

# LENT 2013 SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP AGREEMENT

## Why a 5-week Lenten small group on Spiritual Growth?

To help recognize we are all on a spiritual journey, each trying to grow closer to God, each in different ways through different means within different time frames. The Lenten small group study will make us more aware of our journey and encourage us as we encourage others. Each week we study another aspect of the journey to help us sharpen the awareness. There is not one “right” practice, but each of us can actively participate in one or more things that bring us closer to God, other people, and all of God’s creation. This Lent our theme for exploration is called, “Walking Together: Growing Healthy Relationships with God, Family, and Community.”

## How will we do this?

- By getting to know one another
- By supporting one another through listening, sharing, praying, being present to one another
- By discovering meaning in God’s word and applying it to our lives
- By enjoying one another’s uniqueness and appreciating each other’s faith journey

## What are the Lenten small group values?

- We agree to make our meeting a high priority and attend regularly.
- We will pray for one another.
- We will not give advice to one another, attempt to fix or judge one another no matter what is shared, unless we are first asked.
- In order to provide an atmosphere of openness and trust, personal things spoken within our groups will remain within our groups.
- We will strive to become a caring community by sharing our experiences, our struggles, our feelings, our joys, our hurts, and our questions as we may freely decide to do.

## What main topics will be covered?

- Week 1 - Week of Feb. 17 – Walking Together with God: Jesus Meets Us
- Week 2 - Week of Feb. 24 – Walking Together with God: Jesus Calls Us
- Week 3 - Week of Mar. 3 – Walking Together with Family
- Week 4 - Week of Mar. 10 – Walking Together with Community
- Week 5 - Week of Mar. 17 – Continuing to Walk Together with God, Family, & Community

## What will we do each week?

Our meetings will generally follow this flow:

- Opening Prayer
- Bible study on the week’s topic
- Sharing on the week’s topic
- Sharing about last week’s spiritual exercise
- Closing prayer

## What are the Lenten small group practical arrangements?

- Meetings once a week during Lent for 5 weeks, beginning the week of February 17.
- Each session will be approximately 1 1/2 hours long.
- Each session will include scripture study, reflection on the scripture as it applies to your life, and a spiritual exercise for you to try.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP PARTICIPANT GUIDE**  
**RESPECTful Communication Guidelines**  
**and Mutual Invitation**

**RESPECTful Communication Guidelines**

**R** = take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others

**E** = use EMPATHETIC listening

**S** = be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles

**P** = PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak

**E** = EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions

**C** = keep CONFIDENTIALITY

**T** = TRUST ambiguity because we are NOT here to debate who is right or wrong.

**Mutual Invitation Explanation**

In our small group, in order to ensure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak in response to a question, we will proceed in the following way: The facilitator or a designated person will share first. After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share. Who you invite does not need to be the person next to you. After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share. If you have something to say but are not ready yet, say “pass for now” and then invite another to share. You will be invited again later. If you don't want to say anything, simply say "pass" and proceed to invite another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited.

# **SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP PARTICIPANT GUIDE**

## **SESSION ONE: “Walking Together with God: Jesus Meets Us”**

Need: RESPECTful Communication Guidelines, Spiritual Growth Group Agreement, Mutual Invitation Explanation, blank paper for Journey Chart

