



Fall 2023 Group Discussion Guide

Week 1 - A Place for Life Change: Acts 2:40-47 (NLT)

BIG IDEA: Church is not just a place for events and meetings. Church is a place for life change. How does the Holy Spirit transform us?

AUGUST 26, 2023

INTRODUCTION

- What's a food that's perfect as it is?
- Whether this is your first or 100th Connect Group, almost every group has its own personality or "vibe"—the feeling you have when you're together, the thing that creates group culture. What would you say gives a group a good vibe?
- Leader: You or someone else write what people share.
- What's something you personally hope to get out of being part of this group?
- What do you personally bring to help others have a great group experience? (Examples: Asking good questions, active listening, participating in the discussion, bringing snacks to share, bringing a friend, praying regularly for group members, being vulnerable, etc.)

WATCH VIDEO

DISCUSSION

Read Acts 2:40-47 (NLT):

⁴⁰ Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation!" ⁴¹ Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.

⁴² All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. ⁴³ A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴⁴ And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. ⁴⁵ They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. ⁴⁶ They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— ⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

1. Re-read verse 42. What do you picture here? What changes did this community make?
2. You've probably heard the saying, "Change happens when the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of change." Do you think people in Peter's audience changed out of pain or in response to a preferred future?
3. What about you...when you make a change in your life, are you changing in response to pain or a desire for a preferred future?
4. What's something "crooked" in every generation, not just ours, that requires people to be saved from?
5. How can followers of Jesus lead that change?

6. How does the Holy Spirit change us?
7. In which aspect of your life or character would you like the Holy Spirit to bring about life change?

GOING DEEPER

Verse 43 points to “a deep sense of awe” that came over the people. What word or phrase comes to mind when you think of “awe”?

1. Did the people change before the Holy Spirit moved in their hearts, leading to the sense of “awe”? Or did the Holy Spirit change their hearts, motivating them to transform their lives? When we hear the word “awe”, we may think of something as “awesome”! However, the Greek word in today’s passage is phobos, [“fôh-bôs”], translated as fear, dread, or terror. In fact, another Bible translation of verse 43 reads, “Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.”
2. What is the difference between healthy and unhealthy “fear of the Lord”?
 - a. Read **2 Chronicles 19:9**
 - These were his instructions to them: ‘You must always act in the fear of the Lord, with faithfulness and an undivided heart.’ (NLT)
 - b. Read **Psalms 111:10**
 - Fear of the Lord is the foundation of true wisdom. All who obey his commandments will grow in wisdom. (NLT)

APPLICATION

- Connect with one group member and commit to praying for each other this week about the specific area in which you’re asking the Holy Spirit to change you.
- Make time this week to look up Scriptures related to the area in your life you’re asking the Holy Spirit to change you.
- Invite a friend or coworker to join you at church or Connect Group!

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Reflect on the areas of life change from Question 9 to pray for one another.

COMMENTARY

Going back to **Acts 2:37-39 (NLT)**, we can see Peter’s listeners weren’t responding to suggestions or a checklist of good habits. They responded to his powerful appeal to “repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” Peter is encouraging you to repent, which means to admit and turn from your sins (that’s your part) and also to allow the Holy Spirit to change you (that’s God’s part).





Fall 2023 Group Discussion Guide

Week 2 - A Place for Acceptance: James 4:11-12 (NLT)

BIG IDEA: Church is not a place for condemnation and rejection. Church is a place for love and acceptance. How does God embrace and accept us?

SEP. 2, 2023

INTRODUCTION

Icebreaker: As people show up, have them write their middle name on a slip of paper, fold it so the name is hidden, and drop it in a bowl. Pass the bowl around so everyone takes a name (not their own), introduces themselves, reads the name they pulled, and guesses whose middle name it is!

- Welcome, and thank you for being here! Share your name and where your middle name came from.
- Last week, we talked about what we wanted our group vibe to be and how it helps create culture in our group. Before we jump into our discussion, let's talk about values that reinforce our group culture. Examples: Confidentiality, non-judgment, courtesy in disagreements (note we aren't suggesting *no* disagreements but rather maturely discussed disagreements), minimizing political views inside the discussion, accepting new members, intentional listening, no cutting sarcasm, etc.
- Why are these values so important to a healthy group?

