

**INTO DEEPER WATER
WITH THE 10 COMMANDMENTS**

**(14 Weeks, 12 Meetings)
November 15, 2020—February 21, 2021**

SMALL GROUP PACKET
Into the Deep Water with Christ

HEALTHY SMALL GROUPS

(Please review the following regularly together as a group)

GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR “DEEP WATER” SMALL GROUPS

- Try to keep your group size from two to six people. The larger the group, the more time it will take at each meeting for everyone to participate and share actively.
- Try to meet together once a week, on average.
- Meet in a place that is conducive to listening and speaking. Loud, crowded restaurants, for example, will probably not work too well.
- Everyone should bring a bible, a pen, and this packet to each of their small group meetings.
- This packet, focusing on the Ten Commandments, has enough material to cover 12 weeks’ worth of meetings. On February 21, 2021, a new packet of materials will become available for the next part of our “deeper water” journey.
- **Buffer weeks:** We are adding two *additional weeks* to this session, so that **you have 14 weeks in which to cover 12 weeks’ worth of materials**. Your group can use these extra two weeks to 1) catch up if your group has to miss a weekly meeting or two, or 2) If your discussions go long on some weeks, you can use the extra time to spread things out and/or backtrack as necessary.
- While it is not a requirement, we recommend that men partner with men, and women partner with women.
- You do not need to designate any particular person in your group to be a facilitator or leader. Just follow the materials together and agree on a time limit to your meetings.
- Allow extended silences to happen during your small group discussions. The bible is a challenging book and the Word can sometimes shake our thoughts up at first before bringing them around towards Christ. Silence allows time for the Spirit to give us speech.
- While you are discussing with your group, always jot down thoughts that the group shares.
- It is likely that you will encounter different Bible translations within your group. If the group feels this is an obstacle to understanding or discussion, discuss the possibility of procuring bibles of the same translation for everyone. The New Revised Standard Version, which St. John’s uses at worship, is an example of a well-balanced, readable and accurate translation. Call Pastor Seth (217.255.2118) or Pastor Patti (614.875.2314) if you need any help or guidance regarding Bible translations.
- On **February 21, 2020**, we will start a new topic in our Deep Water journey. Every time we begin a new topic (about every two-three months), small groups and partnerships can reconfigure themselves as necessary. As you approach the end of each topic, please talk intentionally about how and whether your group will continue into the next topic together intact, or what changes you need to make based on your personal schedules, etc. While we encourage everyone to plug in to as much of our deep water journey as possible through the next few years, we also understand that some of us will need to drop out and rejoin at various points in the journey.

THE MOST IMPORTANT PRINCIPLE TO FOLLOW IN YOUR SMALL GROUP: CONFIDENTIALITY

Keeping things confidential is vital to establishing trust and open communication with your partner or small group. Be sure to acknowledge this rule clearly with each other at the beginning of your journey together, and regularly over the course of the following weeks. What is said in your small group should stay in your small group!

REMEMBER: PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT MEMBERS OF ST. JOHN'S ARE WELCOME TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS JOURNEY!

We encourage you to invite non-members to participate. Think of a friend with whom you'd like to take this journey, and invite them to jump in.

IF YOU LOSE YOUR PACKET, OR NEED MORE PACKETS

Hard copies are available in the church office, in the display in the Link (breezeway) at church, or from one of the pastors. You can download a packet from our St. John's website: <https://www.stjohnsgc.org/> If you have a printer, you can request an electronic copy of the packet by email: SJersild@stjohnsgc.org Just remember, the packets can be over 40 pages long!

IF YOUR SMALL GROUP IS STRUGGLING OR DISSOLVES

Call Pastor Seth at 217.255.2118 if you need help or have special concerns.

SMALL GROUP INFORMATION

(Names, phone, email etc.)

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)

**Into the Deep Water with Christ
The Ten Commandments**

WEEK #1 SMALL GROUP MEETING

Target Week: November 15-21, 2020

1. Confirm as a group what your time limit is going to be. Over time, each group will develop a natural feel for what kind of pace they need to maintain in order to fit everyone's schedules.
2. Please review the material under the heading "Healthy Small Groups" together, above.
3. Emphasize together the crucial importance of keeping what you share in this group confidential. Also, make sure you have each others' phone numbers, email addresses, and etc. for communication purposes.
4. Please note our practice of adding **buffer weeks** for each topic (from the "Healthy Small Groups" section, above). Remember, you will have 14 weeks in which to cover 12 weeks' worth of meetings.
5. Spend about 5 minutes having everyone share high points and low points from the last several days.

6. OPENING PRAYER

- Designate someone to pray the prayer in italics, below. Always feel free to improvise as the Spirit moves you. You can use the written prayer loosely, as a model. Special intercessions can be added.

Heavenly Father, thank you for bringing us together to study your holy Word and to lift each other up in your love and grace. Thank you for sending Jesus into the world for our salvation, and for the new life and power that you pour into us through the Holy Spirit. Protect, heal, and uphold all those for whom we have special concerns today. As Peter followed Jesus' call to cast his net into the deep water, give us courage to follow Jesus' call into deeper spiritual territory, that we might grow in our witness to others. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

7. Have someone in your group read the following aloud:

For the next – weeks, we'll be studying the Ten Commandments together with the following goals:

- *To come to a deeper understanding of God's intentions in giving ancient Israel the Law, and the role the divine Law played in Israel.*
- *To more fully appreciate the Ten Commandments as a gift from God which continue to give divine structure to our lives as followers of Jesus.*
- *To appreciate the Ten Commandments as a reflection of God's grace and love for us.*

- *To understand the relationship between the Ten Commandments and “everyday rules” we follow, in general.*
 - *To understand the relationship between God’s Law and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to be able to distinguish between law and gospel in church and in our daily lives.*
8. Please have someone in your group read **Matthew 22:36-40** aloud, and then discuss the following together:
- Jesus sums up the entire law (and the prophets) with these two commandments, basically distilling everything down to 1) complete love for God, and 2) full love for our neighbors. How do you relate *love* to “following rules?” How does love both 1) fulfill rules and 2) go beyond rules?
 - Does *love* for God and neighbor involve more than just “following rules?” Try, as a group, to describe the relationship between 1) “having rules and following them,” and 2) *loving* God and our neighbors?
 - Why do you think God gave us the Ten Commandments?
 - Discuss different reasons why we teach our children rules.
 - Discuss different reasons why any society or community needs rules.
9. Have someone read **Romans 7:7-13** aloud while everyone follows along in their Bibles, and then discuss the following:
- According to Paul, is the Law of God a good thing?
 - According to this passage, do you think Paul is saying that following the Law can **save** us or “make us right” with God if we follow it?
 - What is Paul saying regarding the Law here? What function does it perform in our lives, when it comes to our direct relationship to God?
 - Paul says “It was sin, working death in me through what is good (the Law), in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.” How can Paul present this as a *good* thing?
 - How does knowing a **rule** help us to see our own sin clearly?
 - If we did not have rules, would the power of sin still be working in us? Along the same lines: if we never taught our children any clear rules, how might this affect their lives and their ability to move forward after failures and mistakes?
10. Have someone read **Psalms 119:97-112** aloud while everyone follows along, and then discuss the following:

- Why does the Psalmist *love* God’s law? What are some of the benefits he lists of meditating on the Law and living in accordance with it?
- How do you square what the Psalmist is saying about the Law with what Paul (who also says that the Law is good) says about the Law in the above passage from Romans?
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a famous Lutheran pastor, theologian, and martyr, meditated on Psalm 119—a long song of praise and thanks to God for his Law—regularly. As Christians we see God’s character revealed most fully in the person of Jesus. How might we see a reflection of the same God’s love for us through meditating on his Law? How might the Law be a helpful guide for us as we seek to *embody* the love of Christ to others?

11. Discuss the following with your group:

- What would you say are some cardinal rules or principles you have learned, or set for yourself to follow, in your daily life and relationships?
- What would you say is one of the greatest “victories” or personal achievements you’ve ever experienced in your life? What made it so fulfilling, satisfying, joyful? Looking back on this achievement, describe the road that you took to get there. No need to be overly modest 😊.
- What role do RULES play in helping us stay disciplined and goal-oriented in our endeavors?
- When can rules play a negative role in people’s lives? Can you think of concrete examples of when you’ve seen an organization or governmental authority making too many rules? Can you think of examples of *bad* rules? Have you seen (or been) a person who follows rules too rigidly? Describe some of the real-world consequences you’ve seen resulting from too many rules, or bad rules.

12. In turn, without going into too much depth about each situation, share one or two specific issues that you would like your partner(s) to pray about for you this week. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, *and be sure to pray for them!* Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.

13. Remind each other that there’s homework to do (below) before each group meeting. The homework material provides the substance for each group meeting. Confirm the time and place of your next gathering. Review whether you will be “doubling up” on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.

