



LIFE GROUPS | LEADERS GUIDE
February 8-14, 2026 | Winter Week 4

ANNOUNCEMENTS

You're in your rhythm!

1. YOUR FOURTH MEETING:

- At this point, we are nearing the halfway point through this season of Life Groups. If you have members in your group that you haven't seen too much of yet, be sure to reach out to them – being careful to not make them feel guilty for not coming as much, but to express your care for them. Ask them how life is going, and if there's anything that you can be praying for as a group.

2. SERVE PROJECTS:

- Here's a little update with where our groups are serving this season.
 - **Dykshoorn/Arends** are planning with a Life Recovery Home for maintenance projects
 - **Unrau** are making arrangements with the Life Recovery Thrift store.
 - **Hilderman** have been trying to book a different time slot at the Food Bank.
 - **Baars/Dejong** are booked in at the Food Bank on March 20th.
 - **Gorer/Luymes** are hosting the Date Night comedy tour on February 9th.
 - **Langelaar** are providing some meals for a family in need.
 - **Feenstra/Beerda** took it upon themselves to clean all the signs in our church parking lot.
 - **Roos** will be working with serving meals with 5and2 Ministries.
- Don't see your group in the list? Bring up the serve ideas this coming week to plan a time to contribute to the life and times of our city.
- Send in your pics as you serve our city! We love seeing you all in action – *and look at all this empty space here that we can fill??*



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. Think about someone you deeply trust. What is it about them, that makes them so trustworthy?

LEADER NOTE: We're talking overall here in this text about matters of integrity – and it is good for us to take note of people who we have known in our lives who have lived ways of being trustworthy and honest. And while we remember such individuals, we are certainly left inspired to live in similar ways.

2. In which area of life do you find it easy to be a person of integrity? Where is it difficult?

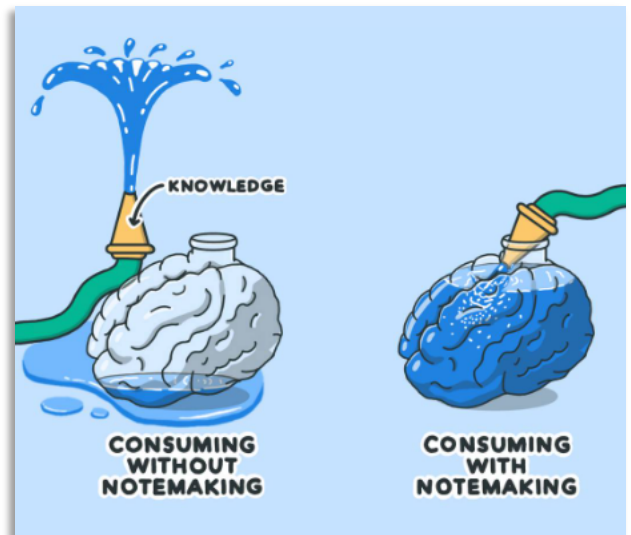
LEADER NOTE: This getting to know you question might not be the typical one that we have where we're invited to talk about our favourite flavour of ice cream or to name our celebrity doppelganger. This question, like the last, should have us deepening our reflections of our own journey's in life. But this doesn't mean that you can't have fun with this moment, but it also means, that as you enter it, you need to be quite aware of where your members are, and meet them where they're at.

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: Taking notes and interacting with the message that we hear shared on Sunday mornings is a very helpful practice. As you engage both the listening mind, and the physical act of writing, content is more readily solidified in memory!



2. Pastor Justin noted how we tend to struggle with moral superiority on one side, crushing shame on the other, and how the gospel dismantles both. When you struggle spiritually, do you tend more toward *performing* (looking better than you are) or *withdrawing and/or shame* (feeling too broken to come close to God)? How does the good news of Jesus confront and heal both instincts?

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. By now, you know the practice that is working well for your group – keep it up! But don't be afraid to change up the patterns too – just don't skip this!

READ Matthew 5:27-37

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 5:27-30. Sin is not just actions, but motives that begin in our hearts. Things like lust, deception, and broken promises reveal disordered desires that need healing, not just restraint. What are some of the patterns and commitments you have made, to live as Jesus has invited you?

