



Group Life Discussion Guide

The purpose of this guide is to help you and your group members experience life-change through relationships. This guide is designed for group settings where discovery is the central means by which learning takes place. God’s Word is the source of truth, and the Holy Spirit is the guide and revealer of all truth. This creates a safe environment for real life-changing discussion about God’s truth.

Framework for Each Session

LEAN IN

- The purpose of this question is to get everyone in your group to “lean in” and get involved. It’s easy to answer and fun. It creates a sense of energy—so much so that group members physically lean in as they engage the discussion. The “lean in” question also frequently provides an emotional link to the “Look In” question. It also provides safety for answering the question and sets the tone for the rest of the study.

LOOK DOWN

- This is an observation question. It’s designed to help group members “look down” and see relevant details and facts in the Bible passage being studied. This question establishes a solid foundation for the rest of the study. Everyone in the group can get involved simply by taking an observant look at what the Bible says. This question is answerable by anyone solely based on their observation of the passage without requiring any prior knowledge or reference to other related texts. No Bible college degree is required.

LOOK OUT

- This question helps group members “look out” and see the principles of the Bible passage through the lens of the world today. The answers are not focused on your group members, but on other people. This will lead to more authentic dialogue within the group. It builds a bridge between the facts of the passage and our understanding of it as it relates to our world and our culture. It also helps individuals see the effect and the end result of those who pay attention to and those who ignore the importance of God’s Word in our culture.



LOOK IN

- Here is where group members begin to personally “look in” and see what God might be nudging them to change in their lives. During this part of the study, group members begin to move from knowing to doing what God’s Word says. It’s about obedience. The goal of all Bible study is life transformation. Many times, breaking into smaller huddles of three or four enhances disciple-making friendships. Group members should write down responses of the others in their huddle so they can pray and follow-up with them to see how they’re doing with their new commitment.

LOOK UP & LIVE IT OUT

- The final step is to give everyone in your group an opportunity to “Look Up” in prayer, and “Live It Out” during the week. The group leader’s role in this step is to give the Holy Spirit enough space to do His life-transforming work in the lives of the group members. Members are challenged to share what they’ve discovered about Jesus with others, put God’s Word into action in a very practical way, and prepare for the next time together. Finally, end the group time with praise and prayer for everyone. Rotate closing prayer among members and/or have 2 members volunteer to close each week. Note: Typically, there is not adequate time for everyone to share their personal prayer requests. Those types of prayer requests can be shared on a slip of paper, swap requests with another group member (or in smaller huddles) or texted to a prayer coordinator in the group. The group leader’s role in this step is to give the Holy Spirit enough space to do His life-transforming work in the lives of the group members. We trust that God will reveal Himself to you and your group in very special ways.



Session #1: Jesus and the Confused Professor (John 3:1-21)

Dig Deeper Group/Reflection Questions

Message Big Idea – Encounters matter. Encounters with Jesus matter even more! John chapter 3 is perhaps the most sloganized, billboarded, bumper-stickered chapter in the New Testament. It provides the rallying cry of “born again” Christianity, as well as the New Testament’s most frequently quoted verse: John 3:16. Our passage today introduces a character that seems a bit confused. Even though Nicodemus seemingly “knows it all”, Jesus aims to broaden his vision and elaborate on what it means to be “born from above” (3:5). We may find ourselves in the very same position – and our openness to Jesus’ invitation is of utmost importance.

Lean In:

- Since this is week one of “Come & See”, ask the following questions:
 - Introduce yourself. A little about your life, etc.
 - “Why did you sign up for this group?”
 - “What are you most looking forward to during this study?”
 - “If you could grow in one area spiritually this year, what would that be?”

Look Down:

- (Option A) Read John 3:1-21 (Read twice – if possible, two different translations)
- (Option B) If you are a part of a group (or family), do a dramatic reading of John 3:1-21. Assign roles to a narrator, to Jesus, and to Nicodemus. Following the reading, share briefly:
 - What most captures your attention as you hear the story?
 - What questions does it raise for you?
- What facts can we gather about Nicodemus from the first couple sentences?
- Jesus’ initial response doesn’t seem to go along with the flow of the conversation. Why do you think he responded as he did?
- In your own words, explain Jesus’ answer to Nicodemus (John 3:3, 5-8)

Look Out:

- Jesus and Nicodemus seem to have very different views of the concept “born again”. With people you know in mind, what do you think they think about the much debated phrase “born again”?
- Jesus had barely begun his ministry, but according to John 3:14-15, what did Jesus already know about his mission?



