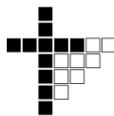




FUELING THE GLOBAL GROWTH OF THE CHURCH
————— FALL GROWTH GROUP SERIES —————



St. Luke Lutheran Church

Fall Growth Group Study

Our Growth Groups represent a crucial component of our ministry. Along with a practice of committed worship and regular personal Bible reading, participation in this group will help you to do two things:

- Grow in *Knowing the Peace and the Power of the Cross*
- Grow in a desire and ability to share your faith in Jesus

In our fall series we will consider what fuels the growth of the Church worldwide. While we obviously understand that the Holy Spirit leads people to faith, is it possible to identify other common characteristics at work where the Church is expanding?

The reports of the demise of the Christian church are overblown. Jesus said, “I will build my church and the gates of Hades cannot prevail against it.” We may see attendance and participation decline in America, but world-wide the Church continues to expand. During our time together we will consider aspects of the Church where it is expanding and prayerfully contemplate how those aspects might impact our little corner of the Kingdom.

- WATCH INTRODUCTION VIDEO -

Session Overview

Session	Central Teaching
Session I <i>Deity of Jesus</i>	Jesus is true God and true man
Session II <i>Sacrifice</i>	Following Jesus often leads to persercution
Session III <i>Orthodoxy</i>	The church defends ortrhodox teachings
Session IV <i>Supernaturalism</i>	God can and does work in supernatural ways

Videos for the Study

The videos for this study are available at the Information Center at both Meridian and Christ Campus. The videos are also available at www.knowingjesus.org/ministries/growth-groups.

Service + Fellowship

Along with gathering for studies, Growth Groups should care for the people in the group (service) and gather together as a group to enjoy life together (fellowship).

Service Ideas	Fellowship Ideas
Who needs encouragement in your Growth Group? Speak an encouraging word to this person.	Gather together as a Growth Group for a fall campfire or Thanksgiving celebration.
Who needs an act of kindness or generosity in your Growth Group? Make a meal or give a small gift to that person/family.	Attend an event (sporting event, play, concert) together.
Who needs help in your Growth Group? Use your unique gifts to help that person/family.	Organize a “Progressive Dinner” with your Growth Group. (If you don’t know what this is, Google it).
Who needs your time? Make some time to meet with and pray for a person in your Growth Group.	Celebrate the birthday of somebody in your Growth Group!

Session I: Deity of Jesus

PRAYER

Have someone lead your group in prayer.

DISCUSS

- Where have you seen the Church grow? What draws and keeps you connected to Jesus and his Church?
- What do you think contributes to the Church's struggle to grow in America?

In the video you will learn more about the following:

First Characteristic: *Where the Church is growing, there is a very high view of Jesus. He is understood to be truly man and truly God.*

WATCH SESSION #1 VIDEO

CONVERSATION

Dan Kimball wrote They Like Jesus but Not the Church. The book discussed weaknesses within the American Church which repel people from the Church. He offered good insights.

But he did not explore who "the Jesus" was that people liked. When we hear about people generally "liking Jesus," the Jesus they like may have little similarity to the Jesus of the Bible.

What do you think average Americans think about Jesus? How would they answer the question he posed to the disciples, "Who do people say I am?"

Fueling Global Growth: One aspect of the growing Church is a very high view of Jesus. Jesus is understood to be not only true man but also true God. He is also understood to be a God unlike the various gods of mythology and ancestor worship.

DIG IN

Read the following passages and discuss how they help us view Jesus properly. How do they help you view Jesus as “Other?”

- 1 John 4:1-5
- Matthew 2
- Mark 4:35-41
- John 14:1-7

Martha was a close friend of Jesus. Sometimes she got it wrong; she was busy serving Jesus when she should have been listening. But sometimes she got it right. Read John 11:17-27 and discuss Martha’s “high view” of Jesus.

Fueling Growth Locally: How can a “higher understanding” of Jesus motivate you to share him with others? What would you like someone else to know about Jesus?

