

**Spring 2025**



## **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

**"Far More Here Than Meets the Eye"**

By Pr. Paul Knudson  
(Based on Genesis 22)

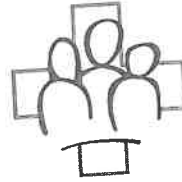
For years on end, you have pleaded with God for the heir He had promised to give you. Finally, that gift was granted only to have this same God test you in a way that is beyond comprehension and also, if I dare say so, just plain mean. How could a gracious and merciful God ask this of you?

We cannot in one devotion even begin to wrestle with this test of faith and the apparent absurdity of God's demand of his servant Abraham. Many of us have experienced times of severe testing without any assurance of God's provision to save us from what feels like a loss too much to bear, but we will have to delve even deeper as we deal with this testing by God and provision for his servant, and for us.

We have just come through Lent, hearing God's Son cry out in his own time of testing, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" It is vital to reflect on the fact that God did not give any reprieve to His Son as he died an agonizing death. There was no last-minute rescue. There was, however, the resurrection of God's Son three days later. In his agony, he cried out as one feeling forsaken, but also in his last breath, he declared, "Into your hands I commend my Spirit."

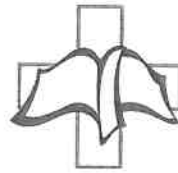
What does it mean for us in this season of Easter to have One who, in whatever depths we may face, even in danger of losing all hope, comes to us declaring that "neither height nor depth, nor anything in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord," our crucified and risen Lord and Savior?

*Dear Lord Jesus, we cannot imagine the suffering you experienced both in your dying on the cross and by how you were scorned by those who earlier praised you. We lift up to you those in our fellowship who have or are now suffering beyond their strength. Draw them to you, for in you our suffering, our grief is overcome. Amen.*



Sharing...Describe the most beautiful place you have ever been.

1. Luther claimed that Christ is found on \_\_\_\_\_ of the Old Testament.
2. Jewish readers call Gen. 1-19, "The \_\_\_\_\_ of Isaac."
3. Martin Luther notes that God's command \_\_\_\_\_ His own promise to Abraham.
4. It's just there (ram in the thicket) that the shadow of \_\_\_\_\_ appears in this horror show.
5. Yet as death threatens us, God once again has provided the \_\_\_\_\_.
6. The center of this story here is \_\_\_\_\_, not people.



**Growing...**

1. How do you react emotionally to this text? Does knowing that God did not intend for Isaac actually to die change your perception of it? Why or why not?
2. If God gave you a command as senseless as the sacrifice of Isaac, how would you react? Would you be able to proceed as unquestioningly as Abraham did?
3. Why did God need to know if Abraham’s trust was rooted in His promise or in Isaac? Has your faith been rooted more in God’s promise to you or in what He provides you?
4. Discuss how Jesus served in the roles of both the ram in the thicket and Isaac on the altar. How does that help to reveal what it cost the Triune God to redeem the world?
5. Despite the terrible ordeal God inflicted on Abraham and Isaac, how does this text ultimately prove that God is trustworthy? What does that mean for you in your life?



**Serving...** Go through your closets, box up items to donate and drop them off at church for the rummage sale.

**“Unconventional Leader”**

By Laura Stowman

(Based on Genesis 42-43)

Most of us know the story of Joseph, with the amazing technicolor coat. By a series of unforeseen events, Joseph found himself as the governor over Egypt, the person who sold grain to all its people during a famine. Joseph’s brothers, all except Benjamin, were sent to Egypt by their father, Israel, to buy food, because the famine had also spread to Canaan, where Joseph’s family lived.

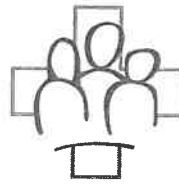
The brothers bought grain from Joseph, whom they had sold into slavery, never to be seen again. Unbeknownst to them, Joseph ordered for their sacks not just to be packed with grain, but also, secretly, with the silver they had used to purchase it. He even sent them home with provisions for the trip back. In exchange, the brothers had to leave Simeon behind to assure that they would return with Benjamin.

When Israel’s family ran out of grain, the brothers returned to Egypt, this time with Benjamin along, to buy more grain. Again, Joseph did something unexpected. He invited them to his house for a feast.

Joseph knew the sins that his brothers had committed. They left him for dead and lied to their father. The brothers deserved punishment. Instead, Joseph gave them more than they ever expected or deserved. He forgave them, because he loved them.

Often we are like the brothers. We are selfish, jealous, and hateful. We come before Jesus groveling, deserving nothing. And what we receive is unexpected, astonishing, and all from love, from unconditional grace!

