

Session 8

Faith Life

Welcome and Prayer

Ask for a volunteer to open the session with prayer.

Sharing

Invite the group to share any insights, questions or revelations from the daily reflections from the prior week.

Introduction of Session Focus

Our faith in Christ does not originate in, nor is it centered in, ourselves. It is grounded upon, anchored in, and fed by the promises and the presence of Christ Jesus in his external Word, shared through speaking and the sacraments. The building up of faith by the Word of God is therefore another way of saying that we are Christ-centered, which in turn equips us to be stewards of his Word in carrying out the Great Commission. As those who loved by God and sent into the world by Christ, our lives are grounded in faith. As St. Paul said in Romans 14:8, "For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's."

Time in the Word

Scripture reading — John 15:1-5

[Jesus said,] "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

Large Group Discussion

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight words or phrases that stand out for you.
2. Why do you think these particular words and phrases caught your attention?
3. There is perhaps no better, or simpler, scriptural metaphor for the life of faith than Jesus' vine/branches illustration. What are some ways that you find this helpful with respect to discipleship?
4. What are the various ways that we abide in Jesus?

5. What does Jesus mean with the admonition, “apart from me you can do nothing?” How does this manifest in the daily exercise of our faith?

Small group break-out sessions

Gather in groups of two or three.

Discipling Conversations:

Have each person share how they feel about their current faith life. Allow your discipling conversations to arise naturally out of the sharing. Try to follow the flow of discipling conversations.

- Where are you now? (Current Reality)
- Where do you want to be? (Vision)
- Does your vision reflect your beliefs, values & priorities? (Alignment)
- How do you plan to accomplish your vision? (Action Plan)
- What resources will you need?
- How can I hold you accountable?

Set a time for your small group to meet and reflect on the daily devotions for between the sessions.

Large group wrap-up

Have participants share any closing thoughts, questions, insights or observations that arose from the break out groups.

Remind participants:

1. Continue to do the daily devotions and journal their insights and questions.
2. They should set a time during the second week of devotions to meet with one or two others for a discipleship guiding session.

Next Session (in two weeks): Looking at “Priorities”

Close in Prayer

Helpful Resources

Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith by Kathleen Norris

Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis

The Problem of Pain by C.S. Lewis

Devotions: Week Eight & Nine

Weekday 1 – Thursday

Scripture reading — Hebrews 11:1

¹“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Focus Questions

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight the word or phrase that stands out for you.
2. What is going on in your life that connects with that word or phrase?
3. How well are the words “assurance” and “conviction” reflected in your faith life? Can you think of other words that you associate with faith?

Spend some time in prayer and meditation asking God to strengthen your faith.

Daily Journal

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

What has caused you to think deeper?

Weekday 2 – Friday

Scripture reading — 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

¹⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Focus Questions

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight the word or phrase that stands out for you.
2. What is going on in your life that connects with that word or phrase?
3. What does it mean to regard Christ and others “according to the spirit,” as opposed to the “flesh”? How is this reality fundamental to your “ministry of reconciliation” (v. 19)?
4. In what ways do you carry out your vocation as an “ambassadors for Christ” (v. 20), and how does this relate to life-to-life discipleship?
5. Martin Luther spoke of the “Happy Exchange” of Christ’s saving work. How does verse 21 speak to this, and how does it relate to the vine/branches metaphor found in John 15?
6. Where is the Holy Spirit inviting you to respond this week?

Daily Journal

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

What have you thought about today in this focus area that you are longing for?

Saturday (before worship...preparing)

Saturdays are a day of preparation as we contemplate the coming Sabbath. Look back over the week, consider such questions as:

1. What sins will I lay before the Lord in my confession?
2. What prayers will I lift up?
3. What questions will I be seeking the answers to?
4. What burdens do I need to lay down in order to be fully open to the movement of the Holy Spirit?
5. Who might I invite to journey with me?

Sunday (after worship...pondering)

Sundays are devoted to worship and reflection. We gather together as the Body of Christ to lift our praises to God and receive what only he can give us. Later, reflect on such questions as:

1. What point of the sermon or Sunday School lesson most caught my attention? What exactly touched my heart?
2. Which song, hymn or portion of liturgy most became a prayer or conversation with God?
3. How will making my confession and hearing the absolution affect how I live this week?
4. What strength or comfort did I receive as I participated in worship today?
5. What was the gospel message I heard today and who did I share it with?
6. Who did I speak with that I can remember in prayer this week?