WATCH VIDEO

DISCUSSION

Read James 4:11-12 (NLT):

¹¹ Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God's law. But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you. ¹² God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to judge your neighbor?

1. According to this passage, why is it wrong to speak evil against or judge someone?
2. What's the difference between sharing your views and speaking evil of someone?
3. "Speak evil" in Greek is to slander. One theologian described it as "the sin of those who meet in corners and gather in little groups and pass on confidential information which destroy the good name of those who are not there to defend themselves." (Barclay) Source: <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/james-4/>. When you put it like that, can you think of a time you've done this? What impact did your treatment of the person have?
4. At our church, we truly mean it when we say, "Come as you are!" We're going to love you as you are, but we hope you don't leave the same way you came. Does acceptance equal agreement or approval? What's the difference?
5. Read **John 13:34-35 (NIV)**. What does it look like to love and accept people with whom we disagree or whose choices we disapprove?
6. And the other way around, how do you show love to someone who disagrees or disapproves of you?

7. It's been said that getting right with God should result in getting right with other people. According to these verses, what does this look like?
8. Let's read James 4:4 (NLT). This verse seems to be at odds with verses 11-12, yet, it's written by the same author, James. How can they both be true?
9. In verse 4, what does it mean to have "friendship with the world"?
10. How does avoiding "friendship with the world" differ from speaking evil of or judging people?

GOING DEEPER

Read Romans 13:8-10 (NLT)

1. Based on these Scriptures, what's a practical way to show love to people without compromising biblical values?

How does a biblical worldview impact how you treat people you don't agree with on a core level?

For further study: Exodus 20:13-17, Leviticus 19:18.

APPLICATION

- Think of a person you usually feel antagonistic toward. How might you show love and acceptance toward them? (Suggestions: Pray for them or ask them to share their story with you.)
- Do you need to forgive this person or be forgiven by them?
- If it's on you, how can you authentically forgive the person?
- Invite that person to join you at church or Connect Group.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

COMMENTARY

Holding a biblical worldview and loving people who don't follow Jesus are not mutually exclusive. Acceptance and approval are not the same. It's okay to disagree with someone's life choices while still accepting them as an image-bearer of God worthy of his love and Jesus' sacrifice.

Don't confuse teaching the gospel and condemning people. As Jesus' ambassadors, we share the gospel and trust the Holy Spirit to draw people to Christ.





Fall 2023 Group Discussion Guide

Week 3 - A Place for Healing: Luke 4:16-28 (NLT)

BIG IDEA: Church is a place for healing, not by excusing wrongdoing or disregarding our sin, but by helping people find forgiveness and help. How does the Holy Spirit work within us to bring healing?

SEP. 9, 2023

INTRODUCTION

Welcome, and thank you for showing up! So far, we've discussed the Church being a place for life change and acceptance. This week, we're talking about the Church as a place for healing. We believe in emotional and physical healing and want to be a place where people are comforted.

WATCH VIDEO

DISCUSSION

Read Luke 4:16-28 (NLT):

¹⁶ When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures. ¹⁷ The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,

that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, ¹⁹ and that the time of the Lord's favor has come."

²⁰ He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. ²¹ Then he began to speak to them. "The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!"

²² Everyone spoke well of him and was amazed by the gracious words that came from his lips. "How can this be?" they asked. "Isn't this Joseph's son?"

²³ Then he said, "You will undoubtedly quote me this proverb: 'Physician, heal yourself'—meaning, 'Do miracles here in your hometown like those you did in Capernaum.' ²⁴ But I tell you the truth, no prophet is accepted in his own hometown.

²⁵ "Certainly there were many needy widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the heavens were closed for three and a half years, and a severe famine devastated the land. ²⁶ Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them. He was sent instead to a foreigner—a widow of Zarephath in the land of Sidon. ²⁷ And many in Israel had leprosy in the time of the prophet Elisha, but the only one healed was Naaman, a Syrian." ²⁸ When they heard this, the people in the synagogue were furious.