14. Close with prayer. Today, have one person volunteer to pray for the group. Try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer. Include a prayer for the power of

the Holy Spirit to guide your group and fill you with confidence and determination as you get started on this journey together.

HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (2nd) SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Find a place where you can concentrate. Say the following prayer *aloud*; always feel free to add extra petitions and thanks.

Almighty God, I thank you for sending Jesus into this world and into my life, so that I can know you and love you, through him, as my Heavenly Father. Speak to me now as I study your holy Word. Give me courage and faith to go deeper in my discipleship for you, that I may glorify you in all that I do. Use me as an instrument of your Holy Spirit to draw the people around me into your loving presence. Amen.

2. As Christians, we believe that God gave his Law to us in three basic ways.

First, he wrote these instructions upon the heart in every human. All people have a conscience—an inborn sense of right and wrong. Please read **Romans 2:14-16** and then respond to the bullet points that follow.

- In your own words, what is Paul saying about God’s law here?
- How would you relate what Paul is saying here to people who follow religions other than Judaism/Christianity, or to atheists? What would you point to as *evidence* that God’s law is “written on people’s hearts” regardless of who they are, as Paul says?
- From what you know of Paul, would you say that this “natural law,” which is written on all human beings’ hearts, can *save* us if we follow it? Why or why not?

Second, God **wrote** the Ten Commandments on stone tablets for the people of Israel. Please read **Exodus 20:1-17**. Then read the following, and respond to the bulleted items.

*Note: there are multiple ways to number the 10 commandments. For the purposes of our discussion, we will follow the Lutheran tradition. Exodus 20:1-11 contain the first **three** commandments, and Exodus 12-17 contain the last **seven** commandments.*

- Remember how in your first small group meeting, you talked about how Jesus distilled all the commandments down to two: 1) “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind,” and 2) “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Looking at the 10 commandments in the Exodus passage, which of them speak more to a) “loving the Lord your God with all your heart,” and which of them speak more to b) “loving your neighbor as yourself?”

Third, God also gave these instructions in various ways throughout the Bible. For example, please read **Matthew 5:21-48** and then respond to the following:

- In this passage, Jesus contrasts his “new commandments” to older commandments which were given “in former times.” How do Jesus’ “new” commandments compare with what he presents as the “old” commandments in this passage? For example, would you say Jesus’ “new” commandments are harder, or easier, to follow than what he says are the older ones?

3. In our Lutheran tradition, we have made a helpful distinction between three different ways that God uses his commandments (the Law). We call these the three *uses* of the Law:

First Use of the Law: For the good of his creation, God uses the Law to limit or prevent coarse outbursts of sin, thereby helping to keep order in the world. In this sense, the Law acts as a *curb* to sinful behavior. To understand this *first use of the law*, please read **1 Timothy 1:9-10** and respond to the following:

- In your own words, what does it mean that “The law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners...”

Second Use of the Law: God uses the Law to reveal and condemn our sin. In this sense, the Law acts as a *mirror* which reflects our sin back to us. To understand the second use of the Law, please read the following passages, and write down how you understand them in your own words:

- Romans 3:20
- Romans 7:7
- 1 John 1:10

Third Use of the Law: God uses the Law to guide and direct our thoughts, words, and deeds as Christians in God-pleasing ways. In this sense, the Law acts as a *guide* for living a good life on earth, as creatures made in God’s image. To understand the third use of the Law, please read the following and write down your thoughts and impressions:

- Psalm 119:105
- Proverbs 6:23

4. The second use of the law (as a mirror that reveals and reflects our sin back to us) is particularly important for Christians. It shows that we have all sinned and cannot keep God’s commandments, and so it **makes known our need for the Gospel of Jesus Christ**, who is the fulfillment of the Law. Ultimately, the Law always accuses. Please read the following verses and write down your thoughts:

- Romans 3:21

- Romans 10:4
- Galatians 3:13-14

5. Read the following scripture verses and statements. After each one (based on the material above), please indicate whether you think the verse reflects a) the *first* use of the Law, b) the *second* use of the Law, or c) the *third* use of the Law. Answers may vary; the important thing is to think about it and to explain *why* you answer the way you do.

- *Psalm 1*: Their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper
- *Psalm 119*: I will keep your law continually, forever and ever. I shall walk at liberty, for I have sought your precepts.
- *Psalm 130*: If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?
- *Romans 3*: For no human being will be justified in God's sight by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.
- *Romans 7*: So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?
- "It seems like every time I achieve something great, I want to hold onto it forever, but the glory passes away and I have to start all over at the bottom of the pile again."
- Churches have to agree what time their worship services will be held, so that everyone shows up at the same time.
- I strictly follow the principle of giving 10% of my earnings to charities and church.
- On this stretch of highway, the speed limit is 70 miles per hour.

- “No Swimming”
- “I will never live up to my father-in-law’s expectations.”

6. Look back at what you wrote down with your partner(s) regarding their prayer concerns from your first group meeting. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other closing prayers, please ask God to bless your small group and the congregation of St. John’s as we follow Jesus’ call to go into the deep water with Christ and become more confident, effective “fishers of people.”

**Into the Deep Water with Christ
THE TEN COMMANDMENTS**

WEEK #2 SMALL GROUP MEETING

Target Week: November 22-28, 2020

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer, (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer):
Heavenly Father, we thank you for bringing us together today to study your Word and to support each other in our walk of faith. Help us to listen to each other with open hearts and minds. We thank you for the new life and forgiveness you have given us in Christ, and we pray that you will remove all fear from our hearts as we follow your call to let go of our old lives, that we may live for you alone. In Jesus’ name, Amen.
3. Please go back to the homework you all did for this session, starting on **page 7**. Discuss items **2 through 5** as a group. After you finish, return here and continue with item #4, below.
4. In turn, without going into too much depth about each situation, share one or two specific issues that you would like your partner(s) to pray about for you this week. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, *and be sure to pray for them!* Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.
5. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be “doubling up” on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.
6. Close with prayer. Today, have one person volunteer to pray for the group. Try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer. Include a prayer for the power of the Holy Spirit to guide your group and fill you with confidence and determination as you continue this journey together.

HOMWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (3rd) SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Find a place where you can concentrate. Say the following prayer *aloud*; always feel free to add extra petitions and thanks.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with your free spirit. Make me an agent of your love towards all. In Jesus' name. Amen.

2. Exodus 20:1 reads: **“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”** This is how God introduces himself before giving Israel the Commandments.

- Based on his introduction of himself, what is the *first* thing God wants Israel (and us) to remember about him, all the time?
- What does the simple fact that God saved Israel *prior* to giving them the law tell us about the relationship between 1) our salvation in Christ and 2) our following God’s law? E.g., which comes first? Can we *save ourselves* by following the Commandments?
- Have you ever witnessed people (or have you, yourself) depicting God as nothing more than a lawgiver? Describe what you have experienced in this regard.
- Israel had many ups and downs in their history. Scripture consistently draws a direct connection between their worldly fortunes and their obedience (or disobedience) to the law.

When they were disobedient, they experienced real-world consequences and ultimately national catastrophe (the exile). At the same time, even though they broke his heart repeatedly, God had already chosen them to be his priestly nation (Genesis 12:1-3), and saved them (Exodus 1-15). And he never went back on his choice or his promises.

How do you understand that our disobedience to the law of God 1) brings real worldly consequences and death, and at the same time, that 2) God has chosen us and has saved us once and for all in Christ, and that he will never go back on his promises? In your own words, what does it look like for a Christian to live with both of those truths at once, every day?

3. The First Commandment is: **“You shall have no other gods before me.”** (Exodus 20:3)

Martin Luther understood “other gods” as *anything* we worship other than the living God revealed to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit through the Word, Jesus Christ. A false god

doesn't have to be clothed in religious language or have a religious name, such as "Allah," or "Odin" or "Vishnu." A false god is any *created* thing or person that we put our trust and hope in. Created things cannot give us life. Everything in creation has the potential to become a false god to us. With this very general definition of idolatry in mind, we can understand how it's possible for us to worship many different false gods in the course of one day.

Please read the following Bible verses and write down any thoughts they inspire:

- Isaiah 45:20
- Proverbs 11:28
- Matthew 10:37

4. Please read **Romans 1:18-32** and respond to the items below:

- What strikes you most from the passage?
- In your own words, summarize the connection between *idolatry* and *destructive behavior* that Paul is making in the passage from Romans.
- When Paul writes "God gave them over to [various sinful behaviors]," he seems to be saying that separation from God is the source of all misery, and also that being trapped in sinful behavior *is its own punishment*. In other words, God "gives us over" to the false gods that cannot give us what we want, need, or are looking for, and lets them be our masters. Can you think of any examples from your own experience where being locked in a certain behavior was its own punishment? Can you identify the "god" you may have been worshiping in that situation?
- In the space below, take time to make a list of different "gods" that you think people can be tempted to worship. Include things which we normally think of as "good," such as family, ourselves, friendships, etc. Make notes beside some of the false gods you list, explaining why you included them.
- Narrow down the list you made, above, to some specific false gods which you think people in our society are *commonly* worshiping today. Include some notes by each, explaining why you think these particular false gods are exerting a lot of power right now in our society. What are some of the real-world consequences of this false worship?

