



“If We Have Only **Hoped** in Christ”



The Reliability  
of the Gospel

Spring 2018  
Faith Groups Study  
and Devotional





Growing...

1. If you knew that Jesus was returning in a week, what would you do?
2. Read Matthew 24:42. What do you think it means for us to “stay awake” in regard to Jesus’ return? How do we do this?
3. Why can we rely on Christ’s return?
4. What two things does Paul clarify in I and II Thessalonians?
5. Why is the popular “rapture” belief problematic?
6. What day-to-day attitude should we have when it comes to Jesus’ return?

### 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**

## Video Notes ~ Session 6 ~ “The Reliability of the End”

1. Be \_\_\_\_\_! Keep the lamps burning! Remain diligent! Stay awake!
2. We can \_\_\_\_\_ on Christ’s return, because He said He would return!
3. If anyone is not willing to \_\_\_\_\_, let him not eat.
4. The End—that Last Day and \_\_\_\_\_ second coming—is something we take by faith.



### Sharing...

Do you celebrate your birthday? If so, what does the celebration look like?



### Serving...

Send a card or letter to someone this week just because.

## “Jesus Will Be Coming Back on January 7th!”

By Rachel Kamrath

(Based on II Peter 3:8-13, Matthew 24:36-44,  
I Corinthians 15:23-27a, Revelation 22:16-17)

After reading the verses that “no one knows...only the Father” about when Jesus will return (from Matthew 24: 36-44), I remember making predictions aloud as a kid about when he would come back. My kid logic was sound ...if I “know” Jesus will come back on a certain day...then He cannot possibly come that day! I wanted to have my birthday party and presents, so by declaring that Jesus would return on my birthday, I thought I could delay His coming and celebrate as scheduled. Unfortunately, that’s not how it works. We can’t trick the creator of the universe into changing His master plan. But we can be sure He will return according to his word...and on His own schedule.

*Dear God--We are so thankful for your faithfulness to your word that you will return. Thank you for providing a way for us to spend eternity with you through Jesus’ death on the cross. Give us wisdom to know how to reach other people in your name, that they might also have eternal life with you someday. Give us patience, diligence, and trust in You until your return. In Jesus name, Amen.*

## “Witnessing the Truth”

By Sandy Lennes

(Based on 1 Corinthians 15:1-28)

Those who have witnessed (albeit secondhand) any of the disasters of the past such as, John F. Kennedy’s assassination, the Space Shuttle Challenger explosion, or the Twin Towers, Pentagon and Flight #93 terrorist attacks would have varying reports of the incident—all depending upon their perspective. In modern society, that standpoint would be which television channel they were viewing at the time of the incident. Because we saw with our own eyes, we know it to be true!

Lacking the recording cameras or cell phones 2000+ years ago, we have only the recounting of the resurrection of our Lord as told by the four Gospel writers. These Gospels were written independently of one another, with each writer reporting on what he knew to be true.

Thus, we have Matthew telling about Mary Magdelene and the other Mary visiting the empty tomb, while Luke adds Joanna and several others to the mix. John’s version emphasizes Mary Magdelene as the sole witness to the risen Savior. One thing is certain, however: **the tomb was empty, and all the disciples except Judas Iscariot would eventually see and hear the resurrected Lord.**

I invite you to read and meditate on the resurrection accounts in each of the four Gospels, personally realizing that Jesus rose from the dead and lives with you today. As you grow in your relationship with Christ, he will give you both the opportunities and inner strength to tell his message.

*Gracious Lord, you have been forever faithful in fulfilling your promises. I believe that you have saved me through the cross of Christ and his glorious resurrection. Keep me faithful to your word and help me witness to others of your everlasting love and goodness. Amen.*

## Video Notes ~ Session 1 ~ “The Reliability of the Resurrection”

1. Everything depends on the resurrection, but is the \_\_\_\_\_ dependable?
2. The first factor to trust the resurrection is the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Bible.
3. The second factor to trust the resurrection is the sudden, total \_\_\_\_\_ of Jesus’ disciples.
4. The third factor of trust in the resurrection is the question: Was it just a \_\_\_\_\_?
5. The final factor of trust in the resurrection is the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Church.



