



## Community Group Leaders' Guide – April 6/7, 2024

This guide is designed to help you and your group be **deeply rooted followers of Jesus**.

**Leaders note: Feel free to take different approaches week to week.**

**Take 10-15 minutes and map out an approach for your next meeting in advance.**

**Here's a few examples:**

### **APPROACH #1 - BALANCE GATHER + GROW + GO.**

Our hope is that by the end of each semester, you've given attention to all 3 discipleship categories: *Gather*, *Grow*, and *Go*. But you won't be able to do the entirety of each of the 3 sections in 1 meeting. If you want a balanced approach in this meeting, select one or two items from the Gather and Go section in advance, and condense the Grow section (perhaps skip the sermon recap, and prioritize a few things from each step). You can also choose a different order (for example, maybe it works better to start with "grow" and end with "gather" + "go").

### **APPROACH #2 - EMPHASIZE BIBLE STUDY.**

If you want this meeting to have a higher "study" feel, skip the "gather" section, and work through the "grow" section. Then, at minimum, take one thing from the "go" section: *prayer for the lost*.

### **APPROACH #3 - EMPHASIZE SHARING LIFE.**

If you want this meeting to have a higher "relational" feel, work your way through the "gather" section, and leave the "grow" section for this week. But try, at minimum, to take *prayer for the lost* from the "go" section.

**You don't have to spend hours preparing like a scholar that "teaches".**

**You can spend your week a) walking with God to lead out of the overflow of that relationship, and b) taking 15 minutes familiarizing yourself with this guide to be a shepherd that "cares" and "facilitates".**

# GATHER

**Deeply rooted by sharing life seeking the presence of God.**

This community based context can to heighten your awareness of God's presence in your time together, and give one another space to talk about what's really going on in life.

---

- Pray. Thoughtfully acknowledge God's presence in the room. Commit your time together to him.  
**Start here. This is an important way to start an organized discussion and calibrate everyone to this reality.**
- What practical needs should everyone know about? What can we do as a group to help?
- What decisions are you facing? Is there any input you'd like from us as a group?
- What are you praying about right now? How can we as a group join you in prayer?
- Does anyone have a story of where you've seen God at work? Is there something we can join you in celebrating?

**This can be a way to revisit application plans or prayers from a previous group meeting.**

**We'd love to share and celebrate stories from our Community Groups to honour God and encourage one another!  
(Please get permission to pass them on to us as regularly as possible.)**

# GROW

**Deeply rooted by being formed through the word of God.**

This biblically based content overlaps with the current weekend teaching at your Northview campus and positions you, as a group, to be shaped by studying Scripture.

---

- **Pray.** Acknowledge God's presence, and ask for his help to hear what he's saying.  
**Leaders note: you could ask another person to do this. A sample prayer: "Father, thank you for this time we have. We acknowledge that you are here with us and we ask for your help to hear what you're saying through your word by your Spirit. We commit our time to you for your glory and our good. Amen."**
- **Share a takeaway from the weekend sermon.** Is there something the Holy Spirit highlighted for you?  
**Leaders note: Be sensitive to time by indicating upfront if you plan to move through the other sections of the guide below. It might be helpful to say something like: "we want to start by hearing one thing God highlighted for you in the message, and then in a few minutes we'll move into a short study of the Scripture passage the speaker used."**
- **Facilitate a guided reflection on Scripture.** The primary text from this weekend's message was **John 20:19-31**.

## Start with an "Icebreaker"

In this passage, Jesus appears to his disciples and his presence brings both comfort and belief. We'll discuss this further below but for now, share from your life to get a feel for this dynamic in the text (while also helping others get to know one another).

**Icebreaker question: Is there a time in life you thought you lost something but ended up finding it?** (Maybe your pet went missing for a period of time? Lost your luggage on a trip? Misplaced your keys? Had a moment of panic when you lost sight of a loved one in a crowd?)

## Step 1: Read The Text

Familiarize yourself with this section of verses.

## Step 2: Understand Their Story

Ask *observation questions* to understand what the author is communicating to the original audience.

**You will hopefully find these simple to answer. They are here to a) highlight some key details that contribute to the questions in the later steps ahead, and/or b) help you look deeper at something that might be easy to miss.**

- What repeated phrase does Jesus say to the disciples? (See 20:19, 21, 26)

- **Peace be with you.**
- Follow up question: what was the state of the disciples prior to Jesus saying this to them? (20:19)
  - **They were hiding behind locked doors “for fear of the Jews”**
- John records a strong statement from Thomas in 20:25. What does Thomas say will happen if he doesn't see Jesus' hands and side?
  - **He says “I will never believe”**
- What does Thomas call Jesus after seeing him in 20:28?
  - **My Lord and my God!**
- How does Jesus describe those who believe in him without seeing him? (20:29)
  - **He calls them “blessed”**
- John 20:31 is the clearest purpose statement of why John wrote this book. What does he want people to experience as a result of belief in Jesus?
  - **Life in Jesus!**

Keep these observations in mind as you proceed through step 3.

### Step 3: Connect To God's Story

Ask questions to understand how this text fits in the larger gospel story.

