

LIFE GROUP LEADER GUIDE

For the week of February 16 - 22

This guide is designed to give helpful hints in preparing & leading your group in discussion.

LEADER NOTES

THIS WEEK

Goals for this week:

- Hear from everyone in your group
- Continue to build relationships
- Pray together

Tips:

- Remember you don't have to answer every question (or even go in order!)
- Choose questions best suited to your group
- Listen to the [Audio Guide/Podcast](#) for more discussion suggestions (Pastor Adam is leading for the first time this week!)
- Consider using a messaging app for your group (GroupMe, WhatsApp, FB Messenger, etc.)

LEADER ANNOUNCEMENTS

⇒ MID-SEMESTER GATHERING – THIS SUNDAY! (AFTER AM SERVICE)

- Please join us for our mid-semester gathering for Facilitators and Hosts this Sunday. This meeting is designed to build on your leadership skills and provide valuable information and tips as you lead your group. We will have coffee and snacks and hear from you on what's working, what questions you have, and how we can learn from one another.

LEADER INFO

⇒ WEEKLY TRAINING TIP (OPTIONAL READING)

Looking for more guidance for your fourth meeting? You can find the weekly training tip "[Training Week 5 – Fostering Good Group Discussions](#)" in your planning center portal under "resources" or at the end of this document.

ATTENDANCE

Submit your group's attendance online at <https://gatewaycrc.churchcenter.com/groups/life-groups>. If you're not sure how to get on to planning center to post attendance, find our website access instructions at <http://www.gatewaycrc.org/lifegroups/leader-tools>.

Find all of our leader resources at: <http://www.gatewaycrc.org/lifegroups/leader-tools>

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Leader Note: *Feel free to pick one of the two questions here.*

1) What was your favorite moment this past week?

Leader Note: *This would be a similar approach to last week's high and low question, but leaves it to more open discussion to get a sense of how the group members week has been.*

2) Have you ever been told you look like someone famous? If so, who was it?

QUICK REVIEW

Leader Note: *These questions are low risk. Ask anyone, but remember time limits.*

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

2) This past week we learned it was the responsibility of the elder brother to go looking for his younger brother. How did that reality hit you? How does it make you think about Jesus, our true elder brother?

GOD'S STORY – TRIADS

Discussion Note: *Here our goal is to remain centered on scripture's script and to learn more about what scripture says and how that applies to our daily lives. Since we have been asking these questions each week, take the opportunity to build upon your prior meetings and ask your group if their questions have been changing as we have been getting to know the themes and the characters better.*

READ [Luke 15:11-24](#)

(Note: The goal of Life Group Bible study is to engage with the Bible text primarily and treat the sermon as supplemental.)

1) What does this passage say about the character of God?

2) What does this passage say about fallen humanity?

3) Where does this passage specifically expose sin or unbelief in my own life? How does it specifically call me to change my thinking, redirect my affections, replace my behaviors, and trust my Savior?

DIGGING DEEPER

Discussion Reminder/ Tip – *You won't have time to answer all of these questions. Decide ahead of time which one you want to cover. You could have your group vote on which one they want to make sure your group digs into.*

1) The parable seems to end in a shocking way where the "lover of prostitutes" is *saved* and the son who "never disobeyed [the father's] orders" is *lost*, as far as we know. Why do you think Jesus ends the story this way?

Discussion Note: It is interesting that Jesus leaves us with a bit of a cliff hanger. Consider making special emphasis on the prior two passages where the shepherd left the 99 sheep to find the missing one, and the woman searches for the missing one of ten coins. We are left with wondering why the younger brother wasn't immediately sought after like the previous two parables. It was actually the elder brother's responsibility to seek out his younger brother, but fails to do so. Jesus wants us to long for the True Elder Brother, found in Himself – Jesus Christ – the one who will give up everything in order to find and have relationship with the ones who are lost.

- What do you think ultimately drove the elder son to stay outside of the banquet feast?

Discussion Note: You might hear responses such as, 'he was jealous' or 'he felt like it was unfair' or even 'he hated his younger brother.' It is also important to note that the Elder brother was angry on account of his future inheritance being spent on the return of "this son of yours."

Additional Questions:

- How might have you responded if you were in the elder brothers' shoes?
- Does the father's actions seem 'fair' to you?

