

Guidelines for Faith Groups Discussions

Each session is designed for about one and a half hours, but let the flow of the conversation determine how long each one lasts.

The Bible texts and devotions are provided so that participants may read them before their Faith Group meets each week. They may also be read together at the beginning of each meeting.

We encourage each Faith Group to begin and end each session with prayer. Invite participants to lead or join in the prayers as they feel able to do so.

Each week, look back to how God has been working in your life in light of the previous Faith Group discussion.

Be gracious and supportive of one another in your Faith Group. Remember to keep any personal information that may be shared confidential.

God will be present as you meet! “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” – Matthew 18:20

Sermon Notes—Sunday, September 9

Final thoughts...

“Impossible!”

Are *all* things possible with God?

Faith Group Discussion

Session 7

“The Narrowest Door”



Growing...

1. Rather than just admit that it is utterly impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, why do people often feel the need to soften or explain away that image instead?
2. Jesus promised the faithful a hundredfold wealth, “now, in this age.” Why did he make a promise that conflicted with his own warning? How does it speak to Christians in poverty?
3. Why are people, including Christians, so determined to rely on ourselves or do things our own way, rather than simply trust in God? Do you see evidence of that in your life?
4. A theology of glory always tries to explain the cross or find its deeper meaning. Why is it vital that a theology of the cross simply confront us with the plain reality of it instead?
5. In light of the cross, and of this series, how would you answer the question, “Are *all* things possible with God?” How might your answer shape your witness to the Gospel?



Serving... Get out of your comfort zone and volunteer to do something new in church or the community.

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Weekly Devotion

Session 1

“When Healing
Won’t Come”

“God’s Response to Our Suffering”

By Claire Woelfel

(Based on Mark 9:14-28)

In Mark 9, Jesus exorcised a demon that had caused a boy to be mute and apparently epileptic. The boy experienced no faith in Jesus at all. (He couldn’t, as he was possessed from the time of birth). His father expressed faith, but his faith was mixed and admittedly not enough. He asked God to help him overcome his unbelief and Jesus healed the boy.

Like the boy, we all experience suffering and pain to some degree and place in our lives, and need to be healed. How will we respond to Christ in our moments of suffering? God tells us His grace is sufficient for us and His power is made perfect in our weakness.

To all who suffer—spiritually, relationally or physically—we need to look deep inside ourselves and ask whether God’s grace is enough for us. If we have Him, it is, for we have healing, whether in this age or in the age to come.

Dear Lord, help us to surrender to You our pain and suffering, and give us patience and understanding, knowing you are the Great Healer. In our pain, help us to be of service to You and others in prayer by listening and encouraging. Our hope is in You and in Your power to heal. Amen.

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Video Notes ~ Session 1 ~ “When Healing Won’t Come”

1. “All things are _____ for the one who believes.”
2. “For mortals, it is _____, but with God, all things are possible.”
3. Not being healed is a daily _____ for many devout Christian believers.
4. But what about when people don’t get better, despite our prayer? It’s a big challenge for many people to their _____ in God.
5. Responses. . .Not enough _____!
Cheerful _____!
A kind of _____!
6. The best of these attempted answers when healing won’t come, and that is to trust God _____!
7. Paul’s chronic condition: Perhaps the most plausible is really bad _____.
8. God’s refusal to take away the thorn in the flesh moved the question from one of a transaction to a _____.
God shifted Paul’s focus from “what” to “_____.”
9. . . .but rather we can handle whatever does or doesn’t happen in our lives, because we know God is _____.



Sharing...

What would you most prefer to do - read a good book, watch a good movie, take a long walk or nap?

Video Notes Session 7 “The Narrowest Door”

1. Are they possible for us? . . .Will God do the _____ for us?
2. Jesus wanted an _____ of something that is impossible.
3. It is really important not to apply Jesus’ warning too _____ to those with wealth.
4. It seems like we are still just hopelessly _____ in impossible territory here!
5. God _____ all our efforts to manage our own righteousness.
6. So, the only solution is not to try harder or to make more effort, but to _____ to ourselves in the face of our helplessness.
7. Theology of _____ will always end up in pride or in despair.
8. It leaves no possibility. . . but to confess our sins, surrender all of our thoughts and plans, to _____ in God alone!
9. All things are possible with God, but God will only _____ in His own way, not according to ours!



