



GROUP LEADERS' GUIDEBOOK



THE *Episcopal* CHURCH 

Centered: A Christian Discipleship Experience

Authors

Miriam McKenney
Way of Love Consultant

Jerusalem Greer
Staff Officer for Evangelism

The Rev. Canon Stephanie Spellers
Canon to the Presiding Bishop for Evangelism, Reconciliation and Creation

With contributions from: (in alphabetical order)

The Rev. Canon Lydia Bucklin
The Very Rev. Kim Coleman
The Rev. Canon Anthony Guillén
Andrea Farley
The Rev. Ken Howard
The Rev. Trevor Pearce
The Rev. Jolyon Trickey
The Rev. Anne-Marie Witchger
The Rev. Canon Robert Sihubwa

Learn more about Small Group ministry at <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love/building-intentional-small-groups/>. Learn more about Centered: A Christian Discipleship Experience at <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love/centered/>. Share reflections and queries by writing to wayoflove@episcopalchurch.org or on social media using #wayoflove.

Copyright © 2022 by The Episcopal Church
The Episcopal Church, 815 2nd Ave, New York, NY 10017

Scripture quotations are from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Centered: A Christian Discipleship Experience

Group Leaders' Guidebook

Welcome to Centered

Centered is a discipleship series guiding small gathered communities to get deeply rooted in love with God and one another, so that we all may grow to look, act, and love more like Jesus. The experience includes an initial three-session training for group facilitators, followed by nine core sessions during which church members, neighbors, and friends gather to share a meal and grateful prayer; a short film with related questions to discuss about God, belonging, and living a meaningful life; and support for each other in committing to intentionally follow Jesus and his Way of Love.

Like the Alpha and Via Media courses many Episcopalians and Anglicans have taken in the past, *Centered* is a faith-builder *and* a movement-builder. We hope it fuels a small group/circle movement that empowers lay people, transforms lives, and grows churches numerically and spiritually. A diverse team of disciples, spirituality leaders, and digital content creators across the Episcopal Church and in Anglican Communion developed and filmed this suite of resources and tools. We hope it will be a blessing for generations to come.

Why Discipleship and Why Small Groups and Circles?

A disciple is one who learns and patterns her life after the life of the one she follows. We who take on the name “Christian” are disciples and followers of Jesus. Again and again, Jesus invited people to step onto the road with him, promising that if they followed, it would change their lives and the world.

He offered that invitation to the first disciples, the brothers and fishermen Simon Peter and Andrew. “Follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fish for people.” In Mark 2, he sees Matthew in the tax booth. “Follow me,” he calls out, and Matthew leaps to go. They follow because they sense the fullness of God in Jesus, and they want to experience that fullness for themselves. Christians have been answering that call for millennia.

Together, we disciples make up the Jesus Movement, the ongoing community of people who follow him and grow in loving, liberating, life-giving relationships with God, each other, and the earth, all in the pattern of Jesus. For many of us, church is so busy that we don’t have a chance to focus on following, being a disciple of, and growing in the Way of Love. There are so many details to tend to and meetings to attend, and that’s before considering the non-church responsibilities tugging at our sleeves. Getting to worship at all is an accomplishment, and we expect it to be the principal site for prayer, formation, scripture reflection, fellowship, and service. But when we get quiet, a lot of us admit to a yearning, to wanting more.

Back in the 1700s, John and Charles Wesley felt the same need. The brothers were good Anglicans – neither renounced their priesthood in the Church of England – but they agreed

that growing a full life with God takes edifying worship *and* intentional spiritual practice in small groups *and* service with the least of these. They craved the “strangely warmed hearts” and spiritual vitality of the early church. The Wesley descendants became Methodist Episcopalians, later known simply as Methodists, but their wisdom and the yearning behind it never really left the Episcopal and Anglican fold.