- Examine the subsequent appearances of Nicodemus in 7:45-52 and 19:38-42. What do you think they tell us about Nicodemus? Do you think he grows in faith, crossing the threshold of discipleship and aligning himself with Jesus in the end?
- Thinking once again of your friends or acquaintances, what do they need to see or experience to grow in their acceptance of Jesus? How can you be a part of that?

Look In:

- When did you first remember reading/hearing John 3:16? What does this well-known verse mean to you?
- How would you compare your own search for God with Nicodemus' search? Explain:
 - Less academic
 - More straightforward
 - More relational
 - Less secretive
 - Less dogmatic
 - Other: _____
- Where are you in your spiritual life? Still in the dark, moving closer to the light, or... _____ (you fill in)? Revisit your initial response in the "Lean In" section. What area would you like to grow spiritually this year?

Live It Out:

- What one truth from this passage would you like to take to heart and act upon? How will this affect your life?
- Is there an issue in your life that you are hiding from God? Is there an issue about which you are reluctant to pray?
- Who can you share this with this week?
- Pray this prayer over your personal life this week:
"Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting"
(Psalm 139: 23-24)
- This week: Read Psalm 32. Take a verse or two and turn it into a prayer.



Session #2: Jesus Talks with a Desperate Woman (John 4:1-27)

Dig Deeper Group/Reflection Questions

Message Big Idea – Encounters matter. Encounters with Jesus matter even more! Up until now, Jesus’ miracles have made him instantly popular in Judea. His success has attracted the attention of the Pharisees, who like to think of themselves as the watchdogs of real faith (Judaism). It is not yet time for Jesus to confront them, so he leaves to focus his ministry in Galilee. A pit-stop in Samaria has momentous results and raises several eyebrows. Here, Jesus offers to satisfy the longings, desires, and hopes of a desperate woman. He promises true identity and fulfillment to the woman, but he is speaking to us as well as we all are called to redefine the question, “Who am I” with the promise that we are beloved sons and daughters of our heavenly Father!

Lean In:

- Recap the high points of everyone’s devotional readings the past week. Give everyone an opportunity to share.
- Discuss: Share with your group your all-time favorite or most memorable TV commercial. Why are the messages in TV commercials often so appealing and persuasive?

Look Down:

- (Option A) Read John 4:1-27 (Read twice – if possible, two different translations)
- (Option B) If you are a part of a group (or family), do a dramatic reading of John 4:1-27. Assign roles to a narrator, to Jesus, and to the woman at the well. Assign someone else to take the collective role of the disciples and townspeople. Following the reading, share briefly:
 - What most captures your attention as you hear the story?
 - What questions does it raise for you?
- Why is this woman surprised when Jesus asks her for a drink? Share any knowledge or background you know about the divisive relationship between Jews and Samaritans.
- This woman collected water at the hottest part of the day. Why do you think she did that?

Look Out:

- Like this woman going to get water in the heat of the day when no one was around, why do some people try to hide who they really are?
- How do people often satisfy their hungers and thirsts in life?



- How might followers of Jesus demonstrate love for people in spite of differences or what they may see as questionable character?

Look In:

- What groups of people do you feel uncomfortable being around? Why?
- In what ways can you identify with the woman at the well?
- How is Jesus' gift of salvation different from what the world offers?
- How have you responded to Jesus' invitation to receive His living water?

Look Up & Live It Out:

- What one truth from this passage would you like to take to heart and act upon?
- What are some prejudices you will ask God to help you overcome?
- A little rain can straighten a flower stem. A little love can change a life. Who knows the last time this woman was entrusted with anything, much less the secret to 'living water' and 'eternal life'? Who can you show love to this week... Asking nothing in return?
- Who can you share this with this week?
- This week: Read Isaiah 55:1-3. Praise God for his gracious invitation. Answer that invitation with your prayers.



Session #3: The Man Born Blind (John 9:1-17)

Dig Deeper Group/Reflection Questions

Message Big Idea – Encounters matter. Encounters with Jesus matter even more! As Jesus traveled with his disciples, they came across a man who had been blind from birth. The encounter sparked a theological question from his disciples, but then suddenly escalated into a major confrontation about the rules of the sabbath. Jesus used the episode to reveal how we develop a distorted view of God when we limit his actions or inflate his commandments. Jesus reveals that apart from him we are in darkness. He invites us to accept him as the giver of light and sight.