1. If anyone didn't need to attend church, it was Jesus! Yet, verse 16 tells us Jesus was in the habit of going to synagogue—church in his day. What is the significance of weekly church attendance vs. sporadic attendance?
2. Share a story of healing from your own life or that of someone you know.

3. Looking again at verses 18-19, how do these acts of compassion bring healing?
4. It's been said that church isn't a museum for saints but a hospital for sinners. What does it look like when a church becomes a "museum"?
5. How do we, in the church, keep it functioning as a "hospital"?
6. If we want people to experience healing, how do we point them to Jesus, the Healer?
7. How can we help others or how have you been helped to experience healing and freedom from Jesus?

GOING DEEPER

1. How do you help people heal from their brokenness without being pulled down into brokenness?
2. What are indicators of healing in an individual's life?
3. What are signs of healing in your life?
4. Note the difference between people's reactions to Jesus in verses 22 and 28. It's easy to embrace the warm-fuzzy passages, but resist the more convicting passages. Do you find yourself responding likewise?

For further study: Psalm 139; Luke 4; 1 Corinthians 6:19; Jeremiah 17:14; Jeremiah 33:6; Psalm 147:3; 1 Peter 2:24; James 5:15; 3 John 1:2.

APPLICATION

- If you identify an area of your life still impacted by brokenness or sin, visit www.christplace.church/care and fill out the Care Assessment.
- Who can you serve in a practical way to help them not only to feel loved and accepted but also to receive spiritual healing from sin and brokenness?
- Invite a friend to come to church or Connect Group with you!

CLOSE IN PRAYER

COMMENTARY

Jesus was reading from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, found in 61:1-2 in today's Bible. Isaiah was referencing Israel's deliverance from exile in Babylon. The "Year of Jubilee" was a time when debts were canceled, slaves freed, and properties returned to original owners. Yet, the Israelites' release from Babylon did not bring total restoration. In today's passage, Isaiah was referring to a future Messianic age. We know this because Jesus proclaimed this prophecy fulfilled as soon as He finished reading it. Jesus was the personification of Isaiah's prophecy.





Fall 2023 Group Discussion Guide

Week 4 - A Place for Belonging: Galatians 3:26-29 (NLT)

BIG IDEA: Church is a place for deeper unity and belonging.

SEP. 16, 2023

INTRODUCTION

Welcome, and thanks for being part of our Connect Group! Every individual makes our group better because of who you are and what you contribute to our time together.

In this study, we are looking at what the Church is supposed to be like. We've looked at Church as a place for life change, acceptance, and healing. Today, we're looking at Church as a place for belonging.

WATCH VIDEO

DISCUSSION

Read Galatians 3:26-29 (NLT)

²⁶ For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. ²⁸ There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.

1. If you could go back to high school and join or un-join a club or team, what would it be and why?
2. Share a story of a time when you finally felt like you belonged.
3. Who first made you feel like church was a place you could belong? How or why?
4. Have you ever felt like you don't belong in a group of Christians because you differed on some things? How does that feel?
5. Read **Romans 12:4-5 (NLT)**. How do you help people feel they belong in the body of Christ?
6. How do other people help you feel like you belong in the family of Jesus?
7. Differences are part of life and humanity. They are often initial observations. How do we push past and overcome differences to simply learn and appreciate another person's uniqueness?
8. Someone re-read **Galatians 3:28 (NLT)**. Here, we are reminded we are "one in Christ," and there are no favorites. How can you be a bridge builder for God and remove walls of separation so more people can be part of His family?

GOING DEEPER

Psalm 68:6a (NLT) *“God places the lonely in families.”*

1. When have you seen God place lonely people into the family of God?
2. Have you been on the “lonely” side of that scenario and how did that turn out?
3. Has there been a time when you welcomed someone into your family or group of friends?

