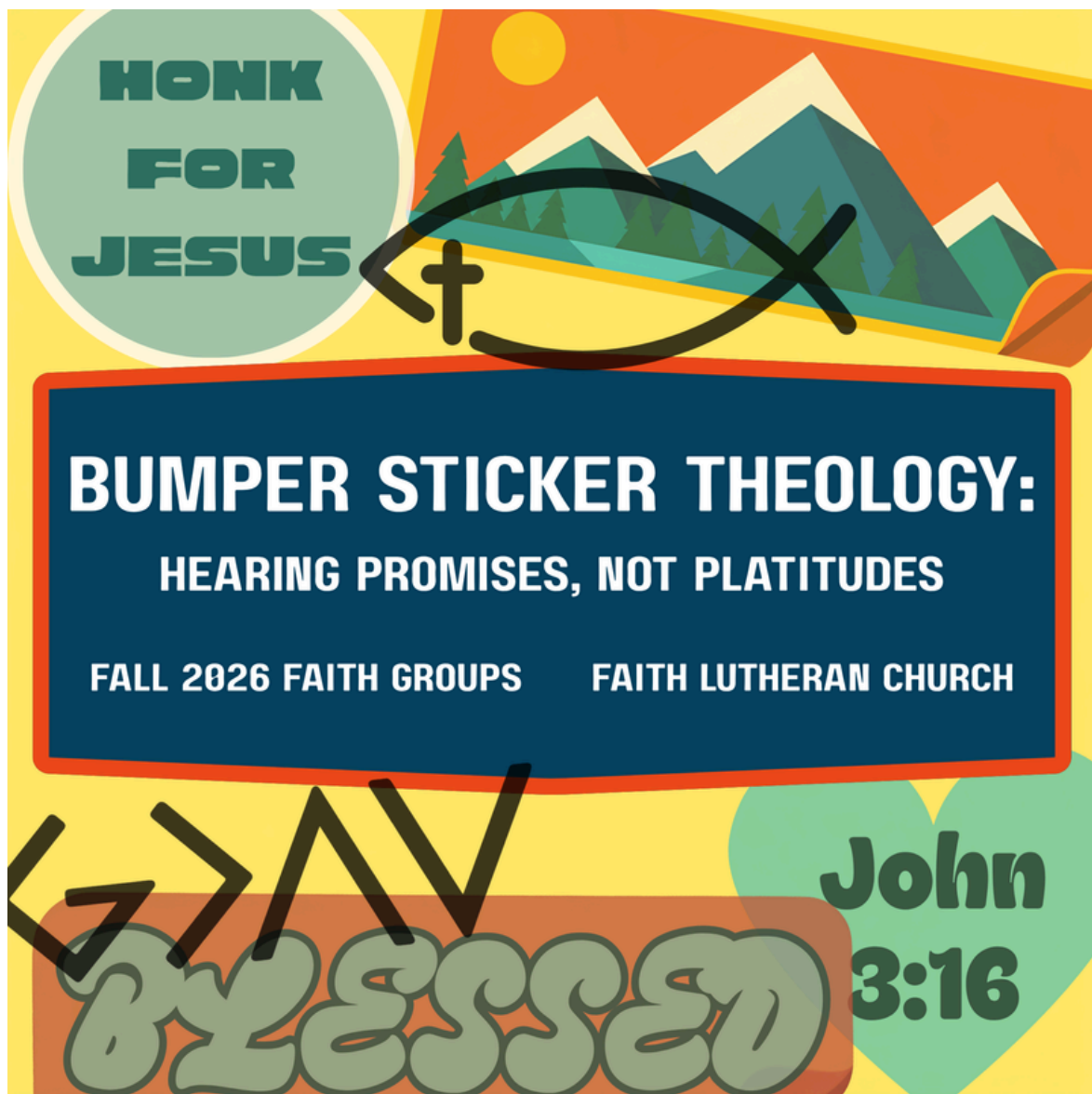




Guidelines for Faith Groups Discussions

- 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

Weekly Devotion

Session 1

“The Prosperity Platitude”

“I Hope He Hears”

By Gail Telecky

Based on Jeremiah 29:11

“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”

I recently became a great-grandmother for the first time. Yes, the first time; my grandchildren know I pray for and expect more! So, thank you God for your provision in plans for my welfare, but what about the times when my future was not very hopeful?

