



Your Kingdom Come February 23 | Group Guide (Men)

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

1. Where did you sense the Holy Spirit stirring you during the sermon on Sunday?
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.

Go over this introduction with your group.

Here we are in Week 2. There may be no greater obstacle to keep us sidelined from what God has for us than despair. As the authors state, "Many men are in a state of massive despair because they have forgotten their future—their inheritance, their calling, their horizon." But this does not have to be our reality. Your past does not define you, but it does have the power to transform you. Your failures are not final. God is working everything in your life for a good purpose. May you have Kingdom vision today and may you see how God is at work in your midst.

Guiding Principles:



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!")*

Ask someone to read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 and another to read the key idea below:

1 Corinthians 4:16-18: *16Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

Key idea: We can lose heart if we put our hope in the wrong thing and it doesn't work out. It's like being pointed in the wrong direction and hitting it, only to realize that it didn't matter. Imagine your life is an arrow. Where is it pointed? That's your telos. And whether you like it or not, your telos dominates how you live. It fuels everything ... if your telos is wrapped up in unfounded hope, you'll just be taking the long way around to despair.

Prayer together for your conversation.

Pray for God to bring things to mind and into your time together that will be impactful. Give thanks for each man in the group.



Check in with one another and reflect on the following questions from Chapter 2:

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

1. How can our view of eternity form (or de-form) our life in the present?
2. How has the lie "There is nothing really worth living for" manifested in your life, and in what ways has it affected your relationships, work, or spiritual journey?
3. Reflect on a time when you felt hopeless. How did you overcome that feeling, and what role did your faith play in finding hope again?
4. The authors assert that "Your hope is secure in Jesus." How can we most practically anchor our hope in Christ when facing life's challenges, disappointments, or periods of despair? How would you describe the difference between optimism and Biblical hope? Which direction do you tend to lean?
5. What does it look like to be a "man from the future?"

Finish by praying for one another.

As you reflect on what has been shared through the course of the evening, take time to pray for each man in the circle.

Your Kingdom Come February 23 | 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. Where did you sense the Holy Spirit stirring you during the sermon on Sunday?
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.

Encountering God's Word.

Leader's Note: This week Matthew 11 is divided into three movements. In each movement, you will lead your group through discussion and prayer connected to part of the chapter. We're encouraging you to cultivate a listening, receptive posture to the reading/hearing of Scripture by providing a few moments of silence before and after reading each passage. The Holy Spirit is present in our encounters with God's Word and can greatly enrich its transforming power, especially when we leave Him space to do so!

Movement 1

Invite everyone into a few moments of silence to prepare to hear God's Word. Read Matthew 11:1-19 or ask someone else in the group to read it. Pause to allow the Spirit to speak before moving on.

- What question does John send his disciples to ask Jesus? (v. 3)



Let's revisit the earlier encounter Matthew records between John and Jesus.

Read Matthew 3:13-17.

- How has John's attitude toward Jesus changed?
- From our reading in chapter 11, what experience may have brought John to a place of doubt and even despair?
- What about you? Have you experienced a time in your life where you moved from confidence in Jesus to wondering if you'd gotten it all wrong somehow?
- How does Jesus answer John's question? (verses 4-6)

Jesus gives evidence of his power to break the power of sickness and death, which entered the world when Adam and Eve sinned.

In verses 16-19, Jesus observes that people are impossible to please. They criticize John for fasting and Jesus for eating and drinking. In other words, they have critical spirits.

This passage invites us to take a look at our own hearts. Do we have a tendency toward a spirit of criticism? When we look at the people and institutions in our lives – our employers, friends, children, husbands, coworkers, life group, and church – are we quick to complain and find fault? Are we difficult to please?

There are certainly times to speak difficult truths and to offer constructive criticism. But if our default mode is to look for the worst, that's what we will bring out in those around us.

Let's take a few moments to invite the Holy Spirit to show us where our heart posture is overly critical. We will move from this time of reflection to a time of prayerful confession where we admit to our Father in front of our sisters the ways in which our spirits have become critical.

Leave a space of quiet and then begin the prayer time with your own confession and repentance. Provide space for other women to pray their own confessions. Don't be



afraid of some silence. As the time of confession comes to a close, read this reworking of Psalm 51:10-12 as a prayer over your group. (The pronouns have been changed from I/me to we/us.):

Prayer: Create in us pure hearts, O God, and renew steadfast spirits within us. Do not cast us from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from us. Restore to us the joy of your salvation and grant us a willing spirit, to sustain us.

Movement 2

Invite everyone into a few moments of silence to prepare to hear God's Word. Read Matthew 11:20-24. Pause to allow the Spirit to speak before moving on.

After observing how fickle and difficult to please the crowds that follow him are, Jesus denounces the cities who failed to believe in him after seeing his miracles. It's important to note Jesus' words. He's not punishing the cities in a fit of temper. He's recognizing the consequences that fall on those who refuse to believe.

- Do you struggle to believe in Jesus' power or willingness to perform miracles?
- Where have you seen Jesus' miraculous power at work?