Weekday 3 – Monday

Scripture reading — Philippians 3:7-16

⁷But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹²Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Focus Questions

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight the word or phrase that stands out for you.
2. What is going on in your life that connects with that word or phrase?
3. In verses 8 - 9 Paul says that for Christ's sake he has "suffered the loss of all things" and now regards them as "rubbish" or garbage. How is his observation descriptive of your faith in Christ?
4. How do you "hold true to what we have attained" (v. 16)? How did you "attain" it to begin with? What does this say about our life in Christ?
5. Where is the Holy Spirit inviting you to respond this week?

Daily Journal

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

What small specific step and active response can you take in the direction God's Word is leading you?

Weekday 4 – Tuesday

Scripture reading —Matthew 8:5-13

⁵When [Jesus] had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, ⁶“Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.” ⁷And he said to him, “I will come and heal him.” ⁸But the centurion replied, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” ¹⁰When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, “Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. ¹¹I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, ¹²while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” ¹³And to the centurion Jesus said, “Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.” And the servant was healed at that very moment.

Focus Questions

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight the word or phrase that stands out for you.
2. What is going on in your life that connects with that word or phrase?
3. “...Only say the word, and my servant will be healed.” Why did the centurion put so much stock in Jesus' word? What does this say to you about the Word and forgiveness?

4. The centurion discerns that Jesus is “under authority.” Jesus later speaks of authority in Matthew 28:18: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore...” How are we “under authority” like the centurion? What does that mean with respect to Life-to-Life discipleship?

5. How is it that “no one in Israel” exhibited such faith? Who was the object of the centurion’s faith, and what does his example mean for you?

6. Where is the Holy Spirit inviting you to respond this week?

Daily Journal

Recording your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

How does this passage focus my attention first on Jesus, second on my identity “in Christ,” and third on my participation in the Body of Christ?

How is this passage moving me beyond myself to take a specific small step in the direction of serving my family, church, or neighbor?

Weekday 5 – Wednesday

Scripture reading — Romans 6:8-14

⁸Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹²Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Focus Questions

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight the word or phrase that stands out for you.
2. What is going on in your life that connects with that word or phrase?
3. Paul says we should “consider” (the KJV uses the less-introspective “reckon”) ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” What does this “reckoning” look like with respect to your recognition of Christ’s lordship?
4. We are sinners; this is most certainly true! How is it, then, that sin has no “dominion” over us? What – who – has replaced it? How do both obedience and repentance fit into our freedom from sin, as well as into the sacrament of Holy Baptism?
5. Where is the Holy Spirit inviting you to respond this week?

Daily Journal

Reflecting on this week.

Reflecting on the Scriptures this week, what theme do you see developing?

Review any action steps you have felt led to take. If you have not yet started, take time to begin.

Begin to write a one or two sentence statement for this week's focus area. Try to have it reflect what the verses this week have taught you about who Christ Jesus is, and his invitation to follow him in this area of life.

Weekday 6 – Thursday

Scripture reading — 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

¹Now I would remind you, brothers, of the Gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ²and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you— unless you believed in vain. ³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

Focus Questions

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight the word or phrase that stands out for you.

2. What is going on in your life that connects with that word or phrase?

3. Paul speaks of justification and salvation as the present work of the Gospel, "... by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word of truth." What are the various ways you "hold fast" to the Word, and how are all Christians stewards and bearers of it?

4. Why does Paul consider himself "as one untimely born?" How does his "nativity" in the faith relate to that of the other apostles, both in terms of similarities and differences? How does his circumstance relate to your own baptismal regeneration? (For further clarification, see Acts 9:1-19.)

5. Where is the Holy Spirit inviting you to respond this week?

Daily Journal

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

What has caused you to think deeper?

Weekday 7 – Friday

Scripture reading — Hebrews 10:19-25

¹⁹Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Focus Questions

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight the word or phrase that stands out for you.
2. What is going on in your life that connects with that word or phrase?
3. How do these passages point to the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion? What is the sacramental connection between “drawing near” [to whom?] and having “a true heart in full assurance of faith” (v. 22)?
3. What is the only basis of an unwavering hope (v. 23), and how does this guide your daily ministry to one another?
4. What is the relationship between “stirring up one another” and “meeting together” – both in the assembly of Word and Sacrament and in groups of 2 or 3 gathered in Jesus’ name (Matt. 18:20)? What or who is it that enables you to do this holy “stirring?”

