



## LIFE GROUPS | LEADERS GUIDE

March 1-7, 2026 | Winter Week 7

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

Well leaders, it's week #7. *Already ...* this season is flying by!

#### 1. YOUR SEVENTH MEETING:

- In the coming weeks, we're going to share our Feedback forms with all of your members. We ask for your help in reminding everyone to fill those out, as their feedback helps to guide our planning and preparations for the new season that will come in September 2026.

### 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 the last photo on your camera roll? Are you willing to share it??

**LEADER NOTE:** This is just a fun way to share in the recent happenings in the lives of your members! Go around the room and share the stories and memories. If someone doesn't have a phone in their pocket with pictures – inviting them to describe the last picture they took, will suffice!

2. When was the last time you had a good solid break from the busyness of life? What did you do?

**LEADER NOTE:** As we've been reflecting on Christ's invitation to behold Him and His glory throughout all the happenings of our lives, while also seeking to deepen our faith practices, it can be good for us to look back at where we've taken purposeful pauses and breaks in our over-busy rhythms of life. Look back at what we've have been able to do, can point us towards what we are in need of, and as well, capable of implementing.

### 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. Genesis 3 and Matthew 4 both center on food and temptation. Revelation 19 and the Lord's Supper both center on food and abiding in the Spirit. How do these themes shape your perspective on fasting?

**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 6:16-24**

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 6:16-18.** Fasting is about abstaining from something for a period of time in order to seek and focus on God's voice and direction. What is something that you might feel lead to abstain from, in order to deepen your faith?

**LEADER NOTE:** Originally, fasting referred to abstaining from food for a period of time. Today, many followers of Christ also choose to fast from other things they value, such as media, activities, alcohol, comforts, intentionally using that time and attention to focus more fully on devotion to God. To put it even more simply, fasting is abstaining from something, with the time being replaced with focus and attention on the Lord.

The most important part of the fasting exercise is filling the time, because if all you do is not eat for a day, you're just dieting. If all you're doing is not scrolling social media, then you're just making good

decisions. Both are good ideas! However, they are not honoring or upholding the true value of a fast. The time gained must be used in pursuit of devotional and spiritual rhythms.

As an extra note, when it comes to fasting from food, it is recommended that you consult your doctor if you plan a fast for more than 24 hours, as fasting from eating is taxing physically and emotionally.

- **READ Matthew 6:5-15.** In what ways does fasting build on what Jesus taught about prayer?

**LEADER NOTE:** Consider the place in which this prayer is placed in the flow of scripture. *First*, we're given a sense of where we are to be in the world. In Matthew 5, Jesus presents a whole different frame of life lived for Him, and how the world receives it. *Second*, In Matthew 6, we're challenged in our postures, as we should be seeking an audience of One, and we're told how to commune with the One who has placed us here on earth and we're taught how to pray. *Third*, we're instructed on our priorities in the world as we're taught about fasting, and about focusing our attention upon what the Lord's desires are.

The picture we get, is that prayer, and being in communion with the Lord God Almighty – our Father – our Abba, our Daddy – is to be central in our rhythms as we navigate our complex lives here on earth.

Take note that the prayer is relational – saying, “*Our Father*,” Jesus teaches that prayer and fasting are meant to cultivate intimacy with the Father who “*sees in secret*,” not public admiration. The prayer also points us to a deepening dependence upon God as we pray, “*Give us our daily bread...*” By abstaining from food, we acknowledge that our deepest sustenance comes from God. The prayer also reorders our desires and passion for things of this world, as we submit to the Lord's will, asking “*Your kingdom come...*” We seek in this moment to align our heart with God's, not His with ours. As we close in our prayers modeled from this, we seek to have our hearts intentions and attitudes exposed as we pray, “*Lead us not into temptation...*” Prayer reveals our thinking. Fasting reveals what we cling to. Both uncover whether our treasure truly is in heaven or not.

- **READ Hebrews 4:12-13.** God sees the heart, not the performance. How might this truth make fasting feel freeing or encouraging? In what ways might it also make fasting more challenging?

**LEADER NOTE:** If God already sees our hearts, we don't need to impress Him or anyone else. We are free from seeking the approval, or avoiding the disapproval, of others. We are free from the responsibility of achieving a certain outcome from fasting. Through fasting God can reveal to us what we value at a deeper level. This personal refinement can reveal deeper idols we carry.

Leaders, it is more than fair to identify and agree together as a Life Group, that all this can be an uncomfortable process. Feeling exposed, weak, or fragile – is one of those critical places that the Lord needs us to be, in order to experience the very true fact that it is He and He only who holds us wholly and completely in His hands.

**2. READ Matthew 6:18.** What are the rewards that we seek from our neighbors? How are those different than the rewards we should be seeking from the Father?

