

LIFEBEYONDBELIEF

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE



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INTRODUCTION

Thank you for allowing God to work through you as you lead your group. The small group experience is crucial to our actually doing what the scriptures that form the basis of this series tell us to be and do. The relationships developed in a small group setting allow people to process what they are learning from the sermons and their reading. Such processing is crucial to personal change. Without it, most of the time we are left with good intentions. Individuals change the most in the context of mutual sharing. Small group leaders are asked to help create an environment where this mutual sharing can occur. The leader need not make it all happen, but only needs to facilitate an atmosphere where people feel that they can make it happen together.

As a result, your job is to walk in step with the Spirit. You don't have to be the best teacher, you don't have to be a front-line leader type and you don't even have to possess an out-going personality. The best small group leaders are those who commune with God and

pray for their group members. If you start there, God will lead you.

Our desire is to provide you with tools that will support you in this endeavor. For this reason, we have written small group lessons. Each week's lesson corresponds with the weekend sermon during the Life Beyond Belief series. In addition, each group member will have access to a daily prayer and reflection guide that will help members reflect on the message. This is intentional. No one learns something new just because they hear it one time. The best way to learn something and to change is to hear it, read it, write about it and process it with others. The small group experience provides a venue for processing the information.

Each lesson contains the same elements:

- Suggested Icebreakers
- Worship Song Suggestions
- Focus Scripture
- Discussion Questions
- Ministry Time Idea

These have been written so that you can use it exactly as it is written, but most of the time God will lead you in slightly different ways. You might do worship first and move the icebreaker down. Someone in the group might bring a worship idea. The ministry time should always be a result of listening to God's leading.

Most likely you will not have time to discuss all of the questions during the small group time. Pray about what you will ask and follow

what you sense the Spirit leading you to do. It is almost impossible to write questions that will fit every group. Therefore, you might ask the first question and the group will answer the next two questions during the natural flow of conversation. If this is the case, skip the next questions and go to the next one.

We have included these lessons on the church web site and in the Prayer Journal. Your copies are different in that some of the questions are written with the group in mind or followed by leader's notes to help you facilitate the discussion.

To help you facilitate worship, we have also provided a Woodland Hills CD that includes praise and worship music. Feel free to use this if you so desire. If you would rather have live worship from musicians in your group, you are certainly welcome to do that. We just want to support you and what God is doing in your group.

Whether you are a seasoned Covenant Group leader or a novice leader who is venturing into new territory with a short-term group, rest in the fact that God is moving in your midst. As you see the Spirit doing what the Spirit does, record what you observe. This is a way to celebrate God and it will build your faith and confidence as a leader.



As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, “Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.” He replied, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.”

LUKE 11:27-28

ICEBREAKERS

Option #1: What is your earliest memory of a church experience?

Option #2: What is the best movie you have seen in the last three months?

WORSHIP SONG SUGGESTIONS

Choose one or two of the following:

- Glorious (CD 1, Track 1)
- Always (CD 1, Track 7)
- Be Thou My Vision (CD 2, Track 2)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(Feel free to choose the questions that are appropriate for your group. Ask them in a way that uses words that are natural to you)

- Read the two verses from Luke. What stands out to you?
- In what ways does modern Christianity promote church as a spectator event?
- Why is proper thinking about God not enough?
- What do you think that Jesus was telling the woman?
- How does participation in the things of the Kingdom relate to obedience?

MINISTRY TIME

Ask people to think about how they could change how they participate in the things of the Kingdom. Don't force people to share, especially if it is a new group. But as people feel comfortable sharing, offer simple and short prayers for those who respond.

As the crowds increased, Jesus said, “This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom; and now one greater than Solomon is here. The people of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now one greater than Jonah is here.

LUKE 11:29-32

ICEBREAKERS

Option #1: What was the most challenging thing about your week?

Option #2: At what point, did you first consider becoming a Jesus’ follower?

WORSHIP SONG SUGGESTIONS

Choose one or two of the following:

- I Really Love You (CD 1, Track 9)
- I Worship You, O God (CD 2, Track 3)
- More, More, More (CD 2, Track 8)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(Feel free to choose the questions that are appropriate for your group. Ask them in a way that uses words that are natural to you)

- Read the Luke passage (Luke 11:29-32). What stands out to you?
- When you hear the word “repent” what comes to your mind?
- How is repentance more than just repenting for immoral deeds (i.e. lying, stealing, etc)?
- What do you think hindered people who were near Jesus from turning (“repenting”) and following Jesus?
- How have you expected God to give you a “sign” before you align your life with Jesus and the Kingdom? How has this hindered your relationship with God?

MINISTRY TIME

If someone shares how they need to repent during the course of discussion, stop and pray for that person and then return to the discussion. You don’t need to wait until the end to pray. Otherwise, take a couple of minutes at the end, play a song in the background and ask people to listen to the Lord and see if he would point out a specific area of repentance.

