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**LIFE GROUPS | LEADERS GUIDE**

*March 2-8, 2025 | Winter Week 7*

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

A building with a number and text

Description automatically generated with medium confidenceWell leaders, we’re over halfway through the season!

1. **YOUR SEVENTH MEETING:**

* A group of people posing for a photo

  AI-generated content may be incorrect.**A group of people posing for a photo

  AI-generated content may be incorrect.**Keep up the patterns with what you’ve all been doing!
* **A group of people sitting in a living room

  AI-generated content may be incorrect.**A group of old people posing for a photo

  AI-generated content may be incorrect.Also, without amount of sickness going around – be sure to be following up with your members who’ve been down and out, and see that they’re all okay, and if they’re single or on their own, see if they have any needs.

1. **Gateway’s 75th anniversary:**

* A group of people sitting around a table

  AI-generated content may be incorrect.As it’s our 75th anniversary this year as a church family, Betty Beukema and her planning team want to fill up a time capsule with memories of who we are now, in 2025.
* Can you all make a concerted effort to get group pictures to me this season!? I would love to have each of our groups represented! Can you all please submit a group shot back to me before February 23rd? I’ll keep track and bug you all (nicely of course) as our weeks carry on!
* **As of this writing, I have now received FIVE! 11 more to go – and we only have THREE more scheduled gatherings of groups.**

**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. What’s the weirdest thing in your fridge or freezer right now? Why is it there?

**LEADER NOTE:** In a leaders guide from a few weeks ago, there was a question that had our leaders considering who might be good hosts for new Life Groups in the fall here at Gateway. This question may serve to weed through those who good hosts *might not be*!! ☺ By now everyone in your group should (or could) be comfortable enough to share some of these secrets.

1. Do you have any mentors or people you look up to? Who are they and why?

**LEADER NOTE:** In Acts 3, we saw the lame man healed, and how he clung to Peter and John, now in Acts 4, the same man is right by their side! Who have your members clung to in life?

**QUICK REVIEW**

**LEADER NOTE:** These following two questions aim to have your group reflect upon last Sunday’s message. The first question will always be the same, and the second one is provided from our teaching pastor from the service.

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:** Be sure to grab a sermon guide on Sunday morning, or bring your own way to take notes, and jot down your own questions!

2. This past weekend Pastor Justin noted that the two marks of a wholehearted disciple of Jesus are courage and humility. Why do you think these are the two most notable attributes of a converted Christian?

**LEADER NOTE:** n/a

**SCRIPTURE REVIEW**

**LEADER NOTE:** This is a critical moment in your group’s meeting, as we’re moving away from discussing the message, and turning our hearts towards the scripture passage and themes we’re exploring. While our groups are “*sermon-based groups*,” they’re not meant to be evaluations or examinations of only the message. Our goals are to get into the themes that come up in the message, from the passage of Scripture we’re rooted in. As you seen the need to change up the pattern of these questions, feel free to more simply ask after reading the portion of scripture, “*What stands out to you about this passage?*”

**READ Acts 4:1-22.**

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

2. What does this passage say about fallen humanity and the world we are in?

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 behaviors, and trust in my Savior?

**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 Acts 4:1-2**. Following Acts 3, the events here are still in the temple courts, and these leaders all appear. What might you know about these leaders’ intentions and why they are all “*greatly annoyed*” (ESV) or “*greatly disturbed*” (NIV)?

**LEADER NOTE:** As Acts 4 opens, we see three groups of Jewish leaders emerge as the disturbance was happening in the temple court, and many are gathered here, and many would have witnessed the lame man’s excitement and joy as he danced and leaped around the courtyard after his healing. It’s even noted at the end of our passage here, in v.22, that this man was “*more than forty years old*.” He’s been around long enough on these steps for people to take notice. The three groups are:

1. **The Jewish Priests** are the religious leaders who are responsible for temple worship and sacrifices, but also making sure that all Jewish people, followed the instruction of the Torah. They held themselves to modeling every letter of the Jewish Law, both of the Torah (God’s Word), and the Mishnah (Their interpretation of God’s Word). Most Jewish Priests found themselves disagreeing with Jesus’ teaching and modelling a different way to follow God’s Word, and even with His Divinity.
2. **The Captain of the Temple** is a high-ranking official commissioned with maintaining order and protocol in the Temple, you might say that this captain functioned as “*Temple Police*” and oversaw a team to keep watch, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. As the captain was clearly aligned with the Priests, they too, would easily find themselves in opposition to what was occurring, and would seek to restore proper Jewish order and etiquette.
3. **The Sadducees** are a small but influential socially elite group of priests. They held to four teachings, all which opposed what Christ taught, which is “*sad-you-see*.” (1) There is no resurrection, (2) They rejected oral tradition, (3) They rejected fate, and claimed sole human responsibility, & (4) There are no angels and spirits. All that happened in Acts 3, doesn’t align with how they see the Jewish tradition play out.

