

# Sermon Discussion Guide

## CONNECT

5-10 minutes

After reviewing the four rules of group discussion, begin your time with some connection questions to foster biblical community.

Personal Connection:

- What were your "highs" and "lows" this week?
- Last week, you mentioned \_\_\_\_\_. Can you give us an update?

Spiritual Connection:

- What has your time with God looked like recently?
- Where have you specifically seen God's work in your life lately?

## GROW

20-30 minutes

Start the discussion by giving a brief overview of the **SERMON**. Ask everyone to look up the main passage in their own Bible or Bible app. Use the following questions to guide your discussion:

Reflect:

- What was your main takeaway from the sermon?
- What scripture spoke to you?
- What insights did you gain about God, humanity, and your personal life?
- How did this sermon challenge or reinforce your current beliefs?
- Do you have a life experience that relates to the sermon's message?

Dig Deeper:

- What aspects of the sermon were familiar, challenging, or thought-provoking?
- Where does the key passage fit into the Bible's grand narrative (use the 3 circle gospel drawing for reference)?
- What cultural or historical details might the original audience have understood that differ from our understanding today?
- What are some cross-references to this passage that are present in other areas of the Bible?
- What theological themes were highlighted in the sermon?

Take Action:

- How would you describe the sermon to someone who wasn't there?
- How would you explain the sermon to a child?
- What specific action will you take this week based on the sermon's message and our discussion?

## SHARE

5-10 minutes

Transition into a time of discussing how to live out what you learned by sharing with others:

- What is your main takeaway from our discussion? Who is one person you will share this with this week?
- How have you recently used your gifts to serve your family, our church, and our community?
- Who can you invite to church or our small group?
- How can you bless someone in your circle of influence?
- Are there any opportunities for our group to reach out to our community this week?

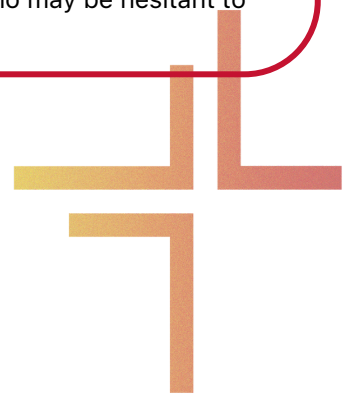
## PRAY

5-10 minutes

Enter a time of prayer by considering the following questions:

- What is your plan for spiritual growth this week?
- What challenges do you anticipate this week?
- What personal prayer requests do you have for the week?

Take note of each person's requests. Spend some time praying for each other. Encourage those who may be hesitant to pray out loud.



# The Cross of Jesus

## December 17, 2023

To help you lead the GROW section of the Sermon Discussion Guide:

Pastor Chip is taking us through the classic story, The Tale of the Three Trees.

Third tree story recap:

In the story, the third tree looked at the valley where busy men and women worked in their busy town. He said I want to grow so tall that when people stop to look at me, they will raise their eyes to heaven and think of God. I will be the tallest tree in the world. But the tree was confused when she was chopped down, and the woodcutter shaped her into strong beams and left her in a lumberyard. "What happened?" the once tall tree wondered. "All I ever wanted to do was stay on the mountaintop and point to God." One Friday morning, the third tree was startled when her beams were yanked from the forgotten woodpile. She flinched as she was carried through an angry, jeering crowd. She shuddered when soldiers nailed a man's hands to her. She felt ugly and harsh and cruel. But on Sunday morning, when the sun rose and the earth trembled with joy beneath her, the third tree knew that God's love had changed everything. It had made the first tree beautiful. It had made the second tree strong. And every time people thought of the third tree, they would think of God. That was better than being the tallest tree in the world.

Reflect (8 minutes):

What does John 3:16 mean to you personally?

How did this sermon challenge or reinforce your current beliefs?