For further study: Acts 10:34-35; Romans 4; Galatians 3:2-9; Ephesians 2:13-18.

APPLICATION

- Text someone who doesn't attend church and invite them to join you for service this weekend or to Connect Group.
- Is there a time you've been biased or thought, as the apostle Peter did, that there are insurmountable differences with people? Ask the Lord for forgiveness and seek His heart to love all people and enjoy the variety of God's family. Read the story in **Acts 10:9-48** and consider ways to celebrate the blend.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

COMMENTARY

God loves all people, not just those we consider “my people.” Pastor Skip Heitzig says, “The Church is a blended family; all the barriers that typically divide us and the distinctions that separate us are obliterated.” In **Galatians 3:28**, the apostle Paul removes all barriers to our relationship with Jesus - ethnic, racial, national, socio-economic, and gender, reinforcing that everyone “in Christ” is equal in value and a co-heir of Jesus.

Baptism is one step to show our identity as a disciple of Jesus, that you belong to the family of God. Attending church, worship, and being in Connect Groups are other ways. By the way, baptism proclaims salvation; it does not produce salvation. We are saved by grace and through faith in Jesus. See **Galatians 2:16** and **3:2**. If your next step in your walk with Jesus is baptism, sign up today at www.christplace.church/baptism.





Fall 2023 Group Discussion Guide

Week 5 - A Place for Growth: 1 Peter 2:1-3 (NLT)

BIG IDEA: We are committed to life change and spiritual growth. Scripture is our standard and often first inspiration.

SEP. 23, 2023

INTRODUCTION

Welcome, and thank you for being here! When you take time to be part of a Christ-centered community, like this Connect Group, you show your commitment to spiritual growth. There's something powerful and admirable about that. Part of our "big idea" this week is that Scripture is the standard for our spiritual growth. We don't worship the Word of God, but when we regularly read the Bible, we more deeply know and love the God of the Word.

WATCH VIDEO

DISCUSSION

Read 1 Peter 2:1-3 (NLT)

"1 So get rid of all evil behavior. Be done with all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all unkind speech. ² Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, ³ now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness."

1. What's a food you wish you could eat all the time and the calories didn't count against you?
2. Food helps us grow, and when it tastes great, that's even better! Name a food you tried for the first time and liked it and you can still remember your first bite.
3. Recall the earlier days of your faith. Are you in the same place spiritually as you were five years ago? What has changed? How have you grown (matured)?
4. Most nutritional food gives us the energy to accomplish what we need to do. Just like too many calories with no nutritional value is not healthy, so is simply knowing God's Word without any spiritual growth. What are you doing today that's going to help you grow spiritually tomorrow?
5. Re-read **1 Peter 2:1-3 (NLT)**. We know the saying, "You are what you eat." What has your spiritual diet been like lately? Are you tasting the pure Word of God or junk food?
6. What are some things that have robbed your spiritual appetite?
7. What soul-training exercise helps you grow spiritually? (Examples: Bible-reading, Scripture memory, fasting, prayer, etc.)

GOING DEEPER

1. Growth is directly proportional to desire. In other words, you can grow as much as you want it. On a scale of 1-10 - ten, absolutely, without question, and one, not remotely - how much do you want to grow spiritually?
2. Read 2 Peter 3:18. "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ..." Our church believes spiritual growth is part of spiritual life, and the Word of God causes that growth. Scripture provides the primary means by which Christians develop and flourish in their relationship with God and others. How does our spiritual maturity influence the rest of our lives?
3. How much does your Bible reading influence you?
4. What item would you bring if you had a show-and-tell for your faith?

For further study: Psalm 119:105; Matthew 5:6; Ephesians 4:11-15, 6:10-18; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; James 1:22-24; 1 Peter 1:22-25; 2 Peter 3:17-18.

