

“Wanting More”

By Brooke & Josiah Frusti
(Based on Genesis 3:1-13)

In a world where knowledge, learning, food, entertainment, and almost all our needs are available at the touch of a screen, we expect things in life to come easily to us. The current college generation comes out of school expecting a well-paying job that supports all they may ever need, or more so, want. It is in our sinful nature to feel like we deserve more.

Adam and Eve, despite the perfect life, were tempted with the idea of “more,” in this case, the knowledge of good and evil or to be like God. Perhaps God should have posted a sign: *“Position filled; humans need not apply.”* Our society is often motivated by this idea of more: more happiness, more health, more wealth, more friends or popularity, more satisfaction. Many of these endeavors to find more are not led by selfish desires but goodwill. Yet, when more is not reached, we are left feeling empty, scared and alone. The same way that Adam and Eve were afraid the moment they realized that their temptation to be like God left them empty and naked. Instead of the perfection they already lived in, they were left with fear and hid from God.

God could have started over. God could have wiped the script, made a new Adam and Eve, but His love for us does not lead to a desire to replace us. The moment we were bonded to sin, unable to free ourselves, God knew his plan. He knew that His one and only Son would crush the serpent’s head and defeat death and the desire for more. Jesus is all the “more” we will ever need and more than we ever deserved. So, while life may seem just okay or you are feeling only okay, realize that your life in eternity is much more than okay. It is perfectly written in the book of life. The attempt for more ended at the cross. Jesus gave his life so we could be like him in the eyes of God, perfect and blameless.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

The Reformation Gospel

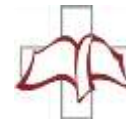
Faith Group Discussion

Week 1



Sharing. . .

Are you a morning person or a night person? Why do you think that is?



Growing. . .

(Additional reading: Romans 7:15-25)

Bondage of the will

1. What do you think of the assertion that, in matters of salvation, we do not have free will?
2. What is the point of Biblical commands if we can’t keep them?
 - a. Do you agree with Erasmus, that if there is an “ought” it implies a “can”?
3. Read Genesis 3:1-7. What was the first sin?
 - a. What role did the devil/serpent play in the first sin?
 - b. In what ways do we try to “be like God”?
4. How are even our attempts to do good, tainted by sin?
5. Why is it important to uphold the doctrine of the Bondage of the will, and why is it ultimately good news?



Serving. . .

Daily pray for each member of your group by name, asking for spiritual growth and a closer relationship with Jesus.

Weekly Devotion

Week 2 – How can I serve God?

“Two Kingdoms?”

By Jeff Amundson

(Based on Romans 3:19-25 and Luke 19:1-9)

Many believe that in order to serve God, you need to have a fancy title or an official mission. We all serve God every day by doing the job we are called to do in life and worshiping the God who has given us salvation. Our service is everywhere every day and not limited to the church building.

We Christians are in God’s earthly kingdom to be stewards of His creation and to live a godly life as much as our sinful nature can allow. We serve by loving our neighbor and by praising God. In this way, we are part of the two kingdoms, serving in our called positions in the earthly kingdom and, by serving our neighbors, we are acting through His grace in His spiritual kingdom. These two kingdoms exist in our lives daily, and we can and are directed to act in both whether at work, home, play or church. Our vocations are God’s calling to us and allow us to do our part in the earthly realm. How we serve reflects our function in the Spiritual Realm. In my position, I try to work with others as if they were my brothers and sisters, with love, caring and understanding.

This does not mean that orders cannot be given or that a mix of compliments and criticism are not a part, they are. Christ often gave direction to his disciples, taught and corrected them, and yet loved them dearly and died for them and us. When we work with our neighbors as a Christian “family,” we are fulfilling our roles in the two kingdoms, through our vocations, and by praising God in our actions in that way pleasing God by our feeble attempts to meet His requests of us.

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Faith Group Discussion

Week 2



Sharing . .

