RED LETTER INVITATIONS
FROM JESUS TO YOU

LIFE GROUP GUIDE FOR MARINERS CHURCH
Group Discussion Guide

The words of Jesus have been read for generations. In many Bibles, these words are printed in red. Look closer at these timeless red letters, and you’ll discover that they are personal invitations from Jesus to YOU, inviting you into the abundant life He has for you.

MAIN POINT

Discussions often take on a life of their own, but they typically lack power when they lack focus. The Discussion Leader ought to use the Main Point to keep everyone on the same page. To do this, you might say something like, “That is very interesting and a good topic for another discussion, but today’s study is about...” and ask a question that brings people back to the topic of discussion.

There will be times when it makes sense to ignore the Main Point, for example, when someone in your group experiences a significant crisis. If you decide to move away from the lesson’s Main Point, you want to do so on purpose and not by accident.

LEAN IN | BREAK THE ICE

These questions will help kick-start your discussion time. The main goal for this time is to get everyone talking and prepare them for the more focused conversation to follow.

LOOK DOWN | LOOK AT GOD’S WORD

The goal for this section is to let the passage speak for itself and stand on its own. This isn’t easy! During this time, you will read the passage out loud (twice) and answer questions focused on the details of the biblical text.

LOOK IN | APPLY GOD’S WORD TO YOUR LIFE

Transformation comes from renewing your mind (Romans 12:2). The goal for this section is to look inward to allow God’s Word to change you from the inside out. Use this time to discuss how your thoughts and feelings are affirmed and/or challenged.
LOOK OUT | IDENTIFY THE RELEVANCE OF GOD’S WORD IN THE WORLD

Jesus calls us to love others, just as He loved us. Based on your understanding of the text and how God is transforming your heart, how will you treat others? How will you apply this teaching to all of your relationships, to everyone you will see this week and beyond?

LEADER NOTES

Where needed, each lesson may have several Leader Notes. This material will provide insight on how to steer the conversation and care for your people. Additionally, these notes will provide greater context to help you understand a difficult word, phrase, or verse.

RHYTHM REMINDERS

A prompt will be provided when one of the 7 Rhythms of Rooted has a natural point of emphasis. We want to help everyone continue to grow holistically in their spiritual journeys. Obviously, some rhythms always exist, like prayer, but occasionally it will be helpful to draw fresh attention to or spend additional time in one of the rhythms.

STORIES & CELEBRATION

A few questions will provide opportunities to follow up on comments, commitments, or applications from previous group discussions. This time is also intended to provide space for sharing stories of how God is at work in people’s lives, what the Spirit is showing them, and things they learned or that were timely in the weekend message or the Annual Read.

PRAYER

Be sure to close your time together in prayer. You can take requests from the group, invite others to lead, and bring God the needs that stood out to you in your group time.

SOME THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

Remember that you aren’t in this alone! God will help you prepare and lead your group discussion. Make it your goal to keep in step with the Holy Spirit!
Pray and read the passage a few times on your own. Take a few minutes to identify what makes an impression for you and how the passage might impact your group.

Once you’ve taken some time to read the passage on your own, read through the entire Discussion Guide. Make sure you understand the Main Point. Identify which questions you want to use in your group time and rewrite them in your own words.

Once your group time is over, take a few minutes to evaluate the discussion. What went well? What could have been different? If you had a “bad night,” DON’T GIVE UP! Everyone has tough nights. There were times that even the disciples didn’t get what Jesus was talking about!

**FREE RESOURCES**

The following list is updated for each series to help you and members of your group understand and respond to the biblical truth we’re studying as a church. Don’t forget about the Mariners Annual Read and the Gospel Every Day podcast discussing each devotional.

Mariners Worship: **Series Playlist (Spotify Playlist)**

The Bible Project: **How to Read Biblical Narrative-The Gospel** (Video, 6 min.)

The Bible Project: **Book Overviews-New Testament** (Videos, 8 min. each)

**ESV Global Study Bible** (Biblical Commentary)

The CSB Study Bible is an excellent resource if you’d prefer a physical copy of the translation used by Mariners Church. It is available for purchase online and in the bookstore at Irvine.

*All Scripture references in this guide are from the CSB unless otherwise noted.*
Come to Me

Week 1

Group Discussion Guide for: RED LETTER INVITATIONS

Matthew 11:16-24, 28-30

PREPARE

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MAIN POINT

In Matthew 11, we see a glaring juxtaposition as we see strong words and tender words from Jesus side by side. Jesus denounces people who have been exposed to the majority of His miracles—the moral and the religious. And yet He invites those who are exhausted to come to Him.

RHYTHM REMINDER: This week will provide a natural opportunity to remind group members of the spiritual rhythm of DAILY DEVOTION. Watch for this icon near the end of the lesson.

Daily Devotion

LEAN IN | BREAK THE ICE

• What’s the most exhausted you’ve ever been? What did you do, when, and why? Did you accomplish your goal? What helped you endure (or would have helped)?

• Let’s consider a few fun facts about human endurance. Who can offer the closest guess to the following Guinness World Records?

  » Holding breath – Male (11 min 54 seconds) Female (9 min 02 seconds)
  » Heaviest weight lifted by neck-1,000 lbs
Longest distance in 24-hour, 3-legged race – 68.23 miles

In our own strength, humans are capable of incredible accomplishments. No matter how far we can push boundaries, there are still limits. We begin a new series by looking at Jesus’ astonishment at people’s stubbornness and His invitation to rest in His strength.

LOOK DOWN | LOOK AT GOD’S WORD

Read Matthew 11:16-24 and 11:28-30. Choose two different people to read the passages out loud.

16 “To what should I compare this generation? It’s like children sitting in the marketplaces who call out to other children:

17 We played the flute for you, but you didn’t dance; we sang a lament, but you didn’t mourn!

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon!’ 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

20 Then he proceeded to denounce the towns where most of his miracles were done, because they did not repent: 21 “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes long ago. 22 But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. 23 And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until today. 24 But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

28 “Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take up my yoke and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” 1 Matthew 11:16-24

What was the cause of Jesus’ frustration in verses 16-24?

Leader Note: Jesus had strong words of warning and rebuke for the religious communities that exhibited hard hearts toward God, especially His work through John the Baptist and now the Messiah, Jesus, Himself. He compared their attitudes to a children’s game similar

to “Simon Says” with immature expectations for God to act according to their desires and expectations. They were not responding appropriately to God’s warnings or invitations either. Comparing these Jewish towns to pagan cities would’ve been shocking to the original hearers.

