WALKING with JESUS

LIFE GROUPS | LEADERS GUIDE

November 22-28, 2026 | Fall Week 9

ANNOUNCEMENTS

It's our final week of Life Groups for the Fall of 2026.

1. **YOUR NINTH MEETING:**
   - As was mentioned last week, we encourage you to close off this half of the Life Group year with strength! We encourage a few things:
     - **Leading your group to fill out feedback forms**, this season, we're going to make a little offer, as we're eager to hear back from you and your members particularly on the section, **"Living into the Vision at Gateway"** portion. Could you as leaders this coming week, lead your group in a few moments to fill out this survey together – during your group's meeting – and for those groups who get 50% of your group filling these out, we'll enter your group into a draw, *and for the winning group*, **we'll provide appetizers and desserts for your first meeting in January!**
       - How do you get the survey? In a few ways:
         - We'll send a link to all Life Group members ahead of time.
         - You can copy and paste the following link into your regular form of communication with your groups: https://gatewaycrc.churchcenter.com/people/forms/1371241
         - You can direct them via this QR code:
   - Other ways to finish strong:
     - **Finishing strong with another study!** Be sure to on your final night, to embrace the journey of study you've been on, and while reflecting back upon the journey, dive once more into God's word as group!
     - **Plan an additional night**, what we might call, Week #10, where you get together socially, and simply have fun together. Maybe, as the Christmas season is right around the corner, make it a Christmas party! Play games over appetizers, do a small gift exchange!
     - **Make plans to celebrate advent together with your church family!** While we'll have each Sunday morning, through the advent season flavoured with all things that celebrate the coming birth of Christ, we'll have a few other events for us to be a part of:
       - Sunday, December 13th, 6.00pm – A night of Christmas Music and Songs.
       - Friday, December 25th, 10.00am – Christmas Morning Service
       - Thursday, December 31st, 10.30am-Noon – Gateway Skates! (ARC).

2. **SERVE PROJECTS:**
   - For all those who helped with ALPHA meals – **THANK-YOU SO MUCH!!!!!**

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

LEADER NOTE: 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. If there was a museum dedicated to your life, what three items would be in the gift shop? Why those three?

LEADER NOTE: This question has nothing to do with our scope of study today, but is a fun one to close off your season together with. Perhaps as an added challenge, invite your members to write down or think for themselves their three items, and then, in the group setting, challenge the person to their left, to guess what those items might be! (or to keep it spouse free, put everyone's names in a hat, and pick out a name that isn't yours or a spouse).

2. As we wrap up this season of Life Groups, what is a moment in your group that you are grateful for?

LEADER NOTE: This is last week of our meetings for this season, and it is always good to look back and celebrate the journey that we have been on together.

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. Pastor Justin referred to these three moments: (1) James and John saw Jesus, but they were blinded by their ambitions. (2) The two blind men couldn't see Jesus physically, but recognized Him as the Son of David. (3) The crowds welcomed Jesus but struggled to understand what kind of King He was. Which of these three responses do you most identify with?

LEADER NOTE: n/a

SCRIPTURE REVIEW

LEADER NOTE: In addition to 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.

READ Matthew 20:20-21:11

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 20:25-28. Jesus commands us to take on the posture of a servant, and a slave; it's not about having authority or being great. What do you find challenging about this image of being a servant, or slave to others?

LEADER NOTE: In the recent weeks of this sermon series, we've take a good look at the place that those who follow Jesus have in the kingdom of God, and it's become quite apparent, that as followers, we don't determine anything about our place, on our own terms, or on our own merit. Back in **Matthew 18:1**, the disciples ask, *"who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?"* Jesus calls a child to join their circle, and points out that unless they become utterly dependant like this child, they won't have a place at all. Jesus goes on to describe numerous ways that He expects His followers to respond to those in the world. They're not to cause any one to stumble, they're to look for those who are lost, they are to constantly and forever forgive those who hurt them. Then there's a moment in **19:16**, where a rich young man asks, *"What good deed must I do to have eternal life?"* as if he can earn a place. Then Jesus paints the picture in direct words and in parable, that those who think they're first, will be last, and that those are last, will be first. There, Jesus even says that He will be the preeminent example of the last, as He'll face crucifixion.

Then after all this, the brother who are disciples, James and John, and their mom come to Jesus, and this mom, kneels in front of Jesus, and pleads with Him that her little boys would have the greatest spots in His kingdom.

It seems like no one has understood that neither merit, nor position, nor desire will earn anyone a place in the kingdom, but it's only by God's good grace that anyone will be named within it. Not even a pleading and tear cheeked mom, can convince Jesus to accept them on their terms. Jesus then flips societies understanding entitlement and deserving hearts on its head, He says, *"whoever would be great … must be your servant, and whoever would be first … must be your slave"* (**Matthew 21:26-27**).