... *and Love...*

Love serves to identify the Church. Jesus’ command for his followers was to love. One of the ancients said of the early members of the Church, “See how they love one another.” Because love is so lovely in a hate filled world, it serves to attract others.

Love is expressed in various ways. Each of our sessions will conclude with an encouragement to express God’s love more intentionally to others around you, those inside and outside the congregation.

One of the ways that love is expressed is through **verbalization**. It is important to say OUT LOUD, “I love you.” Proverbs 25:11 tells us that “*a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.*” Who could benefit from words of love and kindness from you? Take a moment, think, and then write down the name of someone to whom you want to give verbal encouragement.

WRAPPING UP

Share prayer requests and then have someone lead in prayer.

Session II: Sacrifice

PRAYER

Have someone lead your group in prayer.

DISCUSS

- Think of someone (friend, sibling, child) who used to be involved in the Church but has drifted away? Why do you think that is?
- Does that person still identify as a Christian? How Biblical is that person's understanding of Jesus?

In the video you will learn more about the following:

Second Characteristic: *Where the Church is growing there is a high incidence of sacrificial living.*

WATCH SESSION #2 VIDEO

CONVERSATION

Jesus said, "*Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*" (Matthew 5:11-12) Paul wrote, "*In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*" (II Timothy 3:12)

The Ancient Church father Tertullian wrote:

Kill us, torture us, condemn us, grind us to dust; your injustice is the proof that we are innocent... The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed.
Apology, 50

What do you think average American Christians sacrifice or suffer for the faith?

Fueling Global Growth: Another aspect of the growing Church is the experience of people making sacrifices to follow Jesus. In many parts of the world when someone comes to faith in Christ, family connections are lost, careers are ruined, places of residence are forsaken. Where Christians live lives of sacrifice through persecution, there the Church grows.

DIG IN

Read the following passages and discuss how they help us think about persecution and suffering.

- Matthew 10:16-39
- Luke 14:25-33
- Romans 5:1-5

John the Baptist spent his life for Jesus, both while he was living and in his death. He spoke of the Christian life in this way: “He must increase; I must decrease.” *What does it mean for Jesus to increase in your life and you to decrease? Is that sacrifice or suffering?*

Fueling Growth Locally: Martin Luther King said, “There are some things so dear, some things so precious, some things so eternally true, that they are worth dying for. And I submit to you that if a man has not discovered something that he will die for, he isn’t fit to live.” How is this statement reflected in your walk with Jesus?

... *and Love...*

Love lives in the Church. John wrote, “*We love because he first loved us.*” (1 John 4:19) Jesus said, “*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*” (John 13:35) Love can be expressed through **gift giving, generosity**. This describes the dynamic of God’s love. John 3:16 teaches that God’s love is based on giving. Who could benefit from a gift or an act of generosity from you? Take a moment, think, and then write down the name of someone to whom you want to give a gift.

WRAPPING UP

Share prayer requests and then have someone lead in prayer.

Session III: Orthodoxy

PRAYER

Have someone lead your group in prayer.

DISCUSS

- Share your practice of Bible reading? What struggles do you have? What successes have you had?
- How does reading the Bible help? Does the reading the Bible cause difficulties

In the video you will learn more about the following:

Third Characteristic: *Where the Church is growing Scripture is taught from an orthodox point of view.*

WATCH SESSION #3 VIDEO

CONVERSATION

Jesus said, “*If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*” (John 8:31-32) Where do you see the Church “abiding” in the word? Do you see the Church or portions of it NOT abiding in the word?

What do you understand to be “the orthodox” Christian faith?

Fueling Global Growth: A third aspect of the growing Church is an accent on orthodox Christian teaching. Where the Church is expanding the Bible is taught rigorously, conservatively and in accord with the historic understandings of the Church. The orthodox (small “o” meaning “straight” teachings, not large “O” meaning Eastern Orthodox) understanding of the faith is maintained in spite of societal trends and modern thinking. While some are certainly repelled, large numbers of others are attracted.

