



## LIFE GROUPS | LEADERS GUIDE

March 16-22, 2025 | Winter Week 9

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

Well leaders, we're embarking on the last regularly scheduled week of our Winter 2025 season of Life Groups. Thanks so much for being such an amazing part of our ministry at Gateway over these last 9 weeks!! It's an honor and privilege to work with you all, and to see your groups thrive as you strive to deepen meaningful relationships, centered on God's Word and prayer.

#### 1. YOUR NINTH MEETING:

- Have you considered the idea yet of planning a week 10 – a time where you can gather your group together, and wrap up the season with some lighthearted fun and fellowship? If not, we invite you to do that!
- Please help us share our desire to hear back from your members by filling out [THIS FEEDBACK FORM](#). From your web browser, copy the link, and send it to your members in your usual way. From the office, we'll send it out as well, a little later.

#### 2. GATEWAY'S 75<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY:

- As it's our 75<sup>th</sup> 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.
- Just take a moment and look at you all in all these pictures – *well, half of you all!!!* What a good-looking bunch of people, devoted to such an amazing mission.
- **As of this writing, I have now received NINE! We have 8 more to go. I know some of you were hoping to get your shot in soon, so I wait eagerly! For the others – we've still got time.**
- **I will be texting and emailing leaders directly to ask for these, next week again – please beat me to that!**



## 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. It's the last official week of Life Groups in this season. What was a highlight in your time together?

**LEADER NOTE:** As seasons wrap up and find their way to conclusion, it's always a good practice to look back upon your journey and to see the moments that brought you to this time and place. These moments of reflection bring back the fun, and the joy-filled moments in a very special way, that will help you solidify the memories and deepen the desire to continue on the same path.

2. What is something that you have discovered or rediscovered about your faith and about God through this journey in the book of Acts?

**LEADER NOTE:** Like in the first question, reflecting upon the journey travelled is always a good activity, from celebrating the memories, to rediscovering what has been learned. This practice solidifies and hopefully locks in the knowledge and familiarity with this text and the insights and challenges within it.

## 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 weekend, Pastor Justin noted how hypocrisy is the single greatest threat to the church and to koinonia (fellowship) with God. Why is that the case?

**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 see 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 4:32-5:14.**

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 4:32.** This unity, of being of “*one heart and soul*,” isn’t just an affiliation with one church family over another, but a unity in serving Christ’s mission. What in your words, is Christ’s mission in Acts?

**LEADER NOTE:** The church is bigger than just Gateway Community Church, and is sometimes referred to as the, “*BIG-C-Church*,” which refers to the church universal – the whole collective community of Christians across the whole world who love and serve Jesus Christ. The Apostles Creed, as a collective statement of the Christian Faith puts it this way, in the third paragraph ...

*I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic\* church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.*

There’s an “\*” after the word “*catholic*.” This is not the CRC denomination saying that we ascribe to the leadership of the Pope or to the Catholic Church. This is the CRC’s way of saying that we are a part of the “*true Christian church of all times and all places*.” While the Apostle’s Creed was written just a few years after these moments in Acts (*the stories in Acts occur in the AD30’s, but was recorded in the AD60’s, then the Apostles Creed in its earliest form, is dated back to AD340*), there was already an understanding then that the growing church, while it happened and grew in a variety of places, was closely linked together by the devotion and servitude in Christ, not by their location or style.

Christ’s mission in the book of Acts can be summarized like this: God empowers His people, through the Holy Spirit, to boldly serve Him, growing His whole community of believers.

- **READ Philippians 2:1-4.** How do we today, miss this mark of unity?

**LEADER NOTE:** Leaders, *be abundantly careful* that this question doesn’t become a time of critique and evaluation of our church community and practices – but a genuine conversation around how today, disciples of Jesus are human, and are more prone to walk away from God, than run towards Him unified with all believers.

Remind yourself of the unity that the early church was seeking – that they focused first on Jesus, and all the He taught them, then unity amongst them came as result. Which Luke then describes their patterns

as, “*they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers*” (**Acts 2:42** | ESV).

As we’ve learned about how this early community of believers pursued such things as described in **Acts 2:42**, and as well in **4:32-35**, modern day believers might see themselves missing these marks of a Spirit Filled Church, just like how those in the early church did. Modern believers might struggle with all kinds of realities that pull them away from the unified church – there’s a

1. loss of the authority found in scripture,
2. a loss of the understanding of the greatest and highest power of God Almighty,
3. a loss of connection in community,
4. a loss of commitment and belonging to organizations, etc.