Help your group avoid the common misconception about biblical references to Sodom. In contrast to Abraham’s humble love for God and his neighbors, the men of Sodom abused others in their arrogance (see Genesis 18-19). Don’t get distracted with discussions on sexuality since that was not Jesus’ point. The city came to symbolize God’s judgment on sin in general, but Ezekiel 16:49-50 clarified Sodom’s specific sin. Other biblical references, such as Amos 4:11 and Romans 9:29-32, emphasize the foolishness of self-righteousness and unrepentance when the Lord offers mercy.

• What was Jesus’ invitation in verses 28–30? What does that invitation imply?

**Leader Note**: Jesus’ invitation to come to Him for learning and rest implies that without Him, people are doomed to foolishness, futility, and a self-imposed standard for life that is impossible to live up to.

• How do Jesus’ warning and invitation relate to one another?

**Leader Note**: “To what should I compare...” was a common rabbinic phrase for teaching disciples. A rabbi’s teaching, both in word and example, was called a “yoke.” In verse 19, Jesus said “wisdom is vindicated by her deeds”. In verses 28–30, Jesus describes the action that proves understanding. The fruit of true righteousness is repenting of life in our own wisdom or strength and trusting in the liberating truth of Jesus.

**LOOK IN | APPLY GOD’S WORD TO YOUR LIFE**

• How have you grown tired of marching to your own drum or of trying to meet the expectations and demands of other people?

**Leader Note**: Remind group members that Jesus’ warning in verses 20–24 was directed toward religious people who ignored God’s activity in their own lives. Even the “yokes” of their religious traditions held them back from following Jesus. Living for ourselves always ends in disaster, especially after we’ve encountered the life-changing power of God through a relationship with Jesus.

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• What burden do you need to give to Jesus?

• What would rest for your soul look like?

• What would it look like for you to take up His yoke, walking with Him and doing things His way, instead of doing things on your own?

Leader Note: Help people identify biblical truth related to their areas of stress, burden, or burn out. Draw attention especially to any teachings or examples of Jesus.

How can we recognize God’s voice and respond appropriately to Him? What have you been doing to learn from Christ?

Leader Note: Remind group members of the Tim Keller devotional, God’s Wisdom for Navigating Life, and the Mariners Annual Read: Gospel Every Day Podcast. These are simple ways to practice the rhythm of a daily devotion along with others in our church. Of course, people may have other devotional books or reading plans for time in Scripture.

LOOK OUT | IDENTIFY THE RELEVANCE OF GOD’S WORD IN THE WORLD

• How does this story shed light on our world? What heavy burdens do you see others carrying in their own strength?

Leader Note: Remind group members that Jesus was not condemning the world but offering to save it from itself (see John 3:16-18). Keep the tone empathetic and missional, not judgmental.

• In what ways do we burden others with our own expectations and demands?

• How might we help others find rest in Jesus?

Leader Note: Be prepared to share personal examples of when we drift from Jesus toward self-sufficiency and personal expectations. When we take our own path instead of walking with Jesus (removing His yoke), there’s a ripple effect of becoming a burden to ourselves and to the people around us. In contrast, when we follow Him, we have the energy and
awareness to extend His peace to others.

• Close each time together as a group with prayer and the following reminders:

  » Any other related points from the weekend message
  » New prayer requests
  » Prayer
  » Worship by playing or sharing this week’s song from the Mariners Current Series [Spotify Playlist](https://www.spotify.com/playlist).
Follow

Week 2

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PREPARE

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MAIN POINT

The most common invitation from Jesus was to “follow me.” In Jewish culture, it was a huge honor to be invited to follow a famous Rabbi. It meant the Rabbi was committed to you and believed he could make you like him. Jesus is committed to you and committed to making you like Him. His invitation is simple. Follow Him. In this passage, we see some common reasons people refuse to follow Jesus.

LEAN IN | BREAK THE ICE

• Who is your favorite “follow” on social media? Why are they a personal favorite?

Leader Note: Be prepared to share your favorite account on the platform of your choosing. Favorites can be humorous, entertaining, informative, profound, creative, helpful, etc. There is no right or wrong answer.

We follow different people, groups, and organizations for a variety of reasons. Many of the accounts we follow require very little, if any, interaction. Today, we’ll focus on what it means to follow Jesus and how we either view our relationship with Him like social media or as something eternally greater.
LOOK DOWN | LOOK AT GOD’S WORD

• Read Luke 9:57-62. Choose someone to read the passages out loud.

57 As they were traveling on the road someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

58 Jesus told him, “Foxes have dens, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” 59 Then he said to another, “Follow me.”

“Lord,” he said, “first let me go bury my father.”

60 But he told him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and spread the news of the kingdom of God.”

61 Another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go and say good-bye to those at my house.”

62 But Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” 1

• What is Jesus’ invitation? Why is it significant?

Leader Note: Emphasize the Main Point. The most common invitation from Jesus was to “follow me.” In Jewish culture, it was a huge honor to be invited to follow a famous Rabbi. It meant the Rabbi was committed to you and believed he could make you like him. This is the foundation of the Christian life: following Jesus without conditions.

• How does knowing the character of Jesus from other passages help us understand what could sound harsh in the verses taken out of context?

Leader Note: In week 1 of this series, we saw Jesus’ invitation to come find rest because He is humble and gentle (see Matthew 11:28-30). We can therefore conclude that Jesus is not being callous to the needs of people; He knows their hearts.

• What pattern emerges revealing the point of the text and the motives of the people interacting with Jesus?

Leader Note: No matter who initiated each conversation, Matthew’s Gospel groups them together to emphasize the same point—people were hesitant to fully follow Jesus. Each person pointed to seemingly good and honorable things as an excuse to not fully commit to Jesus.

LOOK IN | APPLY GOD’S WORD TO YOUR LIFE

• At times, what good things get prioritized over your relationship with Jesus?

• What hesitations do you experience when you think about following Jesus no matter where He may lead? What excuses do you make to justify your hesitancy?

• In what ways does Jesus’ invitation challenge you today?

Leader Note: The point in this text and in your conversation is not guilt, but clarity. Jesus invites us to see Him clearly and what it means to be fully devoted to His kingdom.

LOOK OUT | IDENTIFY THE RELEVANCE OF GOD’S WORD IN THE WORLD

• Reread Luke 9:62. How does Jesus’ mention of the kingdom of God clarify the point of this text? How does it change the way that we see our lives in the world?

Leader Note: Now that group members have considered their own excuses and hesitations, help them gain an evangelistic and empathetic perspective. Jesus did not live and die and resurrect so that people could say nice things about Him without following Him. A relationship with Jesus radically changes our lives and priorities. We can either live for His eternal kingdom (and therefore He’s the King), or we can try to live for our own kingdoms. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said:

• No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. Matthew 6:24

• Who do you know that might say something like this: “I want to follow Jesus but not yet, first I need to _____."

• What excuses do people make for not following Jesus?
Leader Note: Jesus makes clear that to say *not right now* is the same as “*no*” for now.