1. Welcome
2. Prayer
  - a. Take some moments of silence to center yourself before the opening prayer.
3. Introduction
  - a. Share your name, where you live, and how long you have been at Peace Lutheran Church.
  - b. Some basic information about spiritual growth groups:
    - i. Spiritual growth groups are groups of people who come together to encourage their spiritual growth by getting to know one another and sharing their faith journey with each other.
    - ii. Spiritual growth groups have these elements: sharing, study, and prayer.
    - iii. We plan to meet for 1½ hours. It’s important to stick with this schedule. We want to respect each other’s time commitments, so let’s start and end on time.
    - iv. We’ll meet for five sessions only. After that, some of us may choose to continue as a small group, but do not feel you are obligated to continue.
  - c. Review the RESPECTful Communication Guidelines on the previous page. Questions? Do we agree to use these guidelines in our time together?
  - d. Review the Spiritual Growth Group Agreement together. Questions? Sign and date to show your agreement.
4. Openers
  - a. Review the Mutual Invitation Explanation on the previous page. Using the process of mutual invitation, answer this question (facilitator chooses only one of the following two questions to ask the group):
    - i. Do you like to travel? Share why or why not.
    - ii. Are you a tourist or a pilgrim in life, and what does that mean to you?
5. Bible Take-off Point
  - a. At each small group session we will have a Bible take-off point. Today’s is the story of Jesus meeting two disciples on Easter Sunday afternoon as they walk the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. **Read Luke 24:13-35.**
  - b. What are the two disciples talking about as they walk, and what are their feelings about the topic?
  - c. Why do you think they don’t recognize Jesus?
  - d. Do you think these two disciples are “foolish” (as Jesus described them in verse 25) for not understanding the recent turn of events in Jesus’ life? Note: the word “foolish” in Greek is “anoetos,” describing someone who doesn’t comprehend divine things. Would you have been “anoetos” too in the same situation?
  - e. When and how do they finally recognize Jesus?
  - f. How does this experience with Jesus impact their lives? What message are you receiving from God through this story?

6. Sharing

- a. Each of us is on a spiritual journey that involves a process of discovery and growing and questioning and understanding. Let's try an exercise that helps you think about your life, chart significant milestones and experiences, and hopefully, sense God's presence with you on your journey.
- b. Make a Journey Chart:
  - i. Turn an 8 ½ by 11 inch sheet of paper sideways and draw a line the length of the paper from left to right. At the start of the line (on your left) put "birth" and at the end of the line on your right put "today." Divide the line into smaller segments by five or ten year increments, making a vertical short dash, and then write the year above each of these dashes.
  - ii. Mark significant milestones, experiences, and events on the chart. Here are some possibilities to include: baptism date, school graduation dates, beginning of each new job dates, work milestones, marriage date (if married), birth dates of children and grandchildren, deaths of significant people in your life, empty nest date, marriage of children, retirement, illnesses (self or loved ones), and others not listed above.
  - iii. When you look at your Journey Chart, put a star (\*) beside the times that you remember sensing, most intensely, that God was with you. Perhaps you are thinking of another time you sensed God's presence that is not currently a milestone on your chart. Add it to your chart.
- c. Discuss your Journey Chart. Please reflect on the following questions. If you choose, please share your thoughts with the group.
  - i. Were these times of knowing God's presence with you more during moments of happiness or despair?
  - ii. How did God let you know that God was with you?
  - iii. Did you sometimes feel that you were walking down the road of your life alone, without hope or understanding of the situation and suddenly "your eyes were opened" and you "recognized him"?
- d. These Lenten Spiritual Growth Groups are meant to help us explore this stage of our spiritual journey with God. What are your hopes and dreams for these five weeks meeting as a small group? What are your fears?

7. Spiritual Exercise

- a. Each week you'll be given your choice of several possible spiritual exercises or practices, and you'll be invited to try one of them. At the next session, you'll be invited to share about the experience.
- b. Choose one (or more) of the spiritual exercises listed below and commit to try it this week. You may wish to try something in your comfort zone or something outside your comfort zone. The hope is that you may consider incorporating this exercise into the regular rhythm of your life.
  - i. At the end of each day, look back and ponder if there have been times during the day when you sensed God's presence with you. As you go through each day, be open to seeing God's presence in the life of others who share your day with you. You may choose to keep a journal of your "God-moments" during each day.  
OR (see next page)

- ii. Each day this week, find a quiet space and time and sit in silence for 15 minutes. Imagine Jesus is right there beside you, sitting next to you on the couch, listening to you. What do you want to share with him? (joys, blessings, gratitude, praise, frustrations, concerns, needs, confession, hopes, dreams) Now in silence imagine what Jesus is saying back to you.  
OR
- iii. Each day this week, find a quiet space and time and sit in silence for 15 minutes. Imagine Jesus is right there beside you, sitting next to you on the couch, present right there with you. You may choose to repeat a centering word or phrase and meditate on its meaning in your life; for example, “Jesus, you are my savior and Lord,” or “Jesus, I love you and give my life to you,” or “Jesus, forgive me and give me a fresh start.”  
OR
- iv. In Luke 24:27, Jesus “interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.” Commit to reading a small book of the Bible or the same passage of scripture each day, and as you’re reading, consider how Jesus is revealed to you in this piece of scripture. Consider reading 1 John, Philippians, James, Matthew 5-7 (the Sermon on the Mount), or 3 psalms of your choosing from the book of Psalms.

