



Sermon on the Mount

Living for the Kingdom

LIFE GROUPS | LEADERS GUIDE

February 22-28, 2026 | Winter Week 6

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Well leaders, we're into the back half of the season, before you know it, we'll be asking for those feedback forms again! 😊

1. YOUR SIXTH MEETING:

- Keep up the patterns with what you've all been doing!
- Also, without amount of sickness going around – flu bugs and colds and all that comes along with those fun things – 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.

2. PLAN A SOCIAL EVENT:

- Have you made plans to simply hang out together as a group? Let us know your plans, that way we can share with everyone the activities of our groups!
- Some groups in the past have simply left their study aside, and joined in fun conversation and games. Other groups have planned dinners out, hikes, and bowling. Plan something fun together – and be sure to snap a few pictures, and send them in!

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. If you were an ice cream flavor, what would you be? Why?

LEADER NOTE: This intro question is just for fun, and because ice-cream is one the best desserts known to humanity! Enjoy the correlations your members make between themselves and this dessert – and encourage everyone in your group to share, to get warmed up to chatting within the group, and ready to go deeper into conversation.

2. How do you deal with stress and hardships in life?

LEADER NOTE: This getting-to-know-you question drives a little into our theme this week of discovering and/or deepening spiritual disciplines, like giving, prayer, and fasting. Often times, we think we can solve

our own problems and come up with solutions in our own ways to the trials we face in life. However, when we have these spiritual rhythms in play, the Lord can speak mightily to us through them!

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. Jesus assumes His disciples will *give*, *pray*, and *fast*. Which of these disciplines feels most neglected in your life right now? What would it look like to practice it not out of guilt, but out of gratitude for what Christ has already done?

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 6:1-18

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 6:1-4. In our devotion and spiritual disciplines, it is the attention of the Father that we should be seeking, rather than praise and honour from others. What is a spiritual discipline that you practice that has shaped your life in the Father's eyes, in a positive way?

LEADER NOTE: Jesus opens these verses by saying, "*beware of practicing your righteousness...*" suggesting that He assumes that His disciples are living out these patterns, and that they're committed to following Him into those moments. And the goal with practicing these rhythms, as Jesus is outlining, is not to gain affirmation or credit from anyone else other than the Father.

Your members will talk about some of their rhythms of attending church, reading devotional books, interacting with scripture, and praying. Which are all fantastic things – and this isn't the time to pry about how often, or how deep they go, as the last thing we want to do as leaders is leave our members in any sense of guilt that they're not doing enough. If that is true, they likely know that already, and the Spirit is stirring in their hearts.

Our goal as leaders here, is to affirm these practices, and encourage more! What we're looking for, and desiring to affirm in greater ways, is affirming the posture of their hearts – their motives, their hearts desire to learn more of God's word, to grow closer to Him, and to have a greater understanding of His call. We will however, want to be careful to not do exactly what Jesus implies that we seek – the affirmation of others.

- **READ 1 Samuel 16:7, Ephesians 2:8-10.** According to these verses, how might we discern when sharing a personal element of our faith honors Christ, or seeks praise and recognition from others?

LEADER NOTE: These two texts point us in the same direction, but in slightly different ways. The book of Samuel highlights that the Lord is looking right into our hearts, and to our activity there – looking for pure, authentic, and genuine desire to know Him. While Paul in the Ephesians text emphasizes that God is all about grace, and not about works, that when we are able to do anything good, that God is behind it.

So when it comes to sharing about our spiritual practices, it seems a little oxymoronic to share about what the Lord has instructed us to do in secret. However, there comes a time that we need to model good spiritual rhythms and practices for others, we might have to teach other people how to do it – moments which can tread closely to arrogance and pride.

As we share,

1. We need to evaluate our own postures, while making sure that we're seeking to give God all the glory for the good that we have been able to navigate. Are we magnifying God, or ourselves?
2. We need to be aware of how we respond to the other person, are we hoping for admiration? Are we seeking "*kudos*" and "*good jobs*"? Or do we simply enjoy pointing other people to God?
3. We need to consider the results of what we're trying to teach, and asking if we're taking credit for what we were able to do. Are we giving credit to whom credit is actually due?

2. READ Matthew 6:5-9. Three times Jesus says, "*when you pray*," leaving us with the impression that communicating with the Lord is not an option. Yet many Christians struggle with prayer in their spiritual rhythms. Why might that be? What barriers do you encounter?

LEADER NOTE: Notice that Jesus doesn't say, "*if you pray*," He says, "*when you pray*." Again, He's correctly assuming that His disciples are actively engaging with Him. However, as the question states,

that modern day Christians, struggle in this area. A number of surveys have been completed across North America, and in a quick search, it appears that 50% of Christians say that they are not satisfied with the time and duration of their prayer time. What is further disheartening, is that in one survey it was reported that a majority of Christian respondents, 60% said that they prayed for less than a minute. The reality before us, is that we live busy and complex lives, where we feel that we have less time to give to the Lord in this way. Which, really, isn't a great excuse.

Martin Luther is attributed with saying something like this: *"I read the Bible and pray every day for an hour each. Two hours each when life gets busy."*

Your members will likely talk about a few realities:

1. Distractions – from work patterns leaving the mind occupied, to kids being driven from point A to point B, to the phone in our pockets constantly calling our attention, to never getting a silent moment.
2. Self-sufficiency – in North America, we're losing our need for God, because we feel that we're in control of our own lives, and we forget quickly, that the Lord holds each of us in His hands.
3. Guilt and Shame – when we forget these patterns and get stuck in other negative patterns the sense of shame can actually be more of a hindrance than a help.
4. Performance – we might think that we don't know what to say, or how to say it.
5. Disappointment – we might question the value because we've never seen any impact.