• How can your life point to the kingdom of God and Jesus’ worthiness of following completely?

• Close each time together as a group with prayer and the following reminders:
  
  » Any other related points from the weekend message
  » Updates on previous weeks’ prayer requests
  » New prayer requests
  » Prayer
  » Worship by playing or sharing this week’s song from the Mariners Current Series Spotify Playlist.
Take Up Your Cross

Week 3

Group Discussion Guide for: RED LETTER INVITATIONS

Mark 8:34-38

PREPARE

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MAIN POINT

When Jesus asked the crowd to take up their crosses and follow, they knew He was inviting them to die. They had seen hundreds of people on crosses in their lives. While the command sounds extreme at first glance, it is really life giving. He invites us to die to lives that have never been satisfying and fulfilling. If we lose our life, we actually save it and have real life. The Christian life is a call to daily die to things that are less than Him.

LEAN IN | BREAK THE ICE

• What is the most significant trade or investment you’ve ever made? What made the deal so rewarding or regrettable?

  Leader Note: Help people consider childhood trades of collectible items, the sale or purchase of something surprisingly rare or valuable, or common sense that paid off in a meaningful way.

• In today’s text, Jesus invites us to make a trade that feels counterintuitive, but it’s guaranteed to be worth it.
• Read Mark 8:34–38. Choose someone to read the passages out loud.

34 Calling the crowd along with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me and the gospel will save it. 36 For what does it benefit someone to gain the whole world and yet lose his life? 37 What can anyone give in exchange for his life? 38 For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

• What is Jesus’ invitation?

**Leader Note:** This is a good exercise for each text in this series. Start by asking people to summarize the main theme. In this case, emphasize the necessity of denying ourselves and taking up our cross. Last week we focused on “follow me.”

• Why is it significant that Jesus called “the crowd along with his disciples” and used the words “anyone” (verses 34 and 37), “whoever” (verses 35 and 38)?

**Leader Note:** Emphasize the open invitation and requirement for discipleship. Denying ourselves and taking up the cross are not optional or reserved for certain Christians. This is the first and essential step to following Jesus (repentance). It’s also an ongoing action in the Christian life. Everyone must continually deny themselves and carry the cross.

• Why would this teaching have been shocking to Jesus’ disciples?

**Leader Note:** Point out the context. This statement comes immediately following Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Messiah and his rebuke for not wanting Christ to be crucified. It’s one thing to have the right opinion about who Jesus is and still have our own interests and expectations in mind (see verses 27-33). Jesus was not the kind of Messiah people anticipated. The salvation and kingdom that He offered was greater than the temporary things of this world. In other words, an incorrect understanding of Jesus’s messiahship leads to an incorrect understanding of discipleship.

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The cross was a well-known symbol of humiliation and death. Crucifixion was used by Rome as a statement. It was more than a brutal execution. It was an act of oppression over conquered people like the Jews, and a deterrent to any would-be challengers to their authority. The cross was a public display of a rebel’s death and the empire’s power.

In contrast to the typical rabbi whose disciples would take up his yoke (like we saw last week in Matthew 11:29-30), Jesus invited everyone to take up His cross. This was a public declaration of dying to one’s former life of rebellious sin and declaring allegiance to God’s Kingdom of righteousness.

**LOOK IN | APPLY GOD’S WORD TO YOUR LIFE**

- In what ways does Jesus’ invitation challenge you today?

  **Leader Note:** This is a great question to jump right into personal application each week of this series. Group discussion and personal devotion are not an abstract study. The Spirit invites us to follow Jesus and to fearlessly change the world.

- Are you holding anything back from Jesus? Where do you struggle to deny yourself? What does it look like to “take up the cross”?

  **Leader Note:** Help people recognize the following nuance of “denying” themselves:

  Self-denial is not to deny one’s personality, to die as a martyr, or to deny “things” (as in asceticism). Rather it is the denial of “self,” turning away from the idolatry of self-centeredness and every attempt to orient one’s life by the dictates of self interest...“to take up one’s cross” was to demonstrate publicly one’s submission/obedience to the authority against which he had previously rebelled.³

- Looking at your life, would someone see a cross, or would they see a list of rules and teachings or a ticket into heaven?

- Are you ever ashamed of being a follower of Jesus or of the gospel? If so, why?

  **Leader Note:** These questions are intended to help people consider their own commitment

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to following Jesus before considering cultural examples. Is Jesus a good moral or religious teacher? Is He simply a way to be forgiven after death, or is He worthy of living for right now, no matter the personal cost? Is He a greater reward than any selfish ambition?

**LOOK OUT | IDENTIFY THE RELEVANCE OF GOD’S WORD IN THE WORLD**

- What examples do you see in our culture of respecting Jesus as a teacher or even identifying Him as the Savior, but not denying oneself or carrying His cross?

  **Leader Note:** Without becoming gossipy or judgmental, this is an important question to raise awareness and discernment of “cultural Christianity” that is merely religious activity or identification in name only without meaningful life change. It’s also important to recognize the dangers of Christian language or ideas being misused in ways contrary to Jesus and the gospel such as racial, political, or social extremism.

- In what ways does our culture resist the gospel? Where is there pressure to feel ashamed of the gospel?

- What would it look like to boldly yet humbly (like the public display of a cross) live out our devotion to Christ alone instead of seeking our own kingdoms?

  **Leader Note:** Consider closing your time by reading Paul’s words in Philippians 1:21, where he echoes Jesus’ invitation from today’s text. Wrap up with a reflective mood, not one of guilt but of introspection. Are we living for Christ? Do we seek to gain abundant and eternal life in Him? Is even death considered gain in light of “the glory of his Father” (Mark 8:38)?

- Close each time together as a group with prayer and the following reminders:

  » Any other related points from the weekend message
  
  » Updates on previous weeks’ prayer requests
  
  » New prayer requests

  » Prayer

  » Worship by playing or sharing this week’s song from the Mariners Current Series [Spotify Playlist](https://open.spotify.com/playlist).
Store Treasures

Week 4

Group Discussion Guide for: RED LETTER INVITATIONS

Matthew 6:19–24

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MAIN POINT

Some view Jesus’ commands as intrusive and bothersome to our lives in this world. But His command to lay up treasures in the next world is a gracious and glorious invitation to join Him in building His kingdom and to invest in where we will spend eternity.

RHYTHM REMINDER: This week will provide a natural opportunity to remind group members of the spiritual rhythm of SACRIFICAL GENEROSITY. Watch for this icon near the end of the lesson.

LEAN IN | BREAK THE ICE

• What is something that you have collected, either currently or in the past? What sparked your interest in collecting that sort of thing? Did you hope that the collection would have intrinsic value someday, or was it simply a passionate interest?

• Has a collection ever grown out of control or become an unhealthy obsession?

