



SPX Small Groups

Life is Better Together



Series Description – Can God be good when life is not? When life hits hard, it plunges us into a sea of questions we hoped we'd never have to ask. But when you feel broken, abandoned, and struggling to find answers, there's a beacon in the storm. In this message series we will learn how we can cling to God even when our circumstances are overwhelming because He will carry us through the storm.

Hello SPX Small Groups,

If we have not met I'd like to take a moment to introduce myself and let you know how excited I am to be here at St. Pius, supporting you in your small groups. I joined the staff in July and have been spending the summer learning as much as I could about what makes St. Pius awesome.

I love working with small groups, because they are where church becomes real – where people learn your name, miss you if you aren't there, grow with you, serve with you, and even hold you accountable. All of my best experiences of church have happened through small groups, or because of the people that I've met in those groups. I take seriously the opportunity to help others experience life together in small groups.

I'd ask you to bear with me as I learn the ropes of putting together these group guides. If you find something exceptional helpful or if it seems like something is missing, please let me know. Your feedback is really important as I figure out what to include, what to emphasize and, what may not be needed. Don't worry if your group doesn't get through all the questions – my goal is to include more questions than you will have time for so your group can pick and choose the most interesting questions. You may also notice that two questions may seem similar to each other. I've found that if you ask a question in more than one way, some people might connect better to the first version and others connect to the second. Don't feel the need to repeat yourself if it feels like your group has already answered a question.

I look forward to any feedback you have to share, and call down God's blessing on your group that it might be a fruitful place to grow.

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Suggestion Session Outline

- Gather & Catch up: How was your week?
- Opening Prayer: Make one up of your own or use this prayer:
- Heavenly Father, we come to you today asking for your guidance, wisdom, and support as we begin our time together. Help us to engage in meaningful discussion; allow us to grow closer as a group and nurture the bonds of community.*
- Fill us with your grace, Lord God, as we experience the bumps and bruises of life – great and small. Help us to turn to you in all of these situations as the source of our hope. Help us also to be a beacon of your love, hope and care for those we see struggling around us, that they may be strengthened through our witness.*
- We ask these things in your name, Amen.*
- Discuss: What did you take away from this week’s message? Use the provided questions to dive deeper.
- Any Resolutions: Is there anything you plan to do differently this week?
- Closing prayer: Close your session with a prayer, making sure to find out whether anyone needs prayer in a specific area or for a specific person. Use this prayer if it is helpful:
- God, these are our struggles: (allow each person to name a current struggle out loud or silently). We ask you to hear us and respond. We are listening. We are open to hear your voice. Please speak to us through your Word, through prayer and through others. We trust you and we will wait on Your promises. We ask this in Jesus Name.*

Week 1 – October 6
Jesus is Our Hope in the Dark

- 1) What was the longest power outage (blackout) you lived through (without a generator)? What was the most frustrating thing about that experience?
- 2) When situations are bleak (at work, in relationships, medically, or in tragedies), do you find it easier or more difficult to pray? Why?
- 3) What do you think Jesus' meant when he said: *"If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."*?
- 4) Did you grow up in an environment where you felt safe to bring doubts and questions to God? How do you think that influences your view of God today?
- 5) Can you describe a situation in life that has ever made you:
 - a. Doubt God's existence?
 - b. Question God's goodness?
 - c. Think or feel like God was punishing you?
 - d. Left you feeling alone or abandoned by God?

How did you get through that situation? Did God come to your rescue?

- 6) Why do you think God allows us to go through trials in life?
- 7) Who do you know who is struggling right now? How would you like God to help? How can God use you to help?
- 8) Do you know someone who needs to hear this week's message? How can you share it with them?

Week 2 - Oct. 13
Where are you, God?

- 1) Have you ever been so physically lost that someone had to come find/rescue you? When? What was it like before they arrived?
- 2) It's not uncommon to doubt God when life gets hard. What does this imply about what we believe in God?
- 3) Have you ever met anyone who lost their faith because God didn't come to their rescue or allowed misfortune to occur? What assumptions were they making?
- 4) Who is someone you know who seems to trust God no matter what they are facing? What do you think is different about them?
- 5) In the Bible, Jesus seems to heal someone almost every day. Does God still heal today? If he does, does it happen frequently or rarely?
- 6) Why do you think God allows "bad things" to happen to "good" people?
- 7) In the Gospel story, Jesus heals ten lepers – only one was a Samaritan (who were foreigners generally despised by Jews).
 - a. What does it say about Jesus that he healed all ten?
 - b. What does it say about the Samaritan that he is the only one who returned to thank Jesus?
 - c. Why do you suppose the other nine didn't return?
- 8) After Jesus heals the leper and he returns to thank Jesus, Jesus tells him – "Stand up and Go, your faith has saved you." Yet, many people of great faith aren't healed. Why?
- 9) Has God brought good things to your life during a time when either you or someone close to you were suffering?
- 10) How is God inviting you to act on this story this week?

