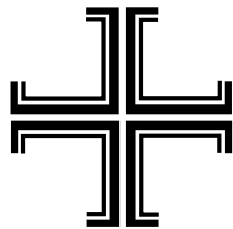




Connecting in Grace™

Radical Gifts, Radical Grace



Welcome



Welcome

Dear Friends,

“How is God poking around in your life?” It’s a question I’ve heard around Incarnation asked again and again. How **is** God poking around in your life? Do you know? Have you been paying attention? This faith study is a chance to open up your senses—to listen, watch, and discover how God is already present in your life each and every day.

Most of us move pretty quickly through the day—too often, we’re simply on auto-pilot. But if you stop to reflect, stop to listen to other people, stop to think about what brings you joy, stop to notice surprises, stop to pray or simply to be quiet, you can begin to sense how God might be moving in your own life. Does it sound unlikely or extraordinary? God’s presence is definitely an extraordinary gift—it’s a radical gift and radical grace!

Connecting in Grace: Radical Gifts, Radical Grace provides a chance to talk about some of these questions: What does God want for my life? How can I watch and listen for God’s presence in ordinary days and in days that are significant marking points? How do other people reveal God’s presence to me? How do I point to God for them? What do I do with my time and energy? How can I be God’s hands and heart in the world? How is God with me in the tough days of challenges, sadness, or loss? How is God with me in days that seem like the best of times? These are all questions about the radical gifts, the radical grace of God.

Your small group is a place to pay attention to how God might be moving in your life. Sometimes it’s a simple comment or a question from another group member that opens up something you hadn’t realized before. Sometimes the written reflections or the questions can bring a new insight or a new discovery about your life or your faith. Your group is a chance to practice listening and watching for how God might be poking around in your life!

Your small group is a chance to connect with others while connecting with God. Your conversations will follow an outline of easy, informal, open-ended questions to give you a chance to gradually grow together as a group. You can share your thoughts or simply listen. By discovering things you share in common, you’ll find another person on a similar journey in life and faith. Through the diversity of the group, you’ll have a chance to learn from others. Whether you simply get to know a few new people or you meet lifelong friends, small groups are a chance to connect with others.

Connecting in Grace: Radical Gifts, Radical Grace

Writer: Lynda Thompson

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We're thankful that you've chosen to be part of this small group! We know that you may be juggling a full, busy life. We've designed these groups to be easy for people with busy schedules—there is no preparation needed and the groups meet only once a month. Because your comments and questions might be just what someone else needs to hear, we hope you'll make this small group a priority in your life and make a commitment to attend. You'll want to stay up-to-date with the group's conversation, and the other group members won't want to miss seeing you and hearing from you.

Watching for signs of God's grace and living lives filled with God's grace are central themes in this faith study. You'll find that the faith study is rooted in the radical gift of God's grace as understood in the Lutheran faith. Each session includes a reflection written at Incarnation Lutheran Church by one of the pastors or staff members. You will find these groups to be different than a Bible study in some ways. While learning from the Bible and reflecting on what the Bible has to say, much of your time will be spent talking with one another and making connections between the Bible and your life today.

Many thanks to the Incarnation community for the opportunity to design and develop the *Connecting in Grace* series. Special thanks to Lynda Thompson, who served as the chief writer and co-coordinator of this project. Many thanks also to Pastor Gary Medin for his encouragement, commitment, and expertise in small group ministry. My gratitude also goes out to the small group leaders at Incarnation who nurture and build a sense of Christian community and create opportunities for people to listen and watch for God.

In Christ,



Denise Floe
Small Group Ministry
Incarnation Lutheran Church

Reflection Topics for Radical Gifts – Radical Grace

Session 1: Ordinary Days

Reflection by Pastor Gary Medin, “Signs of Grace” in *Alive Now* by Charles G. Finney

Session 2: Simple Living

Reflection by Becky Benson & Lynda Thompson

Session 3: Adding Value

Reflection by Shawna Berg, “Do We Know What We’re Asking?” in *Alive Now* by Thom M. Shuman

Session 4: People

Reflection by Becky Benson, *The Signature of Jesus* by Brennan Manning

Session 5: Servant Living

Responsive reading by Lynda Thompson

Session 6: Holy Nudges

Reflection by Lynda Thompson, “Listening for God’s Call” in *Alive Now* by Eli Fisher

Session 7: Suffering

Reflection by Pastor Jeanne Markquart

Session 8: Rituals and Faith Practices

Reflection by Lynda Thompson, Editor’s Note in *Alive Now* by Melissa Tidwell, “Ways of Prayer: Designing a Personal Rule of Life” in *Weavings* by William O. Paulsell

Hospitality in Small Groups

Relationships are most easily built in an open and trusting environment that invites people to come in and relax. It's important to help create this welcoming environment for your group at each and every session. The conversations that happen informally between your group members are just as important as the structured conversations that take place during the faith study.