APPLICATION

- If you make a friendly connection with someone who serves you at a restaurant, barbershop, salon, etc., tip them well and invite them to church or Connect Group.
- Choose a soul-training exercise you can start or continue to help you grow spiritually.
- Identify and write down your goal to grow spiritually. Contact a friend who can help support you in this goal.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

COMMENTARY

"The path of spiritual growth is a path of lifelong learning." —M. Scott Peck

In **Luke 2:52**, Luke, the apostle, tells us, "Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and all the people." The Greek rendering for "grow" could be rephrased as "continued to advance" or "increased." Of all people we might assume did not need to grow, it would be Jesus, the Son of God. But He came to earth and lived fully God and fully human. So, He grew in the context of his humanness. If Jesus chose to grow, we can too.

Think about this: Jesus was spiritual and came to earth to learn to be human. We are human and when we decide to follow Jesus, we are continually learning to be spiritual. In maturing spiritually, we become more like Jesus.





Fall 2023 Group Discussion Guide

Week 6 - A Place for Purpose: Ephesians 2:1-10 (NLT)

BIG IDEA: God has a life purpose for everyone. What does that look like in my life?

SEP. 30, 2023

INTRODUCTION

We're wrapping up our Church series and are glad we went on this journey together. I hope it has inspired you to consider your spiritual growth and involvement in our church community. Keep nurturing your spiritual journey by continuing to be in a Connect Group. It could be this one or any other group that resonates with you. The important thing is to stay connected and keep growing. Alright, let's dive into our final topic!

For followers of Jesus, we do well to reflect on where we once were – spiritually dead in our sins (Ephesians 2:1). Despite being physically alive, we were devoid of true life in Christ. The resurrection of Jesus stands as the ultimate testament to God's unmatched power. Today's passage reveals the profound outcome of Christ's resurrection: the gift of new life.

WATCH VIDEO

DISCUSSION

Ephesians 2:1-10 (NLT)

¹ Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. ² You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. ³ All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.

⁴ But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, ⁵ that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) ⁶ For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. ⁷ So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. ¹⁰ For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

1. What's the most embarrassing fashion trend you used to rock?
2. What's one takeaway from this churchwide study so far?
3. Re-read **Ephesians 2:1-10 (NLT)**. Verses 1-3 focus on what people are like before surrendering their lives to Jesus. Looking back, what's one word or phrase that describes your life before Christ?

4. Re-read verses 4-7, which beautifully portray the transformation in people's lives once they start following Jesus. What catches your attention in this depiction of one's spiritual condition after following Jesus?
5. Verses 8-10 show us how much God values us. What jumps out at you?
6. Specifically, from verse 10, what is God's purpose for all people?
7. Pastor Skip Heitzig of Calvary Church says, "Good works don't produce your salvation. Good works are produced by your salvation. And part of the purpose is that you discover what good work God has called you to do." What are some good works God has called us to do?
8. Look around the room. Pick someone and describe a "good work" you've seen them do.

GOING DEEPER

1. In doing good works for God, we are on mission for God's purposes. What does it mean to live a missional life?
2. How did Jesus exemplify a mission-oriented approach we can wholeheartedly embrace and emulate?
3. Read Matthew 16:18 (NLT) (Jesus speaking to Peter). Jesus made it clear the Church is central to God's plan. Our greatest sense of purpose comes by fulfilling our part in it. Can you identify your part in fulfilling God's plan in your generation?

For further study: Romans 5:1-11, Matthew 16:18, Luke 19:10.

APPLICATION

- List five missional activities you've participated in. Check mark the activities that line up with God's mission to bring salvation and healing to people.
- Engage in a heartfelt conversation with God, asking, "What is Your desire for me in the next season of my life?" Take note of any impressions or insights you receive from God. Share these with a wise and godly friend or leader, requesting their prayerful support.
- Reach out to a neighbor or friend. Express your appreciation for their presence in your life and extend an invitation to join you at church or Connect Group. Let them know they are welcome and valued.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

COMMENTARY

Grasping that Jesus brought you from death to life should stir in you a deep empathy for those still trapped in sin, blinded by the deceptive influence of Satan (v2), and unaware of the saving grace of Jesus. May the purpose of every Christian align with the mission of Jesus - to direct people toward the One who came to seek and save the lost (**Luke 19:10**).

