

A faith and life retreat on
Believing the Bible:
Inhabiting Its Stories, Trusting God's Promises

January 11th, 10am-3pm, \$25 suggested (lunch provided)
Faith Lutheran Church, Reno, NV with Dr. Fred Niedner

Please Register: <https://faithlutheranreno.org/faith-life-retreat-2025/>

Some “Bible believers” insist that authentic biblical faith includes affirming that the universe is but 6,000 years old, that you could have recorded the serpent talking to Eve in the Garden of Eden had iPhones existed then, and that a guy named Jonah once survived a three-day sojourn (during which he wrote poetry) inside the belly of a great fish. Whether such things “really happened” matters little for how we live. What really matters is whether we recognize the times when we are living in those same stories and the serpent is tempting us, or we are wandering in the wilderness subsisting on manna, or we have landed in a graveyard where broken souls live in the tombs and howl at the moon, or we’re hanging nailed between heaven and earth, only to turn and see *him*, “the King of the Jews,” on the next cross over.

Session Outlines

10am Session 1 – Believing vs Trusting, Inhabiting, & Engaging

What does it mean to “believe the Bible?” Questions about the Bible’s origins, authorship, reputed inerrancy, historicity, and textual integrity often dominate discussions about the church’s and individuals’ relationship to the Scriptures and their contents. Ultimately, it matters less what we claim about the Bible than what the Bible says about humankind as a whole and each of us in particular as it diagnoses our circumstances, behaviors, and assorted maladies and offers a promising prognosis regarding what could become of us.

11am Session 2– Accepting the Invitation to Inhabit the Scriptures

The Bible, beginning with the story of creation, offers readers/hearers a place and an identity in a universe of the biblical narrative’s own construction where we can see, examine, revise, and exchange the stories we tell about ourselves and others. We shall listen in on (and see ourselves in) the couple in the garden, Cain and Abel, Jonah, and two lost sons of a waiting father.

Lunch 12-12:45pm, discussion, gathering of questions/responses

12:45pm Session 3 – Swapping Stories with Jesus

The New Testament gospels invite us to believe that Jesus' story is our story, and our story is Jesus' story. The passion narratives of Mark and Luke, for example, meaningfully script our lives no matter where or in what circumstances we find ourselves.

1:45pm Session 4 – Hearing, Trusting, Wrestling with God

Even when we believe in God and accept God's "word," we can find ourselves at odds with God. Then we must have it out with God. Several stories show us how: Genesis 18:22-32 (Abraham dickers with God); Genesis 32:22-32 (Jacob wrestles with the night stranger); Exodus 32 (Moses confronts God, God repents); Mark 7:24-30/Matthew 15:21-28 (Jesus gets nailed and hung up between God's law and a mother's tenacious love).

Fred Niedner is Senior Research Professor of Theology at Valparaiso University, where he taught biblical studies and Hebrew language from 1973 to 2014. While an active faculty member he also served in several administrative roles and preached regularly in Valpo's Chapel of the Resurrection. He has published many scholarly articles, mostly on biblical topics, and for 25 years he wrote a bi-weekly op-ed column for northwest Indiana editions of the *Chicago Tribune*. Fred currently teaches in a variety of ecclesial settings but does not give grades, and he writes frequently for publications that serve the ministry of preaching.