- What are some false gods that you *personally* find yourself tempted to worship on a daily basis? What are some specific factors that tempt you to put your trust in them? What real-life consequences have you experienced from putting your faith in them?
 - How do *fear, loneliness, isolation, anxiety*, and a sense of *powerlessness* factor in our temptation to latch onto false gods and hence destructive behaviors? Any specific examples from your own or others' experience?
5. Please read **Matthew 22:36-40** and respond to the following:
- In your own words, describe how the first commandment is the root of all the others. To put it another way: how does false worship lead us to break ALL the commandments?
6. Please read **Colossians 2:6-23**, then respond to the following in light of the passage:
- In your own words, summarize what the Colossians passage is saying about how God in Christ has freed us from the power of the false gods we are tempted to worship.
 - What are some things *Jesus* shows us about the true God of the universe, in distinction from all false gods?
 - What does the passage say a constant concern for “rule following” in the sense of *legalism* is a continuing sign of?
 - In light of the passage, describe what *positive* motivation we now have to worship only God, and not pretenders? What proper human responses towards God does Jesus make possible for us by what he has done for us?
7. Look back at what you wrote down with your partner(s) regarding their prayer concerns from your first group meeting. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other closing prayers, please ask God to bless your small group and the congregation of St. John's as we follow Jesus' call to go into the deep water with Christ and become more confident, effective “fishers of people.”

INTO DEEPER WATER WITH THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

WEEK #3 SMALL GROUP MEETING

Target Week: November 29—December 5, 2020

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer, (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer):
Lord God, we give you thanks for all the gifts you have given us in this life: our family, friendships, and the beauty of your creation. Most of all, we thank you for sending Jesus into the world to save us from the powers that seek to enslave us. Lift us up, Lord God, and set us free by the blood of Christ to live our lives in joy and confidence as your sons and daughters. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen
3. Go back to your homework for last week, beginning on **page 11**. As a group, please discuss your responses to **items 2 through 6**. When you are finished, return here and continue with item number 4, below.
4. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week, for you. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, *and be sure to pray for them!* Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.
5. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be “doubling up” on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.
6. Close with prayer. Today, pray a “popcorn” prayer. Go around the room, and everyone offer a brief word of thanks and/or praise to God. As is possible, try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer.

HOMework FOR YOUR NEXT (4th) SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Find a place where you can concentrate. Say the following prayer *aloud*; always feel free to add extra petitions and thanks.
Heavenly Father, I thank you for you for the gifts, talents and abilities that you have given me, and I pray for a spirit of discernment, that I might continue to find ways that I can best serve you and build up your holy Church on earth. Bless the work of your people throughout the world, and make us strong in our witness to you, so that people may be drawn to Christ and find eternal life in him. In Jesus' name. Amen.
2. The second commandment is: **“You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.”**

 In the *Small Catechism*, Luther wrote of the second commandment: *We are to fear and love God so that we do not use his name superstitiously, or use it to curse, swear, lie, or deceive, but call on him in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.*

3. When we trust God with our hearts, we use our lips to call upon Him as our creator and redeemer. Using God's name in an improper way might seem like a small thing to many people, but it's a symptom of something deeply broken in us. How we refer to God using language is our foremost *public witness* to him. Using God's name flippantly or carelessly is a way of misrepresenting God to others.

- Please read **Luke 1:39-56**. In the space below, write down what you think inspired Mary to praise God's name.

- In the space below, list some particular things you've experienced in your life which make you want to lift up the name of God in praise, and which make you want others to know his goodness.

- Throughout scripture, God's saving actions cause people to sing his praises in public. Whenever scripture presents an image of heaven, we see joyful corporate worship and praise happening [e.g. Isaiah 6; Revelation 7:9-12]. When Jesus heals people, they and the crowds who witness the healing often cannot keep their mouths shut [e.g. Luke 17:12-16]. In short, the saving acts of God almost always seems to lead, ultimately, to joyful *public witness*. With this in mind, write down some of your thoughts on the role of God's Church in the world, and how you see yourself as part of the Church's public witness.

- How would you generally characterize your own *public witness* to God, through the years and right now?

- Think back on times when other people have witnessed to God to you in a powerful way. Characterize the situations, how the people witnessed, why you listened to them, what they said, etc., that made these experiences particularly memorable and meaningful.

- In what ways do you think you are currently an effective public witness for Jesus by the way you use his name, and by the way you use language in general?

- In what ways would you personally like to grow (or where might you see room for growth) in order to become a more positive and effective public witness for Jesus?

4. At heart, using God's name "superstitiously, or as a curse, or to swear, lie, or deceive" shows that we are regarding God as an **object or tool**. We are trying to take his power to ourselves and

to use it for our own ends, rather than understanding ourselves to be in a living relationship with him.

- Have you ever experienced a time when someone has used the name of God superstitiously? As if using his name might bring the results *they wanted* out of a particular situation? If so, describe the situation and what happened.
- Have you ever experienced a person using the name of God to curse another person? Think about the incident(s). Then, write down how such cursing reflects on a) God himself, b) the person doing the cursing, and c) the person who is cursed, d) onlookers.
- Have you ever seen a person use the name of God to bolster or keep a lie they are telling others? Describe the situation and its outcome.
- Have you ever seen a person use the name of God selfishly to deceive others into doing things that will benefit him/her? Describe the situation.

5. In a deep sense, the name “Jesus” is the heart of *all* language. He is the Second Person of the Trinity, and he is the Word through whom all things were created (John 1:1-6). The simple act of using his name in faith, and with awe and reverence, anchors our language in the center of all things. Jesus roots what we say in the Truth and puts all of God’s creation in perspective. His name is indeed the “name above all names” (Philippians 2:9). When we lose a sense of the importance of his name—when we forget the One to whom the name “Jesus” points—all our language becomes, in sense, detached from its center, debased, and devalued.

- What are some factors that might make it hard to trust what you hear on the news?
- Do you think it’s harder, or easier, to believe what you read or hear on the media right now than it was twenty-five years ago? What factors might be contributing to the shift?
- What factors lead to a person’s words meaning a lot to you, personally? What factors lead you to think a person’s words seem pretty cheap and not worth listening to?
- What would you say are some factors at work today in our society that make it difficult to listen to each other and have conversations about important subjects?
- How do you understand the connections between 1) faith in God and respect for his name, and 2) the care you put into what you say to other people, and 3) the hope you have to really *reach* other people through what you say?

6. Please read the following Bible passages. Next to each, write down your thoughts on how they shed light on the Second Commandment and reflect its importance.

- Luke 11:2
- Isaiah 12:4
- Matthew 28:19-20
- James 3:8-10
- John 16:23
- Psalm 50:15
- Ephesians 5:4
- Matthew 15:11

7. Look back at what you wrote down with your partner(s) regarding their prayer concerns from your first group meeting. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other closing prayers, please ask God to bless your small group and the congregation of St. John's as we follow Jesus' call to go into the deep water with Christ and become more confident, effective "fishers of people."

INTO DEEPER WATER WITH THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

WEEK #4 SMALL GROUP MEETING

Target Week: December 6-12, 2020

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer, (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer):
Holy Spirit, direct us in all we do to our Savior, Jesus Christ. Keep us deeply rooted and grounded in him, that we will serve him faithfully and give our lives generously to the work of his Church. Help us to love each other as the Father loves us, and guide us to new insights today as we study your Word together. In Jesus' name. Amen.
3. Go back to your homework for last week, beginning on **page 14**. As a group, please discuss your responses to **items 2-6**. When you are finished, return here and continue with item number 4, below.
4. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week, for you. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, *and be sure to pray for them!* Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.

5. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be “doubling up” on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.
6. Close with prayer. Today, pray a “popcorn” prayer. If possible, hold hands. Go around the room, and everyone offer a brief word of thanks and/or praise to God. As is possible, try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer.

HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (5TH) SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Say the following prayer *aloud*; always feel free to add any petitions or thanks as you wish. *Lord God, lift me up, heal me, and renew me. Help me to give my life completely into your hands and to trust in your will for me. Be with (my small group partner[s]), help them to know your constant love for them. I thank you for all that we have been able to share in our meetings. Help us to continue to lovingly uphold and support each other in this journey, and make us faithful to you in all that we do. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*
2. The Third Commandment is “**Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.**” (Exodus 20:8-11)

The Third Commandment, regarding the Sabbath Day, emphasizes the importance of a living and dynamic relationship with God. God created human beings to live within the limits and rhythms of biological life, time, seasons, geography, and our physicality. If we do not set aside a particular, regular time to focus on our love relationship with God, it shows that God has become a less “real” part of our life as biological human beings. Without setting aside real time for the relationship, we try to make God into a spiritual idea, rather than what He is—a living and powerful reality who meets us and speaks to us in everyday time and everyday places. Please read **Luke 10:38-42**, and then respond to the following:

- Why does Jesus commend Mary and not hardworking Martha in this passage?