**LEADER NOTE:** When we allow ourselves to be completely honest with ourselves, and evaluate just how we seek those “rewards” from our neighbors, it's likely to leave us a little surprised at how out of balance we actually are. When it comes to the praise of our neighbors, we might find ourselves seeking recognition, approval, a sense of higher status, a sense of belonging, all this seeking to be validated in our decisions and practices. However, in a worldly way, all these elements are only immediate, visible,

satisfying in earthly ways. They're just for the here and now. And as Jesus indicates for those who are seeking those things, "*Truly I say to you, [you] have received [your] reward,*" we're to be left asking where our focus should be. Which, for the believer, the answer is easy to say, but hard to live out.

While we seek all those things mentioned above from our neighbor, it is those very things that we need to be seeking in the Lord. It's just that the Lord doesn't care about how clean we keep our grass, about which phone we have in our pocket, or how we look as we leave the house in the morning. As we seek the Lord's recognition, we'll see we already have it – and there's nothing else we need to do. As we seek His approval, we'll see too, we already have it. As we seek higher status, we'll see He's already called us His children, and co-heirs with His Son. As we seek belonging, we'll be reminded that He made us in His image, and has adopted us into His family, the church. Then from there, as we discover that we have all that, we'll see that we respond in gratitude, and live in all the right ways that honors all that He has done for us.

- **READ 1 Corinthians 9:25, 2 Timothy 4:8.** To Timothy, Paul writes about a reward, a crown, won by an athlete which will not last. To the Corinthians, he expands on the concept, calling the reward a "*crown of righteousness.*" What do you understand this reward to be? How do disciples of Jesus receive it?

**LEADER NOTE:** As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he writes about athletes racing for the first place prize, and encourages his readers to approach deepening their faith with the same eagerness – but knowing that the prize those who believe in Jesus are chasing is one that will never perish, unlike the wreath that the athlete would earn. To Timothy, Paul develops the same metaphor, but this time, he names the reward, a "*crown of righteousness.*"

While Paul doesn't fully define what that crown of righteousness really is, we can infer from all of Paul's letters, and from scriptures themes as a whole, that this reward is what the Lord gives to His followers, to His children – it's the culmination of salvation, it's standing before directly Christ in eternity, having been made completely whole, completely justified, completely sanctified.

Leaders, be careful with the wording of the last part of the question, and note that it asks, "*how do disciples of Jesus receive it?*" and not "*How do they earn it.*" The most comforting reality of all this, is that the Lord, in His abundant mercy and grace, bestows this reward on His followers who choose to follow Him, and that through Christ's sacrifice, the work mentioned above is fully complete, it's already done, and there is nothing more that needs to, or can be done. It's up to us now, to live in to these realities, and serve the Lord to the best of our ability, reflecting to this world our justification and sanctification.

**3. READ Matthew 6:19-23.** What subtle forms of "*earthly treasure*" can quietly compete for our loyalty, even if they are good things?

**LEADER NOTE:** Pastor Justin often describes idolatry as, "*Taking a good thing, making it a God thing, which makes it a tainted and terrible thing.*" This of course implies that anything that we might have in our pockets, on our counters, in our homes, in our garages, or in our backyards – can become God things, if we let them. This simply points out for us that we've prioritized our lives in error.

- **READ Luke 12:15–21.** How attached to your "*things*" are you? What would need to happen to help you realize that your things have no lasting value? How might the spiritual rhythm of fasting help this sense of attachment?

**LEADER NOTE:** We looked at this passage the other week, and we did so in the context of assumptions that we have around wealth and security – as we stockpile our possessions just for ourselves. While it left us challenged in the sense of where we have placed our trust – in God, or in ourselves, this week here, we take a little different vantage point.

Here in North America, we have such an entitled and selfish view of our stuff, and like the rich young man in Matthew 19, who asked Jesus what he must do in order to be saved. Jesus told him to sell everything, and give it all to the poor. The man didn't respond, and all we're told is that "*he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*"

The problem we have in the 21<sup>st</sup> century here, is that attachment. We've earned what we have, and we feel that what we have is ours, and ours alone. And while fires, floods, and tragedies can highlight for us that in the grand scheme of life, that things don't really matter, spiritual rhythms like fasting, can point us away from our things, and to the Father's embrace.

## **TAKING IT HOME**

**READ Acts 13:2-3, 14:23.** What are some reasons to fast that appeal to you? Although fasting was a regular part of the early church (Matthew 6:16 & 17 "*When you fast...*"), nowhere in scripture claims fasting as mandatory for salvation. Under what conditions would you consider fasting? Is that something you're willing to explore?

**LEADER NOTE:** Fasting can and will be appealing for a variety of reasons. Fasting is for seeking clear direction from the Lord, about commissioning and blessing leadership in the faith community, it's about deepening a focus on prayer, it's about being renewed in Spirit, and about developing unity amongst believers who are fasting together.

## **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 6:22-23.** What you look at, and what gets your attention, not only highlights the values that you have in your heart, but communicates those values to others around you. How have others experienced your values? What changes might you need to make, or what additions might you need to seek, in your spiritual rhythms, in order to correct these ways?