LEADER NOTE: As we become more and more aware of the sin and brokenness in our lives, as a result of this exploration of the Sermon on the Mount, we shouldn't be left unchanged, but with transformed hearts that have us pivot away from thinking of ourselves only, to what the Lord would have us do. However, that can be a hard and daunting task as these old patterns are hard to break, and even discovering them, and committing to change can also be difficult. Here are some ways that your members might respond, and ways that you can encourage your members to engage with:

- **Strive to reorient desires.** There does need to be a personal desire to change, and to acknowledge broken tendencies – because no change will occur, until it is known that it is needed.
- **Practice honesty before the Lord.** It can be a great pattern for disciples of Jesus to at some point every day, to look back upon the last 24 hours, and to examine actions and activities, in light of the Lord's invitations, asking, *"where did I mess up?"* and *"where did God receive glory and honour?"*
- **Set intentional boundaries.** Sometimes we need to set up fences and guards in order to protect our hearts and minds, and then commit to follow them.
- **Lean into accountability and community.** It's not just about setting up the guards, but allowing others to speak into our lives when they see those boundaries pushed, and then adhering to their instruction.
- **Turn to what gives life.** Choose better habits and hobbies that promote spiritually healthy living.

Leaders, as a note here, your members might answer these questions with a bit of a distance in their hearts, as they might have a hard time really sharing some of their own difficult journeys. This isn't the time to pry, but to allow people to share what they're willing to share, and to divulge what they're willing to divulge. Take note if their might be an opportunity or need to follow up with any particular member later, and check in to see if they'd like to connect more about all this. Know that as leaders, we entrust their spiritual care to you all, and look to you to join that journey of healing and reconciliation with them – but also, know that we never expect you to travel that road alone. Our elders and pastors all stand ready to enter and be guides as they are needed and invited.

- **READ 1 Corinthians 10:23-24, Philippians 2:3-4.** A central theme in the Sermon on the Mount is living in right relationship with God *and others*. How do you make the distinction between elevating the needs of others, and fulfilling your own personal desires?

LEADER NOTE: It should come as no surprise to you as leaders, or anyone who has been attending Gateway for more than two weeks, that we are constantly asking the Lord, “*to whom are we sent?*” And as we look at our own personal sin and brokenness, we need to see that the Lord would have us look less at ourselves and our own needs and desires, and look more towards the needs of others. Again, these two passages drive us to consider the Lord’s invitation – *maybe, mandate is better?* – to build up the others around us, with everything that we have. Now to be clear, this isn’t us ignoring the sin in our hearts, is us striving to correct ourselves, so that we can be an effective witness for the Lord as we fulfill our calling to be “*the salt of the earth*” and the “*light of the world.*”

This all does mean that we are constantly monitoring our own objectives and desires, and asking if they will serve or be a burden to ourselves, and to others. The Sermon on the Mount keeps pulling us back to the same posture: *faithfulness is measured not by what I can get away with, but by how well I love God and my neighbor.*

2. READ Matthew 5:31-32. Mutual integrity and faithfulness are necessary traits for not just marriage alone, but for how we maintain and build relationships with anyone. How does Jesus’ teaching here invite deeper responsibility for how our choices affect our marriages, and other relationships?

LEADER NOTE: Divorce and broken relationships have far more reaching effects than what we might ever consider. From the love that is lost between the couple, there are often children in the wake, extended families left wondering how to love and care for people once a part of the family, there are friends left picking sides, there are colleagues feeling the stress and burden, there are church communities longing to see restoration and vows upheld. Relationships of any kind that fall apart, have immediate consequences upon self, and community. Jesus teaches us that we are to take responsibility for all of our actions that may harm or limit the growth of relationships, as we always have a choice – to build up, or to tear down. Jesus’ model for us, is to always seek to build up.

And while God never designed marriages to be something that would be temporary, just like how the promise of His Son’s love for the church, would never be something that would end, there are times when relationships could come a part, because irreparable harm has been caused. Abuse of all kinds – physical, emotional, sexual, infidelity are all baseline reasons where these relationships are broken. While there is always forgiveness, and there is always grace, sometimes relationships just cannot carry on. And these are always very hard discussions to have, but need to be done with love and respect, and with the knowledge that God always seeks reconciliation.

- **READ Genesis 2:21-24.** God's intent for marriage is a lifelong *commitment*. How is this different than a *contract*?

LEADER NOTE: It must cause us to pause in our relationships when we realize that divorce rates amongst Christians, is no different than what it is amongst society at large, and largely, that is due to the misunderstanding that we have when it comes to what marriage is meant to be. As the Lord instructs couples to join together – *to be as one flesh* – the image that we have is a permanent, inseparable companionship and partnership, that will only end at death.

