

NOTES

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

“Ancestors, Abraham, & Faith”

By Ronda Eckhart

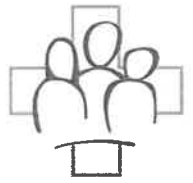
(Based on Genesis 12:1-7)

I grew up in a house that was 100+ years old on a century farm in central Minnesota. Although the home has had numerous additions, renovations, and updates, the basement walls are made of visible, stacked fieldstones cemented together. The stones were gathered by my Danish ancestors who immigrated to America, eventually settling in the Midwest to farm the land. In addition to the arduous labor of farming, building a home, and providing for their families' well-being, our Scandinavian ancestors came together to build local places of worship. Thus, a local country church was where my faith foundation was established.

This year, we are celebrating a similar story for Faith Lutheran. In the late 1800's, Danish immigrants to the Hutchinson area formed a place to worship to meet their needs for spiritual nourishment and growth. They built a place of worship, a blessing to previous and future generations.

Like Abraham, it is important for us to journey on, to keep building Faith Lutheran. Our mission is to Follow Jesus, Announce the Gospel, Invite all people, Teach Christian truth, and Help all who are in need. We have a well -aid foundation to build upon, thanks to our ancestors. How comforting to know that God has promised us our future families will be blessed!

Lord God, thank you for our ancestors who have shared their faith in God with us. Amen.



Growing....

Read Genesis 21:1-7

1. How have you experienced God’s faithful promise even while your faith has not been constant?
2. Share a “birth of Isaac” moment for you, when God finally delivered on his promise.
3. We are Easter people. We know that out of hopeless situations, God can bring resurrection. How does this assertion give you hope in this crazy world?
4. How is Jesus the *end*—in terms both of time and purpose—of God’s covenant promises to Abraham?
5. In light of Genesis 22, Jesus served both as Isaac and the ram in the thicket. How did that dual service bring God’s covenant with Abraham to its *end*?
6. As we wait for the *end* of time when Christ appears again in glory, how does the Bible’s story from Abraham to Jesus give assurance and conviction (Hebrews 11:1) to faith?



Serving...The Faith Blessing Box has truly been a blessing to our community. This week pick up some items to share with others and place them in the Box.



Sharing...What is something you always wanted to do as a kid (or grown-up) but haven’t done?

1. Lord, I believe; help my _____!
2. I have to wonder how deeply he (Abraham) _____ with this call from God.
3. PROMISE 1 - “I will make of you a great _____.”
4. PROMISE 2 - “In you. . . _____ the families of the earth will be blessed.”
5. Worst of all, God told Abraham to set out but didn’t tell him _____ to go.
6. PROMISE 3 - He will _____ the land of Canaan.
7. What do you do when God says “_____,” but you don’t know?
8. Genesis 12 does encourage us to proceed in faith in several ways. . .

Abraham was able to _____ in faith because God called him.

God has given _____ promises that are as great as those that were given to Abraham.

We too, can _____ with as much confidence as Abraham did.

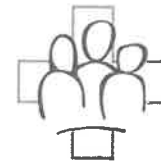


Growing...

1. The language of being “called” is mostly used in the Church for a call to ministry, but, as with Abraham, God calls people in many ways. Have you experienced a sense of God calling you in some way? Did you struggle with it? How did you respond?
2. We admire Abraham for obeying God’s call in Genesis 12, but if an elderly person did that today, we would likely fear he was reckless or deluded. How do we discern whether a sense of call—our own or someone else’s—is genuine or misguided?
3. Why were the three covenant promises God made to Abraham in Genesis 12 so unlikely to happen? How and why would Abraham nevertheless trust God to keep them?
4. Why did Martin Luther consider God’s covenant promise to Abraham to be so enduring and significant *for the Church*?
5. How can Abraham’s experience in Genesis 12 help us to proceed in faith in our lives?



Serving... Invite someone to church or Bible Study this week.



Sharing... During the COVID-19 pandemic, what has been most difficult for you and why?