Across the Anglican Communion today, there is an energetic movement for intentional discipleship, what Anglicans everywhere call the “Jesus-shaped life.” The Episcopal incarnation of that movement is the Way of Love, an intentional commitment to following Jesus that is centered on seven habits (turn, learn, pray, worship, bless, go, rest) that shape us into his likeness. All these efforts spring from a common, growing, and urgent realization that being Christian is about having a God-saturated life. Not just inside the building. Not just for an hour on Sunday. Not just in meetings of the whole congregation.

There is no better way to grow and practice the Jesus Way than in our homes, in our day-to-day lives, with a circle of followers who love and mentor one another as apprentices in the Jesus Way. That has been true all along. (Note the practice of the church in the Book of Acts and its numerical and spiritual growth.) While some Episcopalians and Anglicans may have misgivings about small groups, we believe it is more than worth overcoming that resistance for the opportunity waiting on the other side. So please find the language that works best for you – small group, discipleship circle, small gathered community, neighborhood group, life group, cell gathering, or something else. Whatever the name, a small group or circle provides space for prayerful support and accountability as we seek to live the Jesus Way.

Particularly in this present moment, when pandemic has stripped away many of the trappings that usually surround the church, small discipleship groups and neighborhood circles may be the most effective and accessible way for us to walk the path to love, freedom, and abundant life that Jesus laid out.

Centered was created for just this purpose: to help participants to walk that path – not alone, but together in small groups and circles. Thank you for answering the call to help facilitate this life-changing journey.

With you on the journey,
Jerusalem, Stephanie+, and Miriam

Jerusalem Greer, Staff Officer for Evangelism
The Reverend Canon Stephanie Spellers, Canon for Evangelism, Reconciliation, and Creation Care
Miriam McKenney, Discipleship Consultant

Before You Begin

If this is your first small group experience, or your first time as a small group leader, we recommend reviewing the resources found at www.episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love/building-intentional-small-groups. Start with the [Building an Intentional Small Group Ministry](#) guide, which informs and expands on this facilitator guide with helpful topics such as Small Group Ministry Roles, How to Form Groups, Setting a Timeline, Choosing Location, and Creating Group Norms.

Creating Your Small Groups/Circles

We recommend that a small group/circle be a **minimum of 6 people and no more than 12 people**. If you are beginning your journey with a group larger than 12, you may share meals and gather on your digital platform as a larger group, but make sure that participants are broken into smaller conversation groups beginning with the “check-in” portion. **Also, please ask participants to join the same small group/circle each week.** This will provide continuity and the opportunity for deep relationships to form.

Centered Session Structure

Here is a simple structure for a small group gathering, designed to create space for transformation, belonging, flourishing, and freedom. This structure can flex from 75 minutes with no meal to 90 minutes with a meal, depending on the time your group has scheduled. You can also adapt it to make room for specific content in any given session. Don't be afraid to assign a timekeeper to make sure the gathering keeps moving and no section gets rushed or cut.

1. Welcome and Prayer (3 minutes)
2. Meal (30 minutes, including check-in described below)
3. Covenant Review and Check-in (20 minutes, if no meal)
4. Content Engagement and Reflection (40-45 minutes)
5. Check-out and Prayer (5-10 minutes)
6. Make It Yours Engagement Opportunities (between sessions)

1. Meal: Gathering and Sharing

When we share a meal, we embody how all of humanity gathers across time and space, across divisions and inequities. Whether we prepare a meal as a group, do a potluck, order takeout, or bring a meal to an online meeting, coming together in this way actually places us in the footsteps of the early church.

The meal offers a time to share stories, build community, and deepen your relationship as a group. People tend to do this organically around food. If you're in person, try sitting in a circle (or loose circular shape). The circle shape encourages inclusion and lends itself well to the next parts of the session.

If you're sharing a meal, we encourage you to schedule your sessions for at least 90 minutes, with the first 30 minutes of the meeting focusing on the meal and check-in. You'll need to experiment with the time and setting based on how your group handles meals. Whether they're in person or digital, meals should be filled with joy and connection, so choose a process that brings joy and connection to your group.