8. Closing Prayer

- a. Offer a prayer in silence for the person sitting on your right, perhaps in light of what the person shared. Say an “amen” as a clue for the next person; continue around the group. Thank the person on your left for his/her prayers.
- b. Facilitator offers final brief word of prayer, bearing in mind today’s small group experience.

# SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP PARTICIPANT GUIDE

## SESSION TWO: “Walking Together with God: Jesus Calls Us”

1. Welcome
2. Prayer
  - a. Take some moments of silence to center yourself before the opening prayer.
3. Openers
  - a. Using the process of mutual invitation, answer the question: From the following list, choose which description is the most like you:

Talkative	or	Quiet
Energetic	or	Calm
Thinker	or	Feeler
Visionary	or	Practical

With this set of personal qualities, are you a likely or unlikely candidate to be called to serve God? Why?
4. Bible Take-off Point
  - a. **Read Luke 19:1-10.** This is a story of Jesus calling the tax collector Zacchaeus.
  - b. Zacchaeus’ life choices, up to the starting point of this story, reveal that worldly success is a high priority. What are a few details in this story that suggest this?
  - c. Why might Zacchaeus have been seen by others in his day as an unlikely candidate for God’s service?
  - d. Why does Zacchaeus climb the tree?
  - e. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem (and eventually to his suffering and death on the cross). Of all the people Jesus could have called out to in that crowded city of Jericho, why do you think he chose Zacchaeus?
  - f. What is Zacchaeus’ reaction to Jesus’ call to come down out of the tree?
  - g. What is Zacchaeus’ response to his time with Jesus?
  - h. In verse 10, Jesus declares, “For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.” In what ways was Zacchaeus “lost”?
  - i. In verse 9, Jesus says to Zacchaeus, “Today salvation has come to this house.” From what is Zacchaeus “saved,” and what does that mean for him?
5. Sharing
  - a. Have you ever felt like an “unlikely” candidate for something God has called you to do, and why?
  - b. Is there a “tree” (an area) in your life you are sitting on right now and watching and observing life from... a tree God might be calling you to come down out of and follow Jesus? What is your “tree,” and why have you climbed up in it?
  - c. How likely or unlikely is it that God will call you at some point to come down out of your “trees” to follow God’s leading into new and unfamiliar territory?
  - d. Notice that Zacchaeus does not stop being a tax collector after Jesus calls him. Sometimes Jesus calls us to a different life or work, but more often Jesus calls us, like Zacchaeus, to live life differently or do our same work differently because of our awareness of God’s presence in our life. What has been true for you?

- e. Now on to a foundational passage for the rest of our small group series:  
**Read 1 Peter 2:4-5, 9-10.** Peter is saying that when Jesus meets us and saves us, we are transformed from “no people” into “a royal priesthood.” That means all of us are called by God to use our personal qualities to love and serve God, our neighbors, and God’s world. Jesus is our Chief Priest, and we are all “priests.” What do you think it means to be a priest?

Here’s Martin Luther’s take on this in one part of his commentary on 1 Peter 2: “Now Christ is the High and Chief Priest anointed by God Himself. He also sacrificed His own body for us, which is the highest function of the priestly office. Then He prayed for us on the cross. In the third place, He also proclaimed the Gospel and taught all people to know God and Him Himself. These three offices He also gave to all of us. Consequently, since He is the Priest and we are His brothers, all Christians have the authority, the command, and the obligation to preach, to come before God to pray for one another, and to offer themselves as a sacrifice to God.”

In other words, Jesus’ work as a priest was to proclaim the good news of God’s love, pray for us, and sacrifice himself for us on the cross. *Our job as priests is also to share the good news of God’s love with others, pray for others, and sacrifice for others by living cross-centered and servant-oriented lives.* We explore in our next sessions these three keys to living faithfully as we walk together with family and community:

- i. Sharing good news
- ii. Prayer for others and
- iii. Sacrifice

If there is time, people may want to comment on these three keys. We will explore their significance for our relationships in the next sessions.

