

## **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

## “Back to the Basics”

By Wendy Magruder  
(Based on Genesis 1 & 2)

Have you ever struggled with a difficult life decision or situation? Have you ever heard a coach say, “Get back to the basics”? When wrestling with life, what does it mean to “get back to the basics”?

To me, this means looking at who and whose I am, and to ask what is the purpose of life? It means going back to the beginning. “In the beginning, God created...,” God speaks and that which did not exist comes into being, and it is good!

God lovingly created the world in its perfection out of His love for us, His creatures. This world contains everything that we need for this life. God created human beings to be in communion with Him and with one another. God created us to be stewards of creation, and to be sustained by creation. Through God’s omnipotence and omniscience, He daily protects and preserves us within creation.

Once we have been reminded of our identity and purpose, we have the basics, the foundation which allows us to face life’s decisions and struggles. We can then move forward, enjoying and appreciating God’s good creation. We can thank Him in all circumstances for continuing to care for us daily and bless us through His good creation.

*Dear Lord, thank you for creating us good and making us your own. Amen.*

**Growing...**

1. Have you read Revelation before? Did you find it confusing, threatening, fascinating or all three?
2. Why has reading Revelation as “prophecy” that is a kind of blue print of future events remained so popular?
3. What is the central issue in the book of Revelation? How does that relate to the world today?
4. What was the main message of Revelation to John’s readers? How does that message address our lives?
5. Is it helpful to you to think of Revelation as a pageant or play? How does it affect how we read the book and understand its purpose?



**Serving...** This week ask God to put someone in front of you who needs encouragement and speak encouragement to him or her.



**Sharing...**What is your all-time favorite movie?

1. Many others, though, find \_\_\_\_\_ utterly, endlessly fascinating.
2. It may be more helpful to discuss \_\_\_\_\_ to read Revelation than to analyze what is actually in the book.
3. The most common of these interpretations of Revelation is called \_\_\_\_\_.
4. “Prophecy” is seen as history written \_\_\_\_\_ of time.
5. The job for the \_\_\_\_\_ is to put the Bible details together like a jigsaw puzzle and figure out how they \_\_\_\_\_ to our own day or the future.
6. But there are some serious \_\_\_\_\_ with that approach.
7. The central issue in Revelation is the question, \_\_\_\_\_ is Lord?
8. Revelation is a book written in a specific \_\_\_\_\_ context.
9. The main theological message has three parts:
  - God in Christ is the ultimate, unconquerable \_\_\_\_\_ of the whole cosmos.
  - The present powers of evil are real and oppressive, but they are \_\_\_\_\_.
  - While Christians will suffer because of these earthly oppressive powers, in the end they will \_\_\_\_\_ because Christ is Lord.



**Sharing...**Name something you have always wanted to do or accomplish.

1. Verse 4—“God is referred to as \_\_\_\_\_ God.”
2. Verse 5—“There is no \_\_\_\_\_ in the field, there is no small \_\_\_\_\_ that had sprung up.”
3. Verse 7—“. . . and the \_\_\_\_\_ became a living creature.”
4. Only then does. . .  
Verse 9—“God put \_\_\_\_\_ around him,”  
Verse 19—“and then create \_\_\_\_\_ to help him,”  
Verse 22—“creates a \_\_\_\_\_ out of one of his ribs.”
5. What if the author of those creation accounts were less concerned with the \_\_\_\_\_ and more concerned with the \_\_\_\_\_?
6. Genesis 1. . .presents a God of \_\_\_\_\_. . .of \_\_\_\_\_.
7. God was \_\_\_\_\_ in His creating. He \_\_\_\_\_ created mankind.
8. God’s \_\_\_\_\_ is orderly, but it’s also almost playful.
9. The author is trying to make a \_\_\_\_\_ point.
10. God is the Father Almighty, \_\_\_\_\_ of heaven and earth.
11. He is \_\_\_\_\_ involved in His creation.



**Growing...**

1. What did you learn about the creation accounts that you didn't know before?
2. People are always trying to contrast science and faith, as if they are constantly at odds with each other. Are science and faith incompatible?
3. How do Genesis 1 and 2 answer the questions asked in the video:
  - Who is God?
  - What is He like?
  - Why did He do what he did?
4. Dave asks the question, "When you get right down to it, does the scientific and historical accuracy of Genesis 1 and 2 really matter?" What do you think? Does it affect your faith?
5. How is God still at work creating?
6. In particular, how is this connected with his saving work? Read II Corinthians 5:17 for a hint!



**Serving...** Go for a walk this week and bring a bag with you to pick up trash.

**"In Him All Are Conquerors"**

By Pr. Paul Knudson

(Based on Revelation 12:7-12)

We are a can-do people. We are frustrated when there are those out there that make our lives difficult. If they or some others out there would just disappear or be responsible like us, all would be well.