Lean In:

- Recap the high points of everyone's devotional readings the past week. Give everyone an opportunity to share.
- Have you ever seen a person's weakness or suffering used for God's glory? Share with your group.

Look Down:

- Read John 9:1-17
 - What most captures your attention as you hear the story?
 - What questions does it raise for you?
- What did Jesus mean when he said, "Night is coming, when no one can work" (v. 4-5)?
- Look again at John 9:3 and also at John 11:4. What do these stories show us about one purpose of suffering in our lives? How should this purpose change the way we suffer?

Look Out:

- Do you think it is a coincidence that many of Jesus' recorded miracles occurred on the Sabbath day? Why do you think he was provoking this type of conversation?
- What assumptions did Jesus' followers make about the man's blindness? How did Jesus correct these misconceptions?
- Let's explore this a bit deeper. Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31. Who does Paul say God chooses? Why does God choose them?

Look In:

- Have you ever allowed a weakness or suffering in your life to bring glory to God? Share with your group as you feel led.
- What fresh insights have gleaned from this story about the struggles of life?
- How might you need to change your attitude about your weaknesses and strengths?



Look Up & Live It Out:

- We find it difficult to trust God when we can't figure out why he allows certain uncomfortable things to happen to us. Interestingly, we don't seem to wonder quite so much when God allows good things into our lives! No matter how long you've known Christ, he knew us long before we knew him. We will never reach the end of discovering more about him and his presence in our lives. What did you discover about God or Jesus in this passage?
- What one truth from this passage would you like to take to heart and act upon? How will this affect your life?
- Who can you share this with this week?
- This week: Read the following additional passages on being used by God. Ask yourself the two previous bullet points after reading each passage.
 - Exodus 3:7-4:12
 - Joshua 1:1-9
 - Romans 8:26 and 2 Timothy 2:21
 - 1 Corinthians 1:26-28
 - 2 Corinthians 12:7-10



Session #4: Jesus Cares for a Grieving Family (John 11:1-44)

Dig Deeper Group/Reflection Questions

Message Big Idea – The Jews didn't know what they had in Jesus. They didn't realize the Son of God was in their midst and he had come so they could have abundant life (eternal life). Jesus, through his words and his actions (miracles he performed) clearly identifies himself as the Son of God who has come into the world – to miss this point is to miss the greatest truth in the history of the world! In this passage, we see that in times of pain and difficulty, experiencing God's presence in the midst of the trial will strengthen you, give you comfort and peace, AND will build your faith and bring glory to God.

Lean In:

- Recap the high points of everyone's devotional readings the past week. What questions or points of interest jumped out to you? Give everyone an opportunity to share.
- As a group, come up with your top three best practices for caring for others going through hardship or loss. Be prepared to share with others your list.

Look Down:

- Read John 11:1-44
 - What most captures your attention as you hear the story?
 - What questions does it raise for you?
- What kind of relationship did Jesus have with Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha? (John 11:3, 5)
- How long did Jesus linger after Lazarus was ill? Does this make sense? Why did Jesus choose not to go immediately to see Lazarus? (John 11:4)
- Jesus listens to the sisters and enters into their grieving with them. He then tells Martha something about himself in v. 25, 26. Why is this a significant statement about who Jesus is?
- When Lazarus was raised from the dead, how did people respond? (Read John 11:45, 53, 57; 12:10, 12-13)

Look Out:

- When people experience loss or hardship, can you think of empty or insincere words that we say when people die that do not offer real comfort?
- What lessons are there for us when we meet people going through trials or hardship or loss?
- We all handle emotions so differently. Some of us shed tears easily, and others of us shed one tear every ten years! Isn't it great that Jesus gives himself space to feel the