Sharing... If you could travel to any country, which would it be and why?

“Impossible!”

Are *all* things possible with God?

Faith Group Discussion Session 1

“When Healing Won’t Come”



Growing...

1. Tell about a time when “all things” were *not* possible for you or others, even with God. How did that reality affect your faith? How did your faith affect that reality?
2. How do we understand from a *faith* perspective why God heals or rescues some people, but not all? Why do you think He acts in ways that seem inconsistent or arbitrary to us?
3. What does it mean to *trust* God at times when healing won’t come, in contrast to a kind of cheerful denial of the struggle or a fatalistic sense of destiny?
4. How does it change those situations when healing won’t come if we understand our prayers for healing in terms of relationship and not as transactions?
5. Apply God’s promise to Paul directly to yourself. “God’s grace is sufficient for *me*, for His power is made perfect in (*my*) weakness.” What does that mean *for you in your life*?



Serving... Send a note or card to someone this week who is going through a difficult time and remind him or her of God’s love.

“Who Can Be Saved?”

By Meg Kelly (summer intern)

(Based on Mark 10:23-31)

Can your rich and proud employer give up her callousness for ways of integrity? Can your obnoxious and rude classmate become considerate? Can your bossy and intruding sister give control to God? Can your lazy and passive son-in-law ever wake-up to smell the burning bacon? Can your heart hardened with repeated rebellious sin ever become soft to God’s will and direction? Who *can* change? Who *can* be saved? By Jesus’ words, no one can be saved of their own volition (Mark 10:27).

Thanks be to God that Jesus understands and communicates that we can’t embark on correcting these conundrums on our own. One wants to choose the way to proceed to correct these problems and start off on the journey immediately with a highlighted and marked map. In today’s church culture, it is an easy trap to fall into: find the correct path and door through one’s own reasoning.

God instead invites us to choose the narrowest door: the door of dependence for God’s help. No one wants to be truly dependent, not even a baby, as seen at that stubborn age of pushing away helpful and correcting hands, declaring “me, me, me!” Our desire for independence and control causes the door of dependence for redemption, hope, guidance and care from God to seem difficult to choose. We must choose this difficult and narrow door, for it is the only door that will lead us to a path where we want to end.

Heavenly Father, we are so thankful that you gave us your Son, Jesus who selflessly went to his death on the cross for us and our sinful ways. Amen.

“Impossible!”
Are *all* things possible with God?

Faith Group Discussion Session 6
“The Root of All Evil”



Growing...

1. For what “unanswered prayers” do you thank God?
2. “It’s almost as if we’re not always the best judge of what we do and don’t need, isn’t it?” Pastor Dave mentioned emotions, perspective, and even stupidity as things that limit our judgment. What else gets in the way?
3. When has God answered your prayer with, “I’ve got something better”?
4. Does God actually ever NOT answer our prayers?
5. How is the cross and resurrection of Christ an answer to our needs? What are you praying for now?



Serving... This week, ask God to show you one way to serve another person. Write down what He shows you and what you do.

Weekly Devotion Session 2 “The Lure of Status”

“A Search for What is Eternal”

By Tim Piehl
(Based on Mark 9:30-37)

The argument among the twelve can be seen today everywhere. Temptations of status have become ingrained in our culture. Once upon a time, the news actually reported world events and facts. Today, we are just as likely to hear about the wardrobe or achievement of a celebrity.

We all too often place our icons as the target we attempt to emulate. Do we feel any better or different when we emulate them? Could the lack of fulfillment leave a space in our psyche that we keep trying to fill?

The twelve comparing their achievements in following Jesus is no different. If the goal was simply to be the servant of God, how much more fulfilled would we all be? Sometimes the goals of our faith are opposite the natural instincts we have. Truly helping another human being as God intended is much more rewarding. It fills that empty space left by human emulation. Emulating Jesus is far more rewarding as he is eternal.