Week 3 - Oct. 20

Waiting on God

- 1) What was the hardest thing you have ever had to wait for?
- 2) What do you think is the hardest thing about waiting?
- 3) Are you more likely to place your faith in a result you want or in God's character?
- 4) What is it like for you to wait and listen for God to respond to your pain? What could you do to make more room for listening?
- 5) Share about a time when you either waited on God or tried to force God's timing? What did you learn?
- 6) In today's first reading we hear of Moses needing two others to hold his hands up during the battle so his side would prevail. When have others held you up during a battle or trying situation? What did they do?
- 7) In the Gospel, Jesus encourages us to pray without being weary. How does prayer change either you or God?
- 8) What are you waiting on God to do? How can prayer help you, while you wait for God?
- 9) Have you ever surrendered something to God in prayer? How did that happen? Did it make a difference? Is there anything you want to surrender to God now?

Week 4 – Oct. 27

Embracing God in the Valley

- 1) They say bad things come in threes. Can you describe an example of this in your own life?
- 2) It is helpful to remember times when you saw the goodness of God or experienced his faithfulness in a dark time in your life. Try to name (or make a list) of some answers God has given you in the past. How can you use that list as an anchor for the future?
- 3) During a time that was (or is) difficult, how did you (or do you) continue to embrace God in the middle of the trial?
- 4) In our first reading from Sirach count how many ways God tells us he is listening. Do you (mostly) believe or (mostly) doubt that God listens to you?
- 5) In our second reading, St. Paul affirms God stood by his side and strengthened him, and even saved him from the lion's mouth, even though he knew "the time of my departure is at hand." At the end of your life, do you believe the Lord will bring you safe to his heavenly kingdom? How does that knowledge help now?
- 6) In the Worship song "Scars" by the group *I am They* includes these lyrics:

*Darkest water and deepest pain
I wouldn't trade it for anything
'Cause my brokenness brought me to You
And these wounds are a story You'll use
So I'm thankful for the scars
'Cause without them I wouldn't know Your heart
And I know they'll always tell of who You are
So forever I am thankful for the scars*

Has God used your brokenness to bring you to him? Has God used your brokenness to bring healing to others? Are you thankful for your scars?

- 7) Who do you have around you to pray with you and support you? How can they be praying for you right now?

WEEK ONE: October 6 (27th Sunday in Ord. Time)

Reading 1 HAB 1:2-3; 2:2-4

How long, O LORD? I cry for help
but you do not listen!
I cry out to you, "Violence!"
but you do not intervene.
Why do you let me see ruin;
why must I look at misery?
Destruction and violence are before me;
there is strife, and clamorous discord.
Then the LORD answered me and said:
Write down the vision clearly upon the tablets,
so that one can read it readily.
For the vision still has its time,
presses on to fulfillment, and will not disappoint;
if it delays, wait for it,
it will surely come, it will not be late.
The rash one has no integrity;
but the just one, because of his faith, shall live.

Responsorial Psalm PS 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

Reading 22 TM 1:6-8, 13-14

Beloved:
I remind you, to stir into flame
the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands.
For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice
but rather of power and love and self-control.
So do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord,
nor of me, a prisoner for his sake;
but bear your share of hardship for the gospel
with the strength that comes from God.
Take as your norm the sound words that you heard from me,
in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.
Guard this rich trust with the help of the Holy Spirit
that dwells within us.

Gospel LK 17:5-10

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."
The Lord replied,
"If you have faith the size of a mustard seed,
you would say to this mulberry tree,
'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

"Who among you would say to your servant
who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field,
'Come here immediately and take your place at table'?
Would he not rather say to him,

'Prepare something for me to eat.
Put on your apron and wait on me while I eat and drink.
You may eat and drink when I am finished'
Is he grateful to that servant because he did what was commanded?
So should it be with you.
When you have done all you have been commanded,
say, 'We are unprofitable servants;
we have done what we were obliged to do.'"

WEEK TWO: October 13 (28th Sunday in Ord. Time)

Reading 12 KGS 5:14-17

Naaman went down and plunged into the Jordan seven times
at the word of Elisha, the man of God.
His flesh became again like the flesh of a little child,
and he was clean of his leprosy.
Naaman returned with his whole retinue to the man of God.
On his arrival he stood before Elisha and said,
"Now I know that there is no God in all the earth,
except in Israel.
Please accept a gift from your servant."
Elisha replied, "As the LORD lives whom I serve, I will not take it;"
and despite Naaman's urging, he still refused.
Naaman said: "If you will not accept,
please let me, your servant, have two mule-loads of earth,
for I will no longer offer holocaust or sacrifice
to any other god except to the LORD."