1. God is never late. God is never off schedule. God never forgets. God keeps His _____.
2. We know that out of hopeless situations, God can bring _____.
3. But once Isaac was born, their (Abraham and Sarah) faith turned into _____ instead.
4. Isaac’s birth only began to _____ God’s covenant promises.
5. That long-held faith turned to sight with the _____ of Jesus.
6. Jesus’ Father did not intervene in the nick of time to _____ His Son.
7. Jesus is the end—the terminal point—and the end—the _____ fulfillment of God’s covenant promises to Abraham.

“Fear vs. Faith”

By Wade Eastman

(Based on Genesis 21:1-7)

The Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ (Genesis 18:13) I can only imagine what Sarah was thinking when God told Abraham that they were going to have a baby at the age 100. What an incredible amount of faith they would have to have!

I look at things that have happened in my life and current situations in the world today and ask myself if I have faith that strong. There have been many incidents where things have happened in my life, and after I have had a chance to look back on it, I can clearly see God has answered my prayers and kept his word.

The coronavirus is now the topic of concern all over the world. The infection and loss of life could be staggering. The loss of jobs, economy, and our future is uncertain. I think people are very fearful because they don’t have any control over the situation.

When situations like these come up and my faith is tested, I find myself looking for a scripture verse to remember God’s promise and to restore my faith. One of my favorite passages is Deuteronomy 31:6, which says, “Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.” We can have faith like Abraham did, and even if we don’t know the outcome or have doubts, we can remember that God is great and can do all things!

Gracious God, when we fear and doubt, and find it hard to let go of our desire to be in control, help us to trust in you. Amen.

“Good News”

By Kevin Elton

(Based on Genesis 12:10-20)

When someone asks me what it means to have faith, I refer back to Hebrews 11:1. It states, “To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, and certain of the things we cannot see.” What a simple idea, or is it?

In Genesis chapter 12, we read about Abraham, a man who is considered extremely faithful. Yet, regardless of faith, we see him take matters into his own hands instead of trusting God to provide. I think it is fair to say, we’ve all been in Abraham’s shoes before.

Abraham’s trials are relatable. We have all been in moments of fear. I would also argue we have all experienced moments of emptiness (famine). How did we respond or cope? Did we look to God first or did we take our own course of action? These moments of famine and fear come in many different forms, but our responses seem to remain consistent: me first.

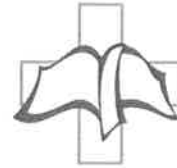
In the end, regardless of faith, we all doubt. Regardless of faith, we all fall short. Regardless of faith, God is more loving and merciful than we can ever imagine and comes to our rescue. That is some good news.

Lord, give us the guidance and awareness to turn toward you in moments of fear and famine. Amen.



Sharing...Tell about a favorite memory with a parent or sibling while you were growing up .

1. When the promise is hard to see, does the life of _____ become the life of _____?
2. Issues arise because of two misunderstandings:
 We are too _____-sighted.
 We have very different ideas of what the promised _____ should be.
3. We _____ God! We _____ faith! We take matters into our _____ hands!
4. Through faith, you are Abraham's offspring. . .
 How are you a _____ to others?
 How are you a _____ to others?
5. It is even more refreshing and reassuring to see the _____ of God.



Growing...

Read Genesis 22:1-18

1. How do you feel about this story? Do you struggle with what God asks of you?
2. The author of Genesis gives very little insight as to what Abraham was feeling during all of this. What do you think was going through Abraham's head throughout this story?
 A. What do you think was going through Isaac's head?
3. Share a time in your life when you felt God was asking something difficult or nearly impossible of you.
 A. What were your feelings toward God throughout that time?
 B. Did God come through for you as he did for Abraham and Isaac?
4. God made and delivered a glorious promise to Abraham, but now that promise was under a real threat. In the same way, through word and sacrament, God makes a glorious promise to us. What threatens that promise?
 A. God provided for Abraham. How does he provide for you?
5. How does the death and resurrection of the Son of God cast this story in a whole new light?