Leader Note: A&E’s infamous TV series Hoarders just began Season 12. The show highlights and offers help to people with disorders that literally consume their lives with overwhelming amounts of material possessions. The tragedy is that they know they need help, but something inside of them can’t bring themselves to let go of their stuff.
Collecting personal treasures is a natural thing. Though our affections can become unhealthy obsessions, Jesus spoke to the human desire to store up things we value.

LOOK DOWN | LOOK AT GOD’S WORD

• Read Matthew 6:19–24. Choose someone to read the passages out loud.

19 “Don’t store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don’t break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. So if the light within you is darkness, how deep is that darkness!

24 “No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. 1

• What is Jesus’ invitation?

• How does this text build upon the themes of previous weeks?

Leader Note: In week 3 of this series, Jesus’ invitation was to deny ourselves and take up the cross (see Mark 8:34). In week 2, Jesus’ invitation was to follow Him without excuses for other priorities. This week, Jesus invites listeners to clarify that we cannot live for two different treasures and masters. Whatever has our affection, has our hearts’ attention. This is another point of clarification regarding personal priorities and values. Jesus invites people to make Him and His kingdom their greatest treasure. In this text, Jesus provides some common-sense rationale to the invitation. Here, Jesus is specific about the temptation to love financial and material comforts over God.

• Reread verses 22–23 with emptiness and a lack of substance, meaning, or truth in mind when Jesus mentions “darkness.” How does this help you understand these verses in their context?

Leader Note: While it may feel like an unrelated tangent in the conversation, Jesus is using another illustration to echo the point about our hearts. This time He refers to our eyes as symbolic of what we desire and pursue. If our focus is on empty, meaningless, and untrue things, then we’re doomed to wreck our lives. On the other hand, if we focus on what is true and good, then we’ll see life clearly.

• Why would Jesus teach on this topic at so many different times and in so many different ways? What does that reveal about His invitation?

Leader Note: If this topic is beginning to feel redundant to group members, emphasize the fact that Jesus knows our hearts. This is a core reality for all of human life and getting a right perspective on it is essential to the Christian life of following Jesus. In the words of the famous hymn, “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing”:

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here’s my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.

LOOK IN | APPLY GOD’S WORD TO YOUR LIFE

• What reasons does Jesus provide for His argument? Why might He appeal to our minds through common sense when speaking about our hearts?

Leader Note: This question will set up the next exercise for group members. Help them recognize that our hearts and minds can work together or can work against each other. This is clearly seen in the Apostle Paul’s letter to Romans when he writes:

For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate. Romans 7:15

• We need to align our heads and our hearts. Even the past several weeks have included stories of people acknowledging something true or good about Jesus with their words or minds, but Jesus is constantly inviting us to a wholehearted relationship.

• Thinking back over the past couple of weeks, what did you identify as an area that you are holding back from God, not denying yourself, making excuses for, or prioritizing over following Christ wholeheartedly?
• On a scale of 1–10 (1 = doing much worse, 5 = no change, 10 = doing much better), how much change have you experienced related to those things since sharing them?

  » What might contribute to your change or lack of change?
  » What lies might you believe about that thing or part of your life (darkness)?
  » What common sense truth can you remind yourself about the greater treasure of Christ and His kingdom (light)?

• Reread verse 24. Specifically related to wealth and material comforts, where is God alerting you to misplaced “treasure” on Earth instead of in Heaven?

• What can you do to align your head and heart, putting into practice what you know to be true about treasuring Christ and His kingdom?

**Leader Note:** As with previous weeks, the point here is not guilt or obligation, but self-reflection and joy. Jesus invites us into something of greater value, satisfaction, and joy than any temporary thing in this world. These questions will set up the concluding points of discussion that follow related to putting into practice what we know to be true.

**LOOK OUT | IDENTIFY THE RELEVANCE OF GOD’S WORD IN THE WORLD**

- How would life look differently if we were storing up treasures in Heaven?

**Sacrificial Generosity**

- What earthly needs can we meet in our community? The world? Our church?

- When have you experienced the joy and surpassing value of “treasure in heaven” by giving sacrificially to bless someone else or meet a temporary earthly need?

- Close each time together as a group with prayer and the following reminders:

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  » New prayer requests
  » Prayer
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Love Me

Week 5

Group Discussion Guide for: RED LETTER INVITATIONS

Matthew 22:34–40

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RHYTHM REMINDER: This week will provide a natural opportunity to remind group members of the spiritual rhythm of SACRIFICIAL GENEROSITY. Watch for this icon near the end of the lesson.

MAIN POINT

When Jesus was asked to rank the commandments that the religious leaders debated, He summed up the entire law with one simple command: Love me with all that you are. The Christian faith is a love relationship with our Holy God. He loves us and He invites us to love Him in return. As we love Him more, we start to love others as He does.

LEAN IN | BREAK THE ICE

• What did you do to celebrate Mother’s Day?

• In what ways has your mother demonstrated her love for you? What things were most meaningful? What things may seem insignificant but were a clear act of love?

Leader Note: For example, looking back I realize that washing my dirty socks from soccer practice or taking me to dance recitals was an act of love. Perhaps she always defaulted to your favorite flavor of ice cream instead of her favorite dessert.
• Do you express your love in the same way you like to be shown love? What sorts of things are most meaningful to you?

**Leader Note:** Group members may or may not be familiar with their personality types, love languages, etc. The point here is simply to think more deeply about ways that we express and recognize love as an action, not just a feeling.

• In today’s text, Jesus invites us to consider the nature of love.

**LOOK DOWN | LOOK AT GOD’S WORD**

Read Matthew 22:34–40. Choose someone to read the passages out loud.

34 When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they came together. 35 And one of them, an expert in the law, asked a question to test him: 36 “Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?”

37 He said to him, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind., 38 This is the greatest and most important command. 39 The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself., 40 All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.” ¹

• What is Jesus’ invitation?

• What is meant by “heart, soul, and mind” in the first command? Why is the phrase “with all your” significant with each way to express love?

• What is meant by loving our neighbors as ourselves?

**Leader Note:** Jesus is commanding people to love God and one another completely and holistically. In what has come to be known as “The Golden Rule”, Jesus clarified the command to His followers with how to love others as they would love themselves:

Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. **Matthew 7:12**

• How does loving God and loving others summarize the entire Christian life?

**Leader Note:** Have group members name specific commands from Scripture to illustrate how everything ultimately falls into those two broad categories of loving God and loving our neighbors. Remind everyone of the 10 Commandments and how roughly the first half deal with learning how to love God and the second half loving our neighbors.

• A great rhetorical question to drive this point home is: What sin could you commit without violating at least one of those two rules: love God completely and love your neighbors completely?

• How is this text another example of someone's head and heart being out of sync with each other?

