



LIFE GROUPS | LEADERS GUIDE

January 25-31, 2026 | Winter Week 2

ANNOUNCEMENTS

We're now in our second week, and we're just getting started! While many groups take the first gathering of the season to catch up with a time of fun, games, and good food, this is the week to begin diving into the study of God's Word together and joining in prayer for the needs of our members.

1. YOUR SECOND MEETING:

- This is where you set the tone for how your meetings will look from here, and especially if you have some new members, be sure to be clear about how you lead and how you direct conversations and discussions. Follow your time commitments, honoring your members and their lives and schedules.
- One of the elements of feedback that is always noted – is the times of prayer, that they are not what they could be, and 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:
 - Invite your members to share their requests, and then immediately pray for that request. Repeat as often as your members share needs.
 - 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."*

2. 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.
- As well, we have fully reprinted and restocked our **SERVE SHIRTS!** 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.

3. PICTURES:

- We love seeing what you're all up to! Take pictures of your meeting spaces, your group 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.

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 is a personality trait that immediately draws you to someone?

LEADER NOTE: This sermon series that we are in, is going to have us consistently look at ourselves and how we interact with people – people that the Lord has put in our paths. Some of those people we'll naturally gravitate towards, as we do largely understand that "*birds of a feather flock together.*" This question might begin some conversation, and maybe even some newly discovered realities, of how God has wired us to connect with others.

2. What is your best secret to a successful relationship (*of any kind*)?

LEADER NOTE: While this sermon series will have us look inward at our own actions, it's going to also drive us to explore how we interact with the people who are in our orbits, so this *Getting to Know You* question seeks to draw out what we've already learned about ourselves and how we interact with those who are close to us.

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. Which of the four strategies (*withdrawal, force, compromise, moral domination*) are you most tempted toward when you think about changing the world? How does Jesus' way in the Beatitudes challenge that instinct?

LEADER NOTE: n/a

SCRIPTURE REVIEW

LEADER NOTE: Reading scripture together is one of the most important practices in our Life Groups, so never shirk away from reading the following passage, always making 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.

These questions that follow, will be the same throughout the season. And if you're familiar with the "Triad Questions" from over the years, these are changed up a bit – simplified, and with slightly different emphases.

READ Matthew 5:1-12

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 4:23-25. Matthew sets the stage for, "*the Sermon on the Mount*," where people from everywhere have shown up. In this relatively short time of Jesus' ministry, how and why do you think His message spread as quickly as it did?

LEADER NOTE: While we didn't look at this portion of the text closely during this weekend's message, it's good to be deeply reminded about who the people are that Jesus was talking to, and even why they've gathered. Matthew tells us that as Jesus began His teaching ministry, that His "fame" was spread throughout the whole region, and that people were bringing to Him those who were sick – who Jesus healed. Surely, this would have attracted the masses to explore more about who this teacher was. And word spread quickly as people walked and talked through their days – travelling to the markets, selling their wares, trading their goods, and going about life. News travelled fast into regions that fully surrounded Galilee, from Syria in the *North*, Judea and Jerusalem to the *South*, those who were beyond the Jordan in the *East*, and the Decapolis (*which was a grouping of cities that were Greek & Roman*) which essentially points us to the final direction that people came from, the *West*. Matthew tells us that everyone came from everywhere to see who Jesus was.

2. READ Matthew 5:2-11, 22:34-40. These nine statements can be thematically divided in two: vs.3-6 describe our *inner devotion to God*, and vs.7-11 describe our *outward action towards the world*. Why do you think Jesus uses this structure to teach?

LEADER NOTE: Any good teacher would structure their lesson in a logical order to help make the point and relevancy more understandable and applicable. Jesus in His good Jewish upbringing, further emphasizes Matthew's goal of deeply connecting with the Jewish audience, where the structure of the Beatitudes also reflects the structure of the Ten Commandments.

