

BY WHAT AUTHORITY?

**Biblical Authority
Today**



**Fall 2024 Faith Groups Series
Faith Lutheran Church**

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

“When God Speaks”

By Jill Manthey
(Based on John 1:1-3)

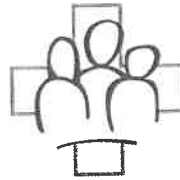
The Word of God is everywhere. We read it in scripture. We listen to it as clergy speak. We study it in devotionals, podcasts, and theological writings. The world is surrounded by the Word of God because God spoke, and the world began.

It is generally agreed that the Word of God needs to be spread widely (Acts 13:47). The Word is taught so that we can learn as much as we can and then go and share it with others (Philippians 4:9). We share God’s Word because as more people hear and believe, more people gain eternal life (1 John 1:3). Embracing the Word is the only way to have a life with Christ forever (Romans 10:9-13).

I wonder, what would the world look like without the Word? Would there even be a world? God created the earth and all that is in it (Genesis 1:1-31). Without the Word we would not exist. The Word of God was and is the birthplace of light and life in the world. God is the light of the world (John 8:12) and His Word keeps it burning.

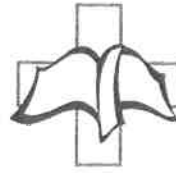
Where do we receive the Word (Ezekiel 3:10)? Are we taking the Word and making disciples among the people (Matthew 28:19)? How will we use the Word to do what God requires of us (Micah 6:8)?

Heavenly Father, fill our hearts and minds with your Word and bless our hands to your service today and always. Amen.



Sharing... What is the best piece of feedback you have ever received?

1. Somewhere between _____ copies of the Bible have been printed.
2. The _____ is the _____ of _____.
3. The first actual meaning of the Word of God is _____.
4. The third meaning of the Word of God is _____.
5. _____ is a specific Word of God for you. It is handed over to you!



Growing...

1. Tell us about your favorite Bible.
2. What is your favorite book, or verse, or story in the Bible?
3. Read John 1:1-3, 14. What does it mean that Jesus is the Word?
4. How is the “proclaimed word” the word of God? Can we say anything and call it the word of God? What makes it the word?
5. What is “biblicism,” and how do we not fall into that trap?
6. What is a faithful way to think about the Bible?



Serving... Purchase an item or two for the Blessing Box and drop off in the church office.

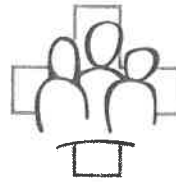
“More Than Just Words”

By Megan Piehl

(Based on II Timothy 3:16-17; John 20:30-31; Matthew 5:17-18)

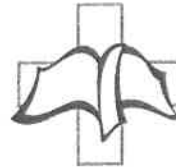
When reading the Bible, do all the stories seem plausible? All the laws and rules easy to follow? Not always, at first glance. But diving deeper into scripture allows one the opportunity to see how God uses both amazing (and sometimes impossible-sounding) events and clearly historical ones to create one thoroughly mind-blowing narrative. Our one true authority in life is God. He is ultimately the one to whom we must answer. God in turn, used the Holy Spirit to inspire and guide humans to write the Bible to proclaim the good news of salvation in Christ, along with guidance for maintaining peace and order in his beautiful creation. As II Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” Even the most irrational-sounding stories can be relatable and can be used to teach. In every case, Jesus remains at the center of scripture. He fulfilled all laws and prophecies so that, just because we can never achieve his flawless character, we still have the hope of forgiveness of sin and eternal life with Him. So, dive deeper into Jesus—His story is more than just words!

Dear Lord, thank you for providing the Holy Spirit as a guide to humans to write your perfect words, and then to compile the Biblical canon. Even though it's hard for us to fathom your precious grace, thank you for sending Jesus and bestowing mercy on us each day. Help us always to remember to turn to your word when we have doubts and instill in us the confidence to go out and teach others. We pray in your precious name, Amen.



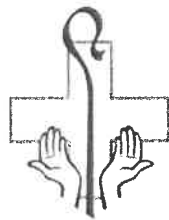
Sharing... What is one characteristic you admire most about your father or mother?