My husband died at the age of 59. My three children lost their father, my seven grandchildren, their grandfather and I lost my best friend. I struggled to see any future past my grief, much less a “future with hope.” God promises wholeness and well-being, but not an easy life or one of continual happiness. Once I was done being angry at God and turned to Him in prayer and for comfort, He listened. Our relationship with God matters so much more than always expecting immediate rescuing.

Now, back to the great-grandchild. This precious new life was a wonderful gift, born very near my husband’s birthday, which was joy!

God is loving, unchanging, and always listens. Yes, God’s ways are not our ways but go to Him in prayer and know He listens.

I often feel a verse is a riddle to solve. I solved this one by reading Jeremiah 29:12: “Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you.” HE HEARD!

Thank you, God, for your unconditional and undeserved love. Continue to bless us with hope, hope in times of sadness and times of joy. Inspire us always to find time to turn to you in prayer. Amen.

Video Notes

Session 1

“The Prosperity Platitude”



Sharing... What is your favorite pastime?

1. It is essential for Christians to read the Bible, _____ and _____.
2. Some verses are often taken _____ and assume a different meaning.
3. Treating Jeremiah 29:11 as a _____ is more than a matter of bad theology. It completely ignores what God actually _____ when He spoke it.
5. God keeps His promises, not without struggle, but _____.
6. For Jeremiah 29:11 is not a bumper-sticker platitude, rather it declares God’s determined will forged in the fire of exile and established eternally in the _____ and _____.

**Growing...**

1. What is the difference between a simple faith in God and a simplistic faith in God?
2. How can the promise that God “knows the plans” He has for us end up misleading, rather than helping people?
3. In Jeremiah 29, the plans God had for the people of Judah were the exact opposite of what they hoped and expected. Have you or people you know experienced “plans” from God that contradicted your hopes? How does this promise speak into those situations?
4. How does the context of Jeremiah 29:11 help us to hear those words of God as a genuine promise and not just a cliché or a slogan?
5. How do Jesus’ suffering death and resurrection testify to the profound commitment God makes to us in Jeremiah 29:11, no matter what “plans” God has for us?



Serving... When making a meal or baking this week, make a little extra and offer it to someone you know who lives alone.

“What to Do?”

By Darlene Larson

Based on Matthew 7:1

“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged”

God has rules. Society has rules. Individually, we have rules. We fail to follow those rules perfectly. Breaking some of the rules will cause us much trouble. We will be judged. It seems that in today’s society, individuals can be extremely judgmental of anyone who has a different view, behavior, or way of doing something. Is that me judging them?

None of us really know what others are going through in this life, perhaps with their physical condition or mental health issues, or perhaps simply not knowing what God expects from us. We each have our own standards of behavior and a code of ethics that we have learned from God’s Word and whatever life has taught us. Each of us is accountable to God.

How should we respond to behavior contrary to what we understand and believe to be correct? In today’s verse, Jesus warns us not to judge. God is the sole judge for eternity. That being said, how should we respond to others? Should we not confront dangerous situations? What should we tolerate and not react? How do we show the love that God shows us? We have more to learn.

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank You for your Word and the words of Jesus showing us the way. We confess to judging others and ask for Your forgiveness. We pray that the Holy Spirit will guide our hearts and actions. We praise you for Your unending love. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Video Notes

Session 2

“The Tolerance Platitude”



Sharing... What is your earliest memory?

1. Brian Thomas... “It may be the most quoted verse in the Bible by people who don’t believe the Bible...And almost everyone who quotes it uses it to _____ a conversation they don’t want to have.”
2. The irony, of course, is that the people who say, “_____,” are actually making a judgment.
3. We believers are not only allowed to judge, we are _____ to judge, because we are called to _____.
4. Our judgments flow _____ for the neighbor.
5. In Christian love we judge and hold one another accountable so that in Christian love we might _____ them.
6. Judgment leads to the _____.

Faith Group Discussion

Session 2

“The Tolerance Platitude”



Growing...

1. Describe a time when you felt fairly or unfairly judged?

Do you think it was handled correctly?

2. Pastor Dave said that we’re not only allowed to judge but called to judge. Do you agree?
3. How is judgment of others crucially linked to love? How do you see this or not see this in the world?
4. Read Matthew 7:1-5. Jesus points out that hypocrisy is the big problem when it comes to judging. It’s also something that, ironically, people judge the church for. How do we keep from hypocritical judging?
5. What is the goal of God’s judgment? How does that affect the way we judge others?



