

INSIDE THE CIRCLE

A 4 part study to begin (or restart!) a group

I Show Up I
I Join In I
I Be Real I

LEADER GUIDE

SERIES OVERVIEW

Inside the Circle is a four-week group launch experience designed to help people move from sitting in rows to sharing life in circles. The big idea is simple: Inside the Circle is where you belong, where faith grows, and where life happens together. Each week builds on the last, creating space for Scripture, story, discussion, and ownership. The goal is to help participants taste authentic community and understand how their presence, voice, and faith make the group stronger.

SERIES OVERVIEW

This guide is meant to be a tool, not a script. Each section you'll find "say something like this" sections to give you a starting point, but you don't have to read them word for word. Let them shape your own voice and flow.

Each week includes:

- **Scripture + Teaching Framework** – a short, focused teaching tied to Jesus and the early church.
- **Discussion Questions** – designed to spark conversation, not complete it. Let people talk. Give space. Follow where the Spirit leads.

Your role isn't to be a teacher with all the answers — it's to be a facilitator who creates an environment where people can connect, share honestly, and grow together. Think of yourself as the one who keeps the circle open, welcoming, and moving forward.

WEEK-BY-WEEK OVERVIEW

Week 1 – Why Circles Matter

Scripture: Acts 2:42–47; Ecclesiastes 4:9–10

Theme: God designed us for circles, not rows. Life is better connected. We need people who celebrate with us and carry us through.

Week 2 – Faith Shapers

Scripture: John 13:34–35; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27

Theme: God grows our faith through others. Sharing about the people who have shaped us helps us see the body of Christ at work and deepens spiritual connection.

Week 3 – Sharing Our Stories

Scripture: Acts 2 (fellowship and life together); Ecclesiastes 4:9–10

Theme: Vulnerability builds community. Each participant shares a snapshot of their story — not the whole biography, just a window into how God has worked in their lives.

Week 4 – Taking Ownership

Scripture: Matthew 7:24–27; John 15:5

Theme: You get out what you put in. Growth happens when we take ownership of our faith outside the circle and take responsibility for contributing inside the circle.

WEEK ONE

Welcome to Week 1 of *Inside the Circle*. Over the next few weeks, we're going to talk about why life is better connected, and why God designed circles like this one to help us grow.

Here's the big idea: *Inside the Circle* is where you belong, where faith grows, and where life happens together. You'll hear me say that a few times, because it's not just a tagline — it's what we see over and over in Scripture.

Like the early church described in *Acts 2:42–47*: 'we see the very first picture of the early church. They didn't just gather in large crowds to listen; they met in homes. They ate together. They prayed together. They shared what they had. They cared for one another's needs. And the text says the Lord kept adding to their number daily. In other words, circles were where the real life-change happened.'

That's the same heart behind what we're doing here. We're not just another group meeting for the sake of filling a calendar. We're stepping into the same rhythm the first Christians lived in — circles of belonging, encouragement, and growth.

Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 says it this way: "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: if either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up."

That's real life, isn't it? Every one of us is going to stumble at some point. We're going to hit hard seasons. We're going to face challenges we didn't see coming. The difference is whether or not we've got people in our circle when those moments come. We all need people who will celebrate with us when things go well, and people who will pick us up when things get hard.

That's what this circle is about. Inside the circle, you're not just another face in a crowd — you're known. Inside the circle, your wins are celebrated, your struggles are carried, and your faith has room to grow.

And here's the beautiful thing: nobody here has to be perfect. This isn't about showing up with all the answers. It's about showing up with honesty, and choosing to walk alongside one another.

That's the heartbeat of this series. Over the next four weeks, we're going to keep discovering what God can do *inside the circle*.

LET'S TALK

- 1 What was the best group or team you've ever been a part of? What made it so great?
- 2 Did that group or team help you grow (e.g., physically, mentally, spiritually)? If so, how?
- 3 Take a minute to individually complete the **How You Connect** activity. When you're finished, discuss the following questions as a group.

In order to relax and re-energize...

How did you rank yourself?

How does this play out in your life?

In a group conversation...

How did you rank yourself?

In this group, how can we make sure everyone has the chance to speak?

When processing new ideas...

How did you rank yourself?

In this group, how might this affect you when you are studying something new?

When experiencing emotions...