6. Spiritual Exercise

- a. Sharing about last week’s spiritual exercise: Each week you’re invited to share about the spiritual exercise you tried this past week. How was the spiritual exercise you tried? Was it natural or unnatural for you? Easy or difficult? What did you learn? How did you grow? Can you see incorporating this into the pattern of your life? Why or why not?
- b. This week’s spiritual exercise: Choose one (or more) of the spiritual exercises listed below and commit to try it this week. You may wish to try something in your comfort zone or something outside your comfort zone. The hope is that you may consider incorporating this exercise into the regular rhythm of your life.
  - i. As you go through your week, notice the places where you feel unqualified or “unlikely” to be doing what you’re doing. As you notice these places, ask God to show you how you are qualified in God’s eyes.  
OR (see next page)

- ii. In 5e above, we said, “*Our job as priests is also to share the good news of God’s love with others, pray for others, and sacrifice for others by living cross-centered and servant-oriented lives.*” Reflect this week on this statement. How are you sharing God’s love with others, praying for others, and sacrificing for others by living cross-centered and servant-oriented lives? How are you not doing these things? Write down 3 ways you’re living out this calling, and write down 3 ways you hope to grow in this calling. Pray for guidance and help as you seek to grow.  
OR
- iii. Practice being attentive to your life by using the ancient spiritual exercise called the Examen. Every evening, alone or with a partner, reflect on your highs and lows (moments of consolation and desolation) for the day. Your highs are the times you felt joy or promise or fulfillment or a deep sense of God’s presence. Your lows are the times you felt despair or disappointment or regret or a sense of God’s absence. After sharing, lift up a prayer offering your highs and lows to God. Over the week, let this exercise help you be more attuned to God’s presence in your life.

7. Closing Prayer

- a. Offer a prayer in silence for the person sitting on your right, perhaps in light of what the person shared. Say an “amen” as a clue for the next person; continue around the group. Thank the person on your left for his/her prayers.
- b. Say the Lord’s Prayer together.

# SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP PARTICIPANT GUIDE

## SESSION THREE: “Walking Together with Family”

Need: Bible Passages for Learning

1. Welcome
2. Prayer
  - a. Take some moments of silence to center yourself before the opening prayer.
3. Openers
  - a. Using the process of mutual invitation: Share one of the greatest blessings or gifts of being part of your family, and share one of the struggles or disappointments of being part of your family.
4. Bible Take-off Point
  - a. Take a moment to refresh your memory. Last week we read in scripture (1 Peter 2) that God has made us priests, and we said, our job as priests is to share the good news of God’s love with others, pray for others, and sacrifice for others by living cross-centered and servant-oriented lives. Keep this in mind as we read today’s Bible passage.
  - b. **Read Ruth 1:1-19a.** This is the story of Ruth and Naomi. The entire book of Ruth focuses on a single family. Background information: Judah is the land in which the Hebrew people live who worship the God of Israel. Moab is not Hebrew territory. The Hebrew people looked on the Moabites as pagans since they worshiped other gods; in fact, Moabite women were considered immoral by many Hebrew people. For more background on this, **read Numbers 25:1-3.** Naomi is Hebrew from Judah. Ruth is Moabite and not originally a faithful worshiper of the Lord. In addition, the Old Testament describes the three most vulnerable groups of people of the day as widows, orphans, and strangers.
  - c. Why does Naomi ask her two daughters-in-law to leave her and go back to their mothers’ homes?
  - d. Orpah returns to her family, while Ruth remains with Naomi. Which decision is the most surprising? Most expected? Why?
  - e. What is significant about Ruth’s decision?
  - f. What qualities does Ruth show in her relationship with her mother-in-law Naomi?
  - g. Talk about some of the characteristics of this family. What are some of their joys and struggles? How did each of the women—Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth—cope with stressful circumstances?
  - h. Last week we said that sharing good news, prayer for others, and sacrifice are three keys to living faithfully as we walk together with family. Where in this story do you see any of these three elements—sharing the good news of God’s love, prayer for others, and sacrifice? Explain.
5. Sharing
  - a. Let’s think of family as those people you love and are close to you. Family does not only have to be blood relatives; family may include close friends.
  - b. Think about the people you would call your family. What are some of the characteristics of your family?