1. Human authors wrote the books of the Bible, but the words were _____ to them, inspired within them, by God.
2. The Bible is claimed as _____ by every branch and denomination and group within the Christian church.
3. It is not surprising that the centerpiece of Jesus' ministry was _____.
4. Sorting out all those questions and documents led to the notion of a _____.
5. The books of the Bible are not considered to be inspired because they are _____.
They are included in the canon because the church recognized them as _____.



Growing...

1. Christians believe God inspired the Biblical authors (“God-breathed”), but did not directly dictate to them (as Muslims claim for the Quran). How do you imagine that process actually worked? Have you ever felt that something you wrote or made was inspired in that way?
2. The early Church described many works as “scripture.” Why was it essential eventually to limit that description to a defined list of books (the canon)?
3. Does the relatively messy process of forming the canon enhance its authenticity or diminish it? How would it strike you if the canon had been decided by one general council of the Church instead?
4. Review the five-fold test the Church developed for including books in the canon. Why were those criteria essential? Are they sufficient? Would you add any others?
5. Why is it important to realize that the Bible is inspired when it is read and not only when it was written? Can you recall a time when you felt inspired while reading it?



Serving... Write a note of thanks to someone!

“Respecting God’s Word”

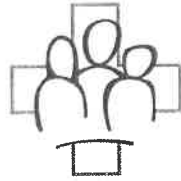
By Darlene Larson

“Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Hebrews 4:12

When I was growing up, my father was a self-employed trucker who hauled can milk for farmers. He liked to give his patrons merchandise with his name on the items. One year the gift was a two-edged knife, one side plain and the other side serrated. Well, you had to be very careful while using the knife so as not to put your hand on the upper edge of the blade. We had to have respect for the knife; we didn’t want to get cut. I still have one such knife in the memorabilia box, though not in use.

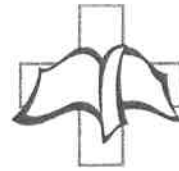
In thinking about God’s Word as being sharper than any two-edged sword, the respect that is due to it is of the utmost importance. As we listen to, study, and allow the living and active Word of God to get into our being, He can guide our thoughts and intentions. How awesome that we have free access to the Bible and the living God. This two-edged sword sounds scary, but can only make us better equipped to follow Him, living according to the Word, and to share the Word with others.

Gracious God, we love You and thank You for giving us Your Word. Forgive us when we follow our own way without You. Show us Your way so our thoughts and intentions can be according to Your Word. In Jesus’ name, Amen.



Sharing... If you could do something different for your job, what would it be or have been?

1. It is important to be aware of all these different genres in scripture, because you read and interpret each genre _____.
2. When interpreting the Bible, we need to be _____ of the genre we're trying to interpret.
3. When people say the Bible is _____, they mean that the Bible is incapable of being _____.
_____ means that the Bible is incapable of _____.
4. Eisegesis is the practice of interpreting a text in such a way as to introduce one's _____ presumptions, biases, or agendas.
5. Exegesis, on the other hand, is more concerned with discerning the _____ meaning of scripture.



Growing...

1. What genre of Biblical literature is easiest for you to read? Which is most difficult?
2. How does mistaking the literary genre of a section of scripture sometimes lead to misunderstanding or misinterpretation?
3. What does it mean that scripture interprets scripture?
4. What is the problem with the doctrines of inerrancy and infallibility?
5. What does it mean when we say that the message of scripture is clear?
6. What are some examples of eisegesis?
7. Read Hebrews 4:12. How does scripture interpret you?



Serving... Do the “Drive-through Difference” or offer to buy someone’s coffee or lunch this week.

“God’s Creation”

By Kevin Elton

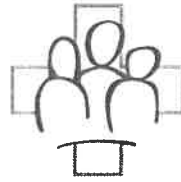
(Based on Psalm 104)

This past summer I had the privilege of traveling with my family. First, we flew to North Carolina where we hiked a few short trails in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Then, later in the summer, we drove to the Black Hills in South Dakota, and to Devil’s Tower in Wyoming. We often found ourselves enamored by the beauty, engaging in deep discussion about the uniqueness. From plush green vegetation to bare rock, regardless of the setting, one common thought on all of our adventures was, “My goodness, what a beautiful creation!”.