In our experiences of frustration and anger, we can blind ourselves to the pervasive reality of, yes, demonic evil on the loose, destroying lives at will. This can and does come to us too often up close and personally.

In these very times, our brothers and sisters in Christ are being savagely put to death for their faith in Jesus Christ. They are martyrs for being our Savior's beloved and for being unwilling to deny him.

"They have conquered him (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony." In the face of horrific evil that destroys all their self-confident human strength, their crucified and risen Lord and Savior gives them victory even over death.

The Evil One's "time is short." He is on the loose. It is vital for us to open our eyes and see his power. It is more important for us then to cry out to our Savior, "Deliver us from evil."

*Oh Lord, deliver us from evil. Amen.*

Faith Group Discussion Session 5 “Making Sense of Paul’s Letters”



Growing...

1. What is your favorite book by Paul?
2. To understand how radical Paul’s message is, it is important to understand how radical of Paul’s conversion was.  
Read Acts 9:1-18
  - a. Why do you think Jesus chose Paul?
3. Read Paul’s spiritual résumé in Philippians 3:4-11.
  - a. How is his bold declaration here consistent with his focus on the cross?
4. What do you think of Pastor Dave’s example of Paul’s ambiguous messages about the role of women in the church?
5. Paul’s focus on the cross is evident throughout his letters, but especially in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25.
  - a. How do these verses describe the message of the cross?
  - b. How does this explain why Paul met so much resistance to his message?
  - c. Paul said that his audiences looked for signs and wisdom. What do people look for today? How does the cross trip them up?



**Serving...** Look for a way this week to do something nice for someone that you normally wouldn’t think to do.

Weekly Devotion

Session 2

“Making Sense of the History of Israel”

“Shema”

By Gladys Nissen

(Based on Deuteronomy 6:4-25)

This passage contains one of the most famous verses from the Bible: the Shema. “Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” The Shema is very important in the Jewish faith. The word “shema” means listen and, more accurately, listen and respond in love. Usually when we pray, we want God to listen and respond to our prayers. We ask God to “shema.” Listening in the Bible includes giving respect to persons who speak to you and doing what they are instructing because they have wisdom. God asks us here to “shema” him – to listen and obey in love.

Do you remember a time when God showed up in a huge way? Take a minute to remember what was going on in your life and how you felt leading up to the answered prayers. Now take a metaphorical “look around” your life today. Look at your home, family, job, and other blessings. These verses remind us multiple times to remember what God has done and remember that God has done it. We all have worked very hard to get where we are, but most of the greatest blessings are things out of our control: finding our spouse, the life of our little ones, our bills being paid just in time, or our safety and health each day. Take a minute to thank God and remember that God has done these things. “Take care lest you forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt...”

*Dear God, we thank you for graciously loving us and providing for our needs. Amen.*

Video Notes ~ Session 2 ~ “Making Sense of the History of Israel”



**Sharing...**Are you participating in Bibleopoly? What guided your decision to participate or not?

1. Christians have often neglected or even \_\_\_\_\_ the O.T.
2. It is helpful to recognize that there are five key eras in the O.T.
  - First are the \_\_\_\_\_ and matriarchs as well.
  - The second era is the \_\_\_\_\_ from Egypt and the Wilderness Wanderings.
  - The third period then is the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Promised Land of Canaan.
  - The fourth section then is the time of the \_\_\_\_\_.
  - That return makes up the last of these five eras of Israel’s history, what is called the \_\_\_\_\_ period.
3. Many Israelite men engaged in \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Women were treated just \_\_\_\_\_.
5. There is just a terrible \_\_\_\_\_ that occurs throughout Israel’s history.
6. There is also a surprising amount of \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Then there is the whole issue of the \_\_\_\_\_.
8. It emphasizes that \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Three principles for reading the Israel’s history:
  - The only \_\_\_\_\_ of the story is God.
  - The key issue throughout Israel’s history is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Just because something is in the Bible, doesn’t mean the Bible \_\_\_\_\_ of it.
10. Instead, it testifies to a \_\_\_\_\_ God whose steadfast \_\_\_\_\_ never fails.

Video Notes

Session 5

“Making Sense of Paul’s Letters”



**Sharing...**If going on a week-long vacation, would you prefer going with a group, your spouse or friend, or going alone?