- c. What has been stressful for you recently? Did you cope like Naomi, Orpah, or Ruth? How so?
- d. Last week we became acquainted with three keys to living faithfully as we walk together with family: sharing good news, prayer for others, and sacrifice.
  - i. In your family, how have you experienced sharing the good news of God's love?
  - ii. In your family, how have you experienced prayer for others?
  - iii. In your family, how have you experienced sacrifice?
  - iv. How important are these three qualities—sharing God's love, prayer, and sacrifice—for strong healthy families? What other qualities are important?
- e. What areas are strong and healthy in your family? What areas are weaker and need growth in your family? What role can you play in strengthening the relationships in your family?
- f. What is your greatest prayer for your family?

6. Spiritual Exercise

- a. Sharing about last week's spiritual exercise: How was the spiritual exercise you tried? Was it natural or unnatural for you? Easy or difficult? What did you learn? How did you grow? Can you see incorporating this into the pattern of your life? Why or why not?
- b. This week's spiritual exercise: Choose one (or more) of the spiritual exercises listed below and commit to try it this week. You may wish to try something in your comfort zone or something outside your comfort zone. The hope is that you may consider incorporating this exercise into the regular rhythm of your life.
  - i. This week, choose a verse from scripture that means something special to you as you think about your calling to love and serve your family. This verse may give you values, needed direction, assurance, comfort, challenge, etc. You may choose one from the list of Bible Passages for Learning on the next pages or find one on your own. Memorize this verse and recall it to mind often in your relationships.  
OR
  - ii. Write a letter to God thanking God in detail for the blessings and gifts that come through your relationships with your family.  
OR
  - iii. Think about your family and close friends and how they have communicated to you their love and support. Think of a way to express your thankfulness to them, and do it, this week.  
OR
  - iv. Choose two or three Christian hymns or songs that encourage you or strengthen you as you think about your relationships with your family. Think closely about the words and let them sink into your being. You may choose to memorize a verse or two and sing it throughout the week. How does music nurture you in faith and remind you of the faithful presence of God with you and your family? (If you need some help, here are some hymns you may use: "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" Burgundy Book Hymn 283, "Thank You, Lord" Burgundy Book Hymn 293, "We've Come This Far By Faith" Burgundy Book Hymn 197, "Just a Closer Walk with Thee" Burgundy Book Hymn 253, etc.)

7. Closing Prayer

- a. Offer a prayer in silence for the person sitting on your right, perhaps in light of what the person shared. Say an “amen” as a clue for the next person; continue around the group. Thank the person on your left for his/her prayers.
- b. Facilitator offers final brief word of prayer, bearing in mind today’s small group experience.

## BIBLE PASSAGES FOR LEARNING

1. Micah 6:8            He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?
2. Joshua 24:15        Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve... but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.
3. Psalm 27:14         Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!
4. Job 19:25            For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth.
5. Numbers 6:24b-26    The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.
6. Amos 5:24           But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.
7. Isaiah 40:31        Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.
8. 1 Samuel 16:7       But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."
9. Psalm 19:14         Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.
10. 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.
11. Proverbs 9:10      The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.
12. Psalm 119:105     Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.
13. John 3:16           "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."
14. Matthew 22:37-40    Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."
15. John 4:24           "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

16. Acts 5:29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than any human authority.”
17. Matthew 6:24 “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”
18. 1 John 4:19 We love because he first loved us.
19. Psalm 37:5 Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.
20. Psalm 50:15 Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.
21. Matthew 7:7 “Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.”
22. Psalm 122:1 I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord!”
23. Psalm 121:7-8 The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and for evermore.
24. James 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.
25. James 1:2-3 My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance.
26. Matthew 22:21 “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”
27. Matthew 5:7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.”
28. Matthew 5:44-45 “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.”
29. Matthew 7:12 “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.”
30. Matthew 5:8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”
31. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.
32. Matthew 19:5-6 “‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

33. 1 Timothy 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.
34. Proverbs 22:1 A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.
35. Matthew 7:1-2 “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.”
36. 1 Peter 4:8 Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.
37. Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
38. Revelation 2:10b Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.
39. 1 Corinthians 13:13 And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.
40. Colossians 3:14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.
41. Joshua 1:9 I hereby command you: “Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”
42. John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”
43. Psalm 145:15-16 The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.
44. Psalm 103:1-2 Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits.
45. Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
46. John 10:30 Jesus said, “The Father and I are one.”
47. Philippians 2:7b-8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.
48. Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.
49. 1 Corinthians 15:19-20 If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.