### Sharing...

What was the best thing that happened to you this week?



### Serving...

Pray that God will give you the opportunity (and the courage!) to tell someone about Jesus this week.

## Faith Group Discussion Session 5 “The Reliability of the Faith”



### Growing...

1. Why are so many people convinced that scientific knowledge automatically rules out religious faith?
2. Kevin Sharpe insisted that “the reconstructed Divine must act in the universe in ways that strike us as obvious.” Evaluate his conviction in light of Genesis 3:1-5.
3. Why did God not directly explain to Job why such great suffering fell on him or even show much sympathy to him? Read Job 40:1-6. (Note that in the first half of verses 3 and 4, Job is quoting what God had said to him earlier.) How did God’s relentless assertion of his divine power and knowledge resolve Job’s frustration and bring him comfort?
4. Most Christians view the complexity and calibration of the universe as convincing evidence that God created it. Why do you think that argument is not more convincing to many non-believers?
5. Have you experienced any “glimpses of joy” as C.S. Lewis or Whitaker Chambers described? How does the possibility of a transcendent reality (a realm beyond what we perceive in empirical ways) challenge the scientific outlook that dominates our culture today?
6. In conversation with a secularist who insists that science rules out Christian faith, how might you move from engaging his/her arguments to witnessing to your faith?

## Video Notes ~ Session 5 ~ “The Reliability of the Faith”

1. Growing scientific knowledge and discovery has presented \_\_\_\_\_ to the Christian faith.
2. Some reactions to scientific knowledge actually reflect badly on the faith. They simply \_\_\_\_\_ the view of those who say, “Faith rules out knowledge”.
3. There is an \_\_\_\_\_ that faith and rationality or faith and scientific knowledge cannot coexist.
4. Job’s frustration led him into a \_\_\_\_\_ and dangerous pride.
5. Joy referred to little glimpses of a \_\_\_\_\_ reality.
6. Intelligent Design insists the universe could not have \_\_\_\_\_ into being the way that we know the way we know it did.
7. Faith in Christ, as Lord, is a step beyond evidence—a step \_\_\_\_\_ just reasoning.



### Sharing...

What is your favorite town/city in the world? Why?



### Serving...

Find ways to put your faith in action this week.

## Faith Group Discussion Session 1 “The Reliability of the Resurrection”



### Growing...

1. Why does St. Paul insist that the entire Christian faith depends on the resurrection?
2. Do you struggle to believe that Jesus rose from the dead? Do you know other people who do? If so, what makes it hard?
3. What important distinction lies in saying that belief in Jesus’ resurrection is *rational*, but not *empirical*?
4. Review the four arguments favoring the reliability of the resurrection made in the video. Do you find them convincing?
5. How else might you make the case for the reliability of the resurrection to someone who denies it or knows nothing of it?

**Weekly Devotion      Session 2      “The Reliability  
of the Bible”**

**“The Scriptures are Reliable”**

By Ellen Juul

(Based on John 1:1-14; II Timothy 3:16, and Romans 10:5-17)

Who or what can you trust these days? If you turn on the news or click on social media, you are bombarded with stories and opinions that claim to be factual and true. But are they? In the same way, you might find yourself asking if we can trust Christianity’s greatest treasure—the Bible—the Word of God.

My answer is that yes, we can trust the Bible. It is reliable. First is its divine inspiration. Most of the Biblical authors from Moses to Paul claimed to be inspired by God in what they said and wrote (II Timothy 3:16, II Peter 1:20-21, II Samuel 23:2). Next is its indestructibility. Though many enemies throughout history have tried to destroy it, the Bible remains the world’s best-selling book with billions of copies sold. Then, though the Bible was written over a period of approximately 1,600 years by approximately 40 authors in too major languages, it still shows a consistent view of life and set of truths. The question of which books to include in the Bible was debated by many councils, notably a council led by Athanasius in AD 367. Athanasius used several specific criteria to decide which books should be included in the Biblical canon: were they authoritative, prophetic, authentic, dynamic, and accepted and used by believers? There have been many other histories written of famous men and nations, but the Bible has more factual support, a shorter time period between origins and surviving copies, and more surviving manuscripts than any other ancient document.