- A favorite is a **potluck**, where each member brings something to share. This method fits well with the suggested schedule.
- Or, you might want to **cook together**. Members could bring the ingredients and then prepare the food together. Because cooking together takes more time, check-in can happen during the preparation and the content engagement portion of the gathering can happen during the meal.
- Your group might decide it's best to **order in**. Group members give what they can, and – with the funds collected – the host can order food for pickup or delivery. Or use an app that allows everyone to place an order for group delivery.
- Another option is **desserts or snacks only**, which works if your meeting time is not at mealtime. As with potluck or cooking together, agree on the process and details that meet everyone's expectations, and make sure no one is overly hungry.
- You can host your meeting and **share a meal over a digital platform** as needed or desired. You can create breakout rooms to encourage fellowship where folks can talk in small groups and change groups two or three times during the meal. Begin and end the meal with the whole group.

2. *Welcome and Prayer: Talking with God*

You can pray anytime: to start the meal, to center and focus the group and aid in transition, to close the session. If your group does not share a meal, start your meeting with a prayer. Your group might find different ways to incorporate prayer into your shared life.

As the group leader, you may offer or begin the prayer at the first session. If you take turns hosting meals in homes, the host can offer a prayer. The host or co-host(s) can offer prayer if you meet online. If you meet at a central location, group members can take turns bringing a prayer.

What prayer should you pray?

- You can use a prayer from the Book of Common Prayer, New Zealand Prayer Book, or your favorite source for prayers.
- You may also speak to God from your heart. God delights in your prayer and wants to hear from you, so you can use words that offer praise, thanksgiving, intercession (praying for others), requests for help and forgiveness, and the other words in your heart, which God always hears.

- You might ask a reader to share a portion of the session’s focus scripture as part of the prayer time.
- Poems and songs can also be prayers. Offer a song or invite a word of response to a poem – that’s a prayer.

3. *Check-in: Connecting with Each Other*

If you’re starting with a meal, after the first 15 minutes you can shift gears to check-in. The meal offers space to get nourished and comfortable, while check-in is the intentional time to connect more deeply with each other.

If meeting in person, gather into a shape that allows all participants to see each other’s faces. Once settled, invite people to take turns reflecting on a check-in question for a specified time. Again, a timekeeper will help you to keep things moving.

What question should you ask? You’ll find suggestions as part of each session description in this guide. Prompts could be as simple as (for the first session), “Why did you decide to join the *Centered* journey?” Or (for other sessions), “Where have you seen God moving in your life since our last session?” The check-in question may link loosely to the session scripture and topic. Especially if you provide group members with the prompt ahead of time, they can ponder and respond to it prior to the gathering and begin to become more aware of God between meetings.

Group leaders should note that, while someone else’s check-in might trigger a memory or response in others, **check-in is NOT about responding to another person’s sharing**. Check-in is about each person’s response to the question, rather than feedback, talkback, or conversation.

As the group leader, start the check-in and invite others to share by going around the circle to the left or right (if in person). Allow people to pass if they are not ready to speak, and return to them once you’ve gone around the circle. Going around the circle makes it easier to ensure that everyone is included.

Another option for sharing is Mutual Invitation, introduced by the Kaleidoscope Institute. After a person shares, she turns to another person in the group – not necessarily someone nearby – and invites that person to share. Many find that Mutual Invitation engages the whole group and spreads leadership more fully. Again, the choice is the leader’s and/or the group’s to make.

Special Note on Talking Piece: Whether in person or online, we recommend using a talking piece. A talking piece is a physical object that a person holds while speaking. A gift from oral traditions, a talking piece might be a rock, a small cross, a poem on a card, a meaningful piece of jewelry, or anything that fits comfortably in hand and invokes

peace.

