

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Structure of each session:

Sharing God's Word

- Open in prayer.
This prayer should be brief. More in-depth prayer will occur at the end of the discussion time.
- Follow-up
When appropriate, follow up on charges or questions from the last session's Application.
- Ice Breaker
A question to lead in to the big ideas and essential questions for today's discussion. Allow any responses to these. Don't look for right or wrong answers.
- Reading
Read the text together. Round robin style, individual readers, etc. Use whatever method works for your group.
- Reflection Questions
Open questions to get the group thinking about what they have just read – suggested questions on discussion guides are merely suggestions. It may be simple enough just to ask something like "What do you notice here?" or "What strikes you in this text?" as a starting point.
- **Essential Questions**
A key question about the ideas presented in the text. Be sure to address these and allow time for thinking and responses.
- Applications
Prompts to move the conversation into personal applications of the text.

Prayer

Identify members of the group each time to lead prayer (possibly more than one each time) and perhaps someone to take note of prayer requests.

Prompt the group with a question like "How can we help you in prayer tonight?"

Fellowship Time

Set aside time intentionally to talk to each other. Work on sharing life and faith together.

Passages & Key Concepts

1. Son of God - John 1:1-18; Luke 3:23-38

How was the Messiah more than expected?

2. Son of Man - Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 1:26-56; Matthew 1:18-25

How was the Messiah less than expected?

3. To Us a Son is Given - Luke 2:1-52

What is God's greatest gift to us?

4. John the Baptist Prepares the Way - Matthew 3:1-17; John 1:19-34; John 3:22-36

How did John prepare the way for the Messiah to follow?

5. Jesus Does Not Stray - Luke 4:1-13

How did Jesus follow the way prepared for Him?

6. The First Followers - John 1:35-51; Matthew 4:18-22; Luke 5:1-11

Who were the first to follow in the way?

7. The "Other" Followers - John 4:1-42

Who else was to follow in the way?

8. New Authority? New Audience? New Message? - Matthew 9:1-17

Was Jesus authority/audience/message new/old/both?

9. "You Have Heard, But I Tell You" Matthew 5:1-20

Did Jesus come to abolish or fulfill the law?

10. Seeking, Saving, Serving - Matthew 7:7-29

What was the message, the mission, the mindset of Jesus?

11. Rejecting, Losing, Opposing - Luke 4:16-30; Matthew 12:22-37

What happens if we see the man and not God's Messiah?

12. The Family of God - Matthew 12:46-13:52

What is God's family plan?

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Son of God

Open in prayer.

Ice Breaker

- What is the biggest surprise you've ever received?

Reading

- **John 1:1-18; Luke 3:23-38**

Reflection

- What strikes you in these texts?
- What were the expectations of Israel for their Messiah?
- How does Jesus' divinity become both an obstacle and a glorious surprise?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How was the Messiah more than expected?
- What challenges does this bring? What blessings?

Application

- What surprises you about Jesus?
- What does "Son of God" mean?
- What difference does it make in your life that Jesus is the divine Son of God?

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2. Son of Man

Open in prayer.

Ice Breaker

- Where were you born and what is your ancestry?

Reading

- **Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 1:26-56; Matthew 1:18-25**

Reflection

- What strikes you in these texts?
- Talk about the humanity of Jesus. What makes that significant?
- How is Jesus like us?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How is the Messiah less than expected?
- How does God work through insignificant people to accomplish eternal blessings?

Application

- What do you expect from Jesus?
- Why are some people disappointed in Christ?
- How do you handle it when God seems to give less than you expected?

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3. To Us a Son is Given

Open in prayer.

Ice Breaker

- Who do you know that you would call a giver? Why?

Reading

- **Luke 2:1-52**

Reflection

- What strikes you in this text?
- How beautiful is this story compared to Matthew's account of Herod and the killing of the boy babies of Bethlehem? What is Luke emphasizing about Jesus' family?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What is God's greatest gift to us?
- How does Jesus' birth and childhood impact our family relationship with God?

Application

- How is God unfolding His plan for His people in this record of Jesus' birth?
- What do Jesus' words to His parents tell us about His understanding of God?

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4. John the Baptist Prepares the Way

Open in prayer.

Ice Breaker

- What does it mean to be “ready”?

Reading

- **Matthew 3:1-17; John 1:19-34; John 3:22-36**

Reflection

- What strikes you in this text?
- Why did John come? What was he preaching to the people?
- What did the people think about him and what did they do?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How did John prepare the way for the Messiah to come?
- How was this part of God’s plan for His people?

Application

- How were you prepared to accept the coming Messiah?
- When our Messiah, Jesus Christ, comes again, what will you have done to prepare for His coming?

