

FAITH	GROUPS
BUILDING FAITH TOGETHER	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sharing• Growing• Serving

The Biblical Orchard: Real-Life Models of the Fruit of the Spirit



Winter 2022
Faith Groups Study
and Devotional

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! Jesus promised, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." – Matthew 18:20

“Teach Us to Love”

By Darlene Larson

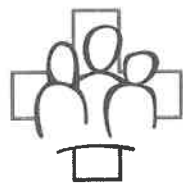
(Based on I Kings 3:16-28)

I can't help but think about the lives of these two women. They no doubt had a very difficult life. Did anyone love them? Were they alone? Perhaps having a baby gave them a welcome break from being a prostitute. Perhaps having a baby was a way to have a family of their own when everyone else had deserted them. I wonder how their lives would have changed with a baby to raise. Regardless, it seems that each mother loved her baby - one overcome with grief, despair and loss of reality, the other willing to give up her child so the child would live. Solomon's wisdom and judgment allowed the true mother to have her son.

Most parents love their children and will do anything to keep them safe. I think of babies that are given up for adoption and the great love that some mothers and fathers have so the child will have a better life.

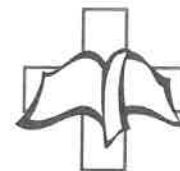
God's ultimate love is through Jesus' death and resurrection. The Holy Spirit can teach us love for all.

Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us. Forgive us when we have a hard time loving other people. We ask the Holy Spirit to show us how to love others in this modern world. Send us out to love and serve your people. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Sharing...What is your favorite book and why?

1. Paul makes a strong and impassioned case that we are not saved by _____, but by the gift of _____ that is given to us.
2. When we are discussing the fruit of the Spirit throughout this series, we're not going to be giving you a to-do list! These are _____, not works.
3. Genuine love, the fruit of the Spirit is never self-gratifying. It's always _____. It is sacrificial.



Growing...

1. What is your favorite fruit to eat?
2. Read Galatians 5:22. At first glance, which fruit of the Spirit do you see most of in your life? Which do you see the least?
3. Pastor Dave emphasized that this isn't a to-do list, but rather that all this fruit is you in Christ. How does that change the way you view these qualities?
4. What is *agape* love and how have you seen it in our world?
5. How does the story of Solomon display *agape* love?
6. How have you experienced this kind of love in your own life?



Serving...Invite someone to church this week.

"True Joy"

By Joy May

(Based on I Samuel 1:9-11; 2:19-20; Luke 1:39-55)

These women have experienced pure joy. What is it?

Joy is....Enough; Untroubled; Constant; Inner Gladness; Love; Makes Life worth Living; Giving.

In deep sadness, Hannah prayed for a son. Hannah had such faith in the Lord that she asked him to give her a son. She would, in turn, give this child to the Lord. Her faith was such that she trusted the Lord and wanted to honor the Lord by offering Him her son.

I cannot imagine giving a son to Eli to honor the Lord. I believe I have a lot of faith, but nowhere near the faith that Hannah had. The feeling that Hannah must have felt by giving her son, Samuel, to Eli to honor the Lord all the days of his life must have been pure joy for Hannah.

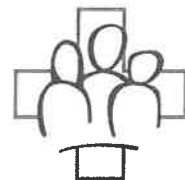
Elizabeth and Mary are two more women who experienced pure joy. Mary (pregnant with Jesus) went to visit Elizabeth (pregnant with John the Baptist). Elizabeth felt honored that Mary would come to visit her; given the son Mary was carrying, "the mother of my Lord" was coming to visit her! Elizabeth said, "As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped with joy."

Through Elizabeth's and Mary's undying faith in the Lord, they were both overcome with joy and blessed with sons, John the Baptist and Jesus. I can only image the joy these women felt knowing their sons were both destined for greatness and them having been chosen to bear them.

Both Hannah's and Mary's songs are similar. They both talk about a God who humbles the mighty, exalts the lowly, and proves His faithfulness.