50. John 1:29           The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”
51. 1 John 1:7           If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.
52. Matthew 16:24-25       Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”
53. 2 Corinthians 5:17       So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!
54. Galatians 3:28       There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.
55. 2 Corinthians 4:7       But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.
56. Ephesians 2:8-9       For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast.
57. Matthew 5:16        “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”
58. Matthew 26:41        “Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”
59. John 10:14-15        “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.”
60. 1 Timothy 6:12        Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.
61. Revelation 21:4       He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.
62. Revelation 3:20       “Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.”
63. Matthew 11:28        “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”
64. Romans 8:28         We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.
65. John 13:34            “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

# SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP PARTICIPANT GUIDE

## SESSION FOUR: “Walking Together with Community”

1. Welcome
2. Prayer
  - a. Take some moments of silence to center yourself before the opening prayer.
3. Openers
  - a. Using the process of mutual invitation, answer this question: What do you like most and what do you like least about living in Tacoma (or your community)?
8. Bible Take-off Point
  - a. Take a moment to refresh your memory. Two weeks ago we read in scripture (1 Peter 2) that God has made us priests, and we said, our job as priests is to share the good news of God’s love with others, pray for others, and sacrifice for others by living cross-centered and servant-oriented lives. Keep this in mind as we read today’s Bible passage.
  - b. **Read Mark 6:30-44.** This is Mark’s telling of the story of the feeding of the 5000. Answer these questions briefly to get the gist of the story:
    - i. Why does the crowd follow Jesus?
    - ii. What is the problem once everybody is there?
    - iii. What is the human response to the problem?
    - iv. What is Jesus’ response to the problem?
    - v. What is the outcome of Jesus’ action?
  - c. What does this story teach us about God?
  - d. Think about a few of the details of this story: “all ate and were filled” (verse 42) and “they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish” (verse 43). Read these two statements. What do you think?
    - i. “With Jesus, there is always enough for all,” and
    - ii. “With Jesus, there is always more than enough for all.”
  - e. What do you think causes the disciples to focus on the problems of their situation rather than its possibilities?
  - f. Notice that in Mark’s telling of this story, Jesus gives the loaves of bread to the disciples to distribute to the people. What does this story teach us about our part in Jesus’ work?
  - g. What does this story teach us about walking together in community?
  - h. We have said that sharing good news, prayer for others, and sacrifice are three keys to living faithfully as we walk together with community. Where in this story do you see any of these three elements—sharing the good news of God’s love, prayer for others, and sacrifice? Explain.
  - i. **Read Jeremiah 29:7 and Micah 6:8-9.** What do these passages suggest about living in the city and serving God in the community?
9. Sharing
  - a. Where or how have you seen or experienced the grace-filled activity of God in your life? In the community?
  - b. When it comes to serving God in the community, from your experience, what causes people often to focus on problems rather than possibilities?

- c. What is the difference between living out of a worldview of abundance vs. a worldview of scarcity?
- d. Last week we talked about three keys to living faithfully as we walk together with family: sharing good news, prayer for others, and sacrifice. Let's apply these three keys as we walk together in community.
  - i. In the community, how have you experienced sharing the good news of God's love?
  - ii. In the community, how have you experienced prayer for others?
  - iii. In the community, how have you experienced sacrifice?
  - iv. How important are these three qualities—sharing God's love, prayer, and sacrifice—for a strong healthy community? What other qualities are important?
- e. Focusing on possibilities in the community has sometimes been called an “asset-based approach to community development.” Community development is going beyond a hand out to a hand up for people, going beyond charity to coming alongside people so they become self-reliant, preserving people's dignity and honor. What areas are strong and healthy in the community? What areas are weaker and need growth in the community? An asset-based approach builds on the strengths and gifts of the community to meet particular needs rather than identifying needs first and trying to find resources to address them. Can you think of one way Peace Lutheran Church can build on its strengths and gifts to meet a community need?
- f. What role can you play in strengthening the community?
- g. What is your greatest prayer for the community?