If you had to give up one of your senses (hearing, seeing, feeling, smelling, tasting), which would it be and why?



Growing . .

Vocation and the Two Kingdoms

1. Why is the Doctrine of Two Kingdoms so significant? Why must the two not be confused?
2. In our world today, does it seem as if God is really ruling over the Left-Hand Kingdom?
3. Some scholars say there are actually three kingdoms, distinguishing marriage and family from the rest of the Left-Hand Kingdom. Why might family life deserve its own “kingdom”?
4. In the Doctrine of Vocation, Luther restored the dignity of daily life and work. What impact do you think that has had on the world since his time?
5. Luther insisted that God does not need our good works, but our neighbors do. How does that shape your understanding of the various callings (vocations) in your life?



Serving . .

Is there someone in your group or church family who has a practical need? What can you do to meet that need? Do so.

Weekly Devotion

Week 3 – Yeah, but we have to do something!

“Freedom in Christ“

By Frances Olson

(Based on Romans 3:19-25)

What does it mean, “we are justified freely“?

We have done nothing to earn salvation. Christ died upon the cross shedding his blood to cover our sins. We are His. To believe this is having faith—therefore justified.

Do we contribute anything to our salvation?

Our parents, stirred by the Holy Spirit, arranged with the pastor to have us baptized. They chose the date and the sponsors. Our parents dressed us up and brought us to the baptismal font at the allotted time and place. We did not contribute anything to our salvation. By use of water and the Word, the Holy Spirit comes down to us and enters our heart. We do not go up to God. The Holy Spirit is a free gift of God.

(Based on Luke 19:1-9)

How does Zacchaeus’ response to Jesus illustrate the freedom of a Christian?

The focus here should be on the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was already in Zacchaeus’ heart even before Jesus entered the town. The Spirit stirred up a curiosity in him and gave him direction. The Spirit invited Himself into Zacchaeus’ house; Zacchaeus was bubbling over with joy!

The question also arises, “How can we, as Christ centered people, better see Jesus?” There are a number of ways already set in place here at Faith Lutheran such as Bible and book studies, Digging Deeper, Sunday School, Confirmation and FLY (youth ministry), Faith Groups, testimonies through Mugs & Muffins and many others. These are the things that we can “do”.

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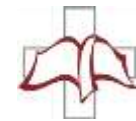
Faith Group Discussion

Week 3



Sharing . . .

Who is/was your favorite grandparent? Why is he/she your favorite?



Growing . . .

Justification by faith and the Freedom of a Christian

1. When it comes to salvation, is there really nothing that we have to do?
2. In the video Pastor Dave likened the old scheme to climbing a ladder. What would be a good metaphor for justification by faith?
3. In session 1 on the bondage of the will, we discussed how even our good works are sinful. Having been justified by faith, then, is there a place for good works?
4. Luther declares first that “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.” And then secondly that “A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”
 - a. How is the first statement true?
 - b. How does the first statement lead to the second statement?
 - c. What does that look like in your relationships?
5. Read Ephesians 2:8-10. How does Paul describe the free gift of faith and its relationship to works?



Serving . . .

Ask God to show you one way to serve another person this week, particularly someone who is hard to love. Write down what he shows you and what you do about it.

Weekly Devotion

Week 4 – I’ve got bad news and good news

“God’s Two-Edged Word”

By Gary Hoffman

(Based on Hebrews 4:12-13 and Mark 10:17-27)

The bad news is that as human beings and sinners, we think that we do not need God to survive here on earth. We seem to have gotten the idea that God needs us in order to have someone to save. Our ancestors before the time of Moses believed this, too, but they felt the power of God's word through Moses and the Flood. We come into this world naked and leave here with nothing that we can claim as truly ours. All power and wealth come from our God because His Word is living and all-powerful.