In Psalm 104:24, it states “LORD, you have made so many things! How wisely you made them all!” How easy it is to agree with this statement when basking in the beauty of nature. Then, as I kept reading, it became a bit more uneasy, “The earth is filled with your creatures...there is the ocean...the ships sail on it, and in it plays Leviathan.” What? God created Leviathan, a symbol of fear?

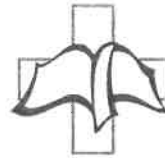
This brings forth a curiosity. In nature we have wildfires, storms, accidents and illness that all exist in God’s creation. Are they by intention, like Leviathan? That’s an uneasy addition to my thoughts and an unsettling reality that not all of God’s creation fits my view of things that are beautiful or good. Fortunately, these things don’t have to fit my view, because God’s design has wisdom and purpose far greater than I can understand.

Lord, help me trust in Your Word when the realities of Your creation do not make sense. Amen.



Sharing... Have you been to the State Fair? If not, what has kept you from going? If so, what was your favorite part?

1. There is no need to assume that science _____ the Biblical accounts.
2. The author does claim that the God of Israel _____ the universe.
3. One main claim was that God created the world according to a _____, in harmony and goodness and order.
4. Only faith testifies that God is the _____ and what His purpose was in making it.
5. Genesis 1 is a _____, majestic account of the whole cosmos.
6. Genesis 2 is a _____, told with warmth and even humor.



Growing...

1. Is it helpful or unnerving to think that the creation accounts are not history or science *in the modern sense of those words*? Does it change your view of Genesis 1 to read it as a litany?
2. How is it that the creation accounts are profoundly *truthful*, but not *factual* (i.e., like a news report of events as they happened)? How does that help to explain the Bible’s authority?
3. Review which questions history, science and the Bible are designed to answer and *not* answer. Does that help you to resolve any conflict among them?
4. What does it mean that God gave humans “dominion” over the earth? How do the methods and results of God’s creative work inform how we are to carry out that responsibility?
5. Why would the final editor of Genesis include two accounts of creation rather than choosing one or trying to combine them? How does that decision *enhance*, rather than detract from, the authority of the Bible’s witness to God’s will for creation?



Serving...This week, drop off some items at the food shelf.

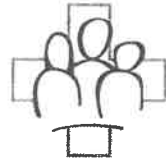
“Respect for Authorities”

By Austin Willhite

(Based on Ephesians 6:5-9; Galatians 3:27-29; I Peter 2:13-21)

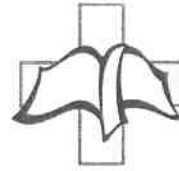
When faced with small talk, I tend to avoid politics and economics. I've never understood, much less been interested in, the economic structure that governs everything from small business to global capitalism. Needless to say, I did not enjoy and at times struggled in my high school and college economics classes. However, there is one group project that has resonated with me since my macro-economics class in high school. The context of our activity centered around a dispute about wage and benefit packages for a large manufacturing company. The class was divided into two groups that represented each side: board of directors and labor union. As the class period went on, each side sent representatives into negotiations that made little to no progress when neither group was willing to budge. This lesson in business left me with a taste of what the world has to offer about fairness and equality. It's not easy respecting the authorities in our lives, especially if they are unpopular. How tempting is it to tell your boss he or she is wrong or to post online about the shortcomings of a political figure? God is at work in us and in each person he raises into positions of power. Stuck in our rebellion of sin we are all made equal by Christ's suffering. As Christians, we are thankful that God does not operate on the world's expectations. Let us live by Christ's example by putting our faith solely in the authority of the Word of God.

*Dear God, life can be so difficult at times. How blessed we are as Christians to know you and receive from you hope in our suffering, joy in our sorrows, and strength in our weakness.
Amen.*



Sharing... What is one thing you remember about your grandparents?