Serving... Offer to do something for a neighbor or friend this week.

Weekly Devotion

Session 3

“The Optimist Platitude”

“Rainbows and Butterflies”

By Casey Nornes

Based on Romans 8:28

“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”

I think it’s probably human nature for us to take verses from the Bible and use them as bumper sticker material. We want a quick and catchy verse to give us comfort and resolution in tough times. This verse is a little convicting for me. Anyone who works with me would say I am, at times, an extreme, maybe even a toxic, optimist. I could be having the worst day dealing with an angry family, a student who is being disruptive and disrespectful in class and demands from our job that can be overwhelming. Yet, when someone asks, “How are you doing?” I respond with, “Living the dream” or “Rainbows and butterflies.” A comment like this can downplay or trivialize the situation when that may not be what is needed.

In this verse we are not meant to minimize or explain away our grief and struggles. “Good” is not meant to say that everything is fine, so you can ignore or end your pain. The “good” it refers to is to be Christ-like. Things can “work together for good” in the middle of a broken marriage, a bankruptcy, or a cancer diagnosis. God doesn’t always spare us from these terrible experiences, but He does promise that He is with us in the fire. He promises that nothing will ever separate us from Him. Praise be to God!

Father in heaven, we so often miss the meaning of your words. Help us to know that there is light in our suffering. In our darkest hours we praise you. Amen.

Video Notes

Session 3

“The Optimist Platitude”



Sharing... What chores or responsibilities did you have growing up?

1. Romans 8:28 - “We know that all things work together for good for those who _____, who are called according to his purpose.”
2. But it’s not a simplistic promise that _____ will always turn out _____.
3. One reason promises result in platitudes is their _____ can be very complex.
4. But, by _____, God does make sinners into whole new creatures.
5. God’s purpose worked out in Christ Jesus is the _____ we can fully trust and testify to that promise.
6. The focus is on you and me, who are “_____ to His _____.”

**Growing...**

1. What is the difference between hope and optimism (or positive thinking)?
2. Have you known or experienced a tragedy that makes you question whether “in all things God works together for good”? Talk about it if you feel able to do so.
3. In light of the whole theology Paul lays out in Romans, what is the “good” that God “works” to assure in “all things”?
4. How can the promise of Romans 8:28 give us genuine hope in the midst of suffering while not trying to pretend away the pain and hardship of suffering?
5. As St. Paul states it in Romans, what is God’s ultimate purpose? How does knowing that purpose clarify and strengthen the promise of Romans 8:28?



Serving... Pray for God to use you to be a gift of encouragement to someone this week.

“Resist Temptation”

By Martha Picton

Based on I Corinthians 10:13

“God is faithful, and He will not let you be tested beyond your strength.”

“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” 1 Corinthians 10:13

What an amazing promise! This verse reminds us that our temptations are not unique to us. The enemy wants to isolate us in our sin, accusing us where we have messed up and making us want to hide our mistakes and live in shame. We are all human and have all sinned, yet God is faithful to forgive us. He is faithful to walk with us, guiding us to live in a way that pleases Him.

God wants us to resist temptation. Why? Because He knows what is best for us. Resisting temptation can be hard, but it is God who gives us strength. We do not have to walk through life alone. We can rely on God and be encouraged by our brothers and sisters in Christ.

God provides for us even in times of trouble. It is often not in ways we expect. I am reminded of a difficult time in my life where God showed up in an unexpected way. He reminded me that He was with me. He brought hope and joy where despair was beginning to set in. Can you relate? How have you seen God's faithfulness? God is with us even in the midst of temptation, strengthening us as we rely on Him.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for Your faithfulness. Help us resist temptation through Your strength. Forgive us for the times that we mess up. Thank You that we receive forgiveness through Christ.
In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Video Notes

Session 4

“The You-Got-This Platitude”



Sharing... Talk about something you enjoyed doing this summer.

1. I Corinthians 10:13, then, is about _____.
2. Paul says, “learn from their example...don’t give in to temptation!”
God has given you _____!
3. God does give us more than we can handle, and He does it
_____.
4. But you can’t do more. You can’t _____ it.
5. God sent the one who _____ handle it.

Faith Group Discussion

Session 4

“The You-Got-This Platitude”



Growing...