*Gracious Father, forgive us for the many ways we sin. Thank you for your grace and love. Amen.*



Sharing...What advice would you give to a younger you?

1. "Now \_\_\_\_\_ loved Joseph more than any of his other children."

\*NOTE: Israel is the new name God gave Jacob!

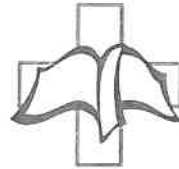
2. It is clear that God is directing the events from \_\_\_\_\_ the scene.

3. Joseph was hauled out of prison and interpreted Pharaoh's dreams

\_\_\_\_\_.

4. Imagine trying to wrap your head around this fact that this high Egyptian official is actually the \_\_\_\_\_ whom you sold into slavery all those years ago.

5. Jesus' crucifixion was driven by a \_\_\_\_\_ far greater even than Judah's love for Benjamin which mirrors Christ love for us.



**Growing...**

1. Did your parents have a favorite child? Was it you? Do you, even unintentionally, favor one of your children? What effects of such favoritism have you seen or experienced?
2. Joseph was sold as a slave and imprisoned unjustly, yet he flourished in both situations. What does that say about the nature of God’s blessing and providence in our lives?
3. When Joseph recognized his brothers bowing before him, why did he not tell them right away who he was? Was it important that he not do so? How does Joseph’s decision help us to understand what it means genuinely to forgive others and be reconciled with them?
4. Judah offered to take Benjamin’s punishment on himself, despite showing no mercy to Joseph earlier. What caused such a change of heart in him? What could bring a similar change to troubled relationships in our lives?
5. How does Joseph’s story shed light on Christ’s saving work for us?



**Serving...** When grocery shopping, offer to return someone’s cart to the corral or, if at Aldi, give your cart to someone else, (with the quarter in it) and encourage them to pay it forward.



## “The Bad Piece”

By Austin Willhite

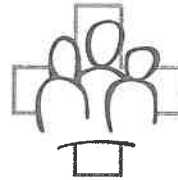
(Based on Leviticus 16)

My grandmother was a fantastic baker but there was one dessert she made that nobody else in the family could come close to replicating—her caramel rolls. They were soft and chewy with just the right amount of sweet, sticky caramel in each bite. One day, I asked her if I could have the recipe and she said, “Sure, let me just think about what it is first.” It wasn’t unusual for her to bake without a recipe card. I, on the other hand, need a very detailed set of instructions if I hope to have a dessert turn out.

She scratched down the list of ingredients and I went shopping. Back in my kitchen, I began the process. After making the dough and stirring the caramel mixture, I came across a line that read, “Take 1 spoon of dough and put to the side.” Looking through the recipe, I couldn’t find where that scrap of dough came back. So, I ignored the instruction and kept on. After my rolls came out of the oven, the caramel had congealed, and the dough was dry. I called my grandmother and asked her where I went wrong. She asked me if I had removed the bad piece. Confused, I replied, “What does that mean? How did you know I would have a bad piece?” I could hear her smile as she said, “Why do you think my rolls always taste so good? I take out one piece that holds all my mistakes and the rest is perfection.”

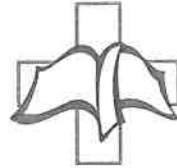
I’m not sure if my grandmother was trying to maintain some mystery behind her famous caramel rolls or play a joke on me. Either way, the “bad piece” reminds me of Christ as our scapegoat, taking on our mistakes so that we can be reconciled, made perfect with God. I am grateful to know that Christ has fulfilled the laws surrounding the day of atonement and that all we need is him.

*Gracious God, how blessed we are that you have rescued us from all our mistakes and sin in our lives. Amen.*



Sharing...What is the strangest thing in your refrigerator (or your garage) and why is it there?

1. How can God's people, in their sin and selfishness, be \_\_\_\_\_ to a holy God?
2. The Day of Atonement was, and still is, the \_\_\_\_\_ day on the Jewish calendar.
3. The ritual of the scapegoat finds its best interpretation in \_\_\_\_\_ as it describes the work of Christ.
4. Jesus entered once for all into the holy places not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his \_\_\_\_\_ blood.
5. Jesus also suffered \_\_\_\_\_ the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.



**Growing...**

1. Who are some modern-day scapegoats?
2. What is the role of a priest? How does it differ from the role of a pastor?
3. Read Hebrews 9:1-7 and then verses 11-15. How is Jesus the Great High Priest?
4. Read Hebrews 10:1-14. How is Christ's sacrifice different from the Old Testament sacrifices?
5. Read Hebrews 13:12-16. Since Jesus has borne our sins as a perfect sacrifice and our scapegoat, what kind of sacrifice is left for us to make?