A talking piece is a great tool to remind everyone in the group to listen deeply when they're not holding it. When the speaker finishes, she can pass the piece to the left or right, or place the piece in the center for someone else to pick up. Use phrases like, "I'll pick up the piece" to signal beginning to speak, and "the piece is in the center" to signal when finished speaking. Bonus: Speaking these words works with or without an actual talking piece or if you're online. It might seem awkward at first, but keep trying it out, since it's a time-honored way to encourage intentional speaking and respectful listening.

Check-in may require longer than 15 minutes the first few times your group meets, so anticipate that when you're setting your schedule. Going forward, try to model doing a check-in within the time allocated, and give gentle reminders if people exceed it. Luckily, your covenant may include an agreed-upon cue to signal someone has gone over time significantly. To help relationships grow and deepen, you may decide to do a 10-minute check-in in duos or trios, and then have a few people share for a couple of minutes with the larger group. This way, everyone feels heard and has a longer time to share. It's not a replacement for everyone hearing from each other, but it's a nice way to occasionally invite deeper sharing.

Special Note on Group Covenant: The first session should include time to craft and/or agree on a simple group covenant. A covenant or set of group norms provides the scaffolding on which each small group is built. If a meeting seems effortless, it's likely because a covenant is in place and being upheld.

Learn more about creating and setting group norms on pages 17-18 of the [Building an Intentional Small Group Ministry](#) guide. Setting group norms helps everyone in the group to start from the same place of understanding and respect. When we take the time to share guidelines that help us communicate with intention, thus rooting our group in the mutuality and love of Jesus, we are better able to move from our heads into our hearts, growing relationally and spiritually.

Why are norms so helpful? Suppose a group has established and agreed on expectations about being on time or listening to each other. In that case, it's much easier to invite a member who shows up late or takes up lots of conversational space to return to the norms. Norms also help the group to hold one another accountable without shame or personalizing. They also help to create a safe, respectful space within which people can take risks, become vulnerable, and engage in transformation.

Equipped with the covenant, facilitators should feel empowered to reference the group's norms if a behavior becomes a distraction. "The group decided that we would not be texting during the session. Is this an emergency?" or "Remember, it's our policy not to interrupt others while they are talking. Please wait for her to finish." If the group

or one member consistently breaks the norms, you may find it helpful to revisit the full covenant with the group. The group may decide to keep or change its norms.

4. *Content Engagement and Reflection: Learning and Growing Together*

Once everyone has checked in, it's time to move into the next part of your small group meeting: about 40 minutes of content engagement and reflection.

Each session of *Centered* is anchored by two short videos (A and B) that explore the topic of the session. Each topic is focused on Jesus and rooted in scripture, particularly the words and actions of Jesus.

The purpose of Video A is to set the theme for the session, while Video B will model the type of intentional conversation we hope your small group will engage in. To save time, participants may watch Video A on their own prior to the gathering. Video B is meant to be watched by the group together.

Engaging content is important and enriching. As a facilitator, you may notice the group or some members stay at the information-gathering level, where they find safety, rather than dive into deeper waters and share about what the content means to them and how it links with their own life and faith. As group leader, you are responsible for helping people step out of their comfort zones, develop trust, speak truth, and become vulnerable before one another and God. Remember that the purpose of a small group is not so much gaining knowledge as growing a meaningful, rich relationship with God and others.

Effective small groups feature open and life-giving conversations. Staying focused on the topic, group members can together ask questions that encourage emotional connection, authentic sharing, and creative thinking, in addition to engagement with the material. Good discussion questions generate a space where people get to talk about what matters to them most.

Each session description below includes some possible discussion prompts. You can develop these further and/or create your own. Remember that a good discussion question...

- Is easily understood by participants.
- Can be imaginative (“I wonder...”) or more probing (“What does it mean for your life that...?”).
- Links the participant’s life experience to the content.
- Is open-ended (“What is intriguing about this idea?”), instead of closed (“Do you like this idea?”). Avoid questions that can be answered with “yes” or “no.”
- Uses the classic news reporter prompts of who, what, when, where, and – best of all – why and how.