2) **READ Matthew 20:1-16** (Jesus' parable of the Workers in the Vineyard) Does this story seem fair to you? Why or why not?

Leader Note: The interesting concept here, is that it's not supposed to seem "fair" to us. God runs His kingdom differently than how we may run our businesses or families. Surely, some of us have experienced life seem unfair. It could be a missed promotion that went to the next person, it could be a farm that was passed down to the other sibling, it could be a matter of healing that didn't occur. Take a moment to prayerfully hear the stories shared after the next question. Understanding that the Spirit is present as we share, and extends God's grace and mercy to each other.

- Describe a time in your life where you have experienced an extra measure of God's mercy, that may otherwise have seemed unfair to someone else?

3) Jesus does not tell us how the elder brother responds at the end of the parable. In that way we are given an invitation to discover Christ as our True Elder Brother. **READ Romans 8:16-17, Galatians 4:6-7, Ephesians 3:6**. Then respond to the following questions:

- How would have the original Jewish community responded to the message that Gentiles were now "fellow heirs" of God's family?

Discussion Note: Remember that the Jews held a strong view of "us" and "them." That anyone outside of the Jewish ancestral lineage, those who couldn't claim that they were a part of Abraham's family – the Gentiles – were immediately on the outside, and

therefore, outside of God's plan. For you and I, unless we can claim the same lineage, we too, are Gentiles.

- What does it mean that we are included as "heirs of God?" Is it hard for you to believe that you are a "co-heir with Jesus?"

Discussion Note: I [Adam] love having this conversation about followers of God being co-heirs with Christ, starting with God's words to Jesus at His baptism. God says as the Spirit descended like a dove, "this is my Son, with whom I am well pleased." Then in the passages we read in Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, we begin to see a strong connection to Christ, like we would to a sibling – that on some level, we're on the same level, that our reward, or inheritance is the same as His – to enjoy the full and true presence of the Father.

TAKING IT HOME (GROUP)

1) Looking back on this "Running from God" series on the book of Jonah and the parable of the Lost Sons, what is a key takeaway you want to remember?

Leader Note: Take some time to reflect on this series together. What have we learned? What do we want to remember? What can we take with us in the weeks and months to come? Also, let the group know that next week we start a new series called "PI2" on praying intentionally for the lost in our lives.

CLOSING YOUR MEETING:

Prayer Ideas: As mentioned in past weeks, mixing up how you end your meeting can help with focus. Dividing in men / women only groups, smaller groups, etc. may help with this. If you haven't divided up yet this semester, this may be a good week to start.

ADDITIONAL SELF STUDY (OPTIONAL):

Leader Note: This is a new section this week. Some people in your group may want to go "deeper" in their personal study time. Others may feel like taking time to read all of the scripture passages and walk through the homework before group meetings to already be a lot! Be sure to express to your group that these are "optional" readings for self-reflection. We won't be engaging these questions as a group.

1) **READ Psalm 26**. The Psalmist prays, "vindicate me, O Lord", as if to say, "clear my name, cleanse me of my sin, make me whole again." Take a moment to reflect on how your True Elder Brother might be wanting to free you today of what stands between you and Himself.

2) **READ Ezekiel 34:1-16; 22-24**. Think about how the Israelite's were led, and consider how God's response in Ezekiel, and Paul's words in **Ephesians 4:11-16** challenge us. How are we left challenged to live in community led by our True Elder Brother?

GROUP REMINDERS

GATEWAY HASHTAG CHALLENGE!

This semester we are going to have a #GatewayLifeGroups Hashtag challenge. Here is how it works: invite members of your group to take a picture and post it on Facebook or Twitter with the hashtag #GatewayLifeGroups. In the comments, write what you love about your group. At the end of the semester we will have a random draw. The winner will receive a \$250 gift card for their entire group to enjoy together! One entry per member. *[P.S. Leader can also get 9 additional entries! All submitted homework on time also equals an entry!]*

Breakdown:

- 1 entry per person, per group (max of 10 entries for the sake of fairness to smaller groups)
= 10 total possible entries.
- 1 entry per submitted homework = 9 total possible entries.
= 19 POSSIBLE ENTRIES PER GROUP

"THE LOST ELDER BROTHER & THE TRUE ELDER BROTHER"

THE STORY OF REDEMPTION:

- THE SON'S REPENTANCE WAS CAUSED BY THE LOVE OF THE FATHER.