3. God set aside the seventh day as a day of rest for his people to worship and to ponder God’s power and goodness in the work of creation. Please read the following passages and, in your own words, describe what they are saying about the Sabbath as a day to appreciate the power of God in creation:

- Exodus 20:8-11
- Matthew 6:24-34

4. Please read **Deuteronomy 5:12, 15** and then write down what else (besides God’s work in creation) the passage is telling us to ponder on the Sabbath.

5. Please read **Hebrews 10:22-25**, and then respond to the following:

- In your own words, why is *gathering together with other believers* in prayer, worship, praise and service, a central part of Christian living?
- In what ways right now is attending worship and participating in church activities feeding you spiritually, in special ways?
- How does active participation and worshiping as part of a congregation help you gain perspective on life that you might not have otherwise?
- What happens, or can happen, when believers neglect worship or don't participate in a local congregation?
- Have you yourself gone for extended periods when Sabbath observance was not a regular part of your life? Describe the circumstances, and what you have learned from that experience.

6. Please read **Mark 6:30-31**, and then respond to the following:

- What does it mean to you that Jesus himself (being 100% God and 100% human) regularly took time to rest and pray and step away from work?
- Have you ever experienced a time when work “took over your life?” What were the circumstances, the feelings, the outcomes, the lessons you learned from that?
- What are some things right now in your life that give you a sense of peace, fulfillment?
- What are some blessings from God you have in your life that you might sometimes too easily forget?

7. Please read **Matthew 11:28**. In the space below, relate how, in your own experience, Jesus Christ gives you spiritual rest from the burden of your sins.

8. In your own words, how is the “peace which surpasses all understanding,” which we have in Christ, 1) different from, and 2) like, the peace we feel in the middle of a really good vacation?

9. As we know, human relationships suffer when we do not devote attention to them. Our daily relationship with God is no different. He speaks to us through particular people (the Church) and through particular means (the Word and the Sacraments). When we neglect the Sabbath Day and attempt to spiritualize God (push Him out of our regular everyday schedule), we miss out on the joy of a living relationship with Him, and we start to dis-associate God from everyday life. Ultimately, neglecting the Sabbath becomes another way we slowly slide into assuming that we are gods to ourselves. The power of sin is always working to pull us into a kind of desperate isolation where we think our lives are in our hands. God does not want us to miss out on the joy of a close, vibrant, joyful and loving relationship with Him in our everyday lives. The Third Commandment is the key to a life of simple, heavenly joy and fulfillment on earth...a life of communion with God. Please respond to the following:

- How have you experienced the power of God (the Holy Spirit) working in your life through other believers in especially powerful ways?
- How does the rhythm of Christian life (starting the week with worship, being fed with the Word, and pondering God's work in the world) help you understand the overarching purpose and meaning of everything you do on the other six days of the week?
- Please read **Romans 10:13-17**. Why do you think Paul says "faith comes by hearing?" How might this speak to the importance of the Sabbath Day?

10. Look back at what you wrote down with your partner(s) regarding their prayer concerns. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other prayers, ask for God's continued guidance and blessing on your small group and on our congregation as we continue into deeper water with Christ. May the Holy Spirit fill us with life and power so that we can become more confident and effective "fishers of people."

DEEPER WATER WITH THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

WEEK #5 SMALL GROUP MEETING

Target Week: December 13-19, 2020

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. For the prayer, everyone say the following verses from Psalm 51 in unison, out loud:
Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for all your gifts to us. Help us each day to grow more fully into the image of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. When we stumble and make mistakes, lift us up and fill us with a sense of your forgiveness. When our hearts are cold and we are filled with frustrations, give us your peace. Keep us focused on you in all that we do. In Jesus' name. Amen.

3. Go back to your homework for last week, starting on **page 18**. As a group, review the material and discuss your responses to **items 2-9**. When you are finished, return here and continue with item number 4, below.
4. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week, for you. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, *and be sure to pray for them!* Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.
5. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be “doubling up” on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.
6. Close with prayer. Today, pray a “popcorn” prayer. Go around the room, and everyone offer a brief word of thanks and/or praise to God. As is possible, try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer.

HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (6TH) SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Say the following prayer aloud; add any petitions or thanks as you wish.
Lord, please give me your wisdom now as I approach your word. Help me to discern your will for me, and open my heart to hear your voice speaking to me through the scriptures. Help me not rely on my own understanding. Thank you God for the clarity, encouragement and hope your Word brings. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.
2. The Fourth Commandment is: **“Honor your father and your mother.” (Exodus 20:12)**
 - Please read **John 19:25-27**. How did Jesus honor his mother (we presume that Mary would have no one in particular left to take care of her and help her after Jesus dies) while he was dying on the cross?
 - From what Jesus says to the “disciple he loved” and to his mother from the cross, how would you describe Jesus’ understanding of the importance of the human family?
3. The Fourth Commandment reveals God’s will for human society much more deeply than it might seem to on the surface. Normally, in the big scheme of things, we might think of our parents’ power as pretty insignificant compared to the authority of a president or a senator. But, notice that none of the commandments say “honor your President” or “honor the King.” These political authorities (politicians, bosses, police, etc.) are to be honored, respected, and obeyed as servants of the public good. The Bible, however, places Dad and Mom in front of all of them. The nuclear family is the basis of human society, and is human society’s fundamental political unit, according to the commandments. When the government of a society starts to intrude into the realm of authority normally held by the nuclear family unit, we know that the government is taking on a power that God does not mean it to have, and therefore will never ultimately achieve.

Why are mom and dad so important? Because no one on earth (usually) is better than parents at combining law with love. As human beings bound by the power of sin, we are inclined from the day we are born towards selfishness. A child who does not regularly encounter real limits (expressed as law) to his or her natural selfishness is a child destined to be a troubled adult who brings misery upon others. Who is best equipped to teach a child his limits, while also assuring him that he is loved, protected, and provided for? Mom and dad! The other alternative is the police, who are skilled at teaching people limits, but who do not have time to spread love around to everyone☺.

Parents are also charged with full responsibility to bring their children up with full exposure to the treasures of the Christian faith. No one can teach kids better than their own parents about God's sacrificial love in Jesus Christ, while also helping kids face the hard facts of human sinfulness, selfishness, evil, and worldly limitations.

Sometimes parents are terrible at being good parents. They are, after all, sinful human beings who become selfish, despairing, lazy, stubborn, overly angry, and maybe even cruel. This does not detract from their huge responsibility, which is based on nothing less than God's own identity and role as parent (Father). The 4th Commandment is by no means a free ticket for parents to claim they are "right" all the time. Rather, it holds parents up to an incredibly high model (God) and places a huge responsibility on them. Parents will answer to God for the job they do.

As children, we are to honor our parents and recognize the incredible sacrifices they make for us. We are never, ever to take them for granted or assume they owe us something. They should have already silently assumed that responsibility for themselves. In extreme cases, where parents have become hateful and abusive towards their children, have fallen into chronic destructive behaviors, or have become otherwise incapable of carrying out their responsibility, we should also be aware of the other authorities (governmental agencies, etc.) that God has mercifully placed in our lives to assist our parents in their duties.

The main sense of the 4th Commandment, in any case, is that God has built the human nuclear family unit in a way that will best serve to help people come to faith, hope, and love towards Him. No other human arrangement will serve God's ultimate purposes better.

- Please write your general response to the above material.
- Would you agree that generally "no one combines law with love" better than parents? Why or why not?
- It has been very common in history for tyrannical governments to seek to weaken the nuclear family (e.g. implement laws and programs that weaken marriage as an institution, or separate children from their parents, etc.). How do you understand the relationship between political tyranny and the role of the nuclear family in human society? Why have so many tyrants seen the nuclear family as an obstacle in their path to power?

4. Please read **Ephesians 6:1-3**, and respond to the following:

- What promise is attached to the commandment to “honor your father and mother?” What might this tell us about obedience to the 4th commandment and its relationship to the general health of human society?
- How would you describe general trends in the culture in which we live, in terms of relationships between parents and children right now?
- From your experience, how would you describe general trends in our culture right now regarding our care of ageing parents?

5. Please respond to the following items:

- How big of an influence would you say your parents have had on your life as a believer in Christ? Describe how you think they were most effective as teachers of the faith. Also, describe which areas they might have been somewhat ineffective as teachers of the faith.
- If you yourself are (or have been) a parent, describe the ways in which you think you’ve done a really good job in raising your children.
- Describe the ways in which you feel you might **not** be doing (or might **not** have done) a great job as a parent. What would you like to have done differently with your children?
- What are the most important things you want see in your children, as human beings?
- We address God as “Father” in our prayers. Besides describing our perfect Father, how does the fact that God is our “Father” help us understand how he sees each of us, his children? What does he want for us?

