



## Fighting Shadows Book Study - Chapter 8 & Conclusion April 6 | Group Guide

### Opening questions (for mixed groups beginning their time together)

1. What did God's Word from the sermon this past week challenge you with? What resonated? What did it stir in you?
2. (For men to answer) What can you share that would be helpful for the women in your group to hear from your *Fighting Shadows* reading this week?

*Pray for your time together. Invite one of the men to pray for the women's discussion and one of the women to pray for the men's discussion. Then, dismiss to your separate discussion locations.*

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We are in the middle of the story, and it's a war. It's a fight between good and evil, justice and injustice, liberation and oppression. And the battle is for our hearts. The enemy wants to steal our vision and dreams, wants to destroy our integrity, destroy our future and our hope and his strategy in our age is to lull us to sleep with apathy and ease us into a sense that there is no battle, that there is nothing urgent to give our lives to. But God calls us forward to be men of courage and strength and to use our vigor for the Kingdom, to use our strength to bring liberation to the captives. The shadow of apathy is cunning and it will slowly destroy us and those we love if we don't fight back.

Guiding principles for the conversation:

1. *Grace – We receive one another with a heavy dose of grace... Jesus' words "neither do I condemn you" set the tone here. This is a space where honesty and vulnerability are essential. There is no hiding here.*
2. *Brevity – No one should dominate the space. Keep your sharing honest, deep and succinct so everyone has time to share.*



3. *Ask questions – Rather than give advice, ask, “Is there anything more you’d like to say about this? What do you need from us right now? How can we pray for you?”*
4. *High calling – Call one another to holiness (cheer each other on and hold one another to a high standard... “Go and sin no more!”)*

### **READ Ephesians 5:11-16 (MSG)**

*Don't waste your time on useless work, mere busywork, the barren pursuits of darkness. Expose these things for the sham they are. It's a scandal when people waste their lives on things they must do in the darkness where no one will see. Rip the cover off those frauds and see how attractive they look in the light of Christ.*

*Wake up from your sleep,  
Climb out of your coffins;  
Christ will show you the light!*

*So watch your step. Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times!*

**Key idea:** The movement of Jesus calls men to something beyond themselves. It is a movement that turned fishermen into apostles and sinners into martyrs. It draws us out of our self-absorbed lives and into the call and cause of Jesus of Nazareth. We are urged to reject apathy and level up. It's time to re-enlist.

### **Pray together for your conversation.**

Pray Romans 12:11 over the group as you begin your conversation: “May we never be lacking in zeal, but rather, may we keep our spiritual fervor, serving the Lord!”

### **Check in with one another and reflect on the following questions from Chapter 8:**

1. What is one idea or quote that stood out to you from this week's reading and why?



2. What do you see as the primary contributors to men being apathetic today?  
What are the primary factors that influence you toward apathy?
  
3. Is there a specific example of how you find yourself struggling with an unhealthy indifference or lack of motivation?
  
4. The authors state that the truth which counters apathy is that “you were born to live a life of consequence.” Do you believe this to be true deep in your bones?  
What could it look like to embrace this truth more fully?
  
5. What practices or mindsets have you found to help you step out of the shadows of apathy and into the light of urgency, purpose and calling?
  
6. What stands out to you from our time together as men these last eight weeks?  
What is the next right thing in your life and in our group in response to the men’s conference and the follow up study on “Fighting Shadows”?

**Read Romans 13:12-14**

<sup>12</sup>The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. <sup>13</sup>Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.<sup>14</sup>Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.



Finish by praying for one another.

Close with this blessing over the men in your group:

*May we face the shadows with honesty.*

*May we fight the shadows with courage.*

*May we walk into the light together.*

*May our most potent days lie ahead.*

*And may we live in such a way as to hear the words, "well done, good and faithful son."*

## **Your Kingdom Come**

### **April 6 | Leader Guide (Women)**

*For the weeks of February 16 – April 6, life group content will be different for men and women. The men will spend time discussing the book Fighting Shadows while the women will continue a study of Matthew, with a special emphasis on prayer.*

In this guide, you will find **leader's notes** with helpful information to explain the rhythm of the evening. We encourage you to read these notes *before* group starts.

You will also find **specific instructions** for how to guide members of your life group through each experience *during* your meeting in *italics*.

Anything that you need to say/read to the group during your meeting time will be in regular type. You may of course put these thoughts in your own words.

Encourage each member of your group to print or download this week's participant's guide; if possible, you may wish to provide a copy for each person.

### **Opening questions (for mixed groups beginning their time together) (10 minutes).**

1. What did God's Word from the sermon this past week challenge you with? What resonated? What did it stir in you?



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2. (For men to answer) What can you share that would be helpful for the women in your group to hear from your *Fighting Shadows* reading this week?