- Encourages story sharing.
- Brings God and faith into the conversation.
- Uses the content to help participants think deeply about what matters to them and the world.
- Is simply the question that’s just right for your group!

Sometimes, the leader will have to ask follow-up questions to keep the conversation going. Helpful follow-up prompts:

- How did that make you feel?
- Say more about that.
- What made you think of that?

Be prepared with at least four discussion questions – again, you may base them on the discussion prompts associated with each session – knowing you’ll probably only use one or two. That’s OK! The point of this time is life-giving conversation, so if that’s happening, there’s no need to shut down the conversation to get through all the questions.

5. *Check-out and Prayer: Placing Our Lives Back in God’s Hands*

Be sure you briefly confirm details of the next session as you start the check-out. You should also direct attention to the optional **Make It Yours** activities and scripture reflections to try at home between sessions. Put the information in the chat if you’re online, and email it to the group after the meeting, along with any summaries or notes from your time together.

You’ll find session-specific check-out questions and prayers in the outline and description for each session below. In general, for check-out, it works to ask people to go around and share **one word** about their experience in the session. Each person might share a word like, “thankful,” “curious,” “enlightened,” etc.

For prayer, a prayer leader might invite people to go around and briefly state what they hope others will pray for on their behalf between now and the next session. The prayer leader might then sum up these hopes as part of a closing prayer, ending with the suggested prayer for the session or another prayer. Simple prayers like this go a long way to creating a spirit of love and unity within the group.

6. **Make It Yours: At-Home Engagement Opportunities**

These simple optional activities help participants to weave scripture and wisdom from the *Centered* sessions into their daily lives.

Part I:

Living and Sharing

Jesus-Centered Life

▶ **Sessions 1-3**



Session 1: Meeting Jesus and Each Other

In the first three sessions, we practice being together while learning from the life of Jesus.

Notes:

1. *Because the group needs to spend time building group norms, this session is 15 minutes longer than the following sessions. So, if you're doing 90-minute sessions, schedule 1 hour 45 minutes; if you're doing 60-minute sessions, schedule 75 minutes.*
2. *If you need to save time, you may ask participants to watch the Session 1: Part A Video prior the first meeting, ideally the same day or the day before, so it remains fresh.*

Core Theme: Jesus – Who is Jesus Christ, why does he matter, and what's love got to do with it?

Core Scripture: John 15:9

Suggested Session 1 Schedule

1. Opening Prayer (3 minutes)

The group leader or a designated volunteer who was asked ahead of time should offer an opening prayer for the session. (If you're sharing a meal, you might start by just praying over the meal.)

2a. Welcome Option, with Meal

Introducing Centered and Crafting Small Group Covenant (35 minutes, including covenant process)

If sharing a meal, your first meal together offers a sacred yet comfortable time to start building community. You might welcome everyone and then start eating, or as you're eating, get everyone's attention for a welcome and offer gratitude for everyone's presence. In future sessions, you will figure out the rhythm of your group and adjust accordingly. Don't rush to eat, and be mindful of time while allowing space for fellowship and community-building.

After 15 minutes of mealtime – it's OK if people are still eating! – welcome the group to shift gears and come together to craft the small group covenant. If they're not already in a circle or at least in a configuration where everyone can see each other's faces, do so now. Then offer the introduction to this first session, described below under #2b.

2b. Welcome Option, no Meal

Introducing Centered and Crafting Small Group Covenant (20 minutes)

If you're not having a meal, you can follow the opening prayer by offering an introduction and welcome and crafting the small group covenant.

i. Introduction

As group leader, you should welcome everyone to the *Centered* journey. Feel free to use language such as that found on the first page of this guide to describe *Centered*.

ii. Creating a Small Group Covenant

Materials needed: whiteboard or giant Post-it Notes, pens or markers, if in person; chat box if online

If possible, place a small table in the center with a lit candle. If you're online, consider lighting a candle and placing it near you, where it is visible to participants.