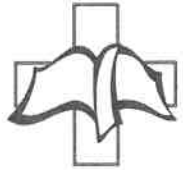
I remember after I had delivered our children, I knew I loved my baby more than any mother has ever loved her baby. I'm sure Hannah, Mary, and Elizabeth (and thousands of other mothers) felt this same way. Pure joy is what I felt!

Dear Jesus, true joy can only come from you. Amen.



Sharing...What is your favorite weekend trip?

1. The fruit that Paul is talking about is a result of the Holy Spirit's _____ within us, not the result of our effort.
2. Joy is the experience of something _____ than ourselves.
3. True joy is rooted in _____ and His promises, not in our emotions.
4. It's rooted in the reality of God's _____ love, not our experience.



Growing...

1. Can you recall a time when you experienced joy as it was defined in the presentation?
2. Review I Samuel 1:1-16 and try to imagine Hannah's life before Samuel was born. What would life have been like for her? How might it have affected her faith in God?
3. Have you or someone you know experienced a similar struggle (whether childlessness or some other issue)? What effect did it have on the faith of those involved?
4. How was it that Hannah was filled with joy *before* Samuel was conceived (see I Samuel 1:17-18)?
5. How does the Spirit's fruit of joy differ from and exceed happiness or contentment?



Serving...Bring something for the Blessing Box this week.

"The Peace That Passes All Understanding"

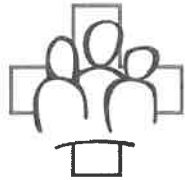
By Casey Nornes

(Based on Genesis 45:1-10, 50:15-21)

Each time we sit down for worship, the pastor greets us with, "Peace be with you" and it's customary for the congregation to respond with "and also with you." We have heard and spoken these words so many times that I tend to forget the power of these words. For those who don't know me, my workdays are spent teaching 8- and 9-year-olds at school and my home life includes a wonderful busy family with children who are active. Finding peace to sit and write this devotional was a challenge. When I'm reminded of true peace that comes from the Father, it puts my heart and mind at ease and I can only be grateful for God's blessings in my life.

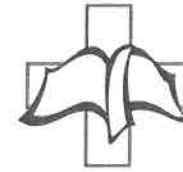
In the reading, Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers who had sold him into slavery. Peace was not the first thing that came to mind while reading these verses. The brothers deserved punishment. Instead, Joseph tells them not to be distressed, for their actions led to Joseph saving many lives. The only way I can make sense of Joseph forgiving his brothers' transgressions is seeing God's will in the story. This kind of undeserved and complete forgiveness can only come from the knowledge that God is in control and his love knows no bounds. It truly is a peace that passes all understanding.

Father in heaven, help us to be still and know the peace you give freely for the sake of your son. Amen.



Sharing...What is the most clever or funniest piece of advertising or commercial you have seen?

1. Joseph bore the spiritual _____ of peace.
2. And that's what peace does! It brings _____ two parties in shalom.
3. We are _____, not by nature, but by His nature which is in us.



Growing...

1. How do you see those anti-peace vices- "enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions"- in our world?
2. How do you see those vices in Joseph's life?
3. Read Genesis 50:19-21. How do you see the fruit of peace in Joseph's life?
4. Read Philippians 4:7. What is the peace that passes all understanding? How have you experienced it?
5. How can the fruit of peace bring calm to chaos?
6. What are some areas or relationships in your life that could benefit from the fruit of peace? Pray that the Holy Spirit would be at work there!



Serving...Talk to someone about Jesus this week.