**Leader Note:** Verse 35 describes the person talking to Jesus as “an expert in the law” meaning that he was full of knowledge about Scripture and a moral lifestyle, but it also says the motive for his question was “to test” Jesus. He was not looking to follow Jesus in faith. The expert was looking to prove his own status as a recognized authority while simultaneously trapping or discrediting Jesus.

**LOOK IN | APPLY GOD’S WORD TO YOUR LIFE**

• What is God revealing to you about love?

• In what ways does Jesus’ invitation challenge you today?

• Are you most likely to express your love for God through your heart, mind, or soul? Which expressions of love do you naturally gravitate toward:
  » studying, reading, teaching, and other cognitive expressions?
  » journaling, praying, singing, and other emotive expressions?
  » serving, volunteering, helping, giving, and other active expressions?

• How can you be intentional to become more holistic in the way you relate to God?

• What expressions of love do you naturally gravitate toward in relating to others?
• Use similar categories of mental, emotional, and practical expressions of love.
  » conversation, education, mentoring in a skill, etc.
  » kindness, listening, counsel, etc.
  » help, hospitality, giving, etc.

• What is something that is meaningful to you that you could do to love your neighbor as yourself? What is something that you don’t personally care about, but you know it would be meaningful to someone else in particular?

• How can you be intentional to become more holistic in the way you relate to others?

**Leader Note:** These categories are intended to provide a helpful framework to think holistically, not a rigid checklist. Take time to be creative and as specific as possible. If meeting through video chat, try sharing your screen like a whiteboard to create a list of numerous ideas generated by your group. If meeting in person, you can use paper, markerboards, or type on a laptop or tablet that casts the screen to a TV.

**LOOK OUT | IDENTIFY THE RELEVANCE OF GOD’S WORD IN THE WORLD**

• How can you take some of the ideas generated as a group and love somebody this week?

• As a group, how can we love our literal neighbors by serving the community?

**RHYTHM REMINDER:** This week will provide a natural opportunity to remind group members of the spiritual rhythm of SERVE THE COMMUNITY. If you don’t have time in today’s discussion, you’ll have another opportunity to highlight this rhythm in an upcoming discussion on Jesus’ invitation to “go.”

**Leader Note:** Check out opportunities to volunteer with a ministry team at one of our locations or to get involved with a local outreach. If you already volunteer or serve together, take a few minutes to share stories about how you’ve seen Christ at work in and through those experiences. Invite other group members who may not currently volunteer or serve to join you.
• Close each time together as a group with prayer and the following reminders:

  » Any other related points from the weekend message
  » Updates on previous weeks’ prayer requests
  » New prayer requests
  » Prayer

  » Worship by playing or sharing this week’s song from the Mariners Current Series Spotify Playlist.
Go

Week 6

Group Discussion Guide for: RED LETTER INVITATIONS

Mark 5:1–20, Matthew 28:18–20

PREPARE

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MAIN POINT

After Jesus healed a man who had been destroyed by evil, by an army of demons, Jesus told him to “Go home and tell people what the Lord has done.” He has invited us to do the same. As Jesus met with His disciples before ascending back into heaven, He invited them to “go and make disciples of all nations.”

RHYTHM REMINDER: This week will provide a natural opportunity to remind group members of the spiritual rhythm of SHARE YOUR STORY. Watch for this icon near the end of the lesson.

LEAN IN | BREAK THE ICE

• What’s something about you that’s true, but people would assume is not real?

  Leader Note: Perhaps you’ve seen questions like this on social media. Answers can involve any random fact, humorous, fortunate, tragic, strange, celebrity encounters, hidden talents, or stories of being in the right or wrong place at the right or wrong time.

• Today’s text focuses on one of the final things Jesus invited His disciples to experience and to do. They had witnessed the most incredible reality in human history. Now what?
LooK doWn | LOOK AT GOD’S WORD


1 They came to the other side of the sea, to the region of the Gerasenes. 2 As soon as he got out of the boat, a man with an unclean spirit came out of the tombs and met him. 3 He lived in the tombs, and no one was able to restrain him anymore—not even with a chain—4 because he often had been bound with shackles and chains, but had torn the chains apart and smashed the shackles. No one was strong enough to subdue him. 5 Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains, he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones.

6 When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and knelt down before him. 7 And he cried out with a loud voice, “What do you have to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you before God, don’t torment me!” 8 For he had told him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!”

9 “What is your name?” he asked him.

“My name is Legion,” he answered him, “because we are many.” 10 And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the region.

11 A large herd of pigs was there, feeding on the hillside. 12 The demons begged him, “Send us to the pigs, so that we may enter them.” 13 So he gave them permission, and the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs. The herd of about two thousand rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned there.

14 The men who tended them ran off and reported it in the town and the countryside, and people went to see what had happened. 15 They came to Jesus and saw the man who had been demon-possessed, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. 16 Those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and told about the pigs. 17 Then they began to beg him to leave their region.

18 As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged him earnestly that he might remain with him. 19 Jesus did not let him but told him, “Go home to your own people, and report to them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you.” 20 So he went out and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how
much Jesus had done for him, and they were all amazed. ¹ Mark 5:1-20

18 Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” ² Matthew 28:18-20

• In Mark 5:1-10, what immediately stands out to you about the man? About the demons?

  Leader Note: Once again, Jesus is showing mercy to a person who was completely outside of any cultural or religious box. Even by today’s standards, this would be a scary and dangerous person who was clearly not in his right mind. Add the fact that he was probably a Gentile living among dead bodies with open wounds, and he was the ultimate “unclean” person and no Jew should be anywhere near him, especially a Rabbi.

• The demons’ response to Jesus is common in the gospels, recognizing His true identity and authority. If group members have been following along with the Annual Read, we spent a couple of weeks just before Easter studying Job and the mysterious nature of good and evil being under the ultimate authority of God. We’ll come back to this point in the next section for personal application.

• Why would the people be “afraid” and beg Jesus to leave rather than celebrate the man’s life-changing good news (see Mark 5:14-17)?

  Leader Note: There’s a contrast between the demons who “begged him earnestly not to send them out of the region” (verse 10) and the people who “began to beg him to leave their region” (verse 17). The demons had a better understanding of Jesus’ identity and authority than the townspeople.

• It’s possible that people were afraid of what they couldn’t explain. The man had been well-known for his demonic affliction. Could Jesus, this man, and the whole situation be trusted or was it the beginning of something worse? Related to that possibility, is the fact that this man’s freedom came at the expense of others’ property when the demons left him and destroyed a herd of pigs. People could have been concerned about what Jesus would cost them and didn’t want any more disruptions to their status quo.

• How do the stories relate of the demonic in Mark 5 and the disciples in Matthew 28? What is Jesus’ invitation?