**Serving...** Take a walk around your neighborhood, bring a bag with you and pick up any garbage you find.

**“House of David”**

By Pr. Paulus Pilgrim

(Based on 2 Samuel 7)

You and I are members of the “House of David.” Do you know why? What comes to mind when you think about David? His father, Jesse, had many older sons, but God chose young David to be His victor over all the enemies of His chosen people, beginning with giant Goliath.

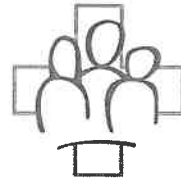
After victories over many kingdoms, and finally having some peace to enjoy his kingship, David decided he should build God a temple. The prophet Nathan agreed, but after hearing from God, he told David, “Nope. No temple now. Not God’s will.”

After some dismay, David bowed to God’s will that his son Solomon would build God’s temple. David learned his faithfulness touches more than his own lifetime. God has an overall plan for all time and eternity.

David is remembered as conqueror over Israel’s enemies. All his descendants—by blood or through faith—need another “descendant,” namely the Son of David, Jesus Christ. All history has been pointing to Jesus, Son of David, Son of God.

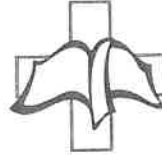
Jesus Christ died and rose to defeat our greatest enemies—sin, death and the devil. You are a member of God’s “House of David” by faith in Jesus. We are all living in our part of the history of God’s plan of salvation, seeking to be faithful to our call to follow our Lord. He daily declares His love and forgiveness so we can move forward in His power and goodness.

*Thank You, my God for assigning me a place in Your eternal Kingdom. Guide me to a life of faithfulness to You in my time. Through Jesus Christ. Amen.*



**Sharing...** Do you have family reunions? If so, tell us about one. If not, why do you think you don't have them?

1. God said, "David's house (dynasty) would last \_\_\_\_\_."
2. David's dynasty didn't last forever, either,—only about \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Not only David's dynasty \_\_\_\_\_; so did Judah as a nation.
4. Israel was not an independent nation again until \_\_\_\_\_.
5. The Jews hung on to the hope that somehow, some way, someday, a new Son of David would come to the \_\_\_\_\_.
6. This Messiah was expected to save the \_\_\_\_\_ People from all her enemies.



**Growing...**

1. Speculate a bit as to why David chose to build a temple when he did and not, say, when he first brought the ark to Jerusalem. Did that play a role in God's refusal? How might David's, and Solomon's, experience address Faith Lutheran's hopes to finish Phase II?
2. Recall the promise God made to David in II Samuel 7. What difference did it make that His promise was a unilateral covenant of divine commitment? What difference does it make for you that God's promise to you in Holy Baptism is the same kind of covenant?
3. Imagine yourself as a Jewish person living in the long centuries after the end of David's dynasty. Would you have held onto God's promise in II Samuel 7 or not? How does that relate to Christians' hope for Jesus' return on the Last Day?
4. How did Jesus' crucifixion seem to contradict God's promise to David? How did his resurrection confirm it? How do the two work together to reveal God's saving work?
5. Does God's promise to David add any new insight or aspect to your understanding of Jesus? What difference might it make in your Christian faith or life?



**Serving...** Offer to buy someone's coffee, a meal in the drive through for someone behind you, or... you pick! Just do something nice for someone...

**“Grace Undeserved”**

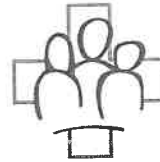
By Kristen Durst

(Based on Isaiah 53)

I have come to realize that I have many people in my life who have selflessly helped me, from the people who help me serve the high school free lunch to mission trip leaders to our faithful volunteers. I have seen the most humility, however, come from my parents and my husband. In May of 2024, I was admitted to Methodist hospital with the diagnosis of nearing kidney failure due to having a 2.5 inch kidney stone. That first night in the hospital, my husband faithfully stayed with me, sleeping on the chair next to my bed and the next night my mom did the same. Following my stay, the road to recovery was arduous. I had a tube left in my back for three weeks. I was unable to do most things for myself and I did not feel well. My family showed up for me even when I was a grouch and selflessly poured out their love for me.