1. Controversy over the Bible's view of slavery isn't about its existence in the world today, but arises instead from placing 21st-century _____ back onto the ancient world.
2. Given how ubiquitous slavery was in the ancient world, people in the Bible couldn't possibly _____ it.
3. Paul totally _____ social status and cultural values.
4. As slaves of Christ, all Christians are free and therefore are of inestimable _____.
5. Onesimus, means, " _____"-- Which is quite ironic, since, he really wasn't useful at all.



Growing...

1. Imposing modern views of slavery on the ancient world is an example of "chronological snobbery." Can you think of other examples of how our modern culture engages in that?
2. Read I Corinthians 7:20-24. How did Paul relativize slavery precisely by *not* advocating for its banishment? How does our identity in Christ relativize all social statuses?
3. Try to put yourself in Philemon's place as you read *Philemon* 1-22. As a wealthy, likely upper class man, but also as a Christian, how would Paul's letter strike you?
4. Now imagine you are Onesimus, the runaway slave, taking Paul's letter back to Philemon. What kind of reception do you expect to get? Are you hopeful, anxious, confident, all three?
5. Harry Wendt wrote, "Paul did not set out to change *external structures*, but *people's hearts and lives*" by proclaiming the good news of Jesus. How can Paul's method help us to address difficult or controversial issues in our day?



Serving...Do something nice to help out a neighbor...

"A Look Back, a Look Forward"

By Pr. Paul Knudson

(Based on Genesis 2:24)

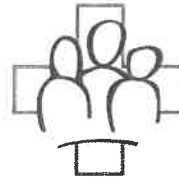
A young eight-year-old growing up in 1950 in a tiny village in South Dakota is secretively poring over the women's section of our Sears and Roebuck catalogue, imagining what the female body looks like. Press forward some 75 years to what his grandsons at that age have available to them that leaves nothing to the imagination and rather floods them with pornographic images beyond some of our imaginations.

Young boys and girls are facing challenges in the realm of sexuality that are beyond scary. Girls are being bullied on social media, in which the shape of their lips or other aspects of their physical bodies are being ridiculed, leading to anxiety, depression, and even suicide. Boys at ever younger ages are viewing pornography that cannot help but bludgeon any notion of God's marvelous gift of sexuality.

We face challenges today that may well overwhelm us, possibly even distorting our own adult experiences of the gift of being male and female, husbands and wives. These are enough to drive us to prayer, crying out to our heavenly Father and his beloved Son to deliver us and prepare us for witness in our marriages, families, and beyond.

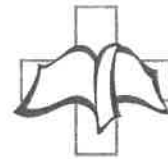
We will need to return not only to understand what we call God's order of creation in making us male and female. We will need to cry out to our heavenly Father, his beloved Son and the Holy Spirit to "forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name." Amen!

Gracious God, our sin consumes us. We thank you that when we repent of our sins, You forgive us. Amen.



Sharing... Did you grow up in the church? If so, who brought you? If not, did anyone ever invite you to go with them? Tell us about it.

1. We look at sexuality and marriage in the Bible, one thing becomes clear— It is _____ as it should be! It, too, has been tainted by sin!
2. We find that scripture is clear and unanimous: There is not a single _____ or _____ verse in the Bible regarding same sex activity.
3. We'd better check ourselves, or as Jesus said, "**Remove the _____ from our own eyes**", because we aren't perfect or sinless ourselves.

**Growing...**

1. Please remember to be respectful of others when discussing this subject, avoiding derogatory terms and negative tones. Why is this important, and why is it so hard to do?
2. Read Matthew 19:3-12. What does it mean to stand under Jesus’ teaching on divorce? What would you advise a young couple getting married? What would you advise a married couple experiencing dysfunction?
3. Do you know anyone who identifies as homosexual? If so, how does that impact your views on the topic?
4. Of the verses on homosexuality we looked at- Leviticus 20:13, I Timothy 1:8-10, and Romans 1:18-32—which one do you think most clearly addresses homosexuality in our day?
5. Some claim that, despite what the Bible says about homosexuality, Jesus’ gracious treatment of sinners, the fact that nobody is perfect, and the assertion that God is love means that we can affirm homosexual behavior as acceptable. How would you respond?
6. Why do some Christians treat homosexuality, and sexual sins in general, as worse sins than others?



Serving... This week, give a little extra for offering and see how God blesses it and you!