“None of you lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead you put it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be just as full of light as when a lamp shines its light on you.”

LUKE 11:33-36

ICEBREAKERS

Option #1: What was the best part of this last week for you?

Option #2: What do you normally do when the electricity goes out?

WORSHIP SONG SUGGESTIONS

Choose one or two of the following:

- Lovely Day, (CD 1, Track 8)
- Lord, You Have My Heart (CD 2, Track 6)
- Amazed (CD 2, Track 10)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(Feel free to choose the questions that are appropriate for your group. Ask them in a way that uses words that are natural to you)

- Read the Luke passage (Luke 11:33-36). What stands out to you from this reading?
- What is the central point of this passage?
- How does internal darkness hinder your ability to obey God?
- How has freedom from darkness brought light to you life and the freedom to obey?
- What would it look like if God were to set you free from darkness at this time of your life?

MINISTRY TIME

If someone shares a specific area of darkness, take a few minutes and pray for that person. Don't force people to share, especially if the group is new. You can invite people to pray generally about the need for God to bring light into their lives.

When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal. Then the Lord said to him, “Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.”

LUKE 11:37-41

ICEBREAKERS

Option #1: What fruit best describes your personality?

Option #2: What is your favorite restaurant?

WORSHIP SONG SUGGESTIONS

Choose one or two of the following:

- In the Sanctuary (CD 1, Track 4)
- Draw Me Close (CD 2, Track 4)
- Knowing You (CD 2, Track 7)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(Feel free to choose the questions that are appropriate for your group. Ask them in a way that uses words that are natural to you)

- Read the Luke passage (Luke 11:37-41). What stands out to you from this reading?
- Why is inside-out transformation so crucial in our walk with Jesus?
- How does a focus on externals deter us?
- How does being generous to the poor relate to inner transformation?
- In what ways has a focus on external performance hindered you in your life with God?

MINISTRY TIME

The last question above may lead to a natural time of praying for one another. If not, ask people to quietly reflect on an area of their life that needs inner transformation. Then lead them to pray, asking the Lord to bring this inner healing. If people are willing to share specifically, that is great. However, allow this occur naturally. Don't force people to share.

“Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone. Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it.”

One of the experts in the law answered him, “Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also.”

Jesus replied, “And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them. Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your ancestors who killed them. So you testify that you approve of what your ancestors did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. Because of this, God in his wisdom said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.’ Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all. Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.”

When Jesus went outside, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, waiting to catch him in something he might say.

LUKE 11:42-54

ICEBREAKERS

Option #1: Name one leader that you admire.

Option #2: How old were you when you realized that God is real and wants a relationship with you?

WORSHIP SONG SUGGESTIONS

Choose one or two of the following:

- He Knows My Name (CD 2, Track 9)
- Friend of God (CD 1, Track 10)
- Let Us Adore (CD 1, Track 6)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(Feel free to choose the questions that are appropriate for your group. Ask them in a way that uses words that are natural to you)

- Read the Luke passage (Luke 11:42-54). What stands out to you from this reading?
- How can inauthentic leaders stand in the way of others following Jesus?
- How can unmet expectations of leaders cause hurt and hinder someone's ability to follow Jesus?
- Spiritual abuse by leaders can cause great damage. While we do not need to bash those who have hurt us in the past, it is important to recognize the hurt and release the leader(s) who caused the pain. Will you choose to forgive these people and release the situations to the Lord?
- What does a healthy relationship with church leadership look like?

MINISTRY TIME

If people share how they have been hurt by previous church leaders, make sure that the focus does not shift to bashing those who caused the pain. Help the people process how they need to forgive the person(s). Spend a few minutes praying for those most impacted by this discussion.

Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.

"I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear:

Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God.

Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

"I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. But whoever publicly disowns me will be disowned before the angels of God. And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

"When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say."

LUKE 12:1-12

ICEBREAKERS

Option #1: What is your greatest fear?

Option #2: When you go home, where do you go to relax?

WORSHIP SONG SUGGESTIONS

Choose one or two of the following:

- Hosanna (CD 1, Track 2)
- Jesus, Draw Me Ever Nearer (CD 2, Track 1)
- Hallelujah O Lord (CD 1, Track 3)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(Feel free to choose the questions that are appropriate for your group. Ask them in a way that uses words that are natural to you)

- Read the Luke passage (Luke 12:1-12). What stands out to you from this reading?
- How do we divide our private beliefs about God from the way we live publicly at work and with our friends and family?
- Why do you think Jesus places such a huge value on public acknowledgment of Jesus?
- What does hiding Jesus from the life we live outside of church reveal about what we really believe about God?
- According to this passage, what is the role of the Holy Spirit?

MINISTRY TIME

Ask people to reflect on how God is calling them out of their comfort zone. After a time of sharing, spend some time praying that God will move on people's lives and stir them out of that zone.