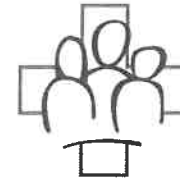
“The Patience of Abraham and Sarah”

By Rachel Kamrath

(Based on Genesis 15:1-6, 17:15-22, 21:1-7)

Patience is a lesson I’ve had to learn many times. I’ve always looked forward to the “next step” in life, studied for tests, and used color coded labeling in my planner. I like to be in control and as prepared as I can be. But I am learning that God’s timing is right and perfect...even better than my planning. This was true when dating and not settling, but waiting for the spouse that is best for me. This was true when I worked as a paraprofessional when I wanted to be teaching physics. This was especially true as I waited to become a mom. We were married three years before trying to have kids and then it took six months. Waiting is hard. At first, I wondered why God wasn’t answering my prayer, then why He was waiting. Then, I wondered if the answer was no. That was difficult to wrestle with. Ultimately, the waiting period forced me to realize God’s plan might not match mine, and that my heart may need to change. I needed to trust God in an area in which I was helpless and only He could make this happen. Like Sarah’s, my waiting ended in a sweet baby, Ruth. God showed up and did answer our prayer, but not before He showed me how much my human self loves control, and how to practice sitting in the passenger seat of my life. It turned into a humbling exercise in letting go and trusting God as He continues to show himself faithful...in his own perfect timing.

Dear God, help us to be patient as we wait for your answer and let go of the control we hang onto so tightly. Amen.



Sharing...What is the weirdest or most remarkable way you’ve met someone?

1. The first king in Israel was _____ but Saul turned out to be a sad, tragic figure.
2. That’s in spite of the fact, that during this long standoff, _____ was presented two golden opportunities.
3. David’s becoming king, was not the only issue here! He _____ to try to hurry God’s plan along.
4. Patience is waiting for the right time, one that is in _____ with God’s will for me and for the world.
5. But it does allow us to let opportunities unfold, to endure setbacks, to handle failures, and to move ahead in _____ trust that God will provide.



Growing...

1. Do you consider yourself to be patient or impatient? How might others describe you?
2. Why do you think God did not simply depose Saul as king and put David on the throne?
3. If you were in David's place, would you have refused the chances to seize the throne?
4. Have you ever had to wait patiently for the "right" time, despite other opportunities?
5. Where is the Holy Spirit producing the fruit of patience in your life—or needs to do so?



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

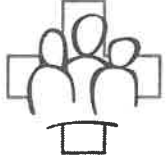
"Loving Others"

By Monica Wehler

(Based on Luke 10:25-37)

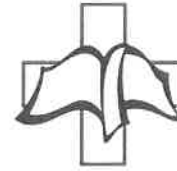
The parable of the good Samaritan shows us whom to love (everyone) and how (actively, with kindness). But there is one more aspect of it that always strikes me as very important: who is able to show that love. Samaritans were the last people the Jews of Jesus' time would have expected to help a dying person, let alone a dying Jewish man. We make the same kind of assumptions of people in our lives, whether it be because of a perpetual frown on their face or a harsh way of talking. We don't expect them to do something kind for another person, or to treat someone with gentleness. I keep finding myself surprised when people who seem gruff and tough show their gentle side, but I shouldn't be. Part of loving people is believing them capable of great love as well. Loving our neighbors means viewing them with the same lens as we view ourselves. I see myself as a kind and loving person, and so I should look at everyone with the expectation that they love with the same heart of kindness that God asks of me. To love someone is to have faith in them, to believe that the same God who is working on my heart is working on theirs.

Lord God, help us to see others as you see them. Help us to love others as you love them. Amen.



Sharing...What makes you feel old when you think about it?

1. And yet, we are made in God's _____ and God, is kind.
2. But it's clear that Paul views gentleness as a part of God's _____ and, thus, a part of our nature by his spirit.
3. Imagine what our world would be like if we saw people as _____ as opposed to opponents.



Growing...

1. Who is the kindest person you know?
What is it that makes him or her so kind?
2. How have you noticed a lack of kindness in our world?
3. How has God been kind to us?
Read Romans 2:3-4. According to St. Paul, what is the purpose of God's kindness?
4. How does kindness lead to this?
5. Who is the most gentle person you know?
What is the difference between being gentle and being weak?
6. What do you think of the description of Jesus as gentle and lowly?
How is gentleness powerful?
7. Which of these two, kindness and gentleness, is more difficult for you?
Pray that the Holy Spirit would increase that fruit!