As your group talks about these realities, ask the whole group about what the right solutions might just be – you may be surprised by the collective wisdom.

- **READ Matthew 6:9-13.** We often treat The Lord's Prayer as a script that He gave us to pray. However, Jesus said, *"this is how you should pray"* (NIV) or *"pray like this"* (ESV). How might you use this prayer as a guide in your own prayers?

LEADER NOTE: While it's not wrong for us to pray these words as a prayer – it's good for us to, to see that Jesus was teaching us how to pray, and not just what to pray. Work then with your group to discover some of the emphasis' that Christ is leading us to consider.

1. The prayer starts with God, and our place in our relationship with Him. He is God in Heaven, and His name is special, and holy, and revered – and we and ours are not. Our prayers, begin with adoration and praise of God, who was at the beginning of time, through all time, and continues to walk with each of us.
2. The prayer seeks the Lord's will, the will of His kingdom – the kingdom of Heaven, and not the kingdom of our hearts, and of our world. We come to the Lord like this, seeking His direction for our paths going forward, rather than for permission for the routes we've already plotted.
3. The prayer teaches our dependence upon the Lord, and not on ourselves, while seeking His daily provision. This recognizes that we're incapable of providing for ourselves – while we think that we can, and we certainly live that way, Jesus reminds us that anything good that we've got, comes from and through Him.
4. The prayer seeks forgiveness from the Lord, who is quick to do so, but also points us back to our relationships, and urges us to recognize that we're to extend the very gift that we have received to all the others in our lives.
5. The prayer asks for the Lord to lead us to places where we can flourish in God's counsel and within His might, keeping us safe from the temptations and distractions of this world.

Ultimately, this prayer is meant to orient our hearts towards our smallness, but intrinsic value we have in the Lord; to align our hearts away from ourselves, and with the Lord's; to step into the rhythm of communicating with the Lord, to trust in His provision, and to surrender to His authority.

3. READ Matthew 6:16-18. Fasting hasn't been a spiritual rhythm that many have explored or committed to. What have you understood (or misunderstood) about the discipline? What questions do you have about it?

LEADER NOTE: Fasting hasn't gained a lot of traction in modernity for a number of reasons. First, we don't fully understand it, we fear the discomfort of being hungry, we're too busy and distracted to really try, we're fearful of judgement and condemnation from others who don't understand it themselves, and we don't have guidance.

What is fasting?

1. It's a practice to grow closer to God – by denying something that the body needs, like food and drink, the body becomes more aware and more attentive to what the Lord desires to offer.
2. It's a tool for prayer and discernment – by removing distractions and physical needs, prayer can be more focused, hearing the Lord's voice can be keyed in on. It's often used for seeking guidance in life, in confessing sin, and praying for others.
3. It's a pattern to express and understand more fully, our dependence upon God. It's a way to say, *“Lord, I lean only and completely on you for all that I need.”*

What is fasting not?

1. It's not about earning favor with the Lord, or standing out more clearly to Him. It's not about impressing God, or about any kind of performance.
2. It's not just about food. It can be abstaining from anything – from devices, activities, or comforts – with the focus being turned towards the Father.
3. It's not about extremes, but small and intentional ways to connect on a deeper level with God.

- **READ Isaiah 58:6–7, Joel 2:12–13, Ezra 8:21–23, Esther 4:15–16, Luke 4:1–2, & Acts 13:2–3.** These passages offer a variety of glimpses into biblical fasting. What principles do you see in these texts?

LEADER NOTE: Here's a brief walk through of each passage:

- **Isaiah 58:6–7:** Fasting isn't just about a personal discomfort, and denial of personal needs, but that it drives us towards seeking justice, being generous with others, and expressing care for those who are in need.
- **Joel 2:12–13:** Fasting is about a posture of repentance, knowing that it is the Lord who provides forgiveness and freedom from bondage to sin.
- **Ezra 8:21–23:** Fasting is about expressing complete and utter dependence upon the Lord.
- **Esther 4:15–16:** Fasting is about being spiritually prepared for spiritual matters, where we're seeking the Lord's strength, and direction.
- **Luke 4:1–2:** Fasting is about preparing to fulfill God's mission in this world.
- **Acts 13:2–3:** Fasting is about commissioning God's people to serve Him on mission, in this world.

TAKING IT HOME

READ Matthew 6:4, 6, 14, & 18. Each of these four spiritual disciplines (giving, forgiving, praying, & fasting) have us focused on a singular audience – the Father. Does that encourage or discourage you to lean more into these disciplines? How so?

LEADER NOTE: We've seen in this text, that there is three key disciplines, where forgiveness is added into the discipline of prayer – and while that is very fitting, it has a bit of a focus on its own. Which is why for the last few weeks of our exploration of Matthew, we've spent some time focusing on it. Thematically here, these disciplines have us focused upon the audience of One – God the Father – sitting in all His power, might, and authority. The reality of God being our only audience should leave us encouraged, knowing that the God of all grace, is really the one who cares the most about how we connect with Him. And while we might feel some guilt and shame about our inability and distracted nature, we need to recognize that it is He who is quick to forgive, and has more compassion and mercy than we could ever conceive. When we look to our neighbor for the same affirmation, we'll get what we're looking for – either a pat on the back, or a deeper sense of inadequacy. But as we look to the Lord and only to the Lord, we'll sense and feel all His care and all His affection. And that's right where we need to be – in His arms of grace.

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 Matthew 6:9-13. Which line of the Lord's Prayer feels most meaningful to you right now, and why? How can we encourage and support one another in developing spiritual habits that move us away from being seen only by others, and toward sincere, joyful devotion to God?