#### 4. Spiritual Exercise

- a. Sharing about last week's spiritual exercise: How was the spiritual exercise you tried? Was it natural or unnatural for you? Easy or difficult? What did you learn? How did you grow? Can you see incorporating this into the pattern of your life? Why or why not?
- b. This week's spiritual exercise: Choose one (or more) of the spiritual exercises listed below and commit to try it this week. You may wish to try something in your comfort zone or something outside your comfort zone. The hope is that you may consider incorporating this exercise into the regular rhythm of your life.
  - i. Choose two or three Christian hymns or songs that have to do with seeking the well-being of our community and serving our neighbor. Think closely about the words and let them sink into your being. You may choose to memorize a verse or two and sing it throughout the week. How does music nurture you in faith and help orient you in serving God by serving God's people and God's creation? (If you need some help, here are some hymns you may use: “Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service” Red Book Hymn 712, “We Are Called” Red Book Hymn 720, “Gather Us In” Red Book Hymn 532, “Christ, Be Our Light” Red Book Hymn 715, “All Are Welcome” Red Book Hymn 641, etc.)  
OR (see next page)

ii. Spend some time in silence, and reflect in prayer on the five most important things on your heart that concern you about our neighborhood, community, or world. Pray this prayer each day for one week. Hold these concerns in your heart throughout each day. Reflect: What is God doing with these concerns? What is God doing within you as you pray these concerns?

OR

iii. Think about your gifts and passions when it comes to the community. Look for an injustice at home, work, church, the neighborhood, or the world that connects with your gifts and passion, one need you see as most urgent or compelling, one that most deeply arouses your compassion. Educate yourself on the issue or concern. Examine how you yourself might be participating in that injustice without knowing it. Then take some action. Even though the needs in our world may feel overwhelming, we can choose one thing and do something about it to make a difference.

5. Closing Prayer

- a. Offer a prayer in silence for the person sitting on your right, perhaps in light of what the person shared. Say an “amen” as a clue for the next person; continue around the group. Thank the person on your left for his/her prayers.
- b. Say the Lord’s Prayer together. Pause after each line and ponder its meaning. Pay particular attention to the lines “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,” and think about what that means in our neighborhood and community.

# SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP PARTICIPANT GUIDE

## SESSION FIVE: “Continuing to Walk Together with God, Family, & Community: The Way of Jesus”

Need: Paper and pens for reflection time. Distribute as people arrive.

1. Welcome
2. Prayer
  - a. Take some moments of silence to center yourself before the opening prayer.
3. Openers
  - a. Using the process of mutual invitation, answer this question: When you were a child, which of these behaviors was most your “style”?
    - i. Frequently initiated daring acts.
    - ii. Usually followed someone else who initiated daring acts.
    - iii. Hesitated to do daring things.Have you ever dreamed of doing something that would be very daring for you to do? Share with the group. Did you do it? If not, what kept you from doing it?
4. Lectio Divina (Divine Reading)
  - a. In the season of Lent, we journey with Jesus to the cross where he is crucified, and we experience the amazing depth of God’s love for us and our broken world. Lent is often a time when people choose to “give up” what might be distracting them from a closer relationship with God and to “take on” what might help them grow closer to God. In so doing, some of these changes may be incorporated into life year-round. Lent can be a time to think of the big picture and to seek to get our priorities in line with God’s priorities.

Jesus is our Lord and Savior, and at the same time, he is our model for loving and serving others. He goes before us to show us the way. **Read 1 Corinthians 12:27.** The apostle Paul tells the church—us—that we are the body of Christ in the world. We are Jesus’ hands and feet doing his work in word and deed. Today we will look at a story from Matthew’s Gospel about Jesus’ attitude toward others and his mission in the world, and this will help us think about our attitude toward others and commitment as we seek to do our part for God’s mission in the world. **Read Philippians 2:5.** It is good for us to pray, as Paul writes, to “have the same mind in us that was in Christ Jesus” as we seek to grow closer to God and more faithfully serve our family and community.