6. Please read **Romans 13:1-7**, and respond to the following items:

- What does the passage say about governing authorities?
- In what ways do you think the authority God gives to parents is similar to the authority gives to civil government? In what ways do their roles differ?
- Below, describe some situations where you think it would be the duty of a believer to actively resist a civil government?

7. Look back at what you wrote down with your partner(s) regarding their prayer concerns. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other prayers, ask for God's continued guidance and blessing on your small group and on our congregation as we continue into deeper water with Christ. May the Holy Spirit fill us with life and power so that we can become more confident and effective "fishers of people."

DEEPER WATER WITH THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

WEEK #6 SMALL GROUP MEETING

Target Week: December 20-26, 2020

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer, (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer):
Loving Father, we gather together today to learn, to grow and to change. Help us to move into a deeper understanding of your truth. We lay our lives down before you and ask that you would move among us. May we all feel safe with each other. Safe to think and question. Safe to ask for help. And safe to share our lives with you, our loving heavenly Father. In Jesus' name. Amen.
3. Go back to your homework for last week, starting on **page 21**. As a group, discuss your responses to **items 2-6**. When you are finished, return here and continue with item number 4, below.
4. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week, for you. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, *and be sure to pray for them!* Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.
5. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be "doubling up" on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.
6. Close with prayer. Today, do a "popcorn prayer." Hold hands and go around the group. Each person says a brief prayer. Then, everyone join in the Lord's Prayer.

HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (7TH) SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Say the following prayer; add any petitions or thanks as you wish.
Loving Father, I will lean in, retreat from the pressures I face, and move closer and deeper into your love. I will breathe out, refrain from the distractions I seek, and become open and receptive to your grace. Help me, Lord, to be honest and real in your presence. Help me to listen, and to be fed with your life-giving Word. In Jesus' name. Amen.

2. The Fifth Commandment is: **“You shall not murder.” (Exodus 20:13)**. Luther, in his explanation of the fifth commandment in the *Small Catechism*, goes far beyond the negative injunction of the 5th commandment. He expresses it in terms of a positive command: “We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, *but help and support him in every physical need.*”

- How do you see the Spirit of Jesus working in Luther’s explanation?

3. The fifth commandment emphasizes that all life is sacred, holy, good, and worthy of protection. The power to give and take life does not rightly belong to us, but to the Author of Life.

This command often brings us up against the tragic nature of a world bound by sin, because sometimes it is necessary to use force in order to protect peaceful people from other human beings who would kill them and destroy any chance a society has for some peace. For example, it is sometimes necessary for publicly recognized authorities to use violence against criminals and political tyrants (e.g. like Hitler). Christians will always debate among themselves about the rightness of capital punishment for particularly dangerous criminals.

The heart of the fifth commandment, however, is that life is good and inherently valuable. We want people to live, and be happy and free. We cannot think of human life—or any life—as a statistic, a measurable quantity, or an abstract idea. ***All people’s lives are infinitely valuable.*** God loves each individual human being infinitely. It is very easy for us to fall into the dangerous habit of treating people like statistics or numbers. When we think of human life in terms of faceless masses, or when we think of nascent life (e.g. unborn children) as a neutral quantity, we show our sinfulness and our predilection towards misusing power (tyranny) all too clearly.

- Please note what stands out for you in the paragraphs you just read. Anything you particularly agree or disagree with?

4. Please read **Luke 10:25-37**, and respond to the following items:

- The priest and the Levite (two religious people) basically leave the beaten, robbed man to die on the road. Why do you think they walked by him? What goes on in the human heart to tempt us to “let strangers die?”
- What factors commonly make it hard for us to extend ourselves towards strangers and sacrifice our own time and resources for others like the Samaritan did?
- The Samaritan was not just a stranger to the man who was beaten: he was also regarded as an *enemy* of Israel...an outsider. What does this parable tell us about God’s will for human community, beyond immediate family and people we know?

- Describe a time you helped a stranger in need, or when you saw other people do it. What made it challenging? What were the results? What do you think was your motivation?

5. In **Genesis 4**, Cain kills Abel out of jealousy and anger (the first murder in the Bible) and responds with defensiveness and shame. By the end of the same chapter, human beings are killing multiple enemies and boasting about it! God responds to the situation in chapter 6, by letting the flood loose and “wiping the slate clean” (except for Noah and his family).

- Why do you think that Scripture sees a godless world as being fundamentally characterized by *violence*?
- Scripture not only teaches that in sin we do not really know who God is or understand him; it goes much farther, to say that we are actually enemies of God who actively rebel against him. Please read **Romans 8:5-8** and **Romans 5:9-11**. How do you understand active human **hostility** towards God? What is going on there?
- How do you understand our hostile relationship with God affecting our relationships with other people?
- What would you say are the most important factors that might drive people to inflicting violence on others?
- Where do you see violence happening in our culture right now? What are some factors contributing to it right now?

6. Please read **Romans 12:9-21**, and then respond to the following:

- What does it mean to you, when Paul says “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’”
- Recall a time when you yourself might have tried to “repay someone with evil” for an evil they committed against you—or a time when you witnessed this between other people. What was the situation? How did it turn out? How do you understand what Paul is saying when he says “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good”?
- Describe how your faith in Jesus Christ helps you control, temper, or re-direct your anger towards other people to positive worldly outcomes, rather than destructive outcomes.

7. Please read **Romans 13:1-5**, and then respond to the following:

- How do you understand a civil government’s role in keeping law and order in a society?
- When a judge who is a believer in Jesus Christ sentences a person to life in prison (or death by capital punishment under the law of a state), how do you understand the Christian judge’s position?
- How do you understand the role of the military from a Christian perspective?
- How do you understand boundaries to a civil government’s power to take life? From history or experience, when do you think a civil authority is crossing the boundary between 1) protecting life, and 2) becoming an agent of evil.

8. Look back at what you wrote down with your partner(s) regarding their prayer concerns. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other prayers, ask for God’s continued guidance and blessing on your small group and on our congregation as we continue into deeper water with Christ. May the Holy Spirit fill us with life and power so that we can become more confident and effective “fishers of people.”

**DEEPER WATER WITH THE TEN COMMANDMENTS
WEEK #7 SMALL GROUP MEETING
Target Week: December 27, 2020—January 2, 2021**

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer, (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer):
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, holy is your word. Perfect are your ways. Bless us as we meditate on your Word today. Help us to hand all our anxieties, worries, fears and frustrations over to you, and fill us with the peace of Christ, which passes all understanding. Bless our congregation and make us faithful in our witness to Jesus. Be with all those who need your healing power. In Jesus’ name. Amen.
3. Go back to your homework for last week, starting on **page 24**. As a group, discuss your responses to **items 2-7**. When you are finished, return here and continue with item number 4, below.
4. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week, for you. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, *and be sure to pray for them!* Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.

5. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be “doubling up” on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.
6. Close with prayer. Today, in your prayers, have each person share one thing for which they are especially thankful to God right now. Then close with the Lord’s Prayer.

HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (8TH) SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Find a place where you can concentrate. Say the following prayer aloud; always feel free to add extra petitions and thanks.

Holy Spirit, lift me up from the pit of my sin and selfishness and fill me with your life-giving power. Unite me with my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and guide me in the way of truth as I seek your will for my life. Lord God, make me your faithful representative, and help me to pour myself out joyfully in service to your Kingdom. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen

2. The Sixth Commandment is **“You shall not commit adultery.” (Exodus 20:14)**

On the deepest level, adultery (sex outside marriage) is forbidden because the marriage union between a man and a woman is lifted up in scripture as the highest earthly reflection of the union between Christ and His Church. The faithful and exclusive relationship between human spouses is meant to be the closest earthly analogy to God’s perfect and self-emptying love for each and every human being. Adultery is a betrayal of love, comparable to the original sin of Adam and Eve, when they turned away from their true love (God) in favor of their own appetites. Adultery is thus (like all sin) an act of idolatry. It is to lift self above others, resulting in pain, destruction, mistrust, and brokenness.

The Sixth Commandment also forbids adultery for very down-to-earth reasons which do not always register with modern people, because we are used to thinking about sexuality in a very privatized way (often as “self-expression” or “self-fulfillment”). Many do not recognize its wider effect on society. The fact is, however: Adultery does extreme damage to the nuclear family unit (see the fourth commandment). Adultery destroys trust between spouses and damages families. The weakening of families, in turn, can lead to generations of children who, through no fault of their own, are generally only half-trained when it comes to civil behavior towards their neighbors and also towards authority figures who are trying to maintain peace and fairness in society.