In Isaiah 53, Isaiah prophesied the ways that Jesus would show up for us. He took up our pain. He was pierced for our sins. He was rejected by those who claimed to love him. Jesus' love for us is that of a suffering servant. It is true humility bearing the unthinkable burden willingly for us. He took on all of our pain without question. When I think about what I put my family through in those weeks, I give thanks to them for what they did. I did not deserve their kindness and love, yet they granted it to me anyway. It is the same with Jesus. He willingly poured out his love for us. He suffered, died, and rose again. It was completely undeserved, yet riddled with God's grace for us.

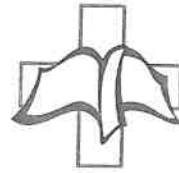
*Thank you, Jesus, for being our suffering servant. Amen.*



**Sharing...** Do you remember your first bike (or one of them)? What did it look like? Where did you get it?

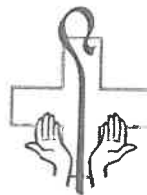
1. The Christian faith confesses that God not only empathizes with suffering, is not only compassionate towards those who suffer, but He also suffers \_\_\_\_\_, and even more so, for us!
2. For thinkers in Paul's day, the idea that God's chosen Messiah would suffer and die like a common criminal was \_\_\_\_\_ and contrary to their expectations.  
 He \_\_\_\_\_!  
 It was because of \_\_\_\_\_! It was for us!  
 This was the \_\_\_\_\_!  
 This suffering servant is \_\_\_\_\_ for His suffering!
3. Just as Jesus overcame that suffering with His glorious resurrection; so for us, too, in Christ, there is \_\_\_\_\_ in our suffering.





**Growing...**

1. Why is there suffering in the world? What is God's response to it?
2. What do you think of Dave Franzen's story? Have you had any experiences that make you ask similar questions to Dave's?
3. How does the cross of Christ separate Christianity from every other world religion?
4. Have you ever felt forsaken by God? How does Jesus' feeling of forsakenness on the cross resonate with you in times of suffering?
5. Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12. What line or lines jump out for you? What lines seem clearly to parallel Jesus' experience on the cross?



**Serving...** Write someone a note just because and send it!

**"God's Grace and Calling"**

By Jeff Amundson  
(Based on Daniel 3)

God's grace is an unearned and undeserved blessing, a gift freely given, regardless of our unworthiness. In Daniel 3, we learn about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who bring to mind a song verse. "They lived in Judah a long time ago; they had funny names, and they lived far away, but they set an example you can follow today." They refused to worship a false god and King Nebuchadnezzar sentenced them to death in a fiery furnace.

Through trust and faith in God, they entered the furnace, facing certain death, but God's unlimited grace and love protected them from the fire. He was seen standing with them in the furnace, not only for their benefit, but also for the King and others to see God's power and love. The King decreed that this God was God. He did what "no other god is able to deliver."

Like these three, we can trust and have faith in God. They knew, as we know, that God is always with us, and with His grace anything is possible. When we find ourselves facing a significant life challenge, remember this story from so long ago, as I have. God was there for me five years ago when I was given six months to live. God was there then and stands beside me, us, today. He blesses us with grace, protects us from harm, loves us forever, and is always calling us and others to Him, even though we in no way deserve it.

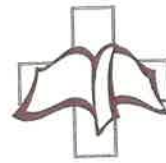
Thanks to our God!

*Gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for your grace, love, and blessings given to us. As we make our way through our own fires in this sinful world, help us to remember your promise and that you are with us forever. May you grant us strength, peace, and comfort while you protect and save us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*



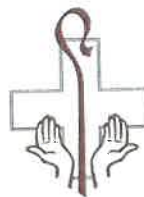
**Sharing...** If you could talk to anyone and have him or her answer any question, who would it be and what would you ask?

1. The Book of Daniel is actually written in two different languages, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
2. These three Hebrew men refused to bow down to the Babylonian king's statue. Their punishment was to be thrown into a fiery \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Surprisingly, only one person in the Gospels ever refers to Jesus as the Son of Man. That person is \_\_\_\_\_.
4. He promises us that he will \_\_\_\_\_ in glory to judge the living and the dead and his \_\_\_\_\_ will have no end.



**Growing...**

1. How do you feel about Apocalyptic writing? Do you like these parts of scripture or do they confuse you? How should we read this kind of writing today?
2. Thinking about the story of the three men in the fiery furnace, how has Jesus been with you in the midst of the fire?
3. Do you ever feel hopeless when hearing about current events? Does it ever seem like nothing can ever get better? What does apocalyptic literature say to that?
4. Why do you think Jesus' favorite way of referring to himself is “Son of Man”?
5. How does Jesus represent all of us?
6. What are your feelings about Jesus' second coming?



**Serving...** Offer to do something at church, school or in the community that you haven't done before.