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5. Jesus Does Not Stray

Open in prayer.

Ice Breaker

- What are some difficult temptations that people face today?

Reading

Luke 4:1-13

Reflection

- What strikes you in this text?
- Where is Jesus in this text and what is going on?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How did Jesus follow the way prepared for Him?
- What scriptures did Jesus use to answer the tempter's snares?
- Why is this important for us to know?

Application

- How do you handle temptations?
- How are the scriptures a sword to fight against temptation?
- What can you do to imitate Jesus' example?

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6. The First Followers

Open in prayer.

Ice Breaker

- What's it like to be chosen for a challenging work?

Reading

- **John 1:35-51; Matthew 4:18-22; Luke 5:1-11**

Reflection

- What strikes you in this text?
- What kind of people did Jesus choose to follow Him and why?
- How did Jesus invite them to follow Him?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Who were the first to follow Jesus in the way?
- How did Jesus choose the first followers and what did it mean to follow Him?

Application

- How did Jesus call you to follow Him?
- What did you leave behind?
- Where has He led you thus far?

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7. The “Other” Followers

Open in prayer.

Ice Breaker

- What does it mean to be one of “those people”?
- What social boundaries are most difficult to cross?

Reading

- **John 4:1-42**

Reflection

- What strikes you in this text?
- Describe the background for this text.
- What does it mean to be rejected because of race, color, or other boundary marker?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Who else, besides the Jews does Jesus call to follow the way?
- What difficulties does this produce and how are we to overcome them?

Application

- How did Jesus present Himself to the Samaritan woman and the people of Samaria?
- Who are the “Samaritans” of our day and why?

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

8. New Authority? New Audience? New Message?

Open in prayer.

Ice Breaker

- What's new in your life?
- What do you wish were new?

Reading

- **Matthew 9:1-17**

Reflection

- What strikes you in this text?
- Why did the people ask about Jesus' authority and teaching?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Was Jesus authority/audience/message new/old/both?
- What was new about Him and His message? What was not new about Him and His message?

Application

- Why is change hard for some of us? What changes does following Jesus demand of us?
- How do you submit to the new authority and message of Jesus for your life?

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

9. “You Have Heard, But I Tell You”

Open in prayer.

Ice Breaker

- What happens when the rules are changed?

Reading

- **Matthew 5:1-20**

Reflection

- What strikes you in this text?
- How is this sermon a declaration of Jesus’ authority?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Did Jesus come to abolish or fulfill the law?
- What is most challenging about his words in this message?

Application

- What does Jesus tell you that you need to hear and do?
- Why is this different from the way the law of God has been taught by others?
- Is Jesus changing the law or explaining its real meaning? Why?

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

10. Seeking, Saving, Serving

Open in prayer.

Ice Breaker

- What do children do when they want something only a parent can give?

Reading

- **Matthew 7:7-29**

Reflection

- What strikes you in this text?
- How would you describe this portion of the Sermon on the Mount?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Where should we seek? How hard? For what? And what will we find?
- How does seeking relate to salvation? Who will we find at the narrow gate? (John 10:7-9) Where can we find a map for the narrow way? (Matt. 7:21,24).
- Where do we find instructions to serve in this passage? What is the purpose of our service, and how does it relate to salvation? (Matt. 5:16).

Application

- What was Jesus instructing his listeners to do with his teachings?
- How do the instructions of Jesus reflect the unfolding of God's plan for His people?

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

11. Rejecting, Losing, Opposing

Open in prayer.

Ice Breaker

- Have you ever wrongly rejected a school, a job, a person, a path?

Reading

- **Luke 4:16-30; Matthew 12:22-37**

Reflection

- What strikes you in these texts?
- What causes people to make bad decisions?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Why was it difficult for Jesus' neighbors to accept him as the Messiah?
- Why was it difficult for the Pharisees to accept Jesus as Messiah and to what lengths did they go to oppose Him?

Application

- Is it ever difficult for us to accept Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the Living God?
- What do you see as the consequences of rejecting, leaving, and even opposing Jesus?
- Why have you chosen to accept, receive and follow Jesus?

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

12. The Family of God

Open in prayer.

Ice Breaker

- What would it be like if your dad was a king?

Reading

- **Matthew 12:46-13:52**

Reflection

- What strikes you in this text?
- What are all these stories in chapter 13 about?
- How did Jesus define His family at the end of chapter 12?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What is God's family plan?
- How do you know that you are part of God's family?

Application

- What does God's family do?
- Why doesn't everyone want to become children of God?
- How do the teachings about the kingdom imply things about God's family?