Essentially, all three groups saw the disturbance as unrest within their sacred place. They sought to put it to rest, and to see whatever uprising that might begin from here, squelched. All that was happening was outside of their control, as well as knowledge and awareness.

* **READ Matthew 3:7-8, 16:1, 22:23**. How do these passages shed light on how the Jewish leaders in Acts 4 respond to Peter and John, and the healing of the lame man?

**LEADER NOTE:** While there are more texts in the Gospels to fill out a fuller understanding of the relationship that Jesus had with these three groups of Jewish leaders, these three paint a picture that Jesus did not see Himself aligned with each of them.

1. **Matthew 3** tells of Jesus’ baptism, and He calls out to the Pharisees and Sadducees, “*You brood of vipers*.” Not exactly a comment thanking them for being present at such an occasion, He’s keenly aware of their intentions to trap Him.
2. **Matthew 16** tells of these groups coming to test Jesus, and not the kind to see if He passes and succeeds, but they test Him hoping to see Him fail, because His actions and ministry don’t line up with how they teach. He appears contrary and opposed to what they’re doing.
3. **Matthew 22** lets us know a bit of the perspective of the Sadducees, who believe there is no resurrection. Remember, that the gospel accounts were written *after* Christ’s death and resurrection. They believe that Jesus’ death was a final victory for their agendas. In their perspective He was then out of the way. But also, they believed that death was final for humanity as well, saying that at death, even the soul ceases to exist.

All this suggests that what they saw play out with the healing of the lame man, and that Peter and John attested this miracle to Jesus of Nazareth, they just couldn’t comprehend or make any sense of it, therefore it must be wrong, and must be squelched. They thought that they had the power and authority to do so.

**2. READ Acts 4:7-8**. The Holy Spirit gave Peter and John the words to say. Can you recall a time when you experienced something similar to explain a faith related truth, recall a passage of scripture, or reach out to a friend in need?

**LEADER NOTE:**  The work of the Holy Spirit can be somewhat of a mystery, especially in texts like this where these two men were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke boldly! The thing is, the Spirit is actively doing the same thing today, just as He did then. We, modern reformed Christians, might not be as aware of His activity as we could be. A key trait of the reformed Christian is one that has our denomination and faith practices be abundantly dedicated to learning, to study, and to having theology and biblical understanding laid out in a succinct and orderly format. The work of the Spirit in this kind of context, perhaps could be an understanding that He helps us recall what we have previously learned or read.

For example, as the question asks if someone has been able to help another person understand a faith related truth – those moments, are fueled by the Spirit helping the speaker share clearly what is being shared, and helps the listener hear and comprehend. There could be other moments in conversations where one person is sharing about a struggle in life, or is asking about how the Bible directs the paths going forward, sometimes the listener, might be prompted in their mind with a Biblical reference or passage that offers solace and comfort. That moment is brought to us by the Holy Spirit.

There could also be other moments where one person is simply just going through the patterns of their day, and they can’t shake a particular name from their mind, so they reach out to that person, they received with such a comment like, “*I needed to hear from someone today.”* This moment too, is ordained by the Spirit.

And these moments probably happen more often than we might consider. Looking back, and reflecting upon them and how they’ve come up, provide us a way to understand just how the same moments might happen again.

* **READ 1 Corinthians 12:4-11**. What are all the gifts of the Spirit mentioned here? How have you seen the Holy Spirit empower God’s people in these ways, for His name?

**LEADER NOTE:** The gifts of the Spirit that Paul mentions here are: (1) **Word of Wisdom**, being able to discern between right and wrong paths. (2) **Word of Knowledge**, being aware and keen on the details about a person or situation. (3) **Faith**, having the extraordinary confidence in God’s power and His ability and desire to follow through with His promises to humanity. (4) **Healing**, being able to provide relief from disease and suffering. (5) **Working of Miracles** would be the ability to come along side God’s supernatural ability to control and manipulate the physical realm. (6) **Prophecy** is speaking of God’s message of salvation, of His challenge for repentance, of His depth of love and care. (7) **Distinguishing of Spirits** is the ability to understanding the difference between the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of Evil. (8) **Various Tongues** is being able to speak in another language not known, or in a spiritual language that is between the Spirit of God and God. (9) **Interpretation of Tongues** is being able to understand and explain the words of a spiritual language, for the benefit and edification of God’s people.