DIG IN

Read the following passages and discuss how they help us think about orthodox teaching.

- Isaiah 55:8-11
- Galatians 1:6-10
- Matthew 5:17-20

- Revelation 22:18-19
- John 5:39

Many of the teachings of God in the Scripture are hard to understand or bear. Many turned from the teachings of Jesus during the days of his pilgrimage. When some were leaving him, he asked the disciples if they would leave too. Peter said, *“Lord, to whom should we go? You have the words of eternal life.”*

In Jesus’ day, some turned away because of the prediction of his death. During the New Testament some turned away because of the emphasis on grace not works. In our day some turn away because of the Scandal of Particularity, that salvation is found only in Jesus. Why might these be issues?

Fueling Growth Locally: Statistically, across America conservative congregations are growing faster than liberal ones. How do we proclaim and teach the word of God in a rigorous, conservative and historical way to our community when people in our community may hold viewpoints opposed to the orthodox faith? Discuss the dynamic of speaking the truth in love.

... *and Love...*

You have heard it said, “Love is a verb.” Love transcends both feelings and emotions. Love is active.

Jesus demonstrated this on the night of his betrayal. At that supper he stooped to wash his disciples’ feet. He was teaching him that love serves. In Matthew we hear his words, *“The son of man did not come to be served, but to serve.”*

A third expression of love is service. Who could benefit from your help, your service? Take a moment, think and then write down the name of someone God is inviting you to serve.

WRAPPING UP

Share prayer requests and then have someone lead in prayer.

Session IV: Supernaturalism

PRAYER

Have someone lead your group in prayer.

DISCUSS

- Have you seen a miracle? Describe a dramatic answer to prayer?
- What if you have neither seen a miracle nor experienced a dramatic answer to prayer?

In the video you will learn more about the following:

Fourth Characteristic: Where the Church is growing people are seeing and experiencing miracles and healings.

WATCH SESSION #4 VIDEO

CONVERSATION

Jesus said, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.”* John 14:12

A missionary from Central America talked about liking to start congregations where there were a lot of possessions. He meant demon possessions not money! He maintained that the Church would grow when people saw demons being cast out and the power of God at work.

Do you think the Church today puts the right emphasis on supernatural power, actions and answers?

Fueling Global Growth: A fourth aspect of the growing Church is an experience with supernaturalism. Where the Church is expanding there are reports of miracles, healing, exorcisms and other signs. The people expect an interaction between the Creator of the world and his creation. God is not viewed as a disinterested watchmaker who having wound things up now sits by to see everything wind down.

DIG IN

Read the following passages and discuss how they help us think about supernaturalism.

- Luke 1:26-37

- Mark 4:35-41
- Daniel 6:19-23
- II Timothy 3:1-5
- James 4:1-5

Jesus elicited confidence in him through his supernatural power. When a centurion's servant needed healing, he said to Jesus, "*Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.*"
Matthew 8:8

Which Biblical miracle or show of supernatural power do you find most interesting or instructive? What do you think people thought when they saw it?

Can you think of times in the Bible that a miracle would have been handy but one was not experienced? What does that tell you about supernatural power?

Fueling Growth Locally: How can we be on guard against "having the form of godliness but denying its power?" How can we expect supernatural experiences without demanding them?

... *and Love...*

Here is one of the great lines about time. "I value the friend who makes room for me on his calendar; I treasure the friend who doesn't check it." People make a distinction between quality and quantity of time. Quality time is far more likely in the experience of "quantity of time."

A fourth expression of love is time. Who could benefit from your time? Take a moment, think and then write down the name of someone with whom God is inviting you to spend time.

CLOSING: As our study draws to a close, what did you find most helpful or instructive? What did you find most challenging? What did you find most exciting?

AND THEN: This is the last organized session for Growth Groups this fall. Before you conclude, make arrangements to get together for continued fellowship, study or service.