Human beings love instant gratification. Tangible goals always seem to be placed first in order of importance. We tend to think in the here and now, unconcerned with future consequences. Human goals fade into nothingness while Gods’ goals endure forever.

Dear Lord God, thank you for providing us with guidance that stands the test of time. You guide us to be better in every way. Help us to be your servants and place you above all else. Amen.

Video Notes ~ Session 2 ~ “The Lure of Status”

1. Don't _____ your status!
2. “. . .everyone who exalts himself will be _____ and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”
3. The Pharisees had _____ their status.
4. Jesus is always _____ up the lowest in stature.
5. Jesus is only concerned with one status--
_____!
6. And then Jesus changes their status. . .
From sinner to _____
From slave to _____
From lost to _____!



Sharing...

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

Video Notes ~ Session 6 ~ “Be Careful What You Ask For”

1. Was God _____ of delivering? Or just not interested?
2. “Sometimes I thank God for unanswered _____.”
Garth Brooks
3. As if our judgment is impaired by:
 - Strong emotion
 - Limited _____
 - Just plain stupidity
4. A part of me _____ that anger and bitterness towards God!
5. The twelve disciples certainly had different _____ for how things would turn out.
6. Jesus dying on the cross? . . .It's exactly what the disciples _____ . . .It is _____ what we need!
7. In the cross and in the empty tomb, God _____ the question that we ought to be asking—in a way that answers every _____!



Sharing...

What was the first game you remember playing as a child?

“Impossible!”
Are *all* things possible with God?

Faith Group Discussion Session 2 “The Lure of Status”



Growing...

1. Time to brag: What trophies, awards, or achievements have you received?
- 2.. What are you most proud of? What are you pursuing? Where do you find worth?
3. How is status in the kingdom of God backwards?
4. If Jesus were walking the earth today, what do you think he would think of the things in which we find status and worth?
5. Read Philippians 3:4-11. Paul rattles off some status symbols, but now, in Christ, what does he consider them? Can the desire for worth and status ever be filled?



Serving... This week, if you're able, offer to pay for a stranger's coffee, meal or _____.

“Be Careful What You Ask For”

By Luke Wollan

(Based on Mark 10:32-40, 46-52)

Last year, I watched a lot of the Hutchinson girls tennis meets because I had some friends on the team. I had a blast and really enjoyed watching tennis. So this year, I was set on joining on the boys team. I told my family and my grandparents, and they were really excited. When the time came around to sign up for tennis, I felt nervous about my definite lack of abilities for the sport and ended up deciding not to play. When my grandpa heard about this, I could tell he was pretty disappointed. I told him that I might play next year but would need to practice a lot. When he heard this, he was excited and hopeful for me. Time passed and my birthday arrived in early May. Guess what my grandparents gave me: fifty dollars towards tennis lessons. I was not too thrilled, and I learned that I need to be careful what I say around my grandpa.

A similar thing happened when Jesus and his twelve disciples were on their way to Jerusalem. Out of the blue, Jesus pulled them aside and basically told them that he was going to die at the hands of the people in Jerusalem. After they heard this, instead of asking why or being worried for him, James and John went up to Jesus and requested something crazy. They asked to be seated at the right and left hand of Jesus when he is in his glory. Like, who would ask Jesus that? Well, Jesus put them in their place and I bet they felt like me on my birthday. You see, we are all guilty of the same thing. We all ask God for things and don't trust the plan He has for us. We ask for things and don't think He answers. He actually does answer, but in ways we wouldn't expect. We have to be more mindful in what we ask for, especially with God.

Lord God, thank you for watching over us and giving us what we need. Help us to trust in you. Amen.

“Impossible!”

Are *all* things possible with God?

Faith Group Discussion Session 5 “The Root of All Evil”



Growing...