Take a moment to reflect on the Ten Commandments, where it is divided in two tables, where it emphasizes our actions and relationship with God in commandments 1-4, and our actions and relationships with our neighbors in commandments 5-10. This is what Jesus re-emphasizes in the Beatitudes, not undoing the authority of the Ten Commandments, but essentially, He deepens their value and purpose. So here in the Beatitudes, Jesus draws the same distinction, that in the way that He has called us to live, He is telling us to be deeply aware of

two realities – our vertical connection with God the Father, and our horizontal connections with our Neighbours. All this, Jesus summarizes in “*the Great Commandment*,” where Matthew tells us of a conversation between the religious leaders – the Pharisees and Sadducees – who were constantly trying to catch Jesus in order to trip Him, we’re told in **Matthew 5:37-40**,

“*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.* ³⁸ *This is the great and first commandment.* ³⁹ *And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* ⁴⁰ *On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.*”

Jesus is very careful to not underestimate Jewish history or the Law that was given to them, instead, He calls attention to their purpose, something that the Jewish Leaders have missed – fairly frequently.

- **READ Matthew 5:3-6.** How does this *inner devotion* towards God affect or alter our worldview, and our approach to facing hard situations in the world all around us?

LEADER NOTE: It is also good at this point to look at the word, “*Blessed*” which starts each of the statements. As we look at the word with our 21st century lens, we might see it to mean, “*happy*,” “*fortunate*,” or “*gifted*.” And we might read the first beatitude this way, “*Happy are those who are poor in spirit, for theirs will be the kingdom of God.*” However, that would be a misreading of Jesus’ intent for us. While the word “*blessed*” in its Greek form (*Makarios*), can actually be interpreted that way, we’d still miss the point. The thrust of Jesus’ intention is that we’re to see that we will “*flourish*,” we will be “*fulfilled*,” or we will be “*approved*” when these positions are lived out. The first statement can then be read and understood as, “*Fulfilled are those who are poor in spirit, for theirs will be the kingdom of God.*”

Then regarding our inner devotion towards God, Jesus has a lot to say to us. Here’s a bit of a breakdown of the first four statements:

#1 “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” We might read the statement to mean, that those who are “*sad*” or “*depressed*” will flourish in the kingdom. But that doesn’t make a whole lot of sense. Jesus is telling us that those who understand that we cannot receive God’s love and grace on our own, will be granted the kingdom. We see ourselves then as dependent upon God, that we are not in control.

#2 “*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*” We might read here that for those who have lost loved ones and are grieving will be comforted. While that is very true of God’s love for humanity, that’s not the thrust of His message here. Jesus is deepening the understanding of our dependency upon God and is inviting His people to mourn and grieve over just how far we are from God, because of the prevalence of Sin in this world. We need to see that reality in ourselves.

#3 “*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*” We might not even know what the word “*meek*” is, as it’s a little outside of our day-to-day usage of the English language. While the word means “*quiet*” and “*gentle*,” Jesus’ thrust of this statement is that humanly, we’re to be gentle in ourselves, because we’ve submitted wholly and completely to God and His authority. We need to see that power isn’t about dominance, but it’s found in submission.

#4 “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*” This is perhaps the clearer and more obvious statement, as we might quickly understand that Jesus isn’t talking about our need to fill our empty and growling stomachs. Jesus is expressing our need to see that His ways are greater than our ways.

- **READ Matthew 5:7-11.** How do these *outward actions towards the world* frame how we look at, and interact with, our neighbors?

LEADER NOTE: Jesus continues and now directs the theme of the beatitudes to now look at how we live out our faith in respect to where the Lord placed us on this earth.

#5 *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."* Jesus is talking about those who posture themselves as kind and compassionate people, where their neighbors feel genuine and authentic love. We need to see our neighbors first, like we do ourselves, as broken people; then leave the blame and judgment up to the Lord.

#6 *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."* Jesus is talking about the people who live with integrity, who do what they say they're going to do. We need to not manipulate people, or maintain appearances in order to be seen doing good deeds.