1. What do you do when you feel overwhelmed?
2. Before watching this video, did you think that this platitude was in scripture?
3. Pastor Dave said that God gives ways out of temptation, but it is not always easy. What are some examples of this?
4. How does this false platitude contribute to the idea of a God who caters to our hopes and dreams and happiness?

What does God “cater” to instead?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-9. How have you experienced “the God who raises the dead” amid your struggles and pain?
6. Why is the point of the law to show us that we can’t handle it?



Serving... Faith will be collecting items for Operation Christmas Child boxes. Pick up some items to donate (or make a note to pack a box when they are available!)

“God is Love”

By Isabelle Dressen

Based on I Corinthians 10:13

“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude; it is not irritable or resentful.”

When we hear I Corinthians 13:4-5 it is easy to relate it to the ideal way for us to love one another. Of course, we want to lead with patience and kindness towards our friends and family instead of being resentful or arrogant.

However, we often see ourselves and others falling into less than favorable habits. Divorce is more common than we would like to admit, family drama is the rule rather than the exception, and hatred runs rampant in every society. We as human beings cannot love each other as we ought—that is, without God.

When God enters the equation, all is reversed. He loves us with unparalleled patience, offers us grace when we fall short, He is slow to anger, and He does not resent us for our unfaithfulness. God is love, and the love spoken of in I Corinthians is only possible through him. Verses 4 and 5 of chapter 13 should not ring as a checklist but as a promise. God promises to love us entirely, and because of his love we can offer that to others. Although we often struggle to treat one another with kindness, the Lord shows us what it feels like to be loved properly so we can share that with others.

Dear God, we thank you for your love toward us. We thank you that although we are still in bondage to sin, you show us what it means to love each other the correct way. Help us to remember your Son and the love shown to us through him. Amen.



Sharing... How did you choose your career or profession?

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. What is the difference between true love and most popular depictions of love?
2. How does agape, the love of God, compare to the love of marriage, family or friends?
3. Have you witnessed problems in churches similar to the issues that plagued the church Corinth? Were they resolved in a constructive way?
4. How does Paul's illustration of the human body help congregations to remain healthy?
5. Although I Corinthians 13 is not about the love of marriage, how can it still be helpful to marriages and other relationships?



Serving... This week, pray for each member of your Faith Group.

“Abased and Abounding”

By Carl Horton

Based on Philippians 4:13

“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”

I have had low points in my life: substance abuse, depression and the birth of my son who had significant health challenges, among others. Through all these times, God was with me, helping me to “do all things” despite those circumstances. I did not overcome these issues using my own efforts. I didn’t triumph over adversity as a decision of will or with a flurry of activity. I prayed and God helped me in dire times, helping me to do “all things” through Him.

Likewise, God helped me when I “abounded,” working in the background to guide me, providing mentors and opportunities like an excellent job with great insurance which covered my son’s kidney transplant. Even in the good times, God was helping me to “do all things” despite little to no effort on my part.

When you review your life with its ups and downs, can you see God’s hand working? It might be overt, discernible acts, but often it is the “still, small, voice” that guides you in the earthquakes and tumults of life, just as God guided Elijah in 1 Kings 19:11-12.

Lord, help us to discern your hand in life’s ups and downs. Whether in abasement or abundance, enable us to look beyond circumstances and praise you for your work in our lives. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.



Sharing... Talk about a significant goal you have achieved.

1. Benjamin Merkle points out that the Greek word for _____ means to “be strong, powerful, able, prevail over.”
2. Paul is not saying that he can *do* all things through Christ, but rather that he can _____ or have victory over any circumstance by relying on Christ and *His* strength.
3. Philippians 4:13 is not a promise of special Christian _____.
4. Philippians 4:13 IS a promise... you can prevail and can get through it because _____ strengthens you.
5. Christ strengthens you through His _____, His _____ and His _____.



Growing...

1. Who is your favorite motivational speaker?
2. How can you see Philippians 4:13 mis-used?
3. Paul receives great concern and support from the church in Philippi. Who has shown you concern and support in your times of trial?
4. What is the subtle difference between “can do” and “prevail” or “have victory over”?
5. How have you experienced strength from Christ in difficult times?
6. Read John 15:1-7. How does this speak to what Paul describes in Philippians 4:13?



Serving... Purchase an item for the Blessing Box to share. Drop off in the church office.