**We've selected a few connections that are here to a) expand on the content of the passage, and/or b) clarify the content of the passage.**

- Jesus says that those who believe without seeing will be blessed (20:29).
  - Read 1 Peter 1:3-9.
    - How does Peter describe our inheritance in 1:4?
      - **From the ESV: Imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.**
    - How does Peter describe what the believers had without seeing him?
      - **They were filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy!**
  - How does Paul describe what happens to those who believe in Ephesians 1:13-14?
    - **We were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit - a guarantee of our inheritance until we see it.**

**Leaders note: even though we don't see Jesus, the blessed hope we have is secure!**

- “...life in his name” (20:31). This is a statement near the end of the book. Trace this theme back more thoroughly from what John previously wrote.
  - Read John 1:4 and 5:26. What are we told about Jesus?
    - **In him was “life” and that life was the light of all mankind.**
    - **The Father granted the Son to “have life in himself”**

- Now look up John 3:36 and 8:12.
  - What description do we get of those who “reject” the Son? (3:36)
    - **They will “not see life” for God’s wrath remains on them.**
  - What description do we get of those who follow Jesus? (8:12)
    - **They will not walk in darkness but have the light of life.**
  
- **OPTIONAL DEEPER DIVE.** 20:23 is a complex part of this week’s passage and biblical scholars debate what Jesus means. A few ideas of how to address this:
  - 1 - Acknowledge that some scriptures are not as clear as others, and that is ok. We don’t need to master every mystery.
  - 2 - Acknowledge that it can be helpful to wrestle with biblical texts without needing to arrive at a settled conclusion. If you feel your group has the time to engage this “wrestling process” without it being a distraction in your time, the section below is a starting point to study further:

Immediately after telling the disciples to receive the Holy Spirit in the previous verse, Jesus says “if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” Let’s aim to get a few steps closer to understanding this verse using the wider witness of scripture:

  - Look up John 8:24.
    - What does Jesus say sin does here?
      - **Sin brings death.**
    - What is his solution to this here?
      - **Belief in him.**
  - Read John 16:7-11.
    - Who is Jesus describing according to 16:7?
      - **The helper.**
    - What thing does he convict of in 16:9?
      - **Sin**
        - Why is this conviction necessary according to 16:9?
          - **“Because they do not believe in me”.**

- **This commentary note will hopefully help offer a synthesized explanation of what we’re pointing to with the connections above:** “The non-forgiveness of sins [in John’s gospel] is always related to refusal to believe in Jesus, suggesting that forgiveness of sins comes through belief in him. It is noteworthy that Jesus’ statement ‘If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven’ is intimately connected with the (symbolic) bestowal of the Spirit (22–23), which is in turn related to the disciples’ being sent into the world as his witnesses (21–22; cf. 15:26–27). This supports the view that the way in which the disciples forgive sins and

retain sins is by preaching the good news and declaring the effects of believing it (forgiveness) and rejecting it (no forgiveness).”<sup>1</sup>

- Now look up Acts 2:36-39. What does Peter tell the people to do in response to his message?
  - **“Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins”**
  - **Leaders note: We’re looking at this text to see that immediately after receiving the Spirit (as Jesus originally said in John 20:22), Peter preaches the gospel and that leads to a response that involves the “forgiveness of sins”. We’ve tried to illustrate the commentary note’s argument with this scene from Acts that followed the scene in John 20.**

Take these reflections with you into Step 4 below.

### Step 4: Apply To Our Story

Ask questions to discern what God is telling us to do with the help of the Holy Spirit.

- Like Thomas, we may have causes for doubt and/or unbelief.
  - What are more common reasons for doubt in you or the people you know: the stuff of the “head” (logic, historical evidence, philosophical arguments for Christianity, etc) or the stuff of the “heart” (pain of unanswered prayer, disappointment in difficult circumstances, hurt from the church, etc)?
  - Follow up question: How would you help guide someone to belief in either case? Is the approach different? Is there something in Jesus’ interaction with Thomas that informs your answer?
- Thomas’ response to Jesus is to not just acknowledge a truth about Jesus - “Lord” and “God”, but to make that truth personal to him - “my” Lord and “my” God. Who Jesus objectively is becomes something Thomas subjectively grabs onto in faith.
  - What things in your life helped you in the past and/or are currently helping you now to “own” your faith for yourself? (Is there a specific situation or time when you remember recognizing that Jesus was now “your Lord and your God”... not simply the person that your parents or friends worshipped and followed?)
- Jesus indicates there will be people who believe without seeing him (which is all of us), and that is a blessed state to be in! Perhaps that’s a prompt for prayer today. You could use this guide as a group:
  - Adoration: Is there a way to incorporate more intentional “praise” towards God this week?
  - Confession: Is there something you need to confess to God or “repent” of this week?
  - Supplication: Is there something you feel prompted to “ask” God for this week?

---

<sup>1</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 377.

# GO

## **Deeply rooted by participating in the mission of God.**

These culturally relevant applications are meant, with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, to prompt actions that bring the life of God's kingdom into us and out to others.

---

- Pray for the "lost" in your sphere of influence. Use the **5x5x5 cards** as a tool.

**Leaders note: This is something that we're putting deliberately at the top here. Every time.**

**("5x5x5 cards" are available at each campus on the weekend.)**

**Note: We'll be hosting "Alpha" starting April 22. Is there someone from your life you could bring?**

- Is there something that seems especially relevant for us to do personally based on our discussion?  
**Leaders note: This is something that may overlap with the "Apply To Our Story" step in the "GROW" section above, but here it is meant to help narrow down a specific thing that people actually plan to commit to doing.**
- Is there something we as a group should plan to do together based on our discussion?  
**Leaders note: Depending on the applications you've discussed in the "GROW" section, there could be opportunities to serve others as a group. Or, perhaps to gather for worship, prayer, and/or equipping together.**
- Is there something we as a group should plan to do to spend time with someone who doesn't yet follow Jesus? Or to make/strengthen connections with our neighbours?