1. It is written \_\_\_\_\_ between Paul and either the churches that he was in relationship with or specific individuals whom he was mentoring.
2. With Paul’s letters, in some cases, we have to \_\_\_\_\_ at what he is responding to.
3. Paul writes different things in response to different \_\_\_\_\_ that the various churches or individuals face.
4. Paul’s teachings are often used in churches that restrict roles of \_\_\_\_\_ that they can play in the church.
5. Throughout Paul’s letters he mentions \_\_\_\_\_ women that were in positions of leadership.
6. The Book of Acts mentions several women as \_\_\_\_\_ in the early church.
7. First, we clearly know that women aren’t saved by having kids, they’re \_\_\_\_\_ by faith—just like the guys!
8. The death and \_\_\_\_\_ of Jesus Christ dominates Paul’s writings.

## “Sharing Jesus”

By Marsha Schmit

(Based on Romans 1:8-17)

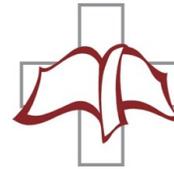
*For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you – or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.*

Romans 1:11-12

This year, many at Faith are taking the Bibleopoly challenge. As I write this, I am nearly through the book of Acts and find myself growing fonder of the Apostle Paul. As you may recall, Paul (then called Saul) was persecuting Christians. He was on his way to Damascus when a bright light flashed from Heaven and a voice said, “Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?” He asked who was speaking and heard, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” and then was told to go into Damascus. When he opened his eyes, he could not see, so his friends led him into Damascus where they met a man called Ananias. God had instructed Ananias to lay his hands on Saul and restore his sight. God wanted Paul on His side, working with Him not against Him!

In the book of Romans, Paul is writing a letter to his friends in Rome. He misses them and prays for them as he is on his new journey for our Lord. Paul wants to encourage them with the Gospel and receive encouragement from them. In this personal letter, you can sense Paul’s yearning for companionship, reassurance and the opportunity to tell them firsthand what God has revealed to him about the Gospel. Just as Paul knew the blessing of sharing Jesus, we, too, are blessed.

*Gracious God, thank you for brothers and sisters in Christ with whom we can encourage and be encouraged. In Jesus name. Amen.*



Growing...

1. Before Bibleopoly began, how much of the Old Testament had you read? What was your impression of it?
2. Review the five main eras of Israel’s history recorded in Genesis through Nehemiah. What was the main emphasis of each one?
3. Of the problematic issues in the Old Testament named in the video presentation, which one troubles you the most? Why?
4. As Christians, how do we reconcile God’s wrath at human sin with God’s grace revealed in Jesus Christ?
5. How do the principles for reading the Old Testament given in the video presentation help to connect it to the New Testament?



**Serving...** This week send an encouraging note to someone and include your favorite Bible verse.

## Weekly Devotion

## Session 3

## “Making Sense of Prophecy”

### “Hardened Hearts”

By Laura Weikle  
(Based on Isaiah 6)

“And [the LORD] said, ‘Yes, go, and say to this people, “Listen carefully, but do not understand. Watch closely but learn nothing.” Harden the hearts of these people.’” (Isaiah 6:9-10a, NLT)

What a hopeless ministry! Isaiah’s hardening ministry would be simple enough, since the surrounding chapters show that God’s people had already listened but did not understand and had hardened their hearts, so they were not ready to repent.

Like many prophets before and after, Isaiah preached about the Lord’s covenantal demands, awaiting judgment and confronting sin, causing the calloused hearts to strengthen.

This people were in need of a Savior; One who would soften their hearts. For years, God’s people fell into the endless cycle of breaking God’s Law, receiving a prophet to help them turn back to God, repenting, and then breaking God’s Law. All of that changed when Jesus Christ came to this earth.

Jesus came to fulfill the Law, filling us with the Holy Spirit and softening our hearts. How can we help but smile, knowing that the Holy Spirit radiates through us, calling us to love others.

*Our Lord and Savior, we thank you for coming into this world and for softening our hard hearts. Amen.*

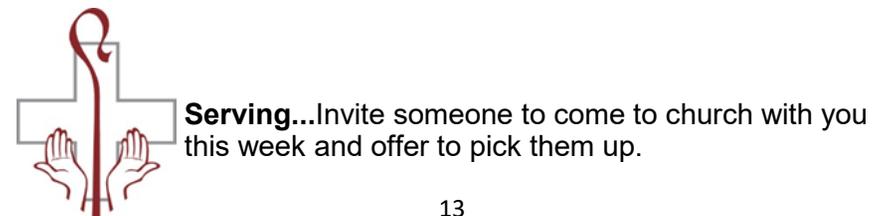
## Faith Group Discussion

## Session 4

## “Making Sense of the Four Gospel Accounts”



1. Why is it important to remember that there are four accounts of one Gospel, rather than four Gospels?
2. On the other hand, why is it important not to try to “harmonize” the four accounts into one unified Gospel?
3. How does knowing the way history was written in the ancient world help to resolve inconsistencies among the four Gospel accounts?
4. How does knowing that all four Gospel accounts drive toward the cross affect how we read the events of Jesus’ ministry?
5. How does hearing or reading the Gospel accounts today lead you to “believe that Jesus is the Messiah...and to have life in his name”?