As we read the story from Matthew 9, we’ll use a process of reflecting on scripture called *lectio divina*, or “divine reading.” You may choose to incorporate this process for reflecting on scripture with other small groups or Bible studies or in your personal devotional time (although it works better in groups). The passage will be read three different times, each with a different question to hold in your mind and heart during the reading. Following each reading, there will be an opportunity to share using mutual invitation.

- b. Step 1: **Read aloud Matthew 9:35-38.** Listen for God’s Word as it touches your life - notice a word, a phrase, or image that “shimmers” – that jumps out at you or sticks with you.
  - i. Your word, phrase, or image: \_\_\_\_\_
  - ii. Share your selection with the group without commenting on it.
- c. Step 2: Read the scripture passage aloud a second time using a different reader. Notice some feeling or experience in relation to the word, phrase, metaphor or image that you selected in Step 1.
  - i. Your feeling or experience: \_\_\_\_\_
  - ii. Each person shares a second time their feeling or experience. Accept sharing without discussion; use “I” and “me” language – avoid we, us, and you. Be comfortable with silence. Listen and receive another’s story as a gift.
- d. Step 3: Another person read the scripture a third time. Ask, “What is God inviting me to do, be, or change with this reading? Am I being called to some action - now in this setting, in my relationships with family, community, work, leisure?”
  - i. Take 10 minutes for reflection, journaling, art, or prayer. This step is done in silence.
  - ii. Share any beckonings to action or decision.

5. More Sharing

- a. Following Jesus is often about taking risks for the kingdom of God. Recently has there been something you believe God has been calling you to risk doing, maybe in your relationship with God or your family or in your service to the community? (Maybe this risk is connected with the “beckoning” or call to action you talked about in the last section; maybe not.) What are the risks? What are the blessings?
- b. What sometimes holds you back from stepping out in faith? When you have taken risks on your spiritual journey, what has helped you to step out in faith?
- c. What is the difference between having compassion for others (like Jesus) and feeling sorry for them?
- d. Jesus preaches and teaches, and he also cares for and cures. His ministry is one of word and deed, meeting spiritual and physical/social needs. The church is called to a ministry of *evangelism* (*evangelism* = sharing the good news of Jesus through loving word) and a ministry of *compassion* and *justice* (*compassion* = empathizing, caring, and reaching out to help those in need through loving action, and *justice* = seeking to make right what is wrong in community in the direction of dignity and fairness for all through loving action). What is one specific way God might be calling you to share the good news of Jesus through loving word? (Note: Using loving words may simply mean sharing words of encouragement, hope, or comfort.) What is one specific way God might be calling you to care for others or fix something wrong in our community through loving action? (Note: Using loving actions may simply mean sharing a hug, smile, or helping hand.)
- e. **Final thought:** The faith community, the church, at its best can be what someone has called a “holding environment,” a safe place in which people can give voice to our confusion and hurt, our fears and anxieties, our hopes and dreams, our risky ideas and felt callings from God. Small groups, like this one, can be a place of trust where we find empathetic and wise listeners who encourage and challenge us to step out in trust to serve God.

6. Spiritual Exercise

- a. Sharing about last week's spiritual exercise: How was the spiritual exercise you tried? Was it natural or unnatural for you? Easy or difficult? What did you learn? How did you grow? Can you see incorporating this into the pattern of your life? Why or why not?
- b. Think back on these five weeks. How have these sessions helped you grow in faith or become more aware of God's presence in your life?
- c. Into the future, think about the spiritual exercises we tried during these five weeks. What practice(s) might you incorporate into the pattern of your life so you might keep growing in your relationship with God? Try "stepping out on faith" and in the future, reflect on your feelings and the results of your stepping out.

7. Closing Prayer

- a. Offer a prayer in silence for the person sitting on your right, perhaps in light of what the person shared. Say an "amen" as a clue for the next person; continue around the group. Thank the person on your left for his/her prayers.
- b. Each person complete the phrase, "Thank you God for..." and offer each petition one by one, with the facilitator closing the prayer.

8. Encouragement for the Journey

- a. God's blessings as you continue the journey with God! Keep in mind Jesus' words from **Matthew 28:20**: "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age," and the psalmist's words in **Psalms 121:7-8**: "The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and for evermore."