We can also order our lives by that Word. Paul tells us that the Word is useful for teaching, reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. (II Timothy 3:16-17). Jesus also prayed for his disciples before he died, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” (John 17:17).

*Heavenly Father, keep us steadfast in your Word. Help us to turn to it for answers to our questions, direction for our lives, reminders of your precious promises and peace for our hearts.*

**Weekly Devotion      Session 5      “The Reliability  
of the Faith”**

**“The Gift of Wisdom”**

By Jon Wehler

(Based on I Corinthians 1:20-31, Job 38 & 42:1-3)

The Lord gives wisdom to those who seek it. If we grasp and contemplate this incredible gift of wisdom, we wrestle in our minds the weight of this knowledge – maybe even too much at times.

When one realizes the nature of God's infinite wisdom, this weight will take its toll (Ecclesiastes 1:18). We were never meant to carry such knowledge. Yet he gives it to us fools anyway!

And so, we wrestle on and on: week after week, month after month, year after year. Godly knowledge and the never-ending wrestling match with it in our minds. “Useless!” says the philosopher in Ecclesiastes. But essential for growth in Him.

So, all we have left is to “boast of what God has done” (1 Corinthians 1:31). Everything is from Him, including wisdom. So, to God goes the glory.

There is no sugar coating any of this. But thank God he reveals these things to us!

*Lord, thank you for revealing to us the wisdom of your ways. Until we are called home, be with us as we dare to contemplate such things. Please give us peace in the midst of all this. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*



Faith Group Discussion Session 4  
"The Reliability of the Church"



**Growing...**

1. What church "black-eyes" have really affected you?
2. How have you seen the effects of our sinful brokenness in the church?
3. How have you seen the Holy Spirit active in the church?
4. How do you respond to those who "reject organized religion," or "love Jesus but not the Church"?
5. How does Jesus feel about the Church? (hint: Ephesians 5:25-27)
6. What does Luther mean when he says that sometimes the true Church is hidden?
7. In the end, why is the Church something that must be believed by faith?

Video Notes ~ Session 2 ~ "The Reliability of the Bible"

1. Writings in the Biblical canon are those that \_\_\_\_\_ to the standard of Holy Scripture.
2. Nearly every Old Testament book is either \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ to in the New Testament.
3. Formation of the New Testament canon began in the early part of the \_\_\_\_\_ century A.D.
4. By the end of the fourth century all twenty-seven books in our present canon were \_\_\_\_\_ by all the churches in the West.
5. Boyd points to \_\_\_\_\_ details and self-damaging details that wouldn't be included had the gospels been manufactured stories.
6. Would they really subject themselves to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ for a hoax?



**Sharing...**

What book, movie, or video have you read or seen recently that you would recommend? Share a little about it.



**Serving...**

Make time each day this week to spend time in God's Word and ask God to provide you a way to share it with someone else.

## Faith Group Discussion Session 2 “The Reliability of the Bible”



### Growing...

1. What is your favorite book of the Bible?
- 2.. How is the Bible different from other sacred texts?
3. Does the fact that the Bible was written by several different people over hundreds of years, as opposed to a single author like the Koran or the Book of Mormon, help or hinder your view of the Bible’s inspiration?
4. How do you think God used the process of canonization?
5. What evidence shows that the Bible isn’t a made-up hoax?
6. Read II Tim 3:16-17.

What do you think it means, in light of what you now know about how the Bible was put together, that “all scripture is God-breathed”?

How have you experienced how the Bible “is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness”?

## Video Notes ~ Session 4 ~ “The Reliability of the Church”

1. Yes, the Church can be trusted, but no, sometimes the \_\_\_\_\_ can’t be trusted.
2. Jesus said to Peter and the disciples...I’m \_\_\_\_\_ my church on you and your confession.
3. Through them (\_\_\_\_\_) the church was built.
4. The church can be trusted because the \_\_\_\_\_ can be trusted.
5. A few reminders. . .
  - The Church is God’s \_\_\_\_\_ to us.
  - God does this for more than just \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Sometimes it is \_\_\_\_\_ to fellowship with people who are against you.
  - If you are stuck in a church that doesn’t look or sound like the Church, check for the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Church.