## Video Notes ~ Session 4 ~ “Making Sense of the Four Gospel Accounts”



**Sharing...** Share one thing you remember or know about one of your grandparents.

1. There is only one \_\_\_\_\_ because there is only one \_\_\_\_\_.
2. For our purposes, the best way to think about the Gospel is as \_\_\_\_\_ history.
3. There were really no \_\_\_\_\_ for citing or crediting sources.
4. The truth is, the four Gospel accounts are \_\_\_\_\_.
5. The key point about ancient history is that it was supposed to be written to \_\_\_\_\_ the reader.
6. There are a number of places where (the Bible) includes more than one \_\_\_\_\_ witness.
7. So the church recognized early on that these four accounts of Jesus' life were authentic and \_\_\_\_\_.
8. John, on the other hand, \_\_\_\_\_ to his own drummer.
9. So how can we read the four accounts of the Gospel and make sense of them?
  - Take the time to read each one as a \_\_\_\_\_ book.
  - Don't try to \_\_\_\_\_ the four Gospel accounts or force them into one over-all scheme.
  - Find \_\_\_\_\_ to help understand the culture of the times, nature of Judaism, politics, etc.
  - Realize that all four Gospel accounts drive to the \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Remember as you read the \_\_\_\_\_ for which all four of these accounts were written.

## Video Notes ~ Session 3 ~ “Making Sense of Prophecy”



**Sharing...** If you had to make a choice, would you choose summer or winter all year long?

1. Gerhard Von Rad: “At a time when (the faith) was being increasingly \_\_\_\_\_, and indeed was not far short of disintegration, it was once again able to \_\_\_\_\_ with almost volcanic force, in a completely new form in the \_\_\_\_\_ of the prophets.”
2. The primary purpose of the prophets was to serve as a \_\_\_\_\_ for God.
3. After the reign of King Solomon. . .the \_\_\_\_\_ of both the Southern and Northern kingdoms were a mess.
4. But sprinkled in amongst bad news there were glimmers of \_\_\_\_\_ -- promises of redemption, comfort, and hope.

### Understanding the Prophetic Books:

5. First there is their \_\_\_\_\_!
6. Then there's the prophet's \_\_\_\_\_ of speaking for God.
7. Another method for the message is the use of \_\_\_\_\_ lessons.
8. Then there are the \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Finally, and perhaps most significantly for us, there are the \_\_\_\_\_ prophecies.
10. When the final prophet came, whom Jesus calls the \_\_\_\_\_ prophet, John the Baptist, the fulfillment of those great prophecies was at hand. The \_\_\_\_\_ had come.



**Growing...**

1. Who is your favorite Old Testament prophet?
2. What was the purpose of the prophets?
3. What is their purpose as we read them today?
4. Read Isaiah's call in Isaiah 6:1-11. Why does God send prophets to a people that will not listen or understand?
5. It's frustrating to read about how God's people constantly ignored the warnings of the prophets, and were led to destruction. How do you think a prophet would be received today?
6. If God brought forth a prophet today, what do you think that prophet might prophesy about/against?
7. How do the prophets point you to Jesus, the Messiah?



**Serving...** Do some Spring cleaning this week and find some items to donate to the church rummage sale.

**“I Already Told You This!”**

By Will Holt

(Based on Luke 24:36-49)

I'm not sure how you feel, but I find the image of Christ scarfing down some "broiled fish," telling some bewildered disciples that he had fulfilled the prophecy to be incredibly comical. Even still, almost to the tune of an agitated parent, Christ reminds the disciples that he has said all this before. It is not clear if Christ was annoyed with his followers, but if he was, I bet it had to do with their bewilderment that he was even in their presence in the first place. Their shock could be rooted in their lack of faith in the prophecy Christ had declared to them, or maybe they were surprised to see him so soon. Regardless, in the final moments of chapter 24 of Luke, Christ fulfills the promise that offers the salvation of all peoples.

As Music Director at Faith Lutheran, I feel obligated to inform you that, to my knowledge, there are no musical representations of the confusion and maybe fear that the disciples experienced upon their initial sight of Christ. Instead, we offer music that reflects our relief and joy of the resurrection. Because of this celebratory season and the music associated with it, I feel it is easy to be caught up in the festive fervor of Easter. Let Christ's reminder to his disciples be a reminder to us of all the challenges laid before them and us. Bewilderment should be something we ourselves attempt to avoid, even as we trust that Christ will keep reminding us again and again all he has done for us.

*Heavenly Father, forgive us for quickly forgetting what you have done and thank you for reminding us. Amen.*