A civilization where the nuclear family is weak is a society where the impersonal governmental authority is necessarily strong. As was said regarding the fourth commandment, the governmental authority (police, agencies, etc.) might be very good at imposing limits on people, but is not well-equipped to balance the use of force with love. A nation where familial love is weak and governmental authority is strong might be a peaceful nation, but is necessarily a nation held together more and more by coercion (force).

- Please respond to the material in the paragraphs above. Anything strike you in particular? Anything you specifically agree, or disagree, with?

3. Please read **Genesis 2:15-24**, and then, in the space below, write down what you think the passage is telling us about God's purposes in creating us male and female.

4. God, being omnipotent, can love each person directly, infinitely and fully. Human beings, on the other hand, are created finite and our love can only reach out in a "ripple effect" through the world starting with our relationships with those closest to us. From the beginning, marriage between one man and one woman reflects this reality. We cannot be "bound" to everyone like God, who is capable of binding himself fully to each and every person at once. But, in our faithfulness and commitment to one person in particular (i.e. our spouse), we reflect God's total love, faithfulness, and commitment to all people. Our love for our spouses ripples out into the world, through our families, spilling out beyond the family unit, affecting people in a kind of chain-reaction, one person to the next. God's command to Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply" (**Genesis 1:28**) actually expresses God's desire for his divine love and blessings to spread far and wide through human beings, starting with spouses.

- From your own experience, have you seen this "ripple effect" in action in human society, where strong marriages and families lead to blessings throughout the society? How would you describe this ripple effect?
- Do you think a nation which esteems marriage highly (e.g. as a divine institution) has advantages over one where marriages are more casual? Why or why not?

5. Please read **Matthew 10:34-38**. In these verses, Jesus puts himself between us and those family members who are dearest to us, making himself **first**. What, if anything, do you find disturbing about these verses? Do you think Jesus is ultimately saying this to strengthen, or weaken, our relationships with spouse and family? Explain your answer.

6. Read what Jesus says about marriage and divorce in **Mark 10:6-9**. Jesus always avoids getting bogged down in never-ending discussions of "exceptions to rules," but rather always focuses like a laser on God's *original intentions* in creation.

- From what Jesus says here, what would you say are some of God's original intentions for marriage?
- All of us have been touched by divorce in one way or another. What are your thoughts on healing and forgiveness for believers who have experienced, or are experiencing, extreme pain and brokenness in their marriages.

7. Please read **Matthew 5:27-28**. Clearly, Jesus is holding us up to a standard that's far beyond the minimal commandment to not commit adultery, here. Please respond to the following:

- Jesus does not just point to the breaking of a commandment, but exposes the “lustful intentions” of our hearts that can drive our behavior in all situations...even when we aren't visibly breaking any commandments! Why is what he says here so challenging for us?
- How do you relate such a high standard (God's intention), which Jesus expresses here, to our need for salvation from the power of sin?
- Without referring directly to anyone: Describe a situation in which you've seen another person's (or your own) “personal appetites” or “lustful intentions” manifest themselves in ways that leave broken relationships and mistrust in their wake?
- Can you think of a time when you've perceived a person's “lustful intentions” hiding behind a veil of righteousness and “lawfulness?” If so, describe the situation without referring to the person directly.

8. Please read **1 Thessalonians 4:3-5**. Describe how you think our faith in Jesus—our new master—helps us channel and discipline our self-centered bodily appetites towards positive and God-pleasing ends?

9. The New Testament often pictures marriage not only as a way of positively transmitting God's love and blessings out into creation through a “chain reaction” of human biological relationships, but also—since sin has entered into creation—as a way in which our powerful, God-given sexual desires can be channeled, contained, and kept from being destructive to society. Please respond to the following:

- Please read **1 Corinthians 7:8-9** and write down your thoughts on this biblical idea, that marriage serves as a major “containment/preventive” measure against widespread selfish behavior.
- How can a person's sexual drives become abusive, exploitative, evil?

10. Please read the following passages, and after each one, write down how they speak to our society's current widespread addiction to *pornography*:

- Psalm 27:4, 8
- 1 John 2:16

- Matthew 5:28
- 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
- 1 Corinthians 6:13
- Ephesians 5:33

11. In summary, the bible is so full of warnings against sexual immorality that a list of passage-headings alone would fill several pages. Why do you think the Word of God devotes so many words to this topic? What does the Bible's consistent emphasis on sexual self-control say about the power of human sexuality, both as a gift from God and a potentially deeply destructive force?

12. Look back at what you wrote down with your partner(s) regarding their prayer concerns from your first group meeting. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other closing prayers, please ask God to bless your small group and the congregation of St. John's as we follow Jesus' call to go into the deep water with Christ and become more confident, effective "fishers of people."

Into the Deep Water with Christ
DEEPER WATER WITH THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

WEEK #8 SMALL GROUP MEETING

Target Week: January 3-9, 2021

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer).
Lord, you have called us to serve you. Grant that we may walk in your presence: your love in our hearts, your truth in our minds, your strength in our wills; until, at the end of our journey, we know the joy of our homecoming and the welcome of your embrace. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
3. Go back to the homework you did for this week, starting on **page 28**. With your small group, discuss your responses to **items 2-11**. After you finish your discussion, come back here and continue with item #4, below.
4. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, and be sure to pray for them! Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.
5. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be "doubling up" on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.

6. Close with prayer. Today, have each person pray for the person on their right. As much as is possible, try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayers.

HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (9TH) SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Find a place where you can concentrate. Say the following prayer aloud; always feel free to add extra petitions and thanks.

Heavenly Father, make me an instrument of your will. Forgive me of my sins and rid me of every fear that keeps me from serving you. Take away my selfishness, my tendency to dwell on past hurts and slights, my anger and frustrations. Help me to let go of the past and to move on to what you would have me do this day, to glorify you and serve the people around me. Give me joy in my work and give me confidence in your love for me. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

2. The Seventh Commandment is: **“You shall not steal.” (Exodus 20:15)**. Again, Martin Luther in his explanation of this commandment goes beyond the negative injunction to say: *“We should fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbor’s money or possessions, or get them in any dishonest way, but help him to improve and protect his possessions and income.”*

- How do you see the Spirit of Jesus at work in Martin Luther’s explanation of the seventh commandment?

3. Please read **Luke 19:1-10**. Then, in the space below, write down some of your thoughts on how Jesus changed Zacchaeus’ life. Focus on Zacchaeus’ attitude changed towards money and possessions.

4. Use the space below to describe a time when you helped another person “improve and protect his/her possessions and income.” What were the circumstances? What would you say is the biggest thing you learned or gained from the experience?

5. Recall an incident where something was stolen from you or taken from you dishonestly. Write about how this incident has affected your view of life and other people, for good or bad. What did you learn from it?

6. The last four commandments all pertain to the sin of “coveting” in one form or another. We look at our neighbors and want to possess what they have, whether it’s their relationships, their good reputation, or their worldly possessions.

Greed and envy towards our neighbors are the products of a lack of faith in God’s providence. We start to think that *things* will bring us fulfillment, when actually, only a relationship with the One who *gives* us everything can fulfill us. God will provide us with what we need. Our job is simply to be faithful to our immediate commitments, in our work and in our relationships. We

become *covetous* when we start believing we are gods who deserve the life and the possessions we have.

- Please read **Matthew 6:25-34**. Then write down your thoughts on how what Jesus says here—about worrying and fearing loss—relates to greed and envy towards our neighbors.

7. Dreaming of higher accomplishments and bigger achievements in life is **good**. God wants us to use all of our gifts to the fullest. In fact, if we don't have a passion to go "onwards and upwards" in life, it's a sign that we might be getting apathetic, self-satisfied, and self-enclosed.

However, if our dreams make us impatient with our immediate commitments and the work at hand, we might start looking for short-cuts through life. This puts us in danger. Stealing, cheating, bearing false witness against our neighbors to put them down, and looking greedily at our neighbors' possessions are all examples of short-cuts to a life we feel we deserve, but will never have as long as we think we deserve it.

- All of us dream of a "better life" in our own way, and often this "better life" involves a vision of financial freedom, lack of worries, and access to beautiful and fun things. There is nothing at all wrong with these visions, in themselves. In fact, these visions are a sign of the heavenly hope that God has put in us from birth. God actually uses our innate ambition to inspire us to reach beyond ourselves towards heaven...ultimately hoping that our hungry spirits will be fulfilled and satisfied by Jesus our Savior. How would you say your natural desire and ambition for a better life has served God and others (e.g. your family) in **positive** ways throughout your life?
- Has there ever been a time when your ambition has met with frustration, leading to greed and envy—and perhaps to dishonest behavior such as stealing? In the space below, talk about your experience, and how it affected you. What lessons did you learn from it?

8. For you, what are the most important ways that the Seventh Commandment protects the life, liberty and trust of each person in a society?