Responsorial Psalm PS 98:1, 2-3, 3-4

Reading 22 TM 2:8-13

Beloved:
Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David:
such is my gospel, for which I am suffering,
even to the point of chains, like a criminal.
But the word of God is not chained.
Therefore, I bear with everything for the sake of those who are chosen,
so that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus,
together with eternal glory.
This saying is trustworthy:
If we have died with him
we shall also live with him;
if we persevere
we shall also reign with him.
But if we deny him
he will deny us.
If we are unfaithful
he remains faithful,
for he cannot deny himself.

Gospel[LK 17:11-19](#)

As Jesus continued his journey to Jerusalem,
he traveled through Samaria and Galilee.
As he was entering a village, ten lepers met him.
They stood at a distance from him and raised their voices, saying,
"Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!"
And when he saw them, he said,
"Go show yourselves to the priests."
As they were going they were cleansed.
And one of them, realizing he had been healed,
returned, glorifying God in a loud voice;
and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him.
He was a Samaritan.
Jesus said in reply,
"Ten were cleansed, were they not?
Where are the other nine?
Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?"
Then he said to him, "Stand up and go;
your faith has saved you."

WEEK THREE: October 20 (29th Sunday in Ord. Time)

Reading 1[EX 17:8-13](#)

In those days, Amalek came and waged war against Israel.
Moses, therefore, said to Joshua,
"Pick out certain men,
and tomorrow go out and engage Amalek in battle.
I will be standing on top of the hill
with the staff of God in my hand."
So Joshua did as Moses told him:
he engaged Amalek in battle
after Moses had climbed to the top of the hill with Aaron and Hur.
As long as Moses kept his hands raised up,
Israel had the better of the fight,
but when he let his hands rest,
Amalek had the better of the fight.
Moses' hands, however, grew tired;
so they put a rock in place for him to sit on.
Meanwhile Aaron and Hur supported his hands,
one on one side and one on the other,
so that his hands remained steady till sunset.
And Joshua mowed down Amalek and his people
with the edge of the sword.

Responsorial Psalm[PS 121:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8](#)

Reading 22[TM 3:14-4:2](#)

Beloved:
Remain faithful to what you have learned and believed,

because you know from whom you learned it,
and that from infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures,
which are capable of giving you wisdom for salvation
through faith in Christ Jesus.
All Scripture is inspired by God
and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction,
and for training in righteousness,
so that one who belongs to God may be competent,
equipped for every good work.
I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus,
who will judge the living and the dead,
and by his appearing and his kingly power:
proclaim the word;
be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient;
convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching.

Gospel LK 18:1-8

Jesus told his disciples a parable
about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary.
He said, "There was a judge in a certain town
who neither feared God nor respected any human being.
And a widow in that town used to come to him and say,
'Render a just decision for me against my adversary.'
For a long time the judge was unwilling, but eventually he thought,
'While it is true that I neither fear God nor respect any human being,
because this widow keeps bothering me
I shall deliver a just decision for her
lest she finally come and strike me.'"
The Lord said, "Pay attention to what the dishonest judge says.
Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones
who call out to him day and night?
Will he be slow to answer them?
I tell you, he will see to it that justice is done for them speedily.
But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

WEEK FOUR: October 27 (30th Sunday in Ord. Time)

Reading 1 SIR 35:12-14, 16-18

The LORD is a God of justice,
who knows no favorites.
Though not unduly partial toward the weak,
yet he hears the cry of the oppressed.
The Lord is not deaf to the wail of the orphan,
nor to the widow when she pours out her complaint.
The one who serves God willingly is heard;
his petition reaches the heavens.
The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds;
it does not rest till it reaches its goal,
nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds,

judges justly and affirms the right,
and the Lord will not delay.

Responsorial Psalm [PS 34:2-3, 17-18, 19, 23](#)

Reading 22 [TM 4:6-8, 16-18](#)

Beloved:

I am already being poured out like a libation,
and the time of my departure is at hand.
I have competed well; I have finished the race;
I have kept the faith.
From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me,
which the Lord, the just judge,
will award to me on that day, and not only to me,
but to all who have longed for his appearance.
At my first defense no one appeared on my behalf,
but everyone deserted me.
May it not be held against them!
But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength,
so that through me the proclamation might be completed
and all the Gentiles might hear it.
And I was rescued from the lion's mouth.
The Lord will rescue me from every evil threat
and will bring me safe to his heavenly kingdom.
To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Gospel [LK 18:9-14](#)

Jesus addressed this parable
to those who were convinced of their own righteousness
and despised everyone else.
"Two people went up to the temple area to pray;
one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector.
The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself,
'O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity --
greedy, dishonest, adulterous -- or even like this tax collector.
I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.'
But the tax collector stood off at a distance
and would not even raise his eyes to heaven
but beat his breast and prayed,
'O God, be merciful to me a sinner.'
I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former;
for whoever exalts himself will be humbled,
and the one who humbles himself will be exalted."