### Sharing...

What is something you dislike doing and why?



### Serving...

The church is not just a building. The church is a family. Pray about ways you can be more involved with the family of Faith.

**Weekly Devotion      Session 4      “The Reliability of  
the Church”**

**“Becoming Part of THE Church”**

By Cecilia Vaillancourt

(Based on: Ephesians 2:19-22, 4:11-16 and Matthew 16:18)

When we are children, we are taught to come to church, go to Sunday school, and say our prayers. Going to church as a child was ‘going because your parents made you go’, and it didn’t mean much to the average kid. Now as a 16-year-old, I have realized that going to church is being part of a bigger community. In the past couple of years, with being more involved in church, I have learned that church is more than just Faith Lutheran Church. A church is, as Ephesians 2 and 4 say “a whole structure, being built together by the Lord” and “joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped”. We are the joints, holding the church together. We are all equipped to play a part in the larger body of Christ. Church is more than just a building; we are the body of Christ, built by the Lord. A church can be anywhere and everywhere. We are not just an institution; together we are the body of Christ! Thanks be to God!

*Lord, help us to continue to see ourselves as a necessary part of the body of Christ, and help us equip others to become part of this larger community. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

**Weekly Devotion      Session 3      “The Reliability of  
Christianity”**

**“Only One God and One Lord”**

By Lou Ann Perschau

(Based on Isaiah 45:5-7, John 14:6-7, I Timothy 2:3-4)

The message to all of us is simple and clear. Jesus is the Son of the living God. He is the promised Messiah, the Christ. God’s assurance of our deliverance from sin and the power of death came through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Although our daily struggles may at times seem difficult and impossible, know that God strengthens us in all our life’s difficulties and our Lord is always faithful in blessing us. Come to the Lord with a grateful and penitent heart, and prayerfully ask for his blessings in your daily lives. Make time each day for devotions and prayer to develop and sustain a close, personal relationship with our Father.

God’s Word continues to enrich and transform our lives and the Gospel declares the full forgiveness of our sins through repentance. Hear and believe the Word because it’s our salvation and God’s gift to us.

*Dear Lord God,  
Thank you for the eternal peace and salvation that you provide to us each day through your Word. We know there is only one God, the Father who is creator of all things, and only one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom we live. Amen.*

## Video Notes ~ Session 3 ~ “The Reliability of Christianity”

1. The commonplace of other religions raises questions about the exclusive, \_\_\_\_\_ claims of our Christian faith.
2. Dr. Newbigin’s key influential factors:
  - The division between \_\_\_\_\_ and values
  - The distinction between the words \_\_\_\_\_ and *pluralism*
  - The \_\_\_\_\_ reality
3. How do we respond?
  - Christianity presents an historical \_\_\_\_\_ to a new and different reality.
  - Claims we make for Christ appeal to themselves, not to any other \_\_\_\_\_.
  - The claim Christianity makes is \_\_\_\_\_ among world religions.
  - A kind of general, common religiosity has no \_\_\_\_\_ to it.
4. We make an \_\_\_\_\_ claim for Christ for an \_\_\_\_\_ purpose.



### Sharing...

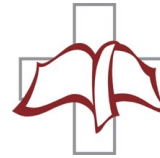
How do you like to spend a rainy day?



### Serving...

This week, look for ways you can be a blessing to others and do it!

## Faith Group Discussion Session 3 “The Reliability of Christianity”



### Growing...

1. Do you know or have you encountered people who adhere to a non-Christian religion?
2. Why do many people today, even many Christians, react negatively to Jesus’ claim that “no one comes to the Father except through me”?
3. Do you think the division between facts and values is legitimate or false? What challenge does it pose to Christian faith?
4. Lesslie Newbigin states that the Gospel “is the light by which things are seen as they really are, and without which they are not truly seen.” How does Jesus’ life, death and resurrection show “how things really are”? What is “not truly seen” apart from Jesus?
5. What does it mean to “make an *exclusive* claim for Christ for an *inclusive* purpose”? How is that a more loving (and truthful!) approach than a pluralism that says all religions are equally valuable?