This is a challenging concept for us even today in the 21st century, as it's in our nature to want to be served, to be elevated on pedestals, to be seen as worthy and as valuable. We measure our standing by the positions we have in society, by the influence we have on others, by the recognition we receive, and by the authority that has been placed upon us. Being a servant and a slave, by their own definition, means that our own interests need to be surrendered, and may never be fully realized.

- **READ Matthew 5:20, 2 Corinthians 5:21, & 1 John 2:29.** We don't get *"right with God"* (or gain "*righteousness*") by serving others, but the way we live and treat others ought to reflect the good work God has done in us through Christ. How does this change the way you understand Christ's call to live as He did?

LEADER NOTE: In a Biblical way, righteousness is defined as *"conforming to the demands and obligations of the will of God."* And really, as we pick up in **Matthew 5:20**, the picture of being fully righteous in the eyes of God, is rather impossible, as even the Pharisees, the very Jewish leaders who knew the Law of God inside and out, couldn't attain it. It's an image that the early Jews would have considered laughable … perhaps it was considered that in order to be better than the pharisees, was to be next to God Himself. Something that was impossible. *And really, it is*.

But not because the Pharisees were close, but because Jesus operates on a whole different level. Up until now, the pharisees, and Jewish leaders, have all been leading the Israelites to understand that good deeds equals nearness to God, that right actions, and following all the letter of the law, was the path to personal righteousness. Jesus is showing us His way, His pathway for our journey to righteousness, and He essentially tells us that on our own, we are fully incapable of fulfilling all requirements of the law, but that only in His goodness, in His perfection, can He declare His children righteous.

That's why both Paul and John record their words about God's righteousness as they do. Paul writes in **2 Corinthians**, *"in Him we might become the righteousness of God."* And John writes in **1 John**, *"everyone who practices righteousness has been born of Him."* Both authors are pointing out the reality that the only way we can do anything good in this world, is through Christ who is active in and through us, that it is His righteousness and perfection that is seen and felt by others.

This backdrop to our faith draws us away from asking the questions, *"what good deed must I do in order to inherit eternal life?"* and having our moms ask Jesus Himself, *"can my boys be great in your eyes?"* But have us asking, *"How should I be living, in light of what God has done for me?"* Our lives from point of salvation, become about living out our gratitude, responding to God in loving others as ourselves, and in obedience to His commands for us to seek the posture of servitude within a world in need.

2. READ Matthew 20:29-34. Matthew sets up this episode in order to contrast the previous two brothers with these two blind men. What do you understand to be Matthew's goal here?

LEADER NOTE: In this chapter, it's becoming really quite evident the power of the Holy Spirit who is working through Matthew's writing, and collecting of these moments together. We've just seen two brothers act in spiritual blindness, and now here, we see two men act out of physical blindness, which paints the picture of our human response to God's continual work in our lives.

This contrast is really another picture of those who think they're first, will be last; and those who are treated as the last will be the first.

The disciples still thought that because of their closeness and connection to Jesus, they were in, that they had important places in God's kingdom. But that was them being *spiritually blind*. Now here, at **v.29-34** Matthew draws us to a scene where the men are *physically blind*, but yet, as we see in how they call out to Jesus, they are actually *spiritually sighted*. They see who Jesus is, and what He is capable of. They plead, *"Lord, have mercy on us!"*

Remember, that those who had these kinds of physical ailments in 1st century society, were seen as unclean, unworthy, often outcast, they were the *last* in society. And they are the ones now, whom Jesus heals, and they respond with following Jesus, seeing who He really is.

Matthew is contrasting spiritual blindness, with spiritual sight.
He's contrasting assumptive faith, with genuine faith.

Matthew is painting the picture for his audience, and us, that those who appear to be closest, or first, to Jesus might not understand what He is doing or receive His nearness; that those who accept their place as *last*, and humble themselves in front of Christ, will be granted His healing and His presence.

- **READ 1 Peter 2:21-25.** Jesus' example of suffering and service challenge the way we think about greatness in His kingdom. Have you seen anyone in your life live this way? What about that example stands out to you?

LEADER NOTE: Fortunately, for Peter, he lived through the moments where Christ died on the cross, and saw Jesus on the other side of the resurrection. He saw the days of the early church grow, and he saw the difficulty that their new community of faith encountered. Then, as Peter was able to look back and see with 20/20 vision, he was able to see all that Christ was teaching, and leading His people towards.

This is where Peter is able to write with deep rooted spiritual confidence and sight, *"For you were straying sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls"* **(1 Peter 2:25).**

As your group talks about these realities, help them share about those whom they have seen live this way. Surely, there are some who have risen above the challenges, who have navigated suffering with strength, who speak kindly, who didn't fight back, who trusted their leaders, who took on offense – all for the good of others.

The example of Christ is amazing, but He is God and is perfect in all His ways. And while it is He who redefines what greatness looks like, human sinfulness and brokenness bar us from such perfection. Therefore, looking to those who have been better amongst us, who have been able to, despite their innate sinfulness, rise above their challenges and obstacles, is good practice to leave us encouraged and equipped to know that better, is in fact possible.