*Pray for your time together. Invite one of the men to pray for the women's discussion and one of the women to pray for the men's discussion.*

*Dismiss to your separate discussion locations.*

### **Experiencing God's Word (30 minutes).**

This week's reading covers Matthew 21-25. These chapters focus on Jesus' role as king. Rather than read the entire section, we will focus on three key ideas it conveys.

*Begin your time together by asking someone to invite the Holy Spirit to guide your reading, listening, and conversation.*

**Leader's Note:** As an alternative to the content the group guide will provide, your group could decide to take turns reading out loud and experiencing the power of these five powerful chapters. You could even have a Bible app narrate it for you. Something special happens when we read and listen to large portions of God's Word together – just as our sisters in the early church would have done. If this idea appeals to your group, go for it! You can then just pick and choose from the content below to reflect on as you have time.

### **Movement 1: The King Is Welcomed (Matthew 21:1-11)**

*Invite someone to read Matthew 21:1-11.*

By riding into Jerusalem on a donkey just before Passover, Jesus is declaring his role as the promised king from the line of David, the great ancient king of Israel. The crowds, also familiar with Zechariah's prophecy (quoted by Matthew in verse 5), know it too, and greet Jesus as they would a king.

- When you think of the word "king," what comes to mind?



- Jesus uses many other pictures to help us understand who he is, including shepherd, vine, physician, and bread. What specifically can we understand about Jesus when we meditate on him as “king”?
- How are you doing at welcoming Jesus as the king of your life?

## **Movement 2: The King Puts His House in Order (Matthew 21:12 – 23:39)**

**Leader’s Note:** You will lead your group through an imaginative reading of Matthew 21:12-17. You will read it three times, with different instructions each time.

I’m going to read a passage for us. As I read it, I invite you to close your eyes and imagine you are watching the scene. What does it look like? What sounds do you hear? What smells do you notice? What expressions do you see on the faces of those around you? Listen and picture it.

*Read Matthew 21:12-17. Pause a moment, then ask people what they noticed.*

I’m going to read the same passage again. This time imagine you are *in* the scene. Who are you? What are your responses to what is happening? What do you notice?

*Read Matthew 21:12-17.*

- Who were you in the scene?
- What did you notice as you put yourself in the middle of the action?
- How did it feel?

I’m going to read the passage one more time. As you listen, I’d like you to ask yourself this question: “What tables do I need to let Jesus overturn in my own life?”

*Read Matthew 21:12-17.*

Let’s go before the Lord, confessing to him the tables we need him to overturn.

*Lead your group in a time of confessional prayer. Be prepared to lead by example. Confession is a powerful experience. Consider inviting your group to kneel in prayer during this time.*



*Close prayer with the following:* May we welcome you, King Jesus, as the people of Jerusalem did. And will you come in and turn over the tables of anything that gets in the way of you in our lives.

### **Movement 3: The King Promises to Put the World in Order (Matthew 24 – 25)**

Jesus arrives in Jerusalem as a king and confronts the corruption and hypocrisy of the religious leaders. But then he teaches about the time when he will come as king *again*, when he will do for the entire world what he has done this week in the temple – put things in order and make things right.

He tells three parables about his second coming. In one, ten young women wait for a bridegroom. Five are prepared; five are not. The unprepared ones miss out on the celebration when the bridegroom arrives.

In another, three servants are given different amounts of money to invest while their master is away. Two servants invest wisely; one servant buries the money. The good stewards are rewarded; the servant who failed to invest what he was given is punished. We will read the last of these parables together, then talk about all three.

**Leader's Note:** If time allows, read all of Matthew 25 (all three parables) out loud.

*Invite someone to read Matthew 25:31-46.*

This is the final parable recorded in Matthew. It provides a vivid image of what humanity will face when “the Son of Man comes in his glory” as the King of kings.

- What way of living distinguishes the sheep from the goats?
- What can you conclude about this king and his kingdom? What does he value? What is he like?
- In light of all three parables in Matthew 25, how is Jesus inviting us to prepare for his second coming?

This is our final week of women-only content for the Matthew series. Let's pray together, focusing on two things:



- Praising God for specific ways we've have grown closer to each other and to him through this prayer-focused time in Matthew.
- Asking that we be prepared, wise, and eager to serve as we wait for his return.

**Leader's Note:** You may wish to go ahead and look at the prayer for the men's study and combine it with this time, closing in a single extended time of prayer together.