The good news is that we have nothing to fear in this world as long as we have faith. The faith that God's love, sent to us through His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, will save us and keep us from all sin and the devil. It is true that we must and will be held accountable at the end of our days, but as we hear God's Word and receive His Love for us, our faith in Him will save us. This leaves us wide open to go out and help others by showing our love to those who need it. What a great opportunity to share the all-powerful Love of God!

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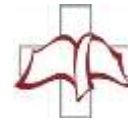
Faith Group Discussion

Week 4



Sharing. . .

In what way are you most like your mom or dad? Explain.



Growing. . .

Law and Gospel

1. Read Hebrews 4:12. How have you heard or felt the “two-edged sword” of God’s Word?
2. In the last week, where or when has the accusing voice of the Law arisen in your life? Where or when have you heard the freeing voice of the Gospel?
3. The Gospel is good news of forgiveness and freedom, so why do we sinners cling to the Law?
4. Why is it vital to “ride the wave” of the Law-Gospel distinction to the end of a text instead of trying to resolve it? (For example, in Matthew 20:1-16, the landowner represents God, but do not defend his pay practices too quickly! How is the parable both bad news *and* good news?)



Serving. . .

Which people in your life do you value the most? How well have you done at showing them your appreciation? What can you do this week to show more love and appreciation for the impact they have had on your life?

Weekly Devotion

Week 5 – Who’s in charge here?

“Beyond Resistance to Joyous Thanksgiving”

By Paul Knudson

(Based on Romans 8:28-31)

To hear the word predestined, I would guess, is troubling to most of us. It is heard as the opposite of freedom, as a matter of something being predetermined.

When I was a small boy in sunflower country in rural South Dakota, we often played a little game. As we plucked one yellow petal of the sun flower off after another, we would say: she loves me; she loves me not. We may carry over that picture here. God loves me; He loves me not. He destines one person to heaven, the next to hell. All this is willy-nilly. This is crazy.

What if we hear this seemingly arbitrary word differently? Permit me to paraphrase verses 29-31 and see if this may help. “For those whom God knows inside and out he elects (chooses) to be conformed to the image of His beloved Son, in order that Jesus might be the first born of one gigantic family of his own choosing. Those whom he chooses he also calls...and declares forgiven/made new. These will live in glory...So if God is for us, who is against us?”

So what about you? If the one who knows you inside and out chooses you to be transformed into the very likeness of our Lord Jesus, gathers you into the huge worldwide family of the living and the dead, calls us, who are rascals, his beloved instead and destines us for eternal glory, what more could we ask for?

You see, it’s not like there is this big crowd of us just hankering to sign up to be conformed to the image of our beloved Savior, who poured his life out for “poor ornery sinners like you and like me.” Ah, but we cry out: give me my space. Don’t impinge on my freedom. So how have you and I been doing with this freedom thing lately?

God is so for us that, through his beloved Son, he keeps breaking through our resistance, electing, calling, forgiving, making new. Cause for thanksgiving, wouldn’t you say?

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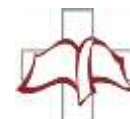
Faith Group Discussion

Week 5



Sharing. . .

If you could eliminate one thing from your daily schedule, what would it be?



Growing. . .

(Additional reading: [John 1:43-50](#))

Election

1. Why does election make us uncomfortable?
2. Brainstorm occurrences in scripture where God asks for volunteers and then occurrences where God simply chooses. Which occur more?
 - a. Can’t think of any? Try: [Genesis 12:1-4](#); [Matthew 4:18-22](#); [Acts 9:1-9](#)
3. So, if a Lutheran shouldn’t use phrases like “I accepted Jesus into my life” or “I made a decision for Jesus,” how does a Lutheran talk about faith and salvation?
4. How do you know you are a Christian?
 - a. What do you point to? Something you did or something God did?
5. What electing, or choosing, words should you listen for in a Lutheran worship service?
6. How does the Lutheran doctrine of election affect the need for evangelism and the way to evangelize?
7. Someone once claimed, “On their deathbed, everyone is a Lutheran.” What do they mean by that and why is the doctrine of election good news?