Yet, as the whole text in this study shows us, that despite all human effort – both positive and negative – God will grow His church. **Acts 5:14** tells us, “*And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.*”

However, just because Jesus will still grow the church, this does not give us permission to simply sit on our hands and watch it all play out in front of us. There’s a very strong theme in the entire narrative of scripture that God, despite human sinfulness, chooses to include His people in His story.

**2. READ Acts 5:1-4.** Ananias and Sapphira’s sin was not just lying about their donation, but about deception, as they were trying to show that they were holier, or more faithful, than they actually were. In modern privatized faith, how can we assess if the same deception is prevalent or not today? Is that even up to us?

**LEADER NOTE:** In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, faith practices have become more and more private, and while there is some good biblical evidence for these private and personal patterns, there’s a changing landscape all around the church where we are seeing these practices subside in importance,

1. Accountability to fellow believers is harder, as there is a growing lack of trust amongst people.
2. Growing suspicion over particular behaviors, as motives are quickly called into question.
3. Greater doubt that people are as genuine as they might say they are, and likely more.

However, the reality, is that all humanity “*fall[s] short of the glory of God*” (**Romans 3:23**). All are sin-filled, and all are at rest are distant from God. This is why Christ came, to fill that gap, and to overcome that distance, and not only that – but to also provide grace for those who are repentant. All people, Ananias and Sapphira included, as well as Peter and John, will have to stand before God at the end of their days, and give an account for their actions, and there, and there only will God “*judge the living and the dead.*”

- **READ Colossians 3:5-10.** How do we guard ourselves from misrepresenting our own faith?

**LEADER NOTE:** Paul’s words here to the Colossian people, starts with a pretty stark reality and challenge – that most actions and behaviors in the world will do their best to pull followers of Jesus away from Him, through all kinds of distracting measures. Paul says it clearly, “*STOP IT!*” Put those patterns of poor and inappropriate decisions “*to death.*” Paul says that as a life is changed in Christ, that their entire life is changed for Him, that there’s a renewal that happens, that no longer does the person rest in the grips of evil in the world but has the opportunity to rest in the grip of God’s love and compassion.



The Christian life from then onwards, lives in response to this gift, seeking to make the right choices, seeking to edify and encourage others, seeking to reflect the Creator to the sin-filled world. Part of the way that believers can guard ourselves, is by allowing others to speak into their lives, which means that they know enough about the actions and habits, that they can point out behaviors that do not line up with God's invitation. Another way is that the believer lives in constant reflection and personal evaluation – checking their motives and thoughts and thinking clearly about actions before they become reality.

- What are we to do, when we do catch ourselves participating in deception?

**LEADER NOTE:** Catching oneself in deception is a good sign that says that the person is aware of the sinful action, but the first step is following Paul's words from early on, "*STOP IT!*" While that is often easier said than done, the following passages have a strong theme ...

**Proverbs 28:13**      *"Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy."*

**1 John 1:9**            *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

**James 5:16**           *"Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."*

While the major theme that comes up in these three texts is for the sinful person to confess their sin to God and to each other, the practice is naming the sin, giving word to the wrongful ways, and not denying the problem any longer!

This is like when a person who is experiencing strong emotions, names what they're feeling, saying that they're sad, or angry. Naming the feeling, gives the opportunity for those around to not just understand but to help. It's similar with sin, that naming it for another – like God, or a good friend – helps the other come alongside and help.

The Greek word for "*repent*" is "*metanoia*" (μετάνοια). Which essentially means "*to make a U-turn.*" It means to acknowledge a wrong path, and then to make a purposeful direction change. Therefore, once the sin is named, change needs to follow. Just saying the words, and going through the motions, doesn't do oneself any good – the confession must lead to alteration.

**3. READ Acts 5:7-8 & Matthew 6:19-24.** Unknowingly widowed, Sapphira joins in the deception before Peter, placing her possessions as more important than her standing before God. How do we today, become more aware of how we might have our life's priorities in the wrong order?