### **Prayer for Men's Study (15 minutes).**

This week in *Fighting Shadows* the men are reading about the shadow of apathy. Tyson and Bethke recently asked 400 women what was wrong with men in the modern world, and the most common answer was apathy. Many men seem stuck, lacking direction, drive, and purpose.

Let's pray for men find purpose in God. To use their strength to fight against our enemy. As Tyson says, "to be violent with spirits and gentle with people" (171).

### **Closing (5 minutes).**

Read Philippians 1:3-6 as a closing prayer over your group.

### **Your Kingdom Come**

#### **April 6 | Participant Guide (Women)**

*For the weeks of February 16 – April 6, life group content will be different for men and women. The men will spend time discussing the book *Fighting Shadows* while the women will continue a study of Matthew, with a special emphasis on prayer.*

### **Opening questions (for mixed groups beginning their time together).**

1. What did God's Word from the sermon this past week challenge you with? What resonated? What did it stir in you?
2. (For men to answer) What can you share that would be helpful for the women in your group to hear from your *Fighting Shadows* reading this week?





*Your group leader may guide a time of prayer before the men and women separate.*

## **Experiencing God's Word**

This week's reading covers Matthew 21-25. These chapters focus on Jesus' role as king. Rather than read the entire section, we will focus on three key ideas it conveys.

### **Movement 1: The King Is Welcomed (Matthew 21:1-11)**

Read Matthew 21:1-11.

- When you think of the word "king," what comes to mind?
- Jesus uses many other pictures to help us understand who he is, including shepherd, vine, physician, and bread. What specifically can we understand about Jesus when we meditate on him as "king"?
- How are you doing at welcoming Jesus as the king of your life?

### **Movement 2: The King Puts His House in Order (Matthew 21:12 – 23:39)**

Your group leader will guide you through an imaginative reading of Matthew 21:12-17, after which you will pray together in response to the passage.

### **Movement 3: The King Promises to Put the World in Order (Matthew 24 – 25)**

Read Matthew 25:31-46.

- What way of living distinguishes the sheep from the goats?
- What can you conclude about this king and his kingdom? What does he value? What is he like?
- In light of all three parables in Matthew 25, how is Jesus inviting us to prepare for his second coming?

This is our final week of women-only content for the Matthew series. Let's pray together, focusing on two things:

- Praising God for specific ways we've have grown closer to each other and to him through this prayer-focused time in Matthew.



- Asking that we be prepared, wise, and eager to serve as we wait for his return.

### **Prayer for Men's Study**

This week in *Fighting Shadows* the men are reading about the shadow of apathy. Tyson and Bethke recently asked 400 women what was wrong with men in the modern world, and the most common answer was apathy. Many men seem stuck, lacking direction, drive, and purpose.

Let's pray for men find purpose in God. To use their strength to fight against our enemy. As Tyson says, "to be violent with spirits and gentle with people" (171).

### **Closing**

Someone will read Philippians 1:3-6 as a closing prayer over your group.

### **Your Kingdom Come**

#### **April 6 | Couple's Discussion**

To help us stay connected with our spouse during these weeks when Life Groups are separated by gender, we are providing a small conversation piece for couples. Our hope is that you will take a moment, whether it's brief or a night out to dinner, and check in with each other and see how our lessons may be connected, how we can pray for each other, and what Jesus is doing in our life.

Can you remember the excitement, enthusiasm, and commitment you had to your marriage when you stood at the altar, across from the man or woman of your dreams, making promises to love, serve, and be faithful—in good times and bad? For many of us, that day is one of the most beautiful moments of our lives.

Even years later, I can mentally return to how I felt that day—it was amazing.

But life isn't always rainbows and unicorns. Life gets challenging. Sometimes, these challenges are brief and easy to recover from. At other times, they are devastating and



alter the path we had envisioned for our lives. These moments can feel overwhelming. They can make overcoming obstacles seem impossible.

They can make us apathetic.

In the Gospel of Matthew (chapters 21–25), we see Jesus in his final days before being unjustly executed. He is facing more pain and suffering than most of us can comprehend. Yet, he doesn't give in. Instead, he fights harder—driving vendors out of the temple courts, confronting the Pharisees, and reminding us what is most important. When faced with unimaginable hardship, Jesus didn't give up. He pressed on.

Has the weight of your marriage, family, career, or choices overwhelmed you? Do you feel like you'll never overcome the trials you're facing? Have your circumstances made you apathetic?

Today is the day to return to the battle!

Reflection & Discussion:

1. Take time to consider what challenges are overwhelming you today. Journal about them or share them with your spouse.
2. Seek help and support. Invite friends or family into the battle with you, seek professional help, and take small steps toward fighting the bigger battle.
3. Pray together every day this week.