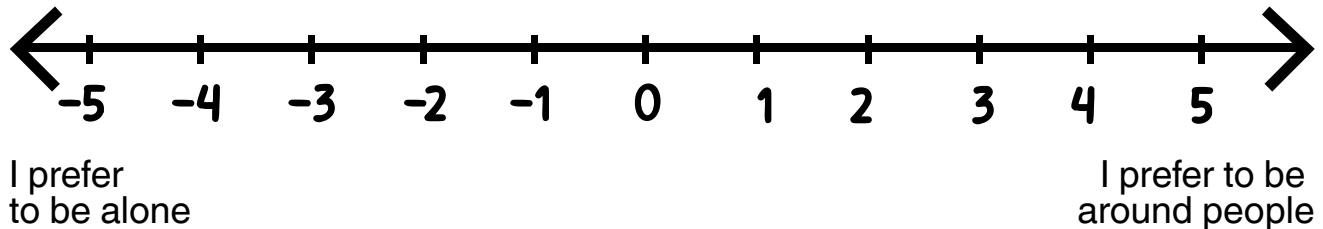
How did you rank yourself?

When you're excited about something, how will the group know?

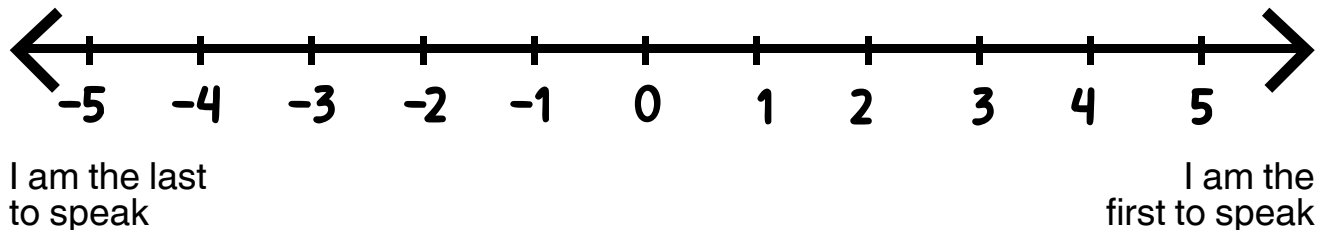
ACTIVITY: HOW YOU CONNECT

Indidcate where you fall on the scales below. There are no right or wrong answers – just think about your own tendencies when it comes to connecting with others

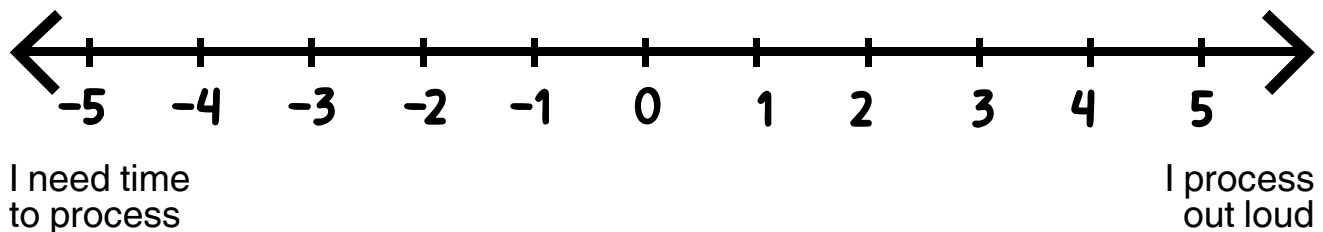
In order to relax and re-energize...



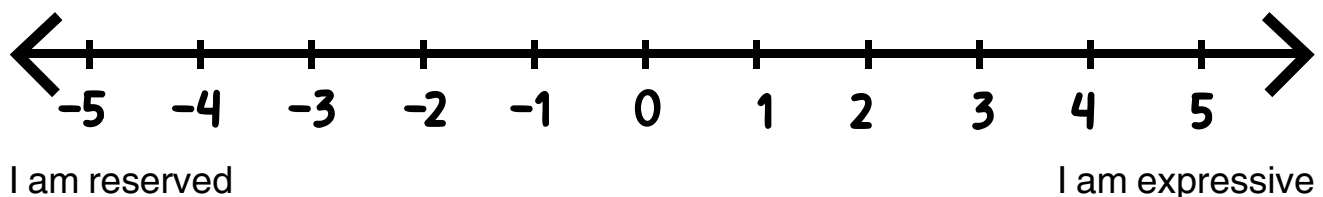
In a group conversation...



When processing new ideas...



When experiencing emotions...