5. Where is the Holy Spirit inviting you to respond this week?

Daily Journal

Recording your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

What have you thought about today in this focus area that you are longing for?

Saturday (before worship...preparing)

Saturdays are a day of preparation as we contemplate the coming Sabbath. Look back over the week, consider such questions as:

1. What sins will I lay before the Lord in my confession?

2. What prayers will I lift up?

3. What questions will I be seeking the answers to?

4. What burdens do I need to lay down in order to be fully open to the movement of the Holy Spirit?

5. Who might I invite to journey with me?

Sunday (after worship...pondering)

Sundays are devoted to worship and reflection. We gather together as the Body of Christ to lift our praises to God and receive what only he can give us. Later, reflect on such questions as:

1. What point of the sermon or Sunday School lesson most caught my attention? What exactly touched my heart?
2. Which song, hymn or portion of liturgy most became a prayer or conversation with God?
3. How will making my confession and hearing the absolution affect how I live this week?
4. What strength or comfort did I receive as I participated in worship today?
5. What was the gospel message I heard today and who did I share it with?
6. Who did I speak with that I can remember in prayer this week?

Weekday 8 – Monday

Scripture reading — Matthew 14:22-33

²²Immediately [Jesus] made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. ²⁵And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. ²⁶But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. ²⁷But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." ²⁸And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. ³⁰But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." ³¹Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³²And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Focus Questions

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight the word or phrase that stands out for you.

2. What is going on in your life that connects with that word or phrase?

3. Jesus went up on the mountain by himself to pray. How is this prescriptive for our own prayer/worship life?

How is this example only part of the picture for us? (See yesterday's devotion on Hebrews 10:19-25).

4. What does Peter's watery mishap (vs. 29-30) and Jesus' immediate response in action and speech (v. 31) say to you about faith and our baptismal calling to repentance?

5. Where is the Holy Spirit inviting you to respond this week?

Daily Journal

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

What small specific step and active response can you take in the direction God's word is leading you?

Weekday 9 – Tuesday

Scripture reading — 2 Timothy 1:5-7, 13-14; 2:1-2

⁵I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. ⁶For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, ⁷for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

¹³Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

²You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, ²and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men [persons] who will be able to teach others also.

Focus Questions

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight the word or phrase that stands out for you.

2. What is going on in your life that connects with that word or phrase?

3. The introduction to this focus area said that we are equipped to be stewards of the Word. How do you see the stewardship of the Word of God played out in the above passage?

4. Who has made a “good deposit” of the Word in your life? What words and what actions did they use to make that deposit?

5. Someone once asked, “What are you going to pass on before you pass on?” What can you do to pass on the faith in a way that helps to insure the next generation passes it on?

6. Where is the Holy Spirit inviting you to respond this week?

Daily Journal

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

How does this passage focus my attention first on Jesus, second on my identity “in Christ,” and third on my participation in the Body of Christ?

How is this passage moving me beyond myself to take a specific small step in the direction of serving my family, church, or neighbor?

Weekday 10 – Thursday

Scripture reading —1 John 1:1-3

¹That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – ²the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us – ³that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Focus Questions

Record your thoughts from prayer and reflection.

1. Read through the Scripture a second time and highlight the word or phrase that stands out for you.
2. What is going on in your life that connects with that word or phrase?
3. John makes a bold claim – that the first disciples experienced fellowship with God and with his Son Jesus. What are the ways they experienced fellowship with Jesus...what did they do?
4. Who can you invite into your fellowship, so that they too can experience the presence of Christ?
5. Where is the Holy Spirit inviting you to respond this week?

Daily Journal

Reflecting on this week.

Reflecting on the Scriptures this week, what theme do you see developing?

Review any action steps you have felt led to take. If you haven't made any actions steps yet, try doing it today.

Begin to write a one or two sentence statement for this week's focus area. Try to have it reflect what the verses this week have taught you about who Christ Jesus is, and his invitation to follow him in this area of life.