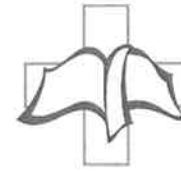


Serving....This week, make a point to pray daily for each member of your Faith Group.



Sharing... If you go on vacation, would you prefer to camp or stay in a hotel or somewhere else?

1. Isaac is the one whom they spent 25 years wandering and _____ for.
2. In the beginning of the story, God is the _____, yet at the end he is the _____.
3. This is exactly what God does want! "I'm a _____ God," he declares. "You shall have no other gods before me."
4. Abraham understands that God commands, that he tests. And yet, at the same time, and in the face of an apparent death of the promise, Abraham still _____ that God provides.
5. "We will worship and _____ will come back to you."
6. It was there, on the cross, where the Lord _____.
7. The Lamb of God, Christ himself, was provided to die in _____ place.
8. They are the _____ of God for salvation.



Growing...

Read Genesis 12:10-20.

1. How are you like the Abraham of the first half of Chapter 12, obediently faithful?
 - A. How are you like the Abraham of the second half of Chapter 13, going out on your own, regardless of faith?
 - B. When has the promise been hard to see, or when has the promise let you down?
2. For those of you who are married or in a relationship, how do you keep selfishness and self-interest from causing problems in your relationship?
3. How do you take the Word into your own hands, or, like Luther said of Abraham, "let the Word get out of [your] sight"?
4. Share a time in your life when you went off on your own and made a mess, yet the Lord still lovingly blessed you in spite of it.
5. Pastor Dave reminds us, "You are Abraham's offspring!" Then he asks, "How are you a blessing to others?" and "How are you a curse to others?"
6. Will this God keep his outlandish promises? How has that been a "yes" for you?



Serving... Write a note of encouragement to a teacher this week.

Weekly Devotion Session 3 **“Otherworldly Faith: Trusting
When God Does Not Act”**

“Trusting in Faith”

By Kristen Matthews

(Based on Genesis 15:1-6)

God comes to Abram and promises him something that he cannot even fathom. This passage always convicts me. I constantly wish that I could have something like this happen to me. God comes to me, promises me something awesome that He is going to provide, and then I get to expect it excitedly like awaiting a package from an online shopping spree. I am sure that Abraham trusted God, but after waiting so long for the deliverance of that promise, I am sure that he struggled to see if God was really going to come through for him. Sometimes I struggle with this now. I think of the promises that have been laid out for us in the Bible. For example, Matthew 11:28-29 tells us that we are to give our burdens to God and then he will give us rest. So, then I wonder why am I not receiving the rest that I need? But God says, give me your burdens and I will give you rest. It is a happy exchange here, but it takes trusting God in His provision that he will truly give you rest. God walks with us because He loves us. He compels us forward through hard circumstances because He is good. He loves you more than anyone on this earth ever could. He calls you to trust him, to walk on the waves, and to see what He has in store for you with the love He gives you.

Gracious God, in our confusion, help us to understand. In our unbelief, help us to believe. Thank you for showing us the way. Amen.

Weekly Devotion Session 6 **“Senseless Faith”**

“Senseless Faith”

By Jeff Amundson

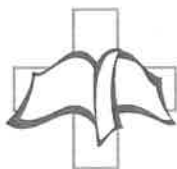
(Based on Genesis 22)

Senseless? What God is asking Abraham seems unbelievable, sacrificing his only son. This was a long journey, time for many questions, how did Abraham answer them? What was Isaac thinking when he, instead of a lamb, was tied up and laid on the altar? God stops Abraham at the last second and provides a ram for sacrifice. A test of faith? It would indeed take a deep faith, a senseless faith, a faith that cannot be explained, to go as far as Abraham did.

How strong is our faith? Could we be like Abraham? Do we simply trudge through the many challenges in our daily life trusting God, or do we worry and despair? Most of us fail to trust God, at least to the level of Abraham. When family members are not home on time, we worry instead of trusting God is watching over them. Job loss often results in great worry, even depression, for we forget to trust God. Every day we worry or are afraid, it drives us to despair. It just seems senseless to forget our worry completely and “give it all up to God.” We want to be in control, not to do the senseless thing, to have unquestionable faith in God.