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

"What Does Generosity Look Like?"

By Marne Martin

(Based on Luke 19:1-10; Mark 12:41-44)

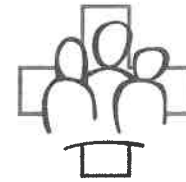
I remember as a child in Sunday School singing the song "Zacchaeus." I remember picturing in my head this tiny little man climbing into a big tree just to see Jesus pass by. I didn't really understand at that time what a tax collector was, and why he was considered a "sinner" by his people, but I remember thinking, "Wow! How amazing it must have felt to have Jesus pick your house to stay the night in!" And then to hear Zacchaeus declare that he would give half of all his belongings to the poor.

And then there is the story of the poor widow at the temple. Hundreds of people came with very generous offerings for Jesus. The widow, however, only had two little copper coins, worth about a penny. The rich men gave what they had to spare, but the widow gave everything she had, thus securing her place in heaven.

One of the most generous people I have ever known in my lifetime was my father. He wouldn't hesitate to help a friend, neighbor, or even a stranger, in whatever way he could. He would always say, "You can pay me back by helping out someone else," as he never asked or expected a thing in return.

With everything going on in our world today, I think generosity needs to be at the forefront of our minds and actions. But I think we need to realize that generosity comes in many forms and is not just monetary. Generosity can mean offering your neighbor a ride to an appointment, baking cookies or making a meal for someone who is ill, or offering a hug or a listening ear to someone who is struggling. No matter how big or small your offering is, if it is done out of love and respect for your friend or neighbor, then it is generous in the eyes of God.

Heavenly Father, help us to be a generous people. Amen.



Sharing... What household chore do you actually enjoy?

1. Zacchaeus did, in fact, hurry down from the tree and "was _____ to welcome" Jesus.
2. Zacchaeus had heard, amidst the crowd's ridicule and hatred, that Jesus had _____ for him.
3. So the generous goodness that just flowed out of Zacchaeus to the people he had _____ was the fruit of the Spirit.



Growing...

1. Have you ever received, or given, "generous goodness" as it was described in the video?
2. Did the background information on Zacchaeus change your perception of him?
3. Why do you think Zacchaeus risked such humiliation and ridicule just to see Jesus?
4. What was it about Jesus' determination to stay with Zacchaeus that caused him to make such radical changes in his life?
5. What changes in your life might be warranted in response to Jesus' presence with you?



Serving... Ask God to show you how to be more generous this week and then do it.

"God Lifts Us Up"

By Paulus Pilgrim

(Based on II Samuel 12:18-25)

There are times in life when we are laid low. We simply cannot bring ourselves up again. The worst is when we bring tragedy on ourselves. It seems there is no way back.

King David used his power to bring a beautiful woman and himself down very low. Adultery still tears people apart today. David grieves heavily as the baby born from his illegitimate relationship dies.

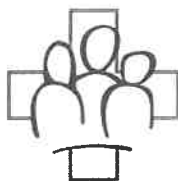
David's attendants are afraid to inform him of the baby's death. When they do, they are surprised at his response. He rises up to live again. Why the change? They are learning that when we are laid low, but turn to God, He lifts us up. (Read I Peter 5:6-7)

David prayed and worshiped, at the Lord's house and at home. He could only lay his sin and depression in the hands of God. It was enough. The Spirit gave him forgiveness and peace. These are results ("fruits") produced from turning to God.

What a lesson of hope for us! Every day contains the possibility we can be laid low by guilt, pandemics, catastrophes. Does God care? David knows the baby's death could be God's judgment upon his adultery and disobedience. He also knows God has not forsaken him. God's faithfulness far outweighs our unfaithfulness.

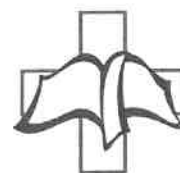
There was another baby Who died. This baby brought things together again. God and human-kind are reunited for all eternity by this Savior, Jesus. Through worship, Scripture, prayer and communion, God continually etches that wonder of His amazing grace into our hearts.

