.
- Faith coexists with doubt. Doubts are inevitable and the view that we need to hide them prevents us from being authentic to ourselves and authentically engaged in a community of faith.

Equal Dignity and Inclusive Language

God loves all people and this love gives equal dignity to every person. However, some groups experience inequality based on race, ethnicity, disability, age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other perceived differences. We believe discrimination of any sort is antithetical to God's love and a violation of God's mission of justice for all people. Therefore, we strive to promote equality and inclusivity in the language and substance of what we teach.

- God is beyond the limitations of gender. Therefore, we do not refer to God using personal pronouns (he, she, or it). Instead, we seek to use the many rich biblical images that help us understand God's relationship and interactions with us, masculine, feminine, and non-gendered.
- We strive to present the male and female characters of the Bible fairly and equally. Due to the overwhelming majority of male characters in Scripture, this means that whenever female characters (especially positive portrayals of women of faith in leadership) appear, these are lifted up in our work.
- All resources should assume that persons of any gender will be using the materials as leaders and participants. Therefore, neutral pronouns should be used (they/them as both singular and plural).
- Care and sensitivity must be practiced when addressing topics of or related to mental health concerns and issues of different physical abilities. The assumption should not be made that all participants are able-bodied.
- In describing someone's condition (as in a physical, emotional, or social disability) or situation, the person comes first, then the condition. E.g. "The man, who was blind..." NOT "The blind man..." "Those in need..." NOT "The poor..."
- We must practice sensitivity toward other cultures and religious traditions. It is especially important to avoid activities that ask participants to create items or practice rituals that are not native to most of our Western mainline Christian traditions.