9. The idea of *not stealing* affirms the right of private ownership. As Christians, we often talk about how nothing we have in life really belongs to us, since everything ultimately belongs to God. The gifts we have in life only belong to us temporarily, and we are to glorify God (their true owner) with them. How do you understand our private ownership of the things and property we work for and maintain (as established by the commandment), while at the same time acknowledging that nothing really "belongs" to us?

10. From what you have experienced yourself or learned from history, what happens when a society or group bans private ownership, in favor of “communal” ownership? Interestingly, small religious groups have successfully practiced communal ownership for surprisingly long (but ultimately limited) periods, whereas non-religious “communal” groups have had much less longevity. How do you understand these dynamics as a follower of Jesus?

11. Look back at what you wrote down with your partner(s) regarding their prayer concerns. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other closing prayers, please ask God to bless your small group and the congregation of St. John’s as we follow Jesus’ call to go into the deep water with Christ and become more confident, effective “fishers of people.”

**Into the Deep Water with Christ
DEEPER WATER WITH THE TEN COMMANDMENTS**

WEEK #9 SMALL GROUP MEETING

Target Week: January 10-16, 2021

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer).
Come Holy Spirit, make God’s Word known to us. Make us desire the truth in all that we do and always bring us home to the source of all truth, our Savior Jesus Christ. Open our hearts and minds to your guidance today as we discuss the sacred scriptures and share this time together. Give us joy in our fellowship, and set us free from our fears, that we may welcome others into the peace of your presence with the graciousness with which you have welcomed us into eternal life with you. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.
3. Go back to the homework you did for this week, starting on **page 32**. With your small group, discuss your responses to **items 2-10**. After you finish your discussion, come back here and continue with item #4, below.
4. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, and be sure to pray for them! Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.
5. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be “doubling up” on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.
6. Close with prayer. Today, have each person pray briefly for the person on their right. If possible, try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer.

HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (10TH) SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Find a place where you can concentrate, with few distractions. Say the following prayer; add any petitions or thanks as you wish:

I praise you, God, for the grace you have shown me: for the gift of life itself, for my family, my friendships, and all the things that I too often take for granted. Most of all, I thank you for sending your Son Jesus into this world and into my life, that I may know you and worship you as my Heavenly Father. Set me free from all the false gods that I am tempted to worship because they offer me easy shortcuts around the cross of Jesus, and lift me up by the Holy Spirit to serve you alone with joy and confidence. In Jesus' name. Amen.

2. The Eighth Commandment is: **“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” (Exodus 20:16).** In his explanation in the *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther goes beyond the negative injunction of the 8th commandment to say: *“We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way.”*

- How do you see the Spirit of Christ at work in Martin Luther’s explanation of this commandment?

3. Please read **Mark 14:3-9**. How does Jesus defend and praise the woman who anoints him?

4. A good name or reputation is important so that each of us may enjoy the trust and respect of others. Please read the following passages, and write down what strikes you about them:

- Proverbs 11:13
- Proverbs 22:1
- Ecclesiastes 7:1

5. Has anyone ever told lies about you in an attempt to hurt you or damage your reputation? Please use the space below to describe the situation, and what you learned from it.

6. How would you rate your own “temptation quotient” when it comes to engaging in gossip about other people? Why do you think holy scripture consistently warns us against engaging in idle gossip about others? Also—why do you think people enjoy gossiping?

7. How do you typically respond when you hear someone speaking badly about another person behind their back? Share with your group some helpful experiences you might have had in life when it comes to these situations.

8. In the space below, please share your thoughts about how social media has affected our society when it comes to obeying/disobeying the 8th commandment.

9. Please read the following passages and make notes beside them. How does each passage speak to “building others up” in light of our Christian faith?

- Luke 7:4-5
- 1 Samuel 19:1-7
- Mark 12:41-44
- 1 Peter 4:8
- Ephesians 4:15
- 1 Corinthians 13:7

10. When it comes to your own life, how natural would you say it is for you to give other people praise, affirming them, speaking kindly of them, or building them up through actions you take? How, if it all, do you think you could be more conscious of doing it, or in what particular ways could you become “better” at it?

11. In what concrete ways do you think you could (verbally or through action) intentionally build up other people (praise them, speak well of them, openly show appreciate for them) in the following areas of your life at the present time? If possible, think of specific individuals.

- Spouse (if applicable)
- Children (if applicable)
- Parent(s) (if applicable)
- Coworkers (if applicable)
- Fellow church members
- Friends

12. **Ephesians 4:14** tells us to “speak the truth in love.” This means to speak truthfully to others for their well-being, to build others up toward the mature fullness of life we have in Christ. It includes gently admonishing or encouraging people to repent of their sin, and pointing out the

dangers of false teachings and false teachers. Obviously, sometimes to speak to the truth in love involves saying things that are difficult to say. Please read the following passages and respond to them, focusing on what each says about speaking the truth in love.

- 2 Samuel 12:1-14
- Ephesians 4:11-16

13. Think of a time when you had to have a difficult conversation with someone you love, for their own good. What was the situation? What made it hard? What was the outcome? What gave you strength to say what you said? What did you learn from it?

14. Has there ever been a time when you should have spoken the truth in love with someone, but did not? What was/is the situation? What factors held you back (or are holding you back) from doing it?

15. What's the difference, would you say, between speaking the truth in love with someone, and being "judgmental" in the popular sense of the word?

16. Look back at your partners' prayer concerns from your last meeting. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other closing prayers, please ask God to bless your small group and the congregation of St. John's as we follow Jesus' call to go into the deep water with Christ and become more confident, effective "fishers of people."

**Into the Deep Water with Christ
DEEPER WATER WITH THE TEN COMMANDMENTS**

WEEK #10 SMALL GROUP MEETING

Target Week: January 17-23, 2021

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer).
Loving Father, lift our eyes to seek you first today and always. Forgive us for getting bogged down in the cares and worries of this world. Renew us through the power of the Holy Spirit to live confidently as your sons and daughters. Give us strength to build up your Church on earth, to witness to Christ, and to serve the people around us with humility and joy. We pray this in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

3. Please go back to the homework you did for this week, starting on **page 34**. With your partners, discuss the material and your responses from **items 2-15**, and then return here to item #4, below.
4. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, and be sure to pray for them! Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.
5. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be “doubling up” on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.
6. Close with prayer. Today, have each person pray briefly for the person on their right. If possible, try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer.

HOMEWORK FOR YOUR NEXT (11TH) SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Find a place where you can concentrate, with few distractions. Say the following prayer; add any petitions or thanks as you wish:

Heavenly Father, I thank you for you for the gifts, talents and abilities that you have given me, and I pray for a spirit of discernment, that I might continue to find ways that I can best serve you and build up your holy Church on earth. Bless the work of your people throughout the world, and make us strong in our witness to you, so that people may be drawn to Christ and find eternal life in him. In Jesus' name. Amen.

2. The Ninth and Tenth Commandments are: **“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his cattle, or anything that is your neighbor’s.” (Exodus 20:17)** Martin Luther’s explanations of these commandments read: (9) *“We should fear and love God so that we do not scheme to get our neighbor’s inheritance or house, or get it in a way which only appears right, but help and be of service to him in keeping it. (10) We should fear and love God so that we do not entice or force away our neighbor’s wife, workers, or animals, or turn them against him, but urge them to stay and do their duty.”*

- How do you see the Spirit of Jesus at work in Luther’s explanations of the 9th and 10th commandments?

3. Please read **1 Kings 21:1-16**, where King Ahab “acquires” Naboth’s vineyard. In the space below, write down what the passage is telling you about covetous behavior, greed, the temptations of power, and the damage that covetous behavior does in the world.

4. In the space below, write down 10 things for which you are grateful to God right now.

5. Thinking of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for us, how would you say gratitude is one of the defining characteristics of a believer's life? How might gratitude set a believer's life apart in a culture which does not recognize a God who gives life, grace, and salvation freely?

6. Please comment from a Christian point of view on the following quip from a magazine: "Forty years ago in America, a person would pull up to a restaurant in a nice car and people would say to the driver, 'well done, buddy! Someday I want to work hard enough to be where you're at now!'" Now, when a person pulls up to a restaurant in a nice car, people say 'Whose back did you step on to get that car?'" To what extent does this quip ring true or not true to you, and why?

7. Please read and comment on **James 4:1-2**. How does the passage speak to you personally?

8. Talk about an experience where jealousy or envy of another person has affected your life. What was the situation? How did it play out? What have you learned from it?

9. Of whom—or perhaps what *kind* of person—would you say you are most envious right now, and why? What, if anything, do you find helps you when you find yourself envying somebody or coveting what they have? Do you find your faith in Christ coming into play, when it comes to adopting a new perspective on things when you are jealous?

10. Please read and comment on **Hebrews 13:5-6**. How does the passage speak to you personally?

11. How does fear of loss, or lack of faith in God's providence (his power to provide us with everything we need), play into our temptation to covet and be jealous of others?