But God is always with us and will take care of our every need. He will provide for us, as He provided the ram for Abraham. We thank God for everything and especially for His senseless love for us.

Lord God, help us to trust in you even and especially when it's difficult to make sense of doing so. Amen.



Growing...

1. Can you recall a situation where you tried to bargain with God? How did it turn out?
2. Why do you think Abraham bargained with God at such length in Genesis 18? Why did he not simply ask God to spare Lot and his family?
3. Why would Abraham bargain with God about Sodom and Gomorrah, but not try to bargain with Him about Isaac’s birth? Which approach showed greater faith in God?
4. Read Luke 18:1-8. Why did the woman’s persistence finally succeed? How should we understand the promise in Luke 18:7, given that God did *not* spare Sodom and Gomorrah despite Abraham’s persistent pleading?
5. How might the promises about prayer in Genesis 18 and Luke 18 affect how you pray? How do they address questions of “whether” God answers our prayers?

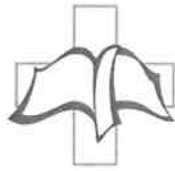


Serving... This week, pray about ways you can be more involved with the family of Faith.



Sharing...Where is your “happy place” and what makes it so?

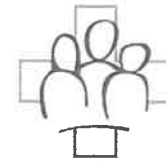
1. But was there a chance that God _____ or even could give her a child?
2. In Genesis 12, the uncertainty lay on Abraham’s side. . .
 _____ do I go?
 _____ I?
 _____ I?
 _____ these promises that God has made?
3. As Christians, we, too, have put our hope and _____ our time, our finances, our faith in God.
4. To be righteous is to be in right _____ with God.
5. The only trait that distinguished Abraham was that God had _____ him. And having chosen Abraham, God then _____ him with an enduring faith even in the face of God’s mysterious, continuously delayed timeline.
6. The truth is Abraham didn’t have that _____ either. God _____ it in him.
7. God makes that same promise and does that same _____ in you and me, as well.

**Growing...**

1. Is there a promise, hope or prayer that you have waited and waited for God to fulfill? Have you ever vented your frustration to God as Abraham did in Genesis 15:2-3?
2. If you were Abraham (or Sarah), how might you have reacted when God responded to Abraham’s doubts by simply re-stating the covenant promises?
3. What moved Abraham so dramatically from frustration (vss. 2-3) to faith (v. 6)?
4. Genesis 15:6 reports that God “reckoned” (or “credited” or “counted”) Abraham’s faith to him as righteousness. What does that mean? Why is it so significant?
5. How have you experienced the “otherworldly” nature of faith? Why is it good news for all of us that faith is not a matter of earthly wisdom or individual achievement?



Serving... Offer to help an elderly “neighbor” with yardwork or by picking up groceries this week.

**Sharing...**How is your faith strengthened outside of worship?

1. To bargain with God seems to suggest that we can _____ Him.
2. Still, Abraham’s bargaining didn’t work. God _____ Sodom and Gomorrah after all.
3. In the Old Testament, righteousness indicates being in a right _____ with God, not being free of sin.
4. But in _____, we can keep praying, keep pleading, even keep bargaining.
5. We trust rather that God will _____ in the best most loving way, because He has shown Himself to be trustworthy, especially in the _____ of Jesus from the dead.
6. The best part of all is that we can trust God to do what is _____ in every situation.

Weekly Devotion Session 5 “Interceding in Faith: Daring to Bargain with God”

“Abraham Negotiates with God”

By Allen Scharn

(Based on Genesis 18:20-33)

In these verses from Genesis 18, Abraham has faith that he can negotiate with GOD about the outcome of the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah. WOW—who on earth would ever think that we could negotiate with GOD? But of course the rest of us are not Abraham.