1. There is every reason to think the rich man in Mark 10 was deeply faithful and obedient to God, so why was he so anxious and uncertain about “inheriting eternal life”?
2. Jesus told the rich man to sell everything he had, knowing there was no way he would comply, in order to dismantle his whole religious system. Why was that necessary?
3. Do Jesus’ words and actions in this text threaten to dismantle your own religious system (i.e., your understanding of how you will “inherit eternal life”)? If so, how?
4. What makes money “a root of all kinds of evil” (I Timothy 6:10) What other good gifts of God can also work that way? Is it possible to avoid tripping over those “roots”?
5. Self-reliance is a valuable trait for daily life, but it is deadly to genuine faith in God. Is it possible for Christians to pursue self-reliance in life, but avoid it in faith?



Serving... Do you struggle with money or some thing in your life? Ask God to help you see a way to share it this week and do it.

Weekly Devotion

Session 3

“Condemning Contradictions”

“The Easter Gift”

By Virginia Brodd

(Based on Mark 9:38-50)

This text is not the words of comfort and peace I’ve come to expect from the New Testament. To be truthful, it is very confusing and somewhat disturbing to me. Jesus is telling his followers to pluck out their eye if it causes them to sin or cut off their hand or foot if it causes them to sin. On my best of days, I doubt I could go an hour or two without losing some body part. How can I possibly live a life good enough to be a follower of Jesus? I can’t!

But then, in verse 40, Jesus says to his disciples, “For he who is not against us is on our side.” That verse gives a bit of hope because I’m certainly on the good side. But just being on the side of Jesus isn’t going to stop sin from happening. And we are back to cutting off limbs and plucking out eyes.

And that is where the Easter Gift saves me. God sent his son to take all those sins – the really big ones and the daily ones, many of which I’m not even aware. Jesus took them all, died on the cross for them and rose on Easter. He saves me every day.

Dear Lord, no matter how hard I try to walk on the straight path, it is impossible not to sin on a daily basis. Thanks be to You for sending us Jesus to hold our hand as we walk the daily path of life, guiding and protecting us. Amen.

Sermon Notes—Sunday, September 30

Video Notes ~ Session 5 ~ “The Root of All Evil”

1. Jesus was not just seeking more _____ from this rich man. . .What Jesus demanded in this text was, in fact, _____!
2. Despite all that devotion, there was something missing. He was _____. He lacked assurance.
3. Instead, Jesus _____ something wrong with the rich man’s entire approach.
4. . . .because the man’s reaction to Jesus’ ultimate demand. . . it shows that the problem he faced was not lack of obedience or courage, but rather. . . _____ - _____.
5. Jesus had to show him the impossibility of _____ the kingdom of God on his own.
6. It can be _____, not just unbelief, that hides rebellion against God.
7. Only then, once we have died to ourselves, does the _____ enter in to replace that sinful self-reliance with faith in Christ alone to forgive us and save us.
8. Wealth can easily lead us to put trust in _____, in what we have, rather than in God.



Sharing...

What is your favorite Bible verse and how does it speak to you?

Video Notes ~ Session 3 ~ “Condemning Contradictions”

1. In Mark 9, Jesus says it's suspiciously _____ and impossibly _____.
2. Had to leave. . .not to change who we were, but to _____ who we were!
3. When do we stand with John and the 12. . .and when do we stand with _____?
4. If we somehow scandalize other believers, is God just going to _____ all over us?
5. “I must have either an _____ sense of the value of my eyes or a grossly _____ view of sin.”
6. The only conclusion then, is that sin is so _____, that it even warrants mutilation of our body.
7. These condemning contradictions from Jesus are entirely _____.
8. _____ for sin is also utterly impossible.
9. But in the breathtaking power of the _____, that is exactly where the promise lies.
10. The Word of God drives us to _____. . .to drive us on further to Christ and the cross.
11. In Christ we are _____ from our sin and reconciled to God.
12. Got has freed us to serve _____ might cross our path in whatever way they might need.



Sharing... If you could be any age, what age would you choose? Why?

“Impossible!”
Are *all* things possible with God?

Faith Group Discussion Session 3



Growing...