LOOK IN | APPLY GOD’S WORD TO YOUR LIFE

• What does the demons’ example in Mark’s Gospel reveal about our personal relationship with Jesus?

Leader Note: The demons desperately acknowledge Jesus’ identity and beg for mercy in His rightful authority. This reveals an important fact about our relationship to Jesus and life in His kingdom. Believing that Jesus is real and powerful is not the same as loving Him with your life. Too often in our culture, we misunderstand Christianity to simply be an acknowledgement of some truths about Jesus and wanting to avoid punishment for sin. In reality, as we’ve seen throughout this series, head knowledge is not enough. Our hearts must be aligned so that we live out our faith. As James wrote:

I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one. Good! Even the demons believe—and they shudder. James 2:18–19

• In what ways does Jesus’ invitation challenge you today?

• In what ways have you experienced the life-changing power of Jesus?

Share Your Story

Leader Note: Take this opportunity to practice articulating things that the Lord has done in your life. Encourage everyone to share a complete thought in sentence or short paragraph form. In other words, avoid answers that are simply a word or phrase. The goal is to get comfortable sharing our stories.

Also, if your group didn’t get to the rhythm of “serve your community” recently, but you feel that this would be a good opportunity to highlight stories and opportunities to volunteer at your Mariners location, getting involved in local outreach, or “sharing your story” from global outreach experiences, feel free to do what’s best for your group.
• Where can you share the good news of Jesus in your regular schedule?

• How might you adjust your routine to be even more intentional about spreading God’s love?

  **Leader Note:** Take time to think through specific opportunities to share your stories.

**LOOK OUT | IDENTIFY THE RELEVANCE OF GOD’S WORD IN THE WORLD**

• Reread Mark 5:1 and Matthew 28:19. What does Jesus’ model and teach about our mission of disciple making.

  **Leader Note:** The gospel is for “all nations.” Jesus constantly made intentional effort to meet and love people outside of normal religious, cultural, and geographic boundaries.

• Why are personal stories of life change and teaching people to observe everything Jesus commanded both important parts of disciple making?

• In what ways might Jesus’ invitation to “go” and make disciples through our stories and Jesus’ teaching upset the status quo? Why might some people even want nothing to do with the life-changing power of Jesus in and through our lives?

• Close each time together as a group with prayer and the following reminders:

  » Any other related points from the weekend message

  » Updates on previous weeks’ prayer requests

  » New prayer requests

  » Prayer

  » Worship by playing or sharing this week’s song from the Mariners Current Series Spotify Playlist.
Love Your Enemies

Week 7

Group Discussion Guide for: RED LETTER INVITATIONS


PREPARE

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MAIN POINT

The command to love our enemies is deeply countercultural, but it is an invitation to know Him more as He is the One who has loved us first and all of us have been His enemies. The more we understand His mercy, the more we offer it to others, including our enemies.

RHYTHM REMINDER: This week will provide a natural opportunity to remind group members of the spiritual rhythm of REPENTANCE. Watch for this icon near the end of the lesson.

LEAN IN | BREAK THE ICE

• Who is the greatest villain of all time? Why?

Leader Note: Be prepared to share an image or an appropriate video clip for your selection of the greatest villain of all time. The character can be from any genre (TV, movie, stage, literature).

• While we may love a good villain in works of fiction, real life is a different story. Some of us may have experienced a personal enemy, a true villain of sorts. Others of us typically consider the term villain or enemy as something more abstract or distant. Today we’ll see what Jesus has to say about our enemies and the invitation He offers.
33

LOOK DOWN | LOOK AT GOD’S WORD

• Read Luke 6:27–36. Choose someone to read the passages out loud.

27 “But I say to you who listen: Love your enemies, do what is good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If anyone hits you on the cheek, offer the other also. And if anyone takes away your coat, don’t hold back your shirt either. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and from someone who takes your things, don’t ask for them back. 31 Just as you want others to do for you, do the same for them. 32 If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 If you do what is good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do what is good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High. For he is gracious to the ungrateful and evil. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. 1

• What is Jesus’ invitation?

• What practical examples of loving your enemies does Jesus provide in verses 27–31?

Leader Note: The command to love your enemies is followed by three other explicit commands and three practical examples, for a total of seven related instructions:

» (1) Love your enemies.
» (2) Do good to those who hate you.
» (3) Bless those who curse you.
» (4) Pray for those who mistreat you.
» (5) Do not retaliate (verse 29a).
» (6) Give freely (verses 29b–30).
» (7) Treat others the way you want to be treated (verse 31). 2

In context, Jesus is in the middle of a sermon that begins with describing our relationship with God and now moves into our relationships with others. He jumps right into the deep end with the most difficult people to love, those who mistreat us. It was culturally acceptable to not love these kinds of “neighbors,” yet Jesus presented a countercultural teaching and example through His life.

The blow on the right cheek was the most grievous insult in the ancient Near East. The clothing in the verse refers to the outer and inner cloak, respectively; the poorest of people (like the average peasant in Egypt) might have only one of each; thus here Jesus refers, perhaps in hyperbolic images, to absolute nonresistance on one’s own behalf.3

• What point is Jesus making by repeating the phrase “what credit is that to you” three times in verses 32–34?

**Leader Note:** Loving your enemies was just as radical (if not more so) at the time than it is today. When Jesus shifts away from describing how to treat “enemies” to address “sinners” in general, He is clarifying that this kind of love is radically distinct and requires the life-changing power of God’s Spirit working in and through us, since it’s not natural.

### LOOK IN | APPLY GOD’S WORD TO YOUR LIFE

• Reread verse 36. How have you experienced the mercy of God?

• With whom do you need God’s help to love? How can God’s mercy toward you change your attitude and actions toward this person/these people?

**Leader Note:** If time permits, have someone read Jesus’ parable offered to answer Peter’s question about forgiveness toward those who sin against us in Matthew 18:21-35. In summary, it’s the height of arrogance and entitlement to accept mercy and forgiveness from God yet angrily demand judgment and withhold mercy from others. Are we greater than God? Is sin against us more unforgiveable than sin against God?

• When has someone’s undeserved generosity, lack of retaliation, or forgiveness changed your relationship with them or maybe changed your life?

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• In what ways does Jesus’ invitation challenge you today?

• Is there a certain person or even an entire group of people that you view as an enemy? How does viewing them through that label make it harder to view them as a human created in God’s image and in need of the gospel’s life-changing mercy?

**Leader Note:** Help people consider labels that they put on people, objectifying or villainizing them. Do they hold prejudices against people based on political, social, economic, religious, moral, ethnic, sexual, or other identifications or behaviors?

• Perhaps a specific person has been annoying and unkind, or even hateful, negligent, manipulative, or abusive. While those wounds may take time and even professional help to heal (some may always leave a scar) even those people (especially those people) need the supernatural work of the Spirit to work in our hearts and theirs for lifechange and freedom to live as sons and daughters of our merciful heavenly Father.