After providing some introduction, guide the group in creating its covenant and introduce the talking piece.

Familiarize yourself with the description and purpose of group covenants and norms on page 8 of this guide. As you start, ask people to think of respectful ways to treat each other and ways they like others to treat them. You could present suggested group norms or let your group create them from scratch. Here are some examples:

- *Confidentiality* – What can people share outside the group? What can members share on social media? Most groups maintain a rule that the only appropriate content to share is your own, in other words, don't share group members or their stories without their permission.
- *Respect* – How will group members respect each other during their conversations? How will we listen to understand vs. listen to respond?
- *Technology* – What is the phone policy? Will phones be turned off or placed out of reach? Or is casual use acceptable?
- *Logistics* – What are the expectations about arriving on time? About providing or sharing food? About consuming alcohol during a gathering? Do members of the group have food restrictions?
- *Session Preparation* – What, if anything, are group members supposed to do to prepare before meeting each week? How is that communicated?

This set of **Respectful Communication Guidelines** from the Kaleidoscope Institute is an excellent place to begin when crafting norms as a group:

R – Take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others.
E – Use EMPATHETIC listening.
S – Be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles.
P – PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak.
E – EXAMINE your assumptions and perceptions.
C – Keep CONFIDENTIALITY. Only share your own stories.
T – TRUST ambiguity because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong.

Some groups prefer to post norms clearly in their meeting space or online chat box. Others reread the norms each week as they begin their time together, while others are more informal. Regardless of how you share your covenant, everyone needs to have the same expectations about their time together. Be sure to make the covenant accessible to all group members.

iii. Introducing the Talking Piece

As group leader, you can learn more about the talking piece on page 7. After you've agreed on the group covenant, you can introduce the talking piece and model using it. Invite people to try it out during the check-in, which is the next segment.

3. Check-in/Group Introductions (15 minutes)

Equipped with the covenant and talking piece, you're now ready to check in for the first time. Don't rush; you're building community. That said, please don't allow check-ins to go untimed or unchecked, as lack of structure makes it difficult for some people to relax into the group. It also makes it harder for you as a group leader to manage all the elements of the session, each of which is important to the journey. If you've got your group covenant in place, you can draw people back to a promise to respect each other's time and voice equally.

So take turns reflecting on the check-in question, giving each person about a minute (2 or more minutes if the group is closer to 6 or 7 people). A timekeeper can help to gently keep the group moving. Also, feel free to remind people that check-in is not about responding to another person's sharing, but for each person to offer her own personal response.

Using the talking piece, the group leader starts the check-in and invites others to share, either flowing naturally to the left or right around the circle, or using Mutual Invitation, where people invite one another. The talking piece should "move" with each speaker.

For instance, when you finish sharing, you might signal that and invite the next person

by saying: “I’m putting down the talking stone. Linda, may I invite you to share?” If Linda accepts, then she might start by saying, “I’m taking up the talking stone....” Remember: You don’t need to be in person and passing a physical talking piece to use this process.

4. Content Engagement and Reflection (45 minutes total)

Once everyone has checked in, it’s time to move into the next part of your small group meeting: content engagement. For this first session, we seek to know more about who Jesus was and what a life with Jesus looks like.

Show: Session I: Part A Video

Note: To save time, participants can watch this video on their own before the gathering.

Discuss the following questions as a group, inspired by the Session I: Part A Video. Remember: You need not cover all the questions in this relatively short time. If it would be helpful, break into pairs or trios for about 5 minutes to facilitate giving everyone a chance to speak. Then, come back to the larger group and share for the remaining 10 minutes. Use these questions or others, as appropriate:

Wondering Questions

- What does a life centered on Jesus look like?
- How would you describe the love of Jesus to someone unfamiliar with Jesus?
- What in this video resonated or challenged you?