1. How can we know if “those who are not against (Jesus) are for (him)” or if “those who are not with (Jesus) are against (him)”? At what point must we divide from others?
2. Given Jesus’ fierce warning about putting “a stumbling block before one of these...who believe in me,” how do we dare engage in Christian ministry or witness at all?
3. How did you react to the poem “Darkening Sock”? Why would Jesus order such violent responses to sin? Is it possible not to take these words literally, but still take them seriously?
4. Why do Christians who claim Jesus as their Savior still so often believe that they can achieve their own righteousness or must overcome their own sinfulness?
5. Why must God force us into realizing that we cannot manage to be righteous by our own efforts? How does that actually empower us for true Christian faith and service?



Serving...

Talk to someone about Jesus this week.

Weekly Devotion

Session 5 “The Root of All Evil”

“Falling Short”

By Randy Redman
(Based on Mark 10:17-22)

It all started to unravel when that Tree of Life had the apple on it that we, as humans, could not leave alone as directed by God!

Evil can inflict pain physically or emotionally and it has no boundaries! Every day, multiple times I ask for forgiveness of my thoughts and actions, but always revert to sin again, sometimes only seconds after I ask to be better. I want to be better not only for myself, but for all those I love. As much as I think I am in control, it never fails that I fall short.

By the grace of God, he promises to forgive if we only ask him with a heart full of repentance for our evil ways.

Gracious Lord, I am evil in ways only you know. I ask that you make me better. I do not ask for you to make life easier, but I do ask that you make me better, so others will see in me how knowing you is the only way to eternal salvation. In Christ Jesus. Amen.

“Impossible!”
Are *all* things possible with God?

Faith Group Discussion Session 4
“Broken Marriages/Broken People”



Growing...

1. Why is God so concerned about relationships?
2. You heard Pastor Dave discuss his family tree, and the blessings and brokenness it contains. What does your family tree look like? What kinds of blessings and brokenness does it contain?
3. How have you experienced the blessed gift (God established it), burden (sinners sin), and sustaining (God still sustains it) aspects of marriage and relationships that Dave described?
4. Read Mark 10:2-16.
 - How do you think Jesus felt about divorce?
 - What is the perceived church stance on divorce?
 - What do you think the church should say about divorce?
 - What can the church do to help divorced men and women?
5. What about other relationship issues, like co-habitation, pre-marital sex, and infidelity? Pick one or two issues and discuss using the questions from #4.
6. In a world of broken relationships, how can the church be a light?



Serving... Do what you can to help mend a broken relationship this week.

**Weekly Devotion Session 4 “Broken Marriages/
Broken People”**

“Trusting God”

By Joy May
(Based on: Mark 10:2-16)

When I was thinking for something to write for this scripture, I googled quotes. One quote that stands out is “Fight for your marriage like it’s under attack from the powers of hell.” This is easier said than done.

God says a marriage is a covenant. It’s a promise that we make on our wedding day. We make this promise in front of God, our families and friends, and to each other as husband and wife.

While the world sees divorce as a valid option for almost any reason, God’s original intent for marriage is seen in the first couple, Adam and Eve. One man and one woman in a committed, loving, lifelong relationship. Such faithfulness in a relationship is meant to reflect God’s forever love for His people.

Divorce rates are about 50%. God recognizes that divorce will occur, even among His children. A divorced and/or remarried believer should not feel any less loved by God.

God forgives our sins. God has helped many people recover from a divorce and forgives all who believe. We are all broken people because of our sins. However, we are all children of God.

We need to remember when we’re feeling sorry for our sins, that God is up to something. There is a reason why we go through tough parts in our lives. We need to trust His process. He’s got us. No matter how tough times get, remember that giving up isn’t the answer; giving it to God is.

*Dear God, forgive us for our sins and help us to trust in you.
Amen.*

1. Marriage is a God-ordained _____ given to men and women.
2. When one sinner marries another sinner-- _____ happens!
3. “But because God, who established marriage, continues still to bless it with his abundant and ever-present _____, we can be sustained in our weariness and have our joy restored.”
4. And while the church is _____ of sinners, Christ lays down his life for her.



Sharing...

What do you think is the key to a happy marriage?