LET'S TALK

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This would be a great opportunity to cover any final details or logistics regarding your group. Communication plan, meal menus, group roles, etc.

5

Conclude your group meeting with a time of prayer for the week ahead. Be sure to document any prayer requests so you can follow-up later.

WEEK TWO

Welcome back to **Inside the Circle**. Last week we talked about why circles matter — how God designed us to belong, to walk together, and to pick each other up when life gets tough. Tonight we're going to move a little deeper into the heart of what makes a circle powerful: being known spiritually.

All of us are shaped by people. Some of those people may have been family, some were friends, teachers, or pastors, and some may have influenced us from a distance through books, songs, or even a moment of encouragement we didn't forget. The truth is, God often grows our faith through others. That's part of why circles like this one exist.

So before we dive in, I'd love for us to warm up by sharing a little about those voices in our lives. Who have been some of the people God has used to shape your faith? What did they do that left an impact? Maybe think back to your earliest memories of faith, or a time when someone else's belief encouraged you when yours felt weak, or even a habit or piece of advice that stuck with you.

*** Allow everyone to share their heroes/mentors of their faith ***

These kinds of stories remind us that faith is rarely a solo journey. Someone walked with us, prayed for us, challenged us, or modeled faith in a way that drew us closer to Jesus. And now, God can use us to be those people for others.

In **John 13:34–35**, Jesus told His disciples, *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another."* Jesus could have made our faith about private practices alone, but instead He points us toward love in community. Our love for one another is meant to be visible — and that visibility grows strongest when we really know one another.

Paul says it another way in **1 Corinthians 12**, when he describes the church as a body with many parts. Each part is unique, but each one is necessary. None of us were designed to carry faith alone; we're designed to carry it together.

That's the gift of being **Inside the Circle**.

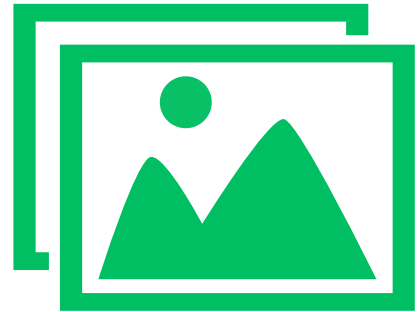
LET'S TALK

- 1 In John 13:34–35, Jesus said people will know His disciples by their love for one another. How have you experienced this kind of love in Christian community?
- 2 1 Corinthians 12 describes the church as a body with many parts. What unique gifts or perspectives do you feel you bring to a group like this?
- 3 Why do you think God designed our faith to grow in community instead of in isolation?
- 4 During the next session, each group member will have the opportunity to share a little about their background as well as the people and circumstances that have been influential in their life. Decide the order in which each of you will share
- 5 How can the group pray for you this week?

HOMEWORK: ABOUT ME ACTIVITY

This activity is a tool that will help you communicate a 7-10 minute snapshot of your life to the group. You may use it as a step-by-step guide when you present. Remember, this time will pass more quickly than you think. Your goal isn't to share your entire life story, but to give your group a foundational understanding of who you are.

Feel free to use a photo or two from your phone or device. If you want to go old school, print one!



- 1 **Where are you from?**
- 2 **What is something few people in this group would know about you (e.g., former figure skater)?**
- 3 **Describe your family.**
- 4 **Describe your faith background.**
- 5 **Describe a significant faith event that influenced who you are today.**

WEEK THREE

Welcome back to **Inside the Circle**. Over the past couple of weeks, we've talked about why circles matter and how God uses people to shape our faith. Tonight, we're taking another step — and this is a big one. Our focus is simply this: **sharing our stories**.

Here's the thing: every single one of us has a story worth telling. Some of us may have dramatic moments of faith, others may have a quieter journey, but all of us have snapshots of how God has been at work in our lives. The point tonight is not to compare or polish our stories — the point is to be real with one another and to see how God shows up in different ways.

So tonight is less about teaching and more about listening. Think of this as passing the mic around the circle. Each person gets a chance to share a snapshot of their story. You don't need to start at the very beginning or give every detail. Just think of one or two moments that help paint the picture of how God has worked in your life.

And let me put you at ease — this isn't about perfection. You don't need fancy words. You don't need to impress anyone. What matters is honesty. God can use your story in ways you may not even realize. In fact, often the very part of your story you're hesitant to share is the exact part someone else may need to hear.

