

WALKING *with* JESUS

LIFE GROUPS | LEADERS GUIDE

September 27-October 3, 2026 | Fall Week 1

ANNOUNCEMENTS

We've only just begun! And we're here with the most groups we've ever had, and with the most people signed up within them that we have ever seen – and we're very grateful to the Lord for providing leaders such as yourselves to serve His community in this way, and for His provision of people for you to lead! So going forward, it's important for leaders to prepare for this season.

1. YOUR FIRST MEETING:

- While many groups take the first gathering of the season to catch up with a time of fun, games, and good food, this is where you set the tone for how your meetings will look going on from here.
 - Be sure of a few things:
 - i. Do new members know where to park, and where to find the entrance to where you're meeting?
 - ii. Do they know what your hopes are for shoes and coats?
 - iii. Entry way lit up?
 - iv. Enough chairs out, ready for them?
 - v. Be sure that new people are introduced to each other.
- If you have some new members, be sure to be informative about how you lead and how you will direct conversations and discussions. Follow your time commitments, honoring your members, and their lives and schedules. Consider reading through the covenant, which you can find at the bottom of the [LEADERS TOOLS](#) page online, in the Leaders Document link.

2. LOOKING AHEAD TO YOUR COMING MEETINGS:

- One of the elements of feedback that is always noted through our seasonal feedback forms, is the times of prayer, that they are not what they could be. While there's a lot of reasons there for the comments we get – here's a few ideas to lead these moments with intentionality and purpose:
 - Create the safest of places for prayer. Before the Lord, and with each other:
 - i. Our postures need to open and honest, and our leaders should lead their members appropriately in that direction.
 - ii. We need to approach prayer out of an abundance of respect, what is shared in these places, stays in these places, and remains at the foot of Jesus.
 - Then, here are some practical ideas to consider:
 - i. Invite your members to share their requests, and then immediately pray for that request. Repeat as often as your members share needs.
 - ii. When you have members who may unpack the whole reality and all the details of the request, perhaps ahead of this time of prayer, invite people to share their needs, but to consider the time, saying something like, *"It's now time for us to join in prayer, and to hear each other's requests, as you share your requests, try to give us the*

heart of what is going on, rather than the whole back story, that'll make sure we can hear from everyone who desire's prayer. And we do this knowing that the Lord knows all our needs in more detail than we can ever be aware of ourselves."

3. SERVE PROJECTS:

- We have curated a list of serve sites and opportunities across our city – have a look [HERE](#), and sign up for an event that grabs everyone's interest. Some dates are flexible; others are pre-booked – connect with pastor Adam to start planning your Serve event.
 - There is a new opportunity this season, and that is to provide a meal for the Alpha program that is being hosted at our church, every Tuesday, until the end of November. There's been a few nights booked up already – but if you're keen on the idea, you can [SIGN UP HERE](#).
 - There's about 25 people all in.
 - Meals need to be ready to go for 6.00pm.
 - Meals can be cooked, prepared, and served from the MPR kitchen (and cleaned up too!)
 - The event should wrap up by 8.00pm, but meal teams do not need to stick around for the whole event.
- As well, we have our [SERVE SHIRTS](#) ready for your members, so send your newest members to the HUB to get theirs, or if any of your members need a new one – they can feel free to grab one. We've got youth sizes XS-L, and adult sizes S-XXXL.

4. PICTURES:

- We love seeing what you're all up to! Take pictures of your group in your meeting spaces, gathered around the kitchen counter with their snacks and drinks, and your group out having fun, and serving together – then share them with Pastor Adam – via email or text.
- Would you consider snapping a group selfie at your first meeting and sharing that with Pastor Adam?

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

LEADER NOTE: As you get discussion going, remember that one of the key emphases of our Life Groups ministry is to build *meaningful relationships*. When we start our discussions with heavy topics, people who have come who are feeling a little hesitant or even a little trepidatious about contributing, may feel immediately unwelcome. Therefore, we do our best to start our conversations in achievable ways for everyone in the room. These questions are meant to do just that.

These are the lowest risk questions and are great ways to get everyone in your group talking – from those who love sharing stories, to those who feel a little uncomfortable in this new space. Low risk questions have their way of breaking the ice and getting everyone a little more comfortable sharing. It also gives a chance for everyone to share in an easy, approachable way.

1. What was something that happened today that made you smile and/or laugh?

LEADER NOTE: As we get this first conversation going, you as leader get to choose how to do that. Read the room, look for those hesitant and worried faces. If you see them, lead this question with a little open-endedness: ask the question, and then, say, *"let's hear from anyone, but we want to hear from everyone!"* That sets the tone that we're hoping to have every voice contribute something, but allows everyone to find their place.

Whereas, if you see that confidence and readiness to contribute from everyone, then you can steer the conversation more intentionally: ask the question, and then say, *“let’s hear from everyone by going around the room.”*

2. As we begin this Life Group season, what are you most looking forward to?

LEADER NOTE: We always desire to be looking forward in life, and in our journey of faith, looking to grow forward to the Lord, and to our peers. In our groups, we hope to do the same thing. By looking forward, we begin to get the sense how the Lord is steering our paths, as often the things that we’re looking for, become the things that we experience.