We need to understand then, the difference between marriage commitment (or covenant) and a contract. A contract that we might make has terms, agreements, and individual interests, where if those elements are not fulfilled, the contract is left null and void. But the Lord doesn't look at our marriages with those same terms. Covenantal commitments, are to be grounded with promise – a desire to fulfill commitments; with faithfulness – a desire to always remain in sickness and health, in joy and challenges; with self-giving love – knowing that at times there may be out of balance love, that one will give more than they receive, as one seeks to always elevate the needs of the other.

Let's put it in these ways:

- Contracts protect rights; covenants protect relationships.
- Contracts are conditional; covenants are enduring.
- Contracts prioritize self-interest; covenants call for mutual sacrifice.

And that's what our marriages are to reflect to this world.

3. READ Matthew 5:33-37. Jesus calls His followers to such integrity that oaths become unnecessary. How does living with such integrity simplify your relationships? What are some personal practices you use to help you have integrity (to help your "yes" be "yes" and your "no" be "no")?

LEADER NOTE: So often in our patterns of life, we say we're going to do something, and we don't. We say we're going to be somewhere, and we don't show up, we say we'll live a certain way, but we fail to do so. Jesus tells us, "*Stop it. Don't make promises and set expectations that you cannot fulfill.*" On the other hand, Jesus tells us to be clear with our intentions, that either will do or say something, or we won't. And to more simply, follow through with what we've agreed to do.

Jesus is getting at the reality that He desires for us that when we can actually be trusted, when we will follow through with what we say we'll do, there will be no need for oaths, promises, and exasperating explanations. Our "yes" is reliable. Our "no" is firm.

Additionally, and quietly, Jesus is giving us permission to say "no" to things – and we might find ourselves saying that to good things that we can be a part or commit to. But on the other hand, He's also making it clear that we do need to actually say "yes" from time to time, and then commit and follow through with that commitment.

Some practices that we can put into place, might sound a lot like our parents words to us:

- Think before you speak.
- Choose your words wisely.

- Reflect on what you have said.
- Check to see if others are experiencing you as you.
- **READ Matthew 12:33-35.** Scripture consistently affirms that words reveal the condition of our heart – what we love, fear, trust, or treasure. In this past week, what would people in your orbit have seen and experienced in you? What might this reveal about your heart?

LEADER NOTE: This is a fascinating moment to reflect upon as Jesus makes it pretty clear, “*for the tree is known by its fruit.*” The gospel of John, highlights this point, and takes it a further step,

⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

John 15:5-6 | ESV

The implication of Jesus’ words both in Matthew and John, is that He deeply cares about how we carry ourselves amongst all the others that He has placed in our paths. So, following up from the last point, we need to reflect upon where we have been, in order to reorient where we are going. As we look back, we can consider what we have said, and see the impact – for the good, or bad. We then replicate the good things, and repent of the bad things. And remember, to repent, is to altar and change direction.

TAKING IT HOME

READ Psalm 139:23-24, Proverbs 20:5, 2 Corinthians 3:17-18. God reveals what is in our hearts so His Spirit can renew our desires and reshape our love for Him. What needs to happen for you to hear what God sees in your heart? What might He be inviting you to notice right now? How can our faith community help you discern His work?

LEADER NOTE: The prayer that David prays in Psalm 139 is piercing and pointed, as he asks the Lord to search his own heart and to reveal to himself where he has gone astray. This is a bold prayer to pray, and a harder prayer to hear the answers to. So often, as we pray, we ask the Lord for things of His blessings, of His provision – physical things like food on our tables, and roofs over our children. And we see His answers just about every day. But do we pray this prayer of David? And if we do, do we actually care enough to listen for His response? Then Paul’s word tied in here, encourage us to see that as the Lord cares for us, and longs to provide for us, that it is always His intention to grant us a freedom in this life, one that is transformational in our heart of hearts. This too reflects the words of Jesus as He shares with us this promise,

I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

John 10:10b | ESV

It wasn’t a promise that committed to full bank accounts, big houses, and all the toys our desires could imagine – it’s a life of freedom from the bondage of sin, and within the care of the Good Shepherd.

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 James 1:13-15, 1 John 1:7-9. Temptation often starts with desire, but not every desire is sinful, as many are God-given, however, fulfilling any desire may lead you to sin. As that happens, we must repent, and the first step in that direction is naming our true and honest desires, and how we sought to fulfill them. What desires most often guide your decisions and actions throughout your days? What patterns do you need to alter in order to not travel down those slippery slopes?