The Role of the Host

You will have the opportunity to be the host or co-host for one of the sessions. Hosting a small group doesn't mean that the meeting must be at your home. The role of the host is a very important one. The host is responsible for bringing treats and calling members to remind them about the time and place of the next meeting (another chance for community building!).

Before the Session

It's the host's responsibility to:

- Call each member the week before the session to say "hello" and offer any reminders or updates. You may want to check in with the leader before you make these calls. Use this time as an opportunity to have a conversation with other group members. For example, if you remember events that were mentioned at the previous meeting, ask how the event went. ("At the last session, you mentioned that you were going to tennis camp. What did you enjoy most?" or "I know that you were looking forward to going to the Twins game last Saturday. I saw in the paper that they won that day. How was the game?")
- Bring treats and a beverage to the session.

At the Session

Although the leader creates the space for the group to meet, it's the host's responsibility to:

- Have the room set up before the first group member arrives. This provides a relaxed setting for the group members and helps them feel as if everything is under control.
- Greet group members as they arrive.
- Provide the beverage and other refreshments.

Your Group Covenant

Your small group will develop a group covenant at one of your first sessions.

Group Mission Statement

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

Group Values

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

Group Arrangements

- We will meet once a month on _____ for 8 sessions.
- We will begin at _____ and each session will last 2 hours.

<i>Session</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Location</i>
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			

Group Members

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
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- _____
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- _____
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- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Additional Resources



This is a comprehensive list of all of the resources listed within each session, plus some additional ones that you may find helpful as you learn about spreading the Good News.

Alive Now, The Upper Room, Nashville, TN, www.upperroom.org/alivenow:

- "The Abundant Life," May/June 2002
- "Amazing Grace," July/August 1998
- "Friendship," January/February 1999
- "God's Call," January/February 2003
- "Household of God," May/June 2003
- "Justice and Righteousness," July/August 2004
- "Mentors," May/June 2000
- "Our Shared Dream," May/June 2005
- "Signs of Grace," March/April 2005
- "Suffering," March/April 2006
- "Visions and Voices," May/June 2004

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Barndt, Joseph. *Dismantling Racism: The Continuing Challenge to White America*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1991.

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Bass, Dorothy C., Ed. *Practicing Our Faith*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997.

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Benson, Robert. *Between the Dreaming and the Coming True*. New York, NY: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1997.

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- Feiler, Bruce. *Walking the Bible*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001.
- Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1978.
- Foster, Richard J. & Smith, James Bryan, Ed. *Devotional Classics*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005.
- Hafften, Ann E., Ed. *Water from the Rock: Lutheran Voices from Palestine*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2003.
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- Jones, Laurie Beth. *The Path: Creating Your Mission Statement for Work and for Life*. New York, NY: Hyperion, 1998.
- Jones, Tony. *Pray*. Colorado Springs, CO: NAVPRESS, 2003.
- Jones, Tony. *Read, Think, Pray, Live*. Colorado Springs, CO: NAVPRESS, 2003.
- Jones, Tony. *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Daily Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004.
- L'Engle, Madeline. *The Irrational Season*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1984.
- Lewis, C.S. *A Grief Observed*. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1961.
- Lewis, C.S. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. New York, NY: HarperTrophy, 1950.
- Manning, Brennan. *The Signature of Jesus*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1996.
- Marty, Martin E. *Speaking of Trust: Conversing with Luther about the Sermon on the Mount*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2003.
- Melander, Rochelle and Harold Eppley. *Our Lives Are Not Our Own: Saying "Yes" to God*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2003.
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- Norris, Kathleen. *Amazing Grace, A Vocabulary of Faith*. Riverhead, NY: Riverhead Books, 1998.
- Nouwen, Henri. *Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life*. San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1981.
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- The ONE Campaign is an effort to rally Americans to fight the emergency of global AIDS and extreme poverty. Learn more at <http://www.one.org/>
- Palmer, Parker. *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1999.
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Roberts, Bruce B., Rice, Craig D., Smith, Joe E. *Where in the World Is Integrity? The Challenge of Doing What Is Right*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005.

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