Serving. . .

Do you have a Christian friend or relative who has strayed from the path of a right relationship with the Lord? If so, what can you do to help illuminate the path back toward God?

Weekly Devotion

Week 6 – I'll do better next time, I promise!

"Finding Peace"

By Lucille Krueger

(Based on Romans 7:14-25)

When Christ becomes our Savior and Lord, the Holy Spirit remains in our hearts and minds. Our human bodies are also filled with the reality of sin, which is in constant struggle with God's law.

When we sin in thought, word or deed, either knowingly or unknowingly, we must ask God to forgive us over and over, to keep God and the Holy Spirit in control of our minds and in our hearts.

Being right with God and keeping our faith strong in Him is the only way we can have peace in our hearts and minds.

Our God is an awesome God! When we pray "without ceasing" and remember how gracious He is to love us so very much, we will have comfort and peace unending.

Just "love and obey," read His Word and pray daily.

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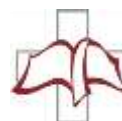
Faith Group Discussion

Week 6



Sharing. . .

If you could speak with a relative or friend who is deceased, who would it be? What would you ask him or her?

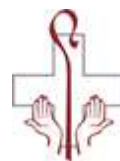


Growing. . .

(Additional reading: Mark 14: 29-31, 66-72)

Simul iustus et Peccator

1. Does the claim that there are "two yous in you" (saint and sinner) ring true in your experience?
2. Read Romans 7:15, 18-19, 21-23. Have you experienced this struggle in your life? How?
3. Luther insisted that the Christian life is not a linear path of improvement, but a continual, circular struggle of sin and faith. Does that insight strike you as hopeful or discouraging?
4. How can confessing our sinful nature actually free us to serve God more faithfully?



Serving. . .

Who in your circle of friends seems to be struggling right now? What can you say or do to be an encouragement this week?

Weekly Devotion

Week 7 – But I’m not the pastor!

“Chosen People”

By Andrew Weckwerth

(Based on 1 Peter 2:9-10 and Matthew 16:13-19)

It’s hard for me to answer questions about God and faith, especially when the asker is someone who isn’t really connected to the church. I feel a little trapped—like I shouldn’t try to give an answer that may not be authoritative enough for one of those tough questions. What if I say something wrong and it gives an incorrect understanding about Christianity? Wouldn’t it turn out better if I just guided them to the nearest pastor’s office to hear a qualified person’s take on the matter?

I found a hint for this situation in what we hear the pastor say at church every Sunday. In Confession and Absolution, we hear “As a member with you of the priesthood of all believers, but by the authority of Jesus Christ, I declare unto you the forgiveness of all your sin.” In this statement, the forgiveness of sins is backed up by God’s authority. As members of what 1 Peter calls “a chosen people, a royal priesthood,” we can trust in that same authority to back us up. When I’m asked tough questions, my answer might not be as good as a pastor’s, but I can trust that I’m not speaking out of turn. God chooses us to proclaim the Gospel, and will help us with the words to say.

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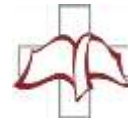
Faith Group Discussion

Week 7



Sharing. . .

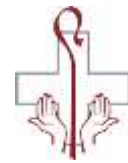
If someone were to ask you what God has been teaching you as you have done this study, what would your answer be?



Growing. . .

Priesthood of All Believers

1. Have you ever thought of yourself as a priest because of your baptism? What difference does that make in how you understand the Christian life?
2. Has God ever put you in a situation where you were called to exercise your “priestly authority” (i.e., to proclaim forgiveness, witness to Christ or do other ministry)?
3. If pastors serve for the sake of good order in the church, what authority do they have to correct or admonish members of a church?
4. Why is “The Office of Preaching” so central and important in Lutheran theology?



Serving. . .

What could you do this week to better reflect the impact that Christ has had on your life? Concentrate on doing it.