As God’s people are gifted with the Holy Spirit to articulate faith in Him, the Spirit also grants these extra abilities to live out the Christian Faith in bold ways. Like in the earlier question, as Reformed Christians, we might not have the pattern as much as our Charismatic friends to name and claim these gifts as they appear, but we can certainly look back upon moments and activities and begin to see just how special moments came about.

It could be a firm certainty around a decision being made around a career path change, or even in approaching marriage. It could be a moment of teaching a student. It could be a moment where faith carried someone through a crisis. It could be hearing about newfound health, that medical professionals cannot explain. It could be the pattern of regular teaching and preaching you hear. It could be the ability to know the difference of right and wrong. It could be understanding someone with a very heavy accent or could be sharing love through a smile and attention. It can even be utterances that humanly speaking that simply don’t make sense but attached with an overwhelming sense of God’s nearness and affection.

The growth area for most Reformed Accented Christians, is to be seeking more awareness of the activity of the Spirit, asking the Lord to give them eyes to see His work, ears to hear it, and hands and feet to follow it.

* **READ Mark 13:9-11**. Jesus says the Holy Spirit will speak through us. How can we know it is the Holy Spirit speaking, and not just our own words? Is that an important distinction? Why or why not?

**LEADER NOTE:** In this passage in Mark, it’s almost like Jesus is foreshadowing this moment in Acts 4, where Peter and John are arrested, and face the Jewish Councils and Governors. And what do Peter and John do in this moment, while under arrest and being interrogated? They “*bear witness before them*.” Once again, Jesus, now back at the right hand of God the Father, must be watching, and smiling ear to ear, thinking to Himself, “*I told them about that, and they’re doing it!*” Jesus must be so proud!

But to answer the question of knowing if it’s the Spirit speaking through us, or if it’s our own words may not be the easiest to fully discern, but here’s a helpful framework to begin the process:

1. **The message must line up with Scripture.** As the Spirit will never deviate or ask us to deviate from God’s plan and commands for life.
2. **The fruit of the Spirit must be evident in the speaker’s life.** Suggesting that the speaker is in regular pursuit of Jesus, enjoying Him and all that He has to offer.
3. **There should be an understanding that it is God’s desire to give such wisdom and direction**. God is perpetually seeking to encourage and edify His people, and will use the Faith Community to do this for each other.
4. **The message must glorify God**, and not the person.

This distinction is vastly important to make and should be sought to be understood and recognized. Such things are good to be confirmed in a trusted community of fellow believers.

**3. READ Acts 4:12**. Why is this such a striking claim for the Jewish leaders? Why might this be a striking claim for listeners today?

**LEADER NOTE:**  The Jewish leaders sought a messiah that was different than the one who came. They were expecting and anticipating a king to come riding in on a majestic white stallion that would lead an army of soldiers to rid the country of Roman occupation. But instead, this Messiah that came, told them that they must love all of their neighbors, soldiers, lepers, cripples, and even the Samaritans. They couldn’t make sense of how different this claim was, than what they were anticipating.

For general public in today’s 21st century climate with a drastic increase in the “*Rise of the Nones*” (those who check off the “None” box of religious affiliation), they have an understanding that they have everything within themselves, in our Christian terminology, to “*save themselves*.” Submitting to authority of any kind, seen or unseen, is a growing subject of debate. Even governments have lost trust, because the individual knows how to do it better. Following an intangible and invisible God, becomes even harder in world where for the most part, life is easy.

**TAKING IT HOME**

**READ Acts 4:18-20, & 1 Peter 3:13-17**. One has to wonder if Peter is remembering these moments that happened in Acts 4 as he writes to the dispersed church. What can we do today in order to grow in our ability to defend the Gospel? Are you committed to doing that? What patterns do you need to adjust?

**LEADER NOTE:** Peter and John, when they were confronted by the authorities, had the option to shrug off all that had happened, to deny once again Christ’s involvement, and to give credit in some other direction, to keep the guilt or responsibility off their shoulders. They didn’t, they did the right thing, of standing up for the faith they had, and speaking with confidence the words that they were being given by the Holy Spirit. They were ready to defend the gospel.

Which begs the question that this question is ultimately getting at, “*are we ready to defend the gospel?”* Will we have the courage, and the humility, to stand up and face whatever might come, in the name of defending God’s name?

Certainly for Peter and John, this scenario could have played out in the same way it did for Jesus as He was brought in front of the very same council. But, they were willing to face all that would come, having no fear, not being troubled, but seeking the whole way through to honor Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

**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 Daniel 3**. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are amongst the leaders in Babylon, ordered to worship Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image, and refuse to go back on their faith and trust in God. Their words in front of the furnace in vs.16-18 are astounding. What strikes you about the way they say, “*But if not* …” suggesting that God might not save them in the midst of the fire? Do you think Peter and John felt the same way in Acts 4? Why do you think that?