• Do you need to repent of any attitudes or actions toward others?

![Lock Icon]

**Repentance**

**Leader Note:** Although we may not often think of unforgiveness as a stronghold, anyone who has ever carried pain, especially pain that has grown to despair or bitterness, knows how liberating it can be to forgive someone that we consider an “enemy.” This is obviously a delicate topic and the desire is not to force a discussion or decision about trauma that a person is not ready or willing to discuss in the group setting. We never want to dismiss or diminish the seriousness and pain of ways that people have been sinned against. The purpose here is to simply provide space for anyone to share ways that the Spirit is working in their hearts.

While someone may have become an enemy out of no fault of our own, sometimes there is something that we need to repent of. Even if someone else was 99% wrong in a circumstance, we can confess and repent of our 1%. If we’re honest, this is rarely the case that someone else is 100% or 99% in the wrong, but there are tragic or hateful circumstances where someone else is overwhelmingly or entirely in the wrong. In such a scenario where someone became an “enemy” by acting entirely or overwhelmingly sinfully toward us, Jesus still taught and modeled loving our enemies. Certain relationships may never be safe or need to be restored to “normal,” forgiving someone may not mean a removal of consequences or
boundaries, but we choose whether or not to view and treat them as an enemy or someone needing the life-changing power of Jesus. Be sure to check out the Mariners Life Group Leader Podcast for a conversation about this rhythm in this week’s discussion in particular.

**LOOK OUT | IDENTIFY THE RELEVANCE OF GOD’S WORD IN THE WORLD**

- How would our news feeds change if people started loving their enemies instead of retaliating, demanding, demonizing, and blaming others?

**Leader Note:** Point out that the only way to ever break cycles of abuse, violence, hatred, racism, greed, exploitation, etc. is to “turn the other cheek” and be the one who refuses to perpetuate the problem by justifying our actions to get even or take justice into our own hands. An old saying is true: bitterness, hatred, unforgiveness... “is like drinking poison and hoping the other person will die.” Nobody wins in that scenario. We hurt ourselves and perpetuate the problem. The love of Christ in and through us is the only way to freedom and abundant life.

- Can the world look to our examples to see the distinct, supernatural, love of Jesus?

- Close each time together as a group with prayer and the following reminders:
  - Any other related points from the weekend message
  - Updates on previous weeks’ prayer requests
  - New prayer requests
  - Prayer
  - Worship by playing or sharing this week’s song from the Mariners Current Series [Spotify Playlist](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3Q5zvQ5zvQ5zvQ5zvQ5).
Take and Eat

Week 8

Group Discussion Guide for: RED LETTER INVITATIONS

Matthew 26:17–30

PREPARE

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**RHYTHM REMINDER:** This week will provide a natural opportunity to remind group members of the spiritual rhythm of REPENTANCE. Watch for this icon near the end of the lesson.

Repentance

MAIN POINT

Communion is deeply rooted in the beauty and power of the Passover—where God’s people would remember their liberation from Egyptian captivity. Our meal is better as we remember our liberation from the captivity of our sin.

LEAN IN | BREAK THE ICE

- What food, drink, or snack brings back a memory or has sentimental value?

  **Leader Note:** If meeting in person, consider providing a sample of a personal favorite food, drink, or snack and share what experience or relationship is associated with it in your memory. Even if the flavor isn’t anything unique, what makes it special to you?

- Today we’ll discuss Jesus’ invitation to reinterpret a symbolic meal that had been shared annually for generations and continues to be celebrated in both the old and new ways.
• Read Matthew 26:17–30. Choose someone to read the passages out loud.

17 On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?”

18 “Go into the city to a certain man,” he said, “and tell him, ‘The Teacher says: My time is near; I am celebrating the Passover at your place with my disciples.’” 19 So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover. 20 When evening came, he was reclining at the table with the Twelve. 21 While they were eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.”

22 Deeply distressed, each one began to say to him, “Surely not I, Lord?”

23 He replied, “The one who dipped his hand with me in the bowl—he will betray me. 24 The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for him if he had not been born.”

25 Judas, his betrayer, replied, “Surely not I, Rabbi?”

“You have said it,” he told him.

26 As they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take and eat it; this is my body.” 27 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks, he gave it to them and said, “Drink from it, all of you. 28 For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 But I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” 30 After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

• What is Jesus’ invitation?

• What was the old and new significance of the bread Jesus shared with His disciples?

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Leader Note: Verse 17 states that Jesus and His disciples were gathering to observe Passover “on the first day of Unleavened Bread.” This feast was part of a weeklong celebration. This meal had been celebrated for generations, as instructed by God, as a way for the Jewish people to remember how the Lord freed them from slavery in Egypt and saved them in faithfulness to His own promise to His chosen people. God had instructed the Hebrew people to bake unleavened bread, meaning it would prepare quickly since it didn’t need time to rise while baking, and it would be better for traveling since it was more compact to carry and less prone to spoiling over time. Unleavened bread became symbolic of God’s act of salvation and personal readiness to follow Him.

Every part of the Passover meal was symbolic, telling part of the Exodus story and God’s great salvation of His people. The greatest part of the meal was the Passover lamb. Originally, the blood of the lamb was spread on the wooden doorposts to identify God’s people. Every household without the blood of the lamb experienced judgment and death. Every household marked with the blood of the lamb was “passed over” and experienced salvation instead of judgment. Jesus was about to become the ultimate Passover Lamb and anyone who identified with Him on the cross would be saved (see and consider reading Exodus 12:1–28).

Once Jesus and His disciples had gathered for the Passover meal, verse 26 records Jesus inviting them to “take and eat; this is my body.” This was a prophetic foreshadowing of Jesus’ body being broken through death on the cross, making new life in the Kingdom of God possible for those who receive His sacrifice as a blessing on their behalf. These words are a statement of divinity and of a new salvation for God’s people who are willing to follow Him. Whereas the Passover had been explicitly about the Lord’s salvation from physical slavery to Egypt, Jesus was now saying that it was about His salvation from spiritual slavery to sin (see Exodus 12:26–27).

LOOK IN | APPLY GOD’S WORD TO YOUR LIFE

• In what ways does Jesus’ invitation challenge you today?

• What are you most grateful for when you remember what Jesus has done for you?

Leader Note: If you did not have time during the previous discussion on Jesus’ invitation to “go,” or you would simply benefit from more time, this is another great opportunity to practice this rhythm of sharing your story. Specifically, how can we share the story of salvation and freedom from sin through the life-changing work of Jesus on the cross?