#7 *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."* Jesus is talking about those who not only seek peace but also seek its partner – reconciliation. We need to see conflict as something to heal, and not to fuel.

#8 *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* Jesus is talking about those who face opposition in life and continue to be faithful to their calling. We need to realize that not everyone we interact with will love and appreciate why we live as we do.

#9 *"Blessed are you when others revile you ... for your reward is great in heaven."* Jesus is talking about those who face oppression as a result of faithful living. We need to realize that the cost of discipleship is high, but the reward is even higher.

3. READ Matthew 5:10-12. The last two Beatitudes describe how we remain faithful when under pressure. Which of these Beatitudes is most countercultural today? Why?

LEADER NOTE: The reality is that both are countercultural, as Jesus tells us that there will be an earthly price to pay as His followers pursue Him. They will be persecuted for their beliefs. They will be made fun of and will face threats. As just mentioned, the cost of discipleship is high, but the reward of heaven, is far higher. Jesus spoke often against the pharisees and the religious leaders in His time, and even, within the Sermon on the Mount Jesus speaks to their ways at **Matthew 6:16**,

And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

Jesus points out that the hypocrites – the religious leaders – received their reward for their public piety when other people noticed them, as that was what they were aiming for. They wanted to be seen following the rules and obeying the regulations. Jesus tells us that is the Father's attention that we should be aiming for and that when we follow His invitations, for Him and not for others, He'll see it, and He will reward it.

And so, to engage in the conversation around what is countercultural – really, all the beatitudes are. Culture around us will often see comfort, success, societal approval as blessings. Culture will not affirm that hardships and suffering come as a result of being fulfilled. The Beatitudes really flips our cultural value that success is marked by full bank accounts to seeing that suffering for God is a mark of His blessing upon us.

- **READ Isaiah 51:7-8, John 15:18-20.** While persecution is not proof of Christ-like behavior, it often comes with it. How do these words help shape what it means to be successful or faithful in our faith?

LEADER NOTE: Following Jesus will put Christians more at odds with the world than at peace with it. And while that sounds like a terrible arrangement, Jesus reminds us in His high priestly prayer in **John 17**, that we are to be *in* the world, and not *of* the world. This is our temporary home, while we await our reward of a place at the right hand of God in heaven above. Isaiah teaches us that we're to seek God's approval, and not our neighbors. And John's passage shows us that as we are faithful to our calling, that we will in fact face opposition. It's not an *if*, it's a *when*. It's a reality that will come up.

TAKING IT HOME

READ Matthew 5:11-12, James 1:2-4, Philippians 3:20-21. In the Reformed Tradition, we often speak of our assurance of faith – of how we're held by God, and that with our faith in God, we will persevere through all of life. How does this assurance and perseverance contribute to the spiritual revolution that the Lord is leading?

LEADER NOTE: It shouldn't be new to us, to hear that within God's sovereignty, He holds each of His people, and He guides each of them through the lives that He has given them. God is not a God who created everything, pressed "go" and left everything to its own devices. While He is the one who did press "go" – He didn't leave it. He continually engages with everything that happens in all that He created. So this revolution of people getting to know Him more and more each day, He is in full control of – guiding and sustaining every element of our spiritual rhythms. There's another really neat passage in the book of John, where Jesus had just fed the five thousand, He declares that He is the symbol of the bread – enough sustenance for all humanity – in that context, Jesus says this in **John 6:44**,

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

God will in fact continue to guide those whom He is drawing to Himself through His followers – His disciples, until the right time when all things have been fulfilled, and He calls everyone to join Himself in His very presence.

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 Galatians 5:16-26. These verses describe spiritual fruit as something that the Spirit grows in us, not something we can force. According to this passage, what conditions allow the Spirit to produce fruit in a believer's life? What is the connection between Paul's words here, and Jesus' Beatitudes? Which fruit or Beatitude do you see most clearly in your own life right now? Which ones do you need to seek the Spirit's help?