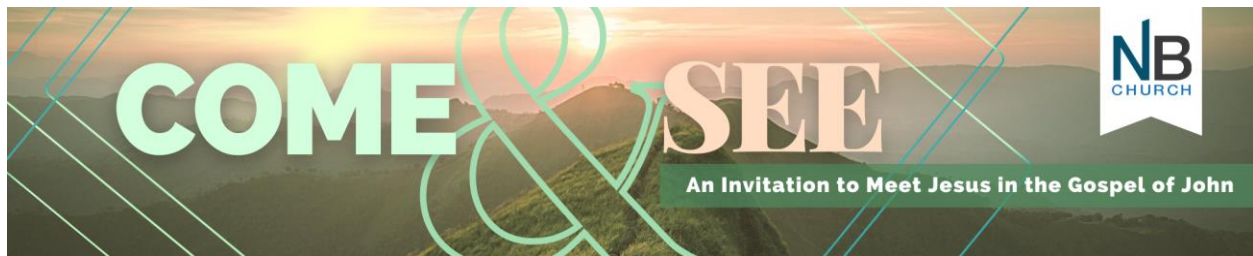
emotion and intensity of what is happening around him with Lazarus' death? In general, why is it important to process and feel the emotion of what is happening around you?

Look In:

- Describe a time when you needed encouragement from others. Did God bring a person or people to come alongside you?
- Does your faith involve trusting in the person of Jesus? When things are going well? When things are not going so well? Even in the face of death?
- Are there any aspects of your life that feel dead? Old dreams? Your finances? Core aspects to your personality that you've shut-off? Dissolved relationships? As your comfort level allows, discuss any of these aspects with your group. Ask Jesus to bring life back to these places.

Look Up & Live It Out:

- Pray for people you know who are facing trials, hardship or loss at this time. Pray that they might find comfort in Jesus, the resurrection and the life. And pray that you might be a channel for God's comfort.
- What one truth from this passage would you like to take to heart and act upon? How will this affect your life?
- Who can you share this with this week?
- Close your time in group with someone reading this prayer:
Father, thank you for caring about our pain and disappointments. Calm the whirling winds of fear and hurt that threaten our faith. Keep us from trying to cope with our struggles by our own strength and willpower. Help us to release our emotions to you and trust you to sustain us. Thank you for your comforting words of wisdom. Let us receive the healing of the Holy Spirit.
- For more Bible passages dealing with hurts, read Matthew 9:36; 11:28-30; Romans 12:15; 2 Corinthians 1:3-7.



Session #5: The Vine & The Branches (John 15:1-16)

Dig Deeper Group/Reflection Questions

Message Big Idea – The key action in this passage is to “remain”. It is translated in different ways: to stay, to abide, to live, to live in union. It might be better to say it this way: “If you stay at home in me and I stay at home in you, you will bear much fruit.” Jesus is to be so much a part of our daily existence that He feels like home. We become like Jesus and do His great deeds not by trying harder or pumping up some kind of spiritual energy. We do all of this by simply staying at home with Him. Bearing fruit then just happens—because it’s ultimately His fruit, not ours. To make this point even stronger, Jesus concludes this verse by stating the same truth in the negative: There is nothing you can do in terms of bearing fruit by yourself. Nothing. Zero. Zip. Let that sink in. It will change you!

Lean In:

- Recap the high points of everyone’s devotional readings the past week. What questions or points of interest jumped out to you? Give everyone an opportunity to share.
- Describe someone you consider to be a true friend? What do you do to maintain your friendship?

Look Down:

- Read John 15:1-16
 - What most captures your attention as you hear the story?
 - What questions does it raise for you?
- When the vine is talked about in the Old Testament, who is that a reference to? Read Psalm 80:8-16 and Isaiah 5:1-7. Why did Jesus have to come if there was already a vine?
- It is interesting to note, that the branches are part of the vine, and that while branches are pruned, in some way the Vine is pruned too. How does Romans 8:17, Hebrews 2:17-18 help us understand this better?

Look Out:

- What does a vinedresser (or gardener) do to care for and provide for the vineyard? If you are a gardener, how do you prepare your garden for planting/growing season?
- The word “remain” or “abide” occurs eleven times in John 15:1-17.
 - What does it look like practically to remain (or abide) in Christ?
 - Why is it sometimes hard to abide in Christ?
 - What in our culture pushes us away abiding in Christ?
- How can we be fruitful in God? Read 2 Peter 1:3-9. What can we learn from this passage about being fruitful?



Look In:

- What are some “false vines” you have attached yourself too at one time or another?
- What is the importance of understanding that God the Father prunes us?
 - Describe a season of life where God has pruned you: What happened?
 - What did you learn?
 - What was the result?
- Are you being fruitful in Christ? How can you make space for grace in your life by focusing on “being” instead of “doing”? What sort of “fruit” would you imagine might come of that? (i.e. I would be more patient with my kids; I would learn to be content at work; etc)

Look Up & Live It Out:

- What one truth from this passage would you like to take to heart and act upon? How will this affect your life?
- Who can you share this with this week?
- Read Galatians 5:22-23: Why is it so important to pray for these?
- Memorize John 15:4-5: *“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.”*
- Close your time in prayer.



