ONE STORY CHURCH YEAR

Small Group Discussion Guide

This week's scripture readings are heavy on instructions, rules, and laws. There is also promise! We hear it in the 10 Commandments: I am the Lord your God. There is a place for the law but life is found in grace and promise.

Week Six: Law & Gospel

Exodus 16-31; Ephesians 4-6; Philippians 1-2; Psalms 133, 109, 90

The Small Group: Its Purpose

Faith matures and deepens in community. Small groups are places to develop faith-based relationships, explore questions, and find support for the journey. Discussion guides contain elements that will help group members get to know each other, reflect on the ONE readings, and pray together. The covenant of the small group is to be encouraging, confidential, and open to the wonderings and assurances that arise from reading scripture.

This Week's Readings: Some Notes

Exodus 16-31 starts off with some engaging narratives about life in the wilderness, the usual whining of "I'm hungry!" that happens on a trip, and God's provision in the form of manna, quail, fresh water. Moses learns from his father-in-law how to delegate. This section of reading provides the journey to Mt. Sinai and the giving of the 10 Commandments. Some of the chapters are tediously full of instruction, particularly on building the tabernacle. Underneath all of it, though, is God's covenantal relationship with Israel.

In Ephesians, chapters 4-6 emphasize living in ways that align with the Gospel, which is unifying. It connects individuals to each other in community and there is a mutuality required to communal living. There is an insistence that the Gospel changes how we live.

Philippians is one of the undisputed letters of Paul, written while he was in prison. It begins with thanksgiving for the congregation in Philippi and the faith that God has given to them. Paul speaks in a deeply personal manner of his relationship with Christ, which is also the source of his relationship with the Philippians. Chapter 2 contains a section known as the "Christ hymn" that focuses on the self-giving love of Jesus.

Connecting: Take Time to Get to Know Each Other

Continue to get to know each other. When have you felt the most free in life?

Praying: Entrusting All Things to God

Designate someone in your group to open in prayer. If members have joys and concerns to share, include those things, too.

Discussing and Studying: Digging In

The Bible study portion for these small group studies focuses on Sunday's preaching texts, but feel free to dig into what you have been reading. What did you read in the last week that surprised you?
What challenged you? What bothered you?
What sounded like good news? What did you find out about God? About yourself?
You could spend your whole discussion time just on these questions. If you like more structure, use the questions below. Some groups may want to go more deeply into the Bible readings; refer to the resource section for more.
Invite someone to read out loud Exodus 20:1-17 and Ephesians 4:1-7. Use the questions below to assist your discussion and study.

1. What are some initial reactions you have to these readings?
2. If you heard this week's sermon, with what did you resonate? What did you wonder? How did it help or hinder your understanding of these texts?
3. Of all the verses included in this week's readings, the above verses are what were chosen for preaching texts. What connections do you see in these texts? What would you have chosen if you were the preacher?
4. There is a human tendency to use rules/commandments/the law against others, pointing out when they are in the wrong. Yet, the commandments are directed at you. How do you feel when you hear them?
5. In Lutheran tradition, scripture holds two kinds of words for us: Law and Gospel. Law is defined as that which orders, protects, and preserves life. It also drives us to Christ, because it reveals our sin and we find that we need forgiveness. In other words, law is good and helpful, but it does not save us. Law is directed at you and is something that you must do. Gospel, on the other hand, is passive for you but active for God. It is God's work in Christ to reconcile you to God through forgiveness of sins and eternal life. It is already done. The Gospel frees you and relieves you of any need to prove or redeem yourself. Reflect on these two types of words and if they resonate for you as you read the Bible.
6. Promise is another way to describe the Gospel. The 10 Commandments actually begin with a promise: I am the Lord your God. This is a declaration! God does not ask permission to be a person God; God simply declares. How does this declaration to be your God challenge or delight you?
7. In Ephesians, we are invited to lead a life worthy of the Gospel. How can we?! Yet, there is a promise in these verses. Verse 7: But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. The measure of Christ's gift is complete and the promise is that you have been given grace. We live not in the hope that we will be given grace, but that it is already given. Already! What is the difference between walking around in the world with the potential for God's love and mercy vs. the promise and assurance of already having God's love and mercy?
8. Any other thoughts on these texts? Tap into study Bibles and other resources to expand your discussion.

Wrapping up

Share closing thoughts and a prayer and/or one of the week's psalms as a benediction for your time together.

Additional Resources

The Bible Project: https://bibleproject.com/
This site has many videos and other resouces that your group may find beneficial for book overviews and context. These videos are short but comprehensive. Specific videos that pertain to this week's readings are:
Exodus 1-18
Ephesians

Luther Seminary: Enter the Bible
Summary of Exodus
Summary of Galatians
Summary of Ephesians