QUICK REVIEW

LEADER NOTE: These following two questions aim to have your group reflect upon Sunday’s message. The first question will always be the same, and the second one is provided from our teaching pastor from the service. One thing that we want to be clear as we approach this section, is that this isn’t to be a time to evaluate the message or the one delivering it, but it’s to be a time when we talk about what we have learned or how we’ve been challenged by God’s Word.

1. Looking back at your notes from this week’s teaching, was there anything that particularly caught your attention, challenged, or confused you?

LEADER NOTE: Leaders, *“lead by example”* in your own use of these resources. Ahead of Sunday services, be sure to grab a guide in the lobby, fill it out during the message, scratch down extra thoughts and notes you might have, and bring it with you to your Life Group meetings.

2. Jesus says the good soil produces a fruitful life. What are some *“good things”* in your life, like family, work, hobbies, relationships, success, or comforts, that could slowly become competitors for your allegiance to God? What would it look like this week to put Jesus first in that particular area?

LEADER NOTE: This week, Pastor Justin offers us this question to consider as we reflect on what he has felt the Lord prepare him to share with us on Sunday morning.

SCRIPTURE REVIEW

LEADER NOTE: Aside from building relationships, reading scripture together is one of the most important practices in our Life Groups; so never shirk away from reading the following passage. Always make time to interact with the Word of God and its message for us. As leaders, you can read the passage yourselves, invite others to read the whole text, or go around the room from paragraph to paragraph. Over time, as you lead, you’ll see what works best. Always say *“thank-you”* to those who read out loud – it’s not everyone’s favourite thing to do. We ask the following questions of the text each week, and it’s your choice as a leader to follow through them, or jump to the next digging deeper questions.

READ Matthew 13:1-23

1. How does this passage highlight God’s presence in our world?

2. What does this passage say about our broken human condition?

3. How does this passage call me to make change in my life?

Another option with these questions, is to even more simply ask, once you've read the passage together, as in a general way, *"What strikes us about this passage?"*

DIGGING DEEPER

LEADERS NOTE: These discussion questions generally start simple and gradually become deeper and more complex. This progression follows natural discussion patterns, but as leaders, you know your group best. Use this guide flexibly; it is not necessary to cover every question. Focus on ensuring everyone is heard and has the opportunity to contribute and ask their questions.

1. READ Matthew 13:9. As Jesus speaks, and as His disciples share His message, those who have ears, that is, everyone, will hear. How did you first respond to Jesus' invitation for you to follow and serve Him? What do you remember feeling in your mind, heart, and soul?

LEADER NOTE: As Jesus says *"He who has ears, let him hear"* – He's telling us that while everyone is going to hear the message, not everyone is going to respond in the same manner, that is what the parable here is essentially telling us. Some will *"snatched away"* by the evil one, some will *"fall away,"* others will simply be *"unfruitful,"* and yet others will *"bear fruit."*

At this early point in our Life Groups season, it's good to have the members of our groups come to an understanding of each other's journey of faith, and how we've arrived at where we are. Think of this question is really an opportunity for your members to share bits and pieces of their testimonies. Ask follow up questions with that in mind!

- **READ John 10:27.** In this season of your life, in whatever place you find yourself, what is it looking like for you to follow His voice today?

LEADER NOTE: The first question here had us look backwards in life, Tow Mater in Cars famously put it this way: *"Ain't no need to watch where I'm goin', just need to know where I been."* While he was on to something about understanding our past and how it helps us see how the future will unfold, we also need to be aware of the present. You might also say that we need to be hyper-aware of our present, and aware of how the Lord is calling us to respond in the very moments we are in.

Today, we live in such distracting times, where there are beeps and buzzes, ads and gimmicks, and all kinds of alluring sites that pull our attention away from the moment we're in. There's a practice of prayer that we can engage with, which simply reminds us of God's nearness, and of our distance. It's a simple prayer, *"Lord, can you show me in this moment, what you're doing?"* Then, we wait in silence, being aware of the words and phrases, and perhaps scripture that's coming to mind, and while we sift through it all, we determine and come to an understanding of how the Lord is responding.

2. READ Matthew 13:10-16. Skim through Matthew 11-12 and look for how different people are encountering the same Jesus and yet respond differently. Can you identify which *"soil"* relates to the different responses?

LEADER NOTE: In these chapters Matthew helps us encounter a variety of characters. We first come across John the Baptist, who is plagued with doubt – he's unsure and feels he has to double check with Jesus, he could be currently finding himself in the *weedy soil*. But as John continues to live and minister,

we see that really, he's in the *good and fertile soil*. Then we encounter towns and cities where he has been rejected, and we get the sense that the devil's work has been effective, and we sense that these people have been snatched away – they're in the *hard soil*. Then Jesus comes across the Jewish Leaders, who also have heard the stories of old, they're quite familiar with who God is, and how He has called them to live, but they're facing all of the realities of the *hard, shallow, and weedy soil*.