Dear God, thank you for lifting us up when we sink low in sin. The hope we have in your faithfulness is enough. Amen.



Sharing...What subject should be taught in school but isn't?

1. As Lutherans, we've always maintained the _____ nature of faith. Faith is not just something we do, but rather a gift given to us by the Holy Spirit.
2. Faith is the Spirit's work in us. Giving us faith in the _____, making us new creations who cling to Jesus.



Growing...

1. Who first comes to mind with the fruit of faithfulness?
2. What does the fruit of faithfulness look like?
3. Do you tend to think of faith as something we do or as a gift given to us?

How does Luther's teaching in the Small Catechism, where he confesses "I believe that I cannot... believe," add to your understanding?

4. Where do you see faithfulness blossoming in the story about David and his dead son?

How has the fruit of faithfulness brought you through a difficult time?

How has the fruit of faithfulness spurred you to good works?

5. Read 2 Timothy 2:11-13. How does Paul describe God's faithfulness?

Where do we see God's faithfulness to us?



Serving...Do the Drive-thru Difference this week (pay for someone's meal)...

"Jonathan and David"

By Wyatt Reece

(Based on 1 Samuel 18:1-4, 20:12-17)

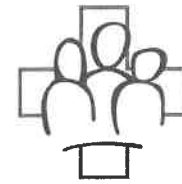
True friends aren't people you meet every day, perhaps not even every year. In fact, given the test of time, someone whom you might or might not deem one of these rare individuals may end up proving you wrong (or vice-versa).

The ones I hold close to my heart have come through environments such as cramped mission trip vans, sweltering baseball dugouts, or peaceful fishing excursions. It takes the most extreme state of vulnerability and empathy between people to create such invaluable bonds, and a ridiculous amount of faith and time to remedy the broken ones. Nevertheless, people who have that shared bond may be compelled to put their own agendas aside for one another even when there is no obligation to do so. God illustrated that selfless dynamic in a man named Jonathan.

When he defeated the towering Philistine warrior, Goliath, in 1 Samuel 17 David was praised by the Israelite nation. Despite his service, this fostered jealousy in the heart of Israel's king, Saul, and he reacted by attempting to kill David twice (with plenty more attempts on the way). However, an unlikely friend emerged in the struggle.

In 1 Samuel 18, David meets Jonathan. Right away, the two were described as having their souls "knit" together, and they formed an unbreakable bond. There was a catch, though. Jonathan happened to be the son of the very man that wanted David dead, King Saul. It's important to note that Jonathan had to choose between siding with his father, the most powerful man in all of Israel, or with some guy he met only recently and who would eventually take his rightful place as king. Due to his immense love for David, Jonathan chose the latter, most difficult choice, removing himself from the picture entirely and subjecting himself to his father's anger. We see more of his humility in 1 Samuel 20. "Jonathan said to David, 'Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you'". He exemplified self-control above all else and gave his everything to help David succeed, from literally the shirt off his back, to his weapons, to his future.

Heavenly Father, self-control can be hard. Help us to be more like Jonathan. Amen.



Sharing...What is your favorite car you owned and what made it so?

1. One area where self-control was not particularly _____ or admired was in the pursuit of power.
2. Given how so many people have ruthlessly _____ power at any cost, what an astounding exercise of self-discipline and self-control by Jonathon.
3. Christian theology has long seen self-centeredness as the driving _____ for sin. That makes self-control an especially important, but delicate fruit of the Spirit.



Growing...

1. What makes self-control a valuable trait? What might make it harmful or counter-productive instead?
2. Why have politically ambitious people so often gotten a pass on the need for self-control?
3. Why do you think Jonathan was so willing to cede his position to David?
4. Having submitted to David, why did Jonathan continue to serve his father, Saul, instead of joining David and his men?
5. When is it appropriate to fight for our rights and privileges? When is it better to exercise self-control and let them go?



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 follow through.