We'll go one at a time. You'll have a 7-10 minutes each — not to tell your whole life story, but just to give us a window into your journey of faith. We'll listen, we'll celebrate, and we'll learn from each other. If at any point you'd rather pass, that's fine too — no pressure.

By the end of tonight, we'll have a better picture of who's sitting inside this circle with us. And here's the hope: that knowing each other more deeply will help us love each other more fully. Because inside the circle, we're not just acquaintances — we're brothers and sisters in Christ.

That's the heartbeat of this week. Tonight, we simply share our stories and let God use them to shape us **inside the circle**.

LEADER TIPS FOR WEEK THREE

Set the Tone

- Remind everyone this is a safe space: “We’re not here to impress each other, we’re here to encourage one another.”
- Keep it light and reassuring at the start — nervous laughter is normal.

Give a Framework

- Encourage snapshots, not full biographies. A few minutes each.
- Remind people: it’s okay if their story feels “ordinary.” God works in ordinary moments too.

Manage Time Wisely

- If you have 8 people, aiming for 7 minutes each = 56 minutes total.
- Give a gentle heads-up like: “Thanks for sharing that — let’s keep moving so everyone gets a turn.”
- If someone goes long, affirm them but steer: “I love what you’re sharing — let’s hit pause so we can hear from everyone tonight.”

Handle Silence or Hesitation

- If someone says, “I don’t know what to share,” give them a soft option: “You can always start with how faith has been a part of your life recently.”
- It’s okay if someone chooses to pass — keep the circle moving without drawing attention.

Celebrate Every Story

- After each person shares, respond with gratitude: “Thanks for sharing that with us.”
- Encourage the group to actively listen, affirm with nods/ “mmhmms”
- If needed, model vulnerability by sharing your own story first.

Pray It In

- At the end, close by thanking God for every story shared.
- Highlight the theme: “These stories remind us God is always at work. Inside the circle, we’re not alone.”

LET'S TALK

1

Thanks again for sharing tonight. Your stories are a gift to this circle, and they remind us how faithful God has been in each of our lives. Before we close, let's take a moment to look ahead. Is there anything that we can be praying for as a group?

WEEK FOUR

Welcome back to *Inside the Circle*. Over the past three weeks, we've seen why circles matter, how God uses people to shape our faith, and we've even shared our own stories. Tonight, we close with an important challenge: you get out what you put in.

Jesus consistently taught His disciples that hearing truth wasn't enough — it had to be lived out. In *Matthew 7:24–27*, He compared it to building a house. The person who hears His words and puts them into practice builds on rock. The person who only hears builds on sand. Both face storms, but only one stands firm. Faith grows when we own it.

In *John 15:5*, Jesus said, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit."* That's an invitation and a responsibility. Remaining connected to Jesus isn't passive — it's a daily choice to abide, to lean on Him, to draw strength from Him. The fruit comes when we invest in our walk with Him.

That's the first lane of ownership: our personal faith. Nobody else can own your walk with God for you. A group can encourage you, pray for you, and challenge you — but at the end of the day, it's your daily rhythms, your prayers, your time in Scripture, and your obedience to the Spirit that will anchor your faith.

The second lane of ownership is our life together *inside the circle*. Groups like this don't just "happen" — they're shaped by the people in them. If everyone leans in, shares honestly, and plays their part, the circle becomes life-giving. If we sit back and hope it works without giving anything of ourselves, the circle stays shallow.

And here's the encouragement: ownership doesn't mean perfection. It just means participation. Everyone has something to bring. Maybe it's hosting one night. Maybe it's checking in on someone during the week. Maybe it's being the steady encourager or the prayer warrior of the group. Whatever it looks like, your contribution makes the circle stronger.

So let's talk about both kinds of ownership — what it looks like to own your walk with God outside this group, and what it looks like to contribute inside this group. Because *inside the circle*, growth comes when we all own our part of the story.

LET'S TALK

Ownership of Faith

- 1 In John 15:5, Jesus calls us to remain in Him. What helps you stay connected to Jesus day by day, and where would you like to grow in that?
- 2 In Matthew 7, Jesus said the wise builder puts His words into practice. What's one specific way you want to put your faith into practice outside this group?

Ownership of the Circle

- 3 Groups work best when everyone participates. What do you feel you naturally bring to this circle (encouragement, prayer, questions, hospitality, consistency, etc.)?
- 4 Looking ahead, what's one way you could take ownership of helping this group thrive — whether it's serving, leading a prayer time, checking in on someone, or just committing to show up?