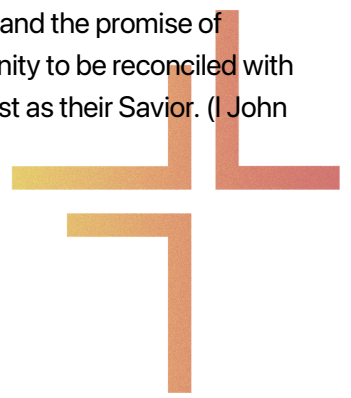
Dig Deeper (8 minutes):

Spend some time discussing the power of the cross.

- The cross reminds us of God's love: The cross is a profound reminder of God's immense love for humanity. It signifies His willingness to send His Son, Jesus Christ, to Earth to save us from our sins. It shows that God's love is sacrificial and unconditional, as Jesus willingly gave His life on the cross to provide salvation for all who believe in Him. (John 3:16, Romans 5:8, Ephesians 2:4-5, 1 John 4:9-10)
- The cross reminds us of Christ's humility: The cross also represents the humility of Jesus. He, the Son of God, chose to come to Earth in human form and to suffer and die on the cross for the sake of humanity. (Philippians 2:5-11, Matthew 20:28, Isaiah 53:3)
- The cross reminds us of our release: The cross symbolizes our release from the bondage of sin and the promise of eternal life. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, we are offered forgiveness and the opportunity to be reconciled with God. It signifies the victory of good over evil and the hope of redemption for all who accept Christ as their Savior. (1 John 1:7, Romans 6:23, Romans 8:1-2, Colossians 1:13-14)

Take Action (8 minutes):

What specific action will you take this week based on the sermon's message and our discussion?



# How to Lead a Group Discussion

## 1. PREPARE TO LEAD

Getting ready both spiritually and practically empowers you lead group discussions effectively and fosters the growth of a close-knit biblical community within your group.

- **Prepare Your Heart:** Dedicate time to daily Bible reading and prayer. This will not only strengthen your own faith but also prepare your heart to lead effectively.
- **Pray for Your Group Members:** Take time to pray for individuals in your group by name.
- **Understand the Material:** Familiarize yourself with the content you'll be discussing during the group meeting. Plan out the flow of your discussion, including how much time you'll allocate to each section.

## 2. SET THE TONE

Setting the tone for your group is an essential part of leadership. Your friendly greeting, clear expectations, and active listening will create an environment of trust, respect, and spiritual growth within your group.

- **Create a Sense of Belonging:** Start each session with a friendly greeting that makes everyone feel included in the group.
- **Set Clear Expectations:** Review the [Rules for Small Group Discussion](#) with the group:
  1. **Confidentiality:** What's said in the group stays in the group.
  2. **No cross-talk:** Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.
  3. **No fixing:** We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.
  4. **Sharing:** Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.
- **Be a Good Listener:** Pay close attention to what your members are saying and show genuine interest in their thoughts and feelings.
- **Facilitate Balanced Participation:** Make sure that every member has an opportunity to contribute to the discussion.
- **Keep the Group on Track:** Effectively manage time for each section and transition as needed to keep the group on track.

## 3. GUIDE YOUR GROUP THROUGH THE FOUR SECTIONS: CONNECT, GROW, SHARE, PRAY

The heart of a meaningful small group discussion lies in how you guide your members through its four core sections: Connect, Grow, Share, and Pray. Each section serves a unique purpose.

- **Connect:** The "Connect" section is designed to build biblical community within the group. It serves as an icebreaker, helping members get to know each other on a deeper level.
- **Grow:** In the "Grow" section, the focus is on reflecting and growing spiritually. It's an opportunity to delve into the sermon's message and/or scripture passage.
- **Share:** Transition into the "Share" section to encourage members to live out what they've learned by sharing with others. This section is about practical application and outreach.
- **Pray:** Conclude the discussion with a time of prayer in the "Pray" section. Spend time praying for each other and offering support.

Remember that as a group leader, your role is to facilitate and guide, not to have all the answers. [Use the provided guide](#) for sample questions to assist you in leading each section effectively.