Show: Session I: Part B Video

Watch the video as a group then discuss the following questions together:

Wondering Questions

In the second video, we hear three leaders discuss their perspectives about who is Jesus and why does his love matter.

- As you listened to their conversation, what came up for you?
- How does your answer to that same question align or diverge from their experiences?
- Why does living a life centered on Jesus matter for Christians?

5. Check-out and Closing Prayer (7 minutes)

For check-out, confirm the time and location for the next session and share the Make It Yours opportunities (if you’re online, paste them in the chat box). Then invite group members to share one word about the time you’ve spent together.

To close with prayer, invite everyone to share what they hope other group members will pray for on their behalf between now and the next session. Then the group leader

or a previously assigned volunteer can gather the prayers and offer them up. Pray spontaneously and simply to God in gratitude, or choose your favorite prayer from the Book of Common Prayer or other prayer books. Especially if you're together in the evening, consider this prayer from the Compline service:

Guide us waking, O Lord, and guard us sleeping; that awake we may watch with Christ, and asleep we may rest in peace. Amen.

6. Make It Yours: At-Home Engagement Opportunity

- Encourage your group to review and reflect with Session I in the Participant Guidebook before your next gathering.
- Ask the group to keep this question in front of them between this and the next session: "What part of your life needs to be centered or re-centered on Jesus?"



Session 2: Meeting Jesus and Sharing Life in Small Groups

Core Theme: Small groups – Jesus gathered his disciples into a group of followers. We also flourish when we follow him as part of a small, intentional community where we experience belonging to God and to each other.

Core Scripture: Mark 3:13-14

Suggested Session 2 Schedule

1. Welcome and Opening Prayer (3 minutes)

Welcome group members and offer gratitude for everyone's presence. Open with prayer.

2. Meal (30 minutes, including Covenant Review and Check-in described under #3)

Enjoy your meal together. Remember – don't rush to eat, and be mindful of time while allowing space for fellowship and continued community building. After 15 minutes to serve and settle in, you can shift gears and review the covenant and do check-in – both are described below – even as people eat. If you are not hosting a meal, please give participants 5-7 minutes to visit before beginning.

3. Covenant Review and Check-in (20 minutes – if sharing meal, occurs during 30-minute mealtime)

Follow earlier recommendations for setting up the space (table with candle) and gathering the group (circle or configuration where all see one another). Feel free to pray again to re-center the group.

Review the covenant you developed at your last meeting and ask for revisions, additions, or deletions. Be prepared to lovingly and respectfully enforce the covenant when necessary.

For this week's check-in, choose one of the following questions:

- Where did you find God present in your life since our last session?
- How did the scripture from the last session show up in your life?
- How are you feeling as you arrive here? *OR* What do you need to acknowledge before you can fully be present?
- *Create your own check-in question.*

Reference earlier suggestions about leading the check-in and using the talking piece.

4. Content Engagement (45 minutes)

Once everyone has checked in, it's time to move into the next part of your small group meeting: content engagement. For this second session, we seek to explore how Jesus calls his first disciples to walk and share life with him, and how we follow his example by sharing life with fellow disciples. Welcome discussion and engagement.

Show: Session 2: Part A Video

Note: To save time, participants can watch this video on their own before your gathering.

Discuss the following questions as a group, inspired by the Session 2: Part A Video. Remember: You need not cover all the questions in this relatively short time. If it would be helpful, break into pairs or trios for about 5 minutes to facilitate giving everyone a chance to speak. Then, come back to the larger group and share for the remaining 10 minutes. Use these questions or others, as appropriate:

Wondering Questions

- How has being in a small group helped you or people you know to experience belonging to God and each other?
- How can you, following the example of the early disciples, be intentional about your participation in your Centered group?
- What in this video resonated with or challenged you?