**LEADER NOTE:** Ananias and Sapphira could have so easily decided what they wanted to contribute to the church from the sale of their property and would have been fine and would have done a great thing for the Lord, and for His church. However, for some reason, likely a desire to receive the same notability that Barnabas received from the community (which, is not indicated in the text), they want to be seen as more faithful and holier than they actually were, in order to receive the same honor and admiration. They placed their desire for credit within their community, over their desire to be honest with God. And they paid a very large price.

Stories like these, especially as we see the positive example of Barnabas, and the negative example of Annanias and Sapphira side by side, show us a spectrum of behaviors, and ask Christians to place themselves within the spectrum, evaluating where they might fall. Christians might need to ask of themselves: Are we quick to give all that we have for the sake of the kingdom? Or are we willing to give some of what we have just to be seen by others? Readers are left with an instruction to examine their own lives, to see whether they're genuinely generous, or simply just performing.

Once again, this question finds group members reflecting upon their lives and taking a good look at their motives. Jesus' words in Matthew, while quite familiar, drive this point home, that life on this earth is not about gathering up possessions, and labeling everything as personal property. But that life on earth is about a growing in understanding that what is owned is to be used for growing God's kingdom, and for furthering His mission.

- **READ 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.** How would you describe the life of an individual who has a deep understanding that both life and possessions, belong first to the Lord?

**LEADER NOTE:** Paul writes to his audience in Corinth about the reality that they, as people, and owners of their things, are not their own – but that they are “*temple[s] of the Holy Spirit*,” which means, that they are there in Corinth, on earth, in that time, for a very specific reason – which is to continue on in the purpose of Acts – to be empowered by the Lord, to grow His church. But, these people, indwelt with the Holy Spirit, like believers today, need to understand this truth that Paul hammers home, that “*you are not your own*.” Which means, that the individual who deeply understands this will be:

1. Generous with what they have,
2. Content in their spaces,
3. Intentional with living in community,
4. Filled with joy to share,
5. Trusting in God's provision, and
6. Resting in the knowledge and hope of an eternal reward.

Leaders, perhaps you might have an opportunity to share this list of qualities, which you can ask your members about which aspect they have an easy time with, and which comes with more difficulty. Those moments will lead to a greater awareness of gaps in their lives.

## TAKING IT HOME

**READ Acts 5:5, 9 & Matthew 5:3-12.** Ananias and Sapphira reaped the fruit of their hearts, missing the goal of humility that the Beatitudes encourage for the disciple of Jesus to foster. In light of these two stories of the early church community, why is the posture of humility still hard for us today? How can we encourage each other in growing in this area?

**LEADER NOTE:** Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has gotten more complex than ever before, not necessarily harder, just more complex. The ease of access to information about the world, people, actions, achievements, and all the happenings has made life today, more challenging than ever before. From perfectly manicured lives scrolled through on all forms of social media, to the news filling in just about every gap that they decide to fill, to the values of our neighbors being out of joint, to people near and far who have deeper bank accounts and more disposable income than they know what to do with. People then compare themselves, in what they have and what they're doing, with all kinds of people that they have no business comparing themselves to.

So, people aspire for more – or at least for the appearance of more, which is a scary trap for humanity to fall into. But, the realities of our cultural moment, encourage such desires. There's an understanding that one can pursue anything they want, as long as they feel it's good for them, which then makes them an expert who can share and promote themselves. There's also the consumer mentality, that once something new is available, it must be sought after. Additionally, people have a very hard time being wrong and will fight tooth and nail to showcase that they're right – as people do not like appearing as though they're weak.

For the Christian, we are called to understand that the Lord will provide for all of our needs, not our wants, as He knows what is best for us, and will provide that, and only that. However, in a world of comparisons and sense of keeping-up-with-the-jones', there's an adjustment and posture correction that must be made and sought after.

Supporting each other in non-evaluative and non-judgemental ways is key to building up a wholesome community. However, these actions start with the individual. We need to be careful to not brag, boast, or puff ourselves up. We need to be careful to not model pride and honor over trivial things. On the flip side, we need to strive to give credit where credit is due – giving God the honor and praise for the gifts He has given, and to honor and respect all people – for who they are.

## **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 Acts 4:36-37.** Joseph (Barnabas) sounds like a model, or ideal, disciple that the church should develop, as he is one who understands, and helps, to fulfil the Christ's mission. Do you understand Gateways' sense of Christ's mission here in the Valley? How are you helping that? How can we as a church community foster and develop such disciples?