• In what ways might you be like Judas, taking for granted our relationship with Jesus and trying to deny our hypocrisy?
**Leader Note:** This is an opportunity for the rhythm of REPENTANCE. We had an opportunity to practice this rhythm in light of sinful attitudes or actions toward our “enemies” previously. This week, we want to really examine our hearts and our love for Jesus as Savior and Lord—our Passover Lamb, whose body was broken and blood poured out for us so that we might experience the freedom and joy of new life. (Next week, all of this heart searching and repentance will lead to celebration and joyful worship.)

- There may be “big” sins in our lives, like Judas in hindsight, that are glaringly obvious and in the way of loving Jesus. There may also be the less obvious and “small” ways that we justify attitudes and actions that aren’t Christlike while still claiming fellowship with Him and one another as His followers.

- Read Paul’s warning in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Without making this a scare tactic, emphasize the holiness and the sobering honesty, confession, and repentance the act of communion and remembering Jesus’ sacrificial death on our behalf should have on us.

**LOOK OUT | IDENTIFY THE RELEVANCE OF GOD’S WORD IN THE WORLD**

- Does anyone have any updates related to people you’ve been praying for, sharing your story with, or trying to better love like Jesus first loved us?

  **Leader Note:** If your group is open to the idea of singing together or prayerfully reflecting while music is played, reread Matthew 26:30 and play this week’s song from the Mariners Current Series [Spotify Playlist](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/yourplaylist).

- Close each time together as a group with prayer and the following reminders:
  - Any other related points from the weekend message
  - Updates on previous weeks’ prayer requests
  - New prayer requests
  - Prayer
Rejoice and Leap for Joy!

Week 9

Group Discussion Guide for: RED LETTER INVITATIONS


PREPARE

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MAIN POINT

Jesus invites us to rejoice in Him as the ultimate source of our joy. Only when we treasure Him above all else are we really living. He is the ultimate treasure.

RHYTHM REMINDER: This week will provide a natural opportunity to remind group members of the spiritual rhythm of WORSHIP / CELEBRATION. Watch for this icon near the end of the lesson.

Worship

LEAN IN | BREAK THE ICE

• What is your go-to GIF to express happiness and celebration?

Leader Note: If meeting virtually, have people share them in a group chat or group text. If meeting in person, have everyone share them in a group text or simply show them. Ideally, a group text allows everyone to not only enjoy the GIFs personally and also to have a group thread for future communication. Have everyone explain why their chosen GIF is a personal favorite.

In the final week of this series, we'll consider joy and how we express it.
LOOK DOWN | LOOK AT GOD’S WORD


44 “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure, buried in a field, that a man found and reburied. Then in his joy he goes and sells everything he has and buys that field.

45 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. 46 When he found one priceless pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it. ¹

Matthew 13:44–46

22 Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you, insult you, and slander your name as evil because of the Son of Man.

23 “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy. Take note—your reward is great in heaven, for this is the way their ancestors used to treat the prophets. ²


17 The seventy-two, returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.”

18 He said to them, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like lightning. 19 Look, I have given you the authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy; nothing at all will harm you. 20 However, don’t rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” ³


• What is Jesus’ invitation?

• In Matthew 13:44–46, what does Jesus’ imagery of a treasure and pearls represent?

Leader Note: This is a great text to start with, because Jesus is describing our initial and ongoing response to the Kingdom of God. In other words, our response to the gospel should be one of joy that leads us to gladly “give up” everything in order to experience the blessing of abundant and eternal life with Christ. Remind people of weeks 2-4 in our Red Letter Invitations series:

“If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me and the gospel will save it. For what does it benefit someone to gain the whole world and yet lose his life?” Mark 8:34–36

• Jesus told him, “Foxes have dens, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” Then he said to another, “Follow me.” Luke 9:58–59

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:21

• In Luke 6:22–23, how can a person find joy in persecution or suffering?

**Leader Note:** Building on the first point of salvation and following Jesus with no exceptions or excuses, we are reminded that this joyful exchange of our self-centered lives for His kingdom-focused life does not guarantee an easy, comfortable, and always happy life. Biblical history shows that the prophets experienced rejection and hardship. And so did Jesus Himself. Faithfulness to God has never been easy, but it’s always been worthy and rewarding. Jesus endured suffering and promised to be with us as we go, knowing that He has ultimate authority that even the demons recognize and obey.

Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go, therefore, and make disciples... And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. Matthew 28:18–20

Dear friends, don’t be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you, as if something unusual were happening to you. Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed. If you are ridiculed for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or a meddler. But if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God in having that name. 1 Peter 4:12–16

Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing. James 1:2–4

• In Luke 10:17–20, what is Jesus’ reminder about our mission to follow Him and fearlessly change the world?
Leader Note: As exciting and literally world changing as it is to be even a small part in God’s mission to spread the gospel for the redemption of all creation, it’s ultimately not about what we get to do or to see. Kingdom life is not about us. It’s about Jesus. Our joy is in our relationship with Christ now and forever, not in our own power or ability.

LOOK IN | APPLY GOD’S WORD TO YOUR LIFE

• In what ways does Jesus’ invitation challenge you today?

• What is it about the Lord that gives you the most joy? How has that joy carried you through hard times?

Worship

Leader Note: Consider having a time of “spontaneous” praise. It may help the mood to incorporate music to this rhythm of worship and celebration. (See the playlist link below or do this time of worship at the end instead and simply answer the question here.) Have people call out words or phrases describing God and ways they’ve experienced His goodness. Encourage people to be as loud and expressive as they’re comfortable, maybe even a little more than they’re comfortable for a worthy expression of their joy. Also encourage them to speak as many words, phrases, or names for God as they’d like. There is no limit on our joy, celebration, and worship!

• Where are you experiencing hardship as a Christian for the sake of Jesus’ name?

Leader Note: Emphasize hardships directly related to suffering for following Jesus, not just general hardship. General hardships and “trials of various kinds” as James described are no less real or painful, but Jesus specifically described joy in the midst of suffering directly related to our love and devotion to Him. Because we are willing to trade everything for the treasure of being in a relationship with Him, we can expect others to ridicule that seemingly foolish, illogical, and irresponsible behavior.

• What has been the most meaningful way that you’ve experienced growth in your relationship with Christ through this series?
LOOK OUT | IDENTIFY THE RELEVANCE OF GOD’S WORD IN THE WORLD

• How can our joy, celebration, and worship be a testimony to the incomparable value of life with Jesus and His Kingdom? How is that testimony especially clear when we suffer for His name?

Leader Note: Once again, if your group is open to the idea of singing together or prayerfully reflecting on Jesus’ invitation to them while music plays, consider ending your time on a high note (pun intended). Play the final song in the Mariners Current Series Spotify Playlist.

• Close each time together as a group with prayer and the following reminders:

  » Any other related points from the weekend message
  » Updates on previous weeks’ prayer requests
  » New prayer requests
  » Prayer