Often these examples in our lives, point us to the qualities we should long for and work towards: humility, patience, willing to sacrifice, consistent in life, and deep in faith.

3. READ Matthew 21:6-9. This moment is usually explored on Palm Sunday, yet we're in it a week before Advent. What makes this passage relevant as we prepare to celebrate Christ's first coming? How does it paint a picture of the kind of victory Jesus came to accomplish?

LEADER NOTE: Jesus' journey towards Golgotha is becoming more and more real as we turn each page of the Gospel of Matthew, and this moment, is one of the key moments. He's now arrived in Jerusalem. However, the Jews were still looking for a Jewish king who would overthrow the Romans, and lead them as an independent nation. They were seeking a Saul-like king, tall, rugged, handsome, with authority, commanding respect, wielding a sword and shield, riding a white stallion, ready to conquer in battle.

And yet, Jesus, rides in on a colt. A donkey, and it's infant. It's nothing majestic. It's nothing that looks like victory in battle. It's nothing that looks like a confident king.

However, the townspeople respond, and begin to make the connection that this is still the King that they've been anticipating. They remove their coats out of respect, and place them on the ground for Him to walk upon. They wave branches in celebration.

Take note, that the word, "*Hosanna*" – means, *"save us!"* – it's their plea for salvation, but not for the salvation that Christ has come to bring. They, like the disciples earlier, are mistaken. They are *spiritually blind,* even while making the right connection to Old Testament prophecies, they misunderstand them. As well, they rightfully make the connection to Jesus being the *"Son of David"* – but rather than seeing the promise of their spiritual messiah, they see David's defeat of Goliath, his victory in battle after battle, they remember the songs sung of David and Saul in **1 Samuel 18:7**, *"Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands."*

But Jesus didn't come to overthrow the Romans, He came to serve them. He didn't come to eradicate their enemies, but to love them. He didn't come to fight the physical battles, but came to overcome spiritual blindness.

While the season of Advent points us to the first coming of Christ, the Christ-child who was born of Virgin Mary, as Immanuel, as God With Us – the season of Advent also points us to Christ's eventual second coming. That as He came to show us a new way, He will come again to accomplish all that has begun, and will return to His Father, with all those who follow Him.

- **READ Romans 8:37, Philippians 4:13, & 1 John 5:4.** Christ has secured victory over sin and death, and we share in that victory through Him. What in your life might need to shift, to look more like Christ on a donkey, rather than Christ on a stallion?

LEADER NOTE: As we think of victory in modern terms, we think of winning games and tournaments, we think of our favorite teams winning the top prize, we think of promotions and parades. We think of battles and wars being won. We associate victory with strength, success, recognition, and influence. We think of getting our own way. We think of getting what we've wanted all along.

Yet this picture of Jesus riding a donkey, shows us that true victory is embraced in humility; in lifting up and strengthening others, it's about building a kingdom on sacrificial love and Christian obedience, and has nothing to do with worldly affirmation, influence, or power.

This concept calls for an epic shift in our human minds, where we begin to see that life has little to do with us, and everything to do with how God has called us to love Him, and to love our neighbor. And that is the true victory that Paul and John are writing about, where we're only able to live into that posture as we see Christ working in us.

TAKING IT HOME

READ Zechariah 9:9-10, & Matthew 21:10-11. The townspeople, while having access to the prophecies that Jesus would be the King they've been looking and hoping for, only see Him as a prophet, missing the image of His victory. How can we guard ourselves and our communities from missing the significance of Christ's arrival and ministry as we enter this Advent season?

LEADER NOTE: ***<u>Take note leaders</u>, that in the provided Sermon Guide, this question was produced with an incorrect reference, Zephaniah 9:9-10 does not exist, the correct reference is* ***Zechariah 9:9-10****.***

We can so easily get caught up in the traditions, activities, and nostalgia of the Christmas season, as it really is an exciting time of year, where society at large steps away from the darkness of Halloween and the gloominess of the winter season. Lights are set up, joyful gatherings are planned, generosity is seen and felt everywhere.

But as we've been navigating the disciples missing the point of Christ's first advent, we easily, like these townspeople, miss the point of not only the first advent, but we easily miss the point of the advent of the second coming. Jesus has promised to return, He says in **Matthew 24:42-44**, *"for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming … for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect,"* and we need to be prepared for that moment, with our hearts aligned with His, with our postures leaning towards others.

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.

<u>READ 2 Timothy 2:1-7, 14-19</u>. The Apostle Paul is writing to his young pastoral protege, Timothy, seeking to equip him as a pastor within the church. In these opening seven verses, Paul uses the imagery of being a "*good soldier*," "*athlete*," and a "*farmer*," each demonstrating qualities necessary for faithful service. How do you see Timothy being challenged? Then, in verses 14-19, Paul further describes the importance of faithfully handling God's Word and serving Christ with integrity. Which of these images, qualities, or postures do you need to pay closer attention to in your own walk with Christ this week?