Luke 15:20

- GRACE ALWAYS COMES AT AN INCREDIBLE COST!

Luke 15:30

THE ELDER BROTHER:

- WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE TO FIND THE LOST BROTHER? THE ELDER BROTHER!

Luke 15:30

- THE ELDER BROTHER IS CONCERNED WITH THE INCREDIBLE COST OF EVERYTHING.

Jonah 3:10-4:1; Luke 15:28-30

THE TWO BROTHERS ARE THE SAME:

1. "I WANT CONTROL!
2. BOTH PUBLICLY SHAME THE FATHER.
3. BOTH SON'S ARE MET WITH THE FATHER'S COMPASSION

OUR STORY:

- WE ARE ALL LOST!
- WE ALL NEED A TRUE ELDER BROTHER.
- WE ALL HAVE A TRUE ELDER BROTHER.



Fostering Good Discussions

In any small group, it can often be difficult to foster a good discussion. We may feel compelled to speak up more often than we'd like in order to keep the discussion going. We may have some people who dominate the conversation, while others never speak up at all.

If that happens, *'What do we do?'*

Today's lesson focuses on some ways we can be intentional about dealing with these issues and fostering productive discussion in our groups. Let's jump in!

Silence

First, *silence*...Here's the secret. Embrace it!

Yes, it seems counterintuitive to a good discussion, but silence isn't necessarily a bad thing. It often can take people 30 seconds to formulate an answer to a complicated question. Which is a long time. Don't jump in too soon. If the silence is following a question that's been posed, give people adequate time to think. If the question was posed by you, you've likely had time to think about it and compose your answer, so you may feel antsy. Fight the urge to break the silence too soon.

Of course, you also need to be a student of body language. If people are indicating cluelessness, rather than deep thought, you may want to rephrase the question or steer the discussion in a different direction. But make sure you aren't misreading the situation.

Talkers and Non-Talkers

There are the talkers. And there are non-talkers.

Here again, discernment is called for. How are they wired?

Yes, some talkers may just like the sound of their own voice, but it's more likely they are verbal processors and that's how they learn. Are they interfering with discussion or are you just personally annoyed? And the non-talkers – are they just naturally less talkative than the others? There's nothing necessarily wrong with that.

However, if you feel there are problems that need to be addressed, you can take some steps to do so.

When you have Life Group members who talk too much, here are a few helpful step-by-step guidelines:

1. **Set Expectations:** You may want to mention to the group *before* discussion that you are looking for brief answers and want as many people as possible to share.
2. **Gently Interject:** If that doesn't work, it may be necessary to interrupt or cut off a talker mid-sharing, thanking them for what they said and asking another member for their thoughts or posing a new question.
3. **One-on-One Conversation:** And if that fails, it may be necessary to speak to them one-on-one about it, possibly even leveraging the situation by asking them to help you get others in the group to share.

For non-talkers, embracing silence may give them the opportunity to process the way that they need. However, it may also be necessary to create openings for them to share, at times specifically asking them if they have

anything they'd like to add and validating them when they share. Of course, you should always accept a "no" or "I don't know" answer when asking if they want to share.

Also, with both talkers and non-talkers, make use of eye contact. By giving more to the non-talkers – perhaps by sitting directly across from them – and less to the talkers – perhaps by sitting next to them – you can subtly encourage the non-talkers to talk more and the talkers to talk less.

Good discussions don't just happen. By being intentional about fostering a good discussion, you can help everyone in your group have a more productive and rewarding experience.

Some Things to Consider:

- What's your level of comfort with silence in a small group setting?
- Are you naturally more of a talker or a non-talker? If a talker, how can someone let you know you're sharing too much? If a non-talker, how can others encourage you to share more?
- How can you tell when people are thinking about an answer versus simply not knowing how to respond?
- Have you had to address a situation with a talker or non-talker before? How did it go? Is there anything you'd do differently?
- What tricks do you use to help foster discussion in your small group?

Want to Keep Learning?

For more practical tips on leading a Life Group (or any small group for that matter), check out the book "Field Guide for Small Group Leaders" by Sam O'Neal.

That's all for now!

In Christ,
Pastor Justin