We don't want to end up like the people of Korazin and Bethsaida. Let's praise Jesus for his miracles, both those we read about in Scripture and those he has performed in our own lives. We can "popcorn prayer" our thanksgiving for Jesus' miraculous power. (In "popcorn prayer," individuals can "pop in" with a word, phrase, or sentence whenever they feel led.)

Pray out loud together, thanking Jesus for his miraculous power.

Movement 3

Invite everyone into a few moments of silence to prepare to hear God's Word. Read Matthew 11:25-30.



Maybe our tendencies to be critical and ungrateful come from our weariness – our constant striving to control our lives, and our frustration with those around us who don't meet our expectations, including God.

The people of Jesus' time struggled with unmet expectations. They had waited for the Messiah a long time but many of them failed to recognize him when he stood in front of them because he wasn't who they expected.

In this passage, Jesus reminds us that he is the way to the Father, and he invites us to come to him, trust him, follow him, and find rest in him.

- What would it feel like to find "rest for your soul"?

In Jesus' time, when oxen were paired together with a yoke, the older and stronger ox bore most of the weight of the load and taught the younger ox how to carry it.

- How might your daily life be different if you were fully yoked with Jesus?

Ask someone to pray on behalf of the group that you would each seek to be yoked to Jesus, learning from him how to live, and receiving his gift of rest.

Prayer for Men's Study (10 minutes)

This week, the men are reading about the shadow of despair. In Matthew 11, John the Baptist languishes in prison, wondering if Jesus is who he says he is. John is in despair. Like John, all of us carry burdens that feel far too heavy for our shoulders. It's easy for us to lose hope.

Many of the men of The Creek are fighting the shadow of despair. Their view of Jesus can't make sense of the suffering and discouragement they experience. They feel out of control and hopeless. But Jesus offers hope. Hope changes how we see suffering. Hope makes us bolder and more thankful.

Hope makes us more like Jesus. Reflecting on what we've studied in Matthew 11, let's



pray for the men of The Creek.

Encourage women to simply begin praying out loud as they feel led.

As you pray, consider naming the places where men you know may feel despair and invite Jesus to flood those dark places with hope.

Closing (5 minutes)

Feel free to join the men for this closing time if that's a practical option for your group. Read Romans 5:1-5 as a prayer over your group.

Your Kingdom Come

February 23 | Participant Guide (Women)

Encountering God's Word

As you read through Matthew 11 together, your life group leader will leave a few moments of silence before and after the reading. The hope is to provide space for you to prepare to listen and reflect on what you hear.

Movement 1

read Matthew 11:1-19.

- What question does John send his disciples to ask Jesus? (verse 3)

Read Matthew 3:13-17.

- How has John's attitude toward Jesus changed?
- From our reading in chapter 11, what experience may have brought John to a place of doubt and even despair?
- What about you? Have you experienced a time in your life where you moved from confidence in Jesus to wondering if you'd gotten it all wrong somehow?
- How does Jesus answer John's question? (verses 4-6)

time of reflection, confession, and repentance for our own tendencies to have critical spirits.



Prayer: Create in us pure hearts, O God, and renew steadfast spirits within us. Do not cast us from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from us. Restore to us the joy of your salvation and grant us a willing spirit, to sustain us.

Movement 2

read Matthew 11:20-24.

- Do you struggle to believe in Jesus' power or willingness to perform miracles?
- Where have you seen Jesus' miraculous power at work?

a time of "popcorn prayer," thanking Jesus for his miraculous power. (Just "pop in" with a phrase or sentence whenever you feel led.)

Movement 3

reading Matthew 11:25-30.

- What would it feel like to find "rest for your soul"?
- How might your daily life be different if you were fully yoked with Jesus?

Let's pray on behalf of the group that you would each seek to be yoked to Jesus, learning from him how to live, and receiving his gift of rest.

Prayer for Men's Study

This week, the men are reading about the shadow of despair. Reflecting on what we've studied in Matthew 11, let's pray for the men of The Creek.

As you pray, consider naming the places where men you know may feel despair. Invite Jesus to flood those dark places with hope.

Closing

Your leader will read Romans 5:1-5 as a prayer over your group.



Your Kingdom Come February 23 | 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.

Have you ever come out of a store and forgotten where you parked the car? You wander aimlessly around the parking lot dodging and weaving between oncoming traffic. But still, you can't find it. Eventually, panic sets in. *Have we lost it? Has it been stolen?* You wander the parking lot like a lost child at the mall until you finally remember you drove the "other" car. You were never going to find the car you were looking for because it was never there!

We tend to search for the wrong things in life – money, professional success, the perfect marriage, the perfect home – and most of these things are good, but they are not what our hearts really need. They will never satisfy our souls. Seeking them can cause us stress or frustration or **despair**. Jesus says, "Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Jesus is where we find real peace, real contentment, real satisfaction; searching for these other things will only exhaust us, frustrate us, or satisfy us for a short time.

1. If you are honest with each other, is there something you are passionately chasing that will never truly satisfy you?
2. What is one specific way you can prioritize God together?
3. Make time to pray together twice this week, asking Jesus for his peace in your hearts and your marriage.