

Series Introduction

The Bible is the written word of God. God has spoken and continues to speak to us through the variety and richness of scripture. Exploring books of the Bible opens us to the great, overarching story of God bringing forgiveness, healing, and new life to all creation.

Inspired by God's Spirit, the writers of the books of the Bible wrote from a faith perspective. Their purpose was to pass on the faith. Through scripture, God speaks to us to create and sustain faith. As we read and study the Bible together, God works in and through us. We "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). The Spirit draws us *together by grace* and sends us into God's work of bringing all things *together by grace*.



God, who is rich in mercy, . . . made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved. Ephesians 2:4-5

GOALS

Together by Grace: Bible Conversations has three goals for bringing people together.

1. Gather together regularly, building and strengthening relationships with one another.

Together by Grace builds community by strengthening relationships within the group and with others in the congregation and the surrounding neighborhood.

2. Dwell together in God's word, seeking what it means for us, our faith community, and the world.

Together by Grace enables adults, whether new or long-time Bible students, to read and discuss scripture together. Sessions focus on reading the Bible—not reading *about* the Bible—to spark stimulating thoughts, ideas, and conversations.

3. Engage faith together, loving and serving God and our neighbors in daily life.

Together by Grace inspires participants to respond to the good news of God's grace by loving and serving God and neighbor in the congregation, community, and world. Participants can invite others to attend a session and try it out.

To assist groups and congregations in meeting these goals, convenience and flexibility are built into the series:

- ♦ New groups as well as existing groups (for example, Bible study groups, church council, committees) can take part in the series.
- ♦ Facilitator guides are available in print and downloadable digital versions.
- ♦ Participant guides are available in print booklets and downloadable digital enlarged print versions.
- ♦ Sessions require no preparation by participants. Preparation time for facilitators is minimal.
- ♦ Sessions are suitable for time frames of 45 to 90 minutes.
- ♦ Groups can meet at times and locations (homes, coffee shops, meeting rooms at church, online, and so on) that are most convenient for them.

The facilitator guides provide tips in each session for time frames of different lengths and for groups that are held completely online or in a hybrid format (some participants online and some on-site).

BIBLE TRANSLATION

Together by Grace uses the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVue), although other translations may be used in the sessions. The most recent Bible translation, the NRSVue reflects current scholarship and interpretation, including scholars and perspectives from marginalized communities.

If you have a copy of the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition or *Lutheran Study Bible, Second Edition*, read the sections called “To the Reader” and “Preface to the NRSV Updated Edition.” These articles provide insight into why and how this updated Bible edition came to be. Almost every Bible translation or version has this kind of introductory article. It’s important to know who is responsible for the translation and what it aims to be and do. You can also find out more about the NRSVue by exploring this website: friendshippress.org/pages/about-the-nrsvue.

The facilitator and participant guides include the full NRSVue scripture text for each session.

SESSION FLOW

The Bible conversations you share in Together by Grace sessions do not simply relay information—they provide opportunities for adults to engage with the Bible and to build relationships in ways that connect with daily life and transform lives. Together by grace, participants grow in faith and in love and service to God and neighbor.

Each session has three components: Gather, Dwell, and Engage. Sessions are designed for 45 to 90 minutes.

1. Gather (15 to 30 minutes)

Participants check in with each other, pray together, and enjoy community-building activities.

2. Dwell (20 to 40 minutes)

This is the heart of the session. Participants hear the text read, take time to reflect and respond, and then go deeper into scripture. After the scripture text is read aloud, the group spends a few moments in silence, then participants respond to open-ended questions that encourage them to share initial thoughts, feelings, and questions about the text. Sometimes called “dwelling in the word,” this practice is similar to *lectio divina*, a traditional monastic way of reading and reflecting on scripture. Each voice is heard and respected, creating a safe environment for learning and discussion.

Through this process, participants become engaged with the text and naturally begin to seek more information. The participant and facilitator guides provide information and questions that lead the group into further discussion about the scripture text.

Together by Grace and *Lutheran Study Bible, Second Edition* (Augsburg Fortress, 2025) view the Bible with four lenses. Together these lenses provide a unique way of engaging with scripture, helping participants to dig deeply into the texts and to hear what God is calling individuals, the group, the church, or the world to do or to be.