A worldly example of that today might be if I were to ask the United Nations Security Council to protect me and my family of Faith Lutheran members of Hutchinson from all harm. Or another example, on a much smaller scale, is if you are having a garage sale. You’ve set your prices, and someone offers less than marked. Are you willing to deal or not?

As God’s Christian children, we realize that our lives are in His hands at all times. And currently, depending on an individual’s immediate health condition with this virus going around right now, one’s own life could be in danger.

But that wasn’t what Abraham was concerned about. He wasn’t asking God to save himself. He was concerned about saving all the righteous among the wicked in the city of Sodom. So the question today might be if we are most concerned about ourselves, thus being selfish, or are we most concerned about the community? We know there are the wicked around the world and that the evil they may inflict on other individuals or even directed at other groups can be devastating.

So, the question is, how do I/we Christians respond to what to us is evil? Do we try to negotiate, after evaluating our own and their side of the issues? Or, do we only consider our side? The only answer, to me, has to come from GOD. I have the confidence that He will not let the evil overcome the righteous, even if, as it says in verse 32, there are only a few.

Lord Jesus, as we struggle with the many issues that surround us everyday, we ask your forgiveness of our sins, the known and the unknown. We also call upon you to enlighten us as to what we can do to improve our community and possibly nation to fight the evils of people and disease. Grant us faith like Abraham’s to know that YOU are with us. In the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Weekly Devotion Session 4 “Mistaken for Faith”

“The God Who Sees”

By Andrea Wollan

(Based on Genesis 16)

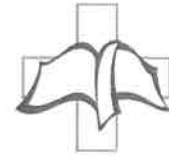
Abraham and Sarah had not been able to conceive a child, so Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham as another wife, in order to have a child by way of Hagar. After Hagar found out she was pregnant, Sarah mistreated her, and Hagar fled. My guess is that Hagar had been a faithful maidservant and maybe even a friend to Sarah. Being abused by Sarah must have been so hurtful. And worse yet, Hagar was forced to be with Abraham, against her will. She flees and an angel of the Lord finds her. She says, “Behold you are a God who sees me”. Hagar finally felt seen and heard. She was no longer just a maidservant. She was pregnant and would bear a son. “You shall call his name Ishmael because the Lord has listened to your affliction.” After the angel of the Lord came to her, Hagar called the Lord, “the God who sees a precious child of God”, whom He sought out to comfort. God has shown that He is looking out for her. She is loved. Hagar doesn’t focus on her pain. She knows in Whom she can trust. She knows this God who chases after people. He finds the ones who have fled, who are bruised and beaten, who are disheartened and ready to give up. He comes to us in our distress, our weakness, and our sinfulness, and sees us. He knows us. Psalm 139 says, “O Lord, you have searched me and known me!”

Dear Lord, we thank You for seeing us and hearing us. Hagar’s story shows us how much You care for Your people. Help us to remember Your great love for us, especially when we are broken-hearted, disappointed, or hurting. Thank You for promising to give us what we need. We love You. In Your Holy and precious name. Amen.



Sharing...What is your biggest pet peeve?

1. Genesis 16—Abraham is still _____, Sarah is still _____.
2. Abram and Sarah took the promise into their _____ hands.
3. Technically, such a child would be Sarah’s and the promise could come to _____.
4. God goes above and beyond with His _____ and love.
5. Wait! Wait on the _____!
6. So, make no mistake—Wait! Wait in _____.



Growing...

Read Genesis 16:1-16

1. How have you experienced the “sloooowness” of God—His infinite patience?
 - A. Why is God’s patience a good thing for us?
2. Pastor Dave quotes commentator Walter Brueggemann, “Faith is not easy. It calls for persistence which is against the common sense. It calls for believing in a gift from God which none of the present data can substantiate.”
 - A. How have you experienced this?
3. How have you plowed ahead with mistaken faith, thinking you know both what God would want and what God would do?
 - A. How does that usually end?
4. How have you gotten into trouble by deferring to others instead of speaking up or taking a stand?
5. For what are you waiting on the Lord in your life right now? How are you dealing with it?



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