12. Please read **Philippians 2:4**, and write down your thoughts on how actively helping others (showing generosity) might be one of the best "cures" for coveting and envy?

13. Please read **Psalm 107:6-9**, and then write down your thoughts on the relationship between “wanting the best” in this world (having ambition) and “covetousness.” How does God use human worldly ambition to *excel* to serve his good purposes in this broken world? On the other hand, when does human ambition become destructive and turn into greed?

14. As a believer, what do you think of competition? Do you think there will be anything analogous to competition or “games” in heaven? When is competition a God-pleasing thing (if ever), and when does it become a destructive thing?

15. Look back at your partners’ prayer concerns from your last meeting. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other closing prayers, please ask God to bless your small group and the congregation of St. John’s as we follow Jesus’ call to go into the deep water with Christ and become more confident, effective “fishers of people.”

Into the Deep Water with Christ
DEEPER WATER WITH THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

WEEK #11 SMALL GROUP MEETING

Target Week: January 24-30, 2021

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer).
Loving Father, lift our eyes to seek you first today and always. Forgive us for getting bogged down in the cares and worries of this world. Renew us through the power of the Holy Spirit to live confidently as your sons and daughters. Give us strength to build up your Church on earth, to witness to Christ, and to serve the people around us with humility and joy. We pray this in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.
3. Please go back to the homework you did for this week, starting on **page 38**. With your partners, discuss the material and your responses from **items 2-14**, and then return here to item #4, below.
4. In turn, share one or two concerns that you would like your partner(s) to pray about this week. Write down your partner(s) concerns, below, and be sure to pray for them! Use this opportunity to express your commitment to support and care for each other in this journey.
5. Confirm the time and place of your next meeting. Review whether you will be “doubling up” on homework at any point if you are not able to meet weekly, etc.

6. Close with prayer. Today, have each person pray briefly for the person on their right. If possible, try to include elements of your discussion from this meeting in your prayer.

HOMework FOR YOUR NEXT (12TH) SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. Find a place where you can concentrate, with few distractions. Say the following prayer; add any petitions or thanks as you wish:

Holy Spirit, renew me, give me a new heart, and fill me with your power. Unite me with my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and make me an instrument of your love towards all with whom I come into contact this week: at work, at home, and in all that I do. Give me a generous heart. In Jesus' name. Amen.

2. Our last “Going Deeper” session on the Ten Commandments will be an opportunity to talk more generally about the role of God’s Law in Christian life, with a special emphasis on some ideas from the Apostle Paul.

3. Please read **Romans 7:14-25**, and then respond to the following:

- What is Paul saying about the difference between 1) what he knows to be right, and 2) what he actually does as a “wretched man?”
- In your own words, how is Paul describing the **Law’s role** in relation to the power of sin, here?
- Even though Paul is presenting the Law’s “function” as very negative in this passage, he is also clearly viewing the Law as “good.” How is what God’s Law does for us “good?” according to this passage?

4. Please read **Romans 13:11-14**, and then respond to the following:

- In this passage, Paul exhorts us to avoid destructive behaviors (much like God tells us to do with all the commandments). On what basis does Paul encourage us, in this passage, to live a new kind of life?
- How does “knowing what time it is,” as Paul describes in this passage, help us to consider how we can be obedient to the way of life that God has shown us in Jesus?

5. Please read all of Romans **14:1—15:6**, and then respond to the following:

- In this section of Romans, Paul talks about positive behavior within the community of believers—much as God’s commandments speak to human behavior. At the same time, notice that Paul does not speak in terms of *commandments* here. How is he measuring positive behavior in these verses?

- How do you see the Spirit of Jesus at work in what Paul says here about inter-personal human relationships? How does the example of Jesus affect our attitudes towards each other in a basic way?

6. Consider the following examples from daily life and write down 1) how they might be positive and life-affirming, and 2) their destructive potential. All of them can be potentially *both*. Finally, how do you see God potentially working and speaking to a person in each situation, through both Law and Gospel?

- A person who counts every calorie of what they eat in order to maintain a particular weight.
- A person who exercises humble self-control to the extent of never saying a negative word to anyone.
- A person who keeps meticulous records of every cent they earn and spend.
- A person who has made it a personal rule to question all authority/traditions and to “think outside the box” in all situations.
- A person who rigorously schedules every hour on their personal calendar, including free time.
- A loving parent who plans, monitors, and seeks to actively shape every aspect of his/her children’s lives.

7. In your own life, where would you say 1) you are most disciplined; 2) you are least disciplined; and 3) where you would like to have more “structure” in your life right now. For #3, what are some factors that might be keeping you from having a sense of order, control, and peace in your own life right now, and what changes might you possibly start making?

8. Robert was a graduate student at Ohio State University. He lived alone in an apartment on High Street. He was a good student and he put all his energy into his studies. His number one priority in life was planning for his future and looking for pathways to a solid job after he received his degree.

Robert’s parents were worried about him. They knew he was perfectly capable of success in his professional life, but when they visited him, they saw that he wasn’t taking care of himself, physically, spiritually or emotionally. His apartment was grotesque; he left dishes piled in the sink and mold was growing on them. They knew to keep their distance from his bathroom. Robert was eating junk food all day and neglected his appearance. They also knew that he had

no friends and was living a solitary existence. His only link to anything outside his odd-smelling apartment was through classwork, video games and TV.

Robert quietly ignored all of his parents' direct verbal pleas to clean up his place and take better care of himself. So they resorted to giving him subtle hints and "tools." His mother left a "Healthy Diet Cookbook" in his kitchen where he would see it. His father gifted him with a handy container of cleaning supplies, leaving it in the middle of Robert's living room floor. Robert thanked his parents for their concern but nothing changed. Nothing seemed to get through to him...until he was forced to work with Mary on a biology lab project.

Robert fell in love with Mary right away, and miracle of miracles...she returned his love. Suddenly Robert was "walking on air." He was more inspired than ever to excel in his classes, but more than that, he seemed to want to work hard at *everything*. His parents were shocked speechless when they walked into his apartment and found an exercise machine, a refrigerator filled with vegetables, and every surface shining clean.

- How might you see this snippet as a kind of "parable" of Christian life?
- In what ways do you see the power of God's Law at work in the story?
- How might this story help you understand how Jesus changes a person's life when it comes to discipline and *obedience*?

9. How would you say our faith in Christ helps us gain perspective on 1) what we have no control over in life, and 2) what we do have some control over in life? How can faith in Jesus Christ help us have wisdom to know the difference? How can our faith in Christ inspire us to "take hold of those things over which we have some measure of limited power" in life?

10. Please think and pray about your next step *going into the deeper water with Christ*. By this time, you will know what our next "Going Deeper" focus will be, starting . At your upcoming small group meeting, you will be discussing with your partner(s) whether you will continue as a group or reconfigure.

11. Please consider writing a blurb about your experience so far with going deeper with Christ for our church newsletter (the Eagle) and/or our website.

12. Look back at your partners' prayer concerns from your last meeting. Make sure to pray for them now. Among your other closing prayers, please ask God to bless your small group and the congregation of St. John's as we follow Jesus' call to go into the deep water with Christ and become more confident, effective "fishers of people."

Into the Deep Water with Christ
DEEPER WATER WITH THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

WEEK #12 SMALL GROUP MEETING

Target Week: January 31—February 6, 2021

1. Spend about 5 minutes sharing highs and lows of the past few days.
2. Someone pray the following prayer (or use it loosely as a model for a spontaneous prayer).
Loving God, thank you so much for the opportunity we've had to come together these past several weeks to praise you for your grace and generosity, and to talk about how we can grow in our love and appreciation of your holy Commandments. Through our Savior Jesus Christ, free us from all fear and give us a spirit of boldness, that we will live our lives in joyful obedience to your will and bring glory to your name in all that we do. We pray in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
3. Please go back to the homework you did for this week, starting on **page 41**. With your partners, discuss the material and your responses from **items 2-9**, and then return here to item #4, below.
4. Talk together about your plans for the next chapter of *going deeper with Christ*. Will you be staying together as a group? Reconfiguring? Disbanding for the time being? Be sensitive to each other's needs and commitments. If you are continuing to the next topic and need to find a new group, please act now! Pastor Seth (217.255.2118) or Pastor Patti (614.875.2314) can help you as needed.
5. The next unit of our Going Deeper journey will begin on **February 21**, 2021. We hope you will participate in the next part of our *Going Deeper* journey!
7. Could any of you (or all of you) write a blurb about your experience for the newsletter and/or website and/or Facebook regarding your journey so far?
8. For your final prayer, have *everyone* pray in turn. Thank God for your partner(s). Thank our Lord for this opportunity we've been given to share our faith, and to build each other up in the love of Christ. Ask for God's blessings and guidance for our congregation as we continue together on this journey into the deep water with Christ.