Show: Session 2: Part B Video

Watch the second video as a group, then discuss the following questions together:

Wondering Questions

In the second video, we hear three leaders discuss why they feel small groups are a vital part of the Christian journey – even if already part of a congregation.

- As you listened to their conversation, what came up for you?
- How does your answer to that same question align or diverge from their experiences?
- How can your small group support and strengthen you for the journey with Jesus along his Way of Love?

5. Check-out and Closing Prayer (7 minutes)

Follow earlier suggestions for check-out (confirm time and location for next session, share Make It Yours opportunities), especially inviting group members to share **one word** about the time they've spent together.

Close with a prayer for sending. As before, invite everyone to share what they hope

other group members will pray for on their behalf between now and the next session. Then the group leader or a previously assigned volunteer can gather the prayers and offer them up. Pray spontaneously and simply to God in gratitude, or choose your favorite prayer from the Book of Common Prayer or other prayer books. Here is but one option:

Dear God, thank you for the ministry of your Son, Jesus. Help us hear him when he speaks to us in our lives each day through people we know and those strangers we are blessed to encounter. Guide our hearts to say yes when we hear the voice of Jesus calling us into life together. It is in his name that we pray. Amen.

6. Make It Yours: At-Home Engagement Opportunities

- For a deeper dive, encourage your group to review and reflect on Session 2 in the Participant Guidebook.
- Challenge your group to notice the people God has placed around them this week. Ask them to consider, “How might you listen more deeply to them and share more fully with them?” Encourage them to deepen a connection with one person or a group of people in the time between Sessions 2 and 3.



Session 3: Following Jesus as a Way of Life

Core Theme: Discipleship – We practice whole-life discipleship, that is, living and loving like Jesus in every part of our lives – not just on Sundays, but for our whole life long.

Core Scriptures: Matthew 22:36-40, Luke 18:22

Suggested Session 3 Schedule

1. Welcome and Opening Prayer (3 minutes)

2. Meal (30 minutes, including Covenant Review and Check-in)

Follow earlier guidance around the meal. About 15 minutes in, welcome people to shift gears and gather round for the check-in. Continue to notice who builds relationships quickly and who might need a nudge to connect. At this third session, your group should begin to gel and find its roots and rhythms.

3. Covenant Review and Check-in (20 minutes – if sharing meal, occurs during mealtime)

Following a brief review and reaffirmation of the covenant, offer one of the following questions for check-in:

- Since our last session, where have you seen Jesus in the context of community?
- How did the scripture from the last session show up in your life?
- How are you feeling as you arrive here? OR What do you need to acknowledge before you can fully be present today?
- *Create your own check-in question.*

Heed earlier guidance around check-in, including using the talking piece, listening respectfully, and honoring each person's time to speak.

4. Content Engagement (45 minutes)

Once everyone has checked in, it's time to move into the next part of your small group meeting: content engagement. For this session, Following Jesus as a Way of Life, we will consider the practice of whole-life discipleship. Welcome discussion and engagement.

Show: Session 3: Part A Video

Note: To save time, participants can watch this video on their own before your gathering.

Discuss the following questions as a group, inspired by the Session 3: Part A Video.

Remember: You need not cover all the questions in this relatively short time. If it would be helpful, break into pairs or trios for about 5 minutes to facilitate giving everyone a chance to speak. Then, come back to the larger group and share for the remaining 10 minutes. Use these questions or others, as appropriate:

Wondering Questions

- What does discipleship mean to you?
- How can you practice whole-life discipleship: living and loving like Jesus in every part of your life – not just on Sundays, but for your whole life long?
- What in this video resonated with or challenged you?

Show: Session 3: Part B Video

Watch the second video for this session as a group, then discuss the following questions:

Wondering Questions

In the second video, we hear three leaders discuss ways that they have noticed Jesus modeling the life of a disciple himself.

- As you listened to their conversation, what came up for you?
- How does your answer to that same question align or diverge from their experiences?
- What are some ways that you could practice whole-life