Unfortunately, we're not given the responses of the man with a withered hand, or of the demon possessed man – so we don't know for sure where a life of faith took them next. However, what we can surmise, is that they both had an incredible encounter with Jesus, and had the opportunity to respond in front of Jesus. We can only hope that it was positive, and they went to their homes and towns, and proclaimed, "*Jesus healed me,*" suggesting that they were amongst the good soil, ready to *bear more fruit*.

- **READ Matthew 12:34-35 & Luke 2:34-35.** In the four soils parable, it's the same farmer, same seed, yet different outcome. What does our response to Jesus reveal about what is going on in our heart?

LEADER NOTE: Think back to the days of creation, humanity was made in the "*image of God*" and retains His "*breath of life*." Spiritually speaking, that dual reality should leave us in a place of full and abundant receptivity to God's word, but the fall occurred. Adam and Eve – *with us very much present with them* – bit into that piece of fruit, and our eyes were opened to all the distractions and temptations of this world. And we became beings unto ourselves.

This parable is showing us just how selfish and broken we really are. We can all identify times in our lives when we found ourselves on the *hard soil* – with stubborn hearts; on the *shallow soil* – with superficial and uncaring hearts; on the *weedy soil* – with strangled and unaffected hearts.

Perhaps as your members have gathered in front of you, some of them are struggling with the reality of being stuck in one of those areas. Have compassion, and listen intently to how your members respond here.

Know that we all have the opportunity to find ourselves in the fertile soil, choosing with our own hearts to hear the Word of God, to receive wholly and honestly the Seed that He is sowing – and then to respond with willing hands to partner with Him and take part in His good work here on earth.

3. READ Matthew 13:19-22. Jesus describes people who hear the Word, but it doesn't ultimately take root in their lives. What do you think is the difference between simply hearing God's Word, and truly receiving it?

LEADER NOTE: As we've talked about already, everyone hears the Word, they receive the Seed. The difference we see happening here, is what happens after the hearing and receiving – and that difference is summed in one word: *transformation*. Did the Word have an impact? Did the Word leave someone changed? Did the patterns of behavior alter because of this hearing?

Consider the metaphorical thought, "*you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.*" Anyone can hear the Word of God, hold it in their hands, remember it in their minds – but until they decide to let it take root, shape them, and produce fruit – all it is going to be, is just the horse staring at the pond. The water and its sustaining power are there, but the horse will die if it never takes a drink. You can take the

metaphor another step, “*you can lead a horse to water, force its head underwater, but you can’t make it drink.*” It’s just going to drown if it doesn’t choose to open its mouth, swallow, and be lifted up.

People can be just like that. Stubborn. Full of themselves. Confident in their own power. We resist God and all His offerings just like the Jewish leaders, we doubt just like John the Baptist. Consider the story of Paul in Acts 9. He’s stubborn, full of himself – he’s firmly planted in the hard soil. But in an amazing turn of God’s work, Luke records Paul’s actions next, “*And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God’*” (Acts 9:20 | ESV). From killing and torturing believers, to proclaiming the gospel – this is an amazing story of *transformation*.

- **READ John 15:1-5.** Imagine Jesus is inviting you to use the four soils to examine the posture of your own heart. Where do you see evidence of God’s Word growing in you? Where would you like Him to continue His good work?

LEADER NOTE: Earlier we had you consider the Lord’s work today, in this present moment, and even earlier we talked about taking a moment to look forward – and this question now, draws us back to that forward looking desire. Remember, “*by looking forward, we begin to get the sense how the Lord is steering our paths, as often the things that we’re looking for, become the things that we experience.*”

Maybe the question needs to be an honest evaluation of what we’re looking for God to do. And we know, we must know, that we don’t determine His course – we follow Him. He directs our paths. He guides our steps. He paves the way forward.

So we might need to pause and prayer, “*Lord, help our hearts to beat like yours, align our passions and desires with your plans.*”

TAKING IT HOME

READ Matthew 13:23. What does it mean to you that this parable doesn’t end with a barren field, but with a plentiful harvest? What does that tell us about God’s intentions with us? Where is the Lord calling you to respond to Him?

LEADER NOTE: The amazing thing about God and how He operates with His Spirit’s work in our hearts, is that He never leaves us unchanged. He never leaves us untouched. He’s always got a purpose to go ahead of us and provide all that we need, to participate in the good work that He is doing. God’s end game here isn’t a barren field; it’s a plentiful harvest. And it is His work that will get us there, not ours. He simply desires our “yes” to live amongst the good soil.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

LEADER NOTE: This following question is completely optional and is intended for the participants’ personal reflection. But do feel free to explore using the question within your groups meeting.

READ Matthew 8:18-22, 12:22-24, 19:16-22, & 26:14-16. What connections do you see to the four soils parable? Think of an area where you struggle in life, and how Jesus by His Holy Spirit might be speaking to you about that area. What might your reaction reveal about something you deeply love, fear, value, or want to protect? How is your answer different than it was five years ago? How would you like to see yourself answer that 5 years from now?