Faith reflection places everyone on a level playing field and requires no prior knowledge or experience with the Bible.



World of the Bible explores people, places, and events mentioned in the Bible, as well as why and when a particular book might have been written.



Bible concepts focus on broader themes and insights that appear throughout the Bible.



Lutheran perspectives use the teachings, insights, and practices of Martin Luther and others to help with reading and interpreting the Bible.

3. Engage (10 to 20 minutes)

“Word and Service” prompts help participants begin to integrate what they have learned into daily life. “Worship and Prayer” prompts provide ways to wrap up conversation and send everyone into the week ahead. “Suggestions for Going Deeper” provide ideas for optional activities, study, and journaling between sessions.

Group Dynamics

ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR

The facilitator’s main role in Together by Grace groups is to guide conversation and to encourage everyone to participate in the activities and discussion. The facilitator guide provides background information, instructions, and tips for carrying out this role in each session.

Here are some general tips for guiding discussion:

- ◆ Seek balanced sharing across the group, giving everyone an opportunity to speak.
- ◆ Encourage and affirm all contributions to the discussion.
- ◆ Allow enough silence after questions or conversation prompts to give people time to think and reflect.
- ◆ Respect everyone’s right to pass on a question. Avoid putting anyone on the spot or pressuring someone to speak.
- ◆ Occasionally invite participants to discuss questions or conversation prompts in groups of two or three. This smaller setting is more comfortable for some and allows more time for each person to speak.
- ◆ Before moving on to another topic, ask whether anyone else has something to add.
- ◆ If someone is dominating the conversation, redirect discussion by raising a new question or inviting responses from others.

In addition, the facilitator ensures that a meeting space is available with comfortable seating for all, and that each session starts and ends on time. Often one or two participants are willing to take responsibility for preparing the meeting space and for timekeeping.

ROLE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The Gather, Dwell, and Engage process follows five guidelines.

1. Love and respect one another as beloved children of God.

Participants maintain a friendly and respectful atmosphere and seek to better understand and learn from other points of view.

2. Balance our listening and speaking so that all voices may be heard.

Participants encourage everyone to join in the activities and discussion, listen respectfully when others are speaking, and avoid monopolizing the conversation.

3. Treat conversations in the group as sacred, meaning that what is shared helps build community and strengthens the faith of others.

Participants and the group as a whole are open to growing, healing, and changing through this experience and the encounter with scripture. Confidential information that is shared with the group is kept confidential.

4. Pray for one another as a caring community in Christ.

Participants pray for everyone in the group during the week, building community and growing in faith and in love for one another.

5. Invite and welcome others to join us on this journey.

Participants consider inviting others to sessions and welcome newcomers to the group.

IN-PERSON, ONLINE, AND HYBRID GROUPS

Together by Grace: Bible Conversations can be used by in-person, online, and hybrid groups. (Hybrid groups have some people who are on-site and some who are online.)

Groups meeting in person: To encourage good conversation flow, we recommend sitting around a table or in chairs arranged in a circle.

Groups meeting online: Check to make sure everyone receives accurate instructions for how to join the meeting from their computers or mobile devices. Designate someone who will monitor the chat feature while the facilitator guides conversation. Agree as a group on some type of signal to use when you have a question or comment.

Hybrid groups: All the recommendations for online groups (above) apply here too. In addition, avoid the temptation to focus the conversation on those who are on-site. Make efforts throughout every session to draw in those who join the meeting online.



Group Covenant

OUR GOALS

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- ♦ Dwell together in God's word, seeking what it means for us, our faith community, and the world.
- ♦ Engage faith together, loving and serving God and our neighbors in daily life.

OUR GUIDELINES

- ♦ We agree to love and respect one another as beloved children of God.
- ♦ We agree to balance our listening and speaking so that all voices may be heard.
- ♦ We agree to treat conversations in the group as sacred, meaning that what is shared helps build community and strengthens the faith of others.
- ♦ We agree to pray for one another as a caring community in Christ.
- ♦ We agree to invite and welcome others to join us on this journey.