Session #6: Jesus Talks to a Demanding Skeptic (John 20:19-31)

Dig Deeper Group/Reflection Questions

Message Big Idea – Encounters matter. Encounters with Jesus matter even more! What happens when doubt wrestles belief? Does the heart need to convince the head, or does the head need to convince the heart? In the experience of Thomas, John shows how belief comes to maturity and how it changes the entire direction of an individual life. Thomas's declaration, "My Lord and my God", presents Christ as the risen Lord, victorious over sin, sorrow, doubt, and death. It also displays the faith that accepts not only the truth of what Jesus said but the actuality of who he is, The Son of God.

Lean In:

- Recap the high points of everyone's devotional readings the past week. What questions or points of interest jumped out to you? Give everyone an opportunity to share.
- Believe it or Doubt it? Raise your hands and cast your vote for the following statements (the answers will be given by your leader):
 - Penguins can smell toothpaste from several miles away?
 - A violin contains about 70 pieces of wood?
 - The Irish like Thomas the Tank Engine so much that they have put faces on all of their trains?
 - Japan has square watermelons because they stack better?
 - The elastic in your underwear will last twice as long if you freeze it after washing it?

Look Down:

- Read John 20:19-31
 - What most captures your attention as you hear the story?
 - What questions does it raise for you?
- In verses 19, 21, and 26, why does Jesus say "Peace be with you" to the disciples?
- Tim Keller says "Doubt is a condition of the soul and the heart. It always masquerades as more intellectual than it really is." In verse 20, Jesus shows the disciples his hands and his side and 'they were (therefore) glad'. Why do you think Thomas wouldn't believe until he not only saw but touched the wounds (v. 25)?
- In the week between Jesus appearing to the disciples, and then to the disciples and Thomas, what feelings or emotions do you think Thomas experienced? Was it more than just doubt?
 - Why wasn't Thomas there with the other disciples on resurrection night (v24)?



- How does John 11:16 and John 14:5 inform your understanding of Thomas' absence on resurrection night?

Look Out:

- What kind of doubts about faith in Jesus or Christianity do you see or experience in our culture? List the top 3 “big questions” you feel people have about faith in Jesus.
- Mary told Thomas she saw and talked with Jesus (v. 18). The disciples told Thomas they saw and talked with Jesus (v. 25). Yet Thomas still needed to see and experience Jesus on his own. What experience of faith have you heard other Christian's experience, but you have not experienced yourself? (i.e. *heard God's voice; felt a leading from the Holy Spirit; etc.*)
- Thomas said, ‘just seeing him isn't going to be enough now, I need to feel him’. However, assurance wasn't experienced that way but rather in Jesus' lovingkindness and tenderness towards him. In other words, he didn't need to touch Jesus, Jesus needed to touch him. In what ways do “Your 3” need lovingkindness and tenderness like Jesus showed Thomas in this passage?

Look In:

- What would you have done if you were in the room when Jesus appeared?
- What kinds of things cause you to doubt? What are you doing with your doubt?
- Share about the conversation, experience, event, or season in your life that Jesus revealed himself to you. What happened that finally made you proclaim like Thomas, “My Lord and My God”?

Look Up & Live It Out:

- What one truth from this passage would you like to take to heart and act upon?
- Who can you share this with this week?
- Ask someone in the group to read this prayer aloud:
God, I can be so weak and sinful in my separation from you. Sometimes I don't trust others, or seeds of doubt begin to creep in because of lies planted by the enemy. I become prideful and turn away. But I know that the Holy Spirit lives in all of your children. Lord, please allow the Holy Spirit to show me the truth and convict my heart of the evidence of Your goodness and Your glory. Enable me to push my own will aside in favor of the Spirit within me, who opens my eyes to Your way and Your plan. Remove my doubt and increase my belief. Like Thomas, help me to move away from my unbelief, to shrug off all my worries and concerns and simply rest in You, and believe.
In Your holy and precious name I pray, Amen.
- For more information about how to EXPLORE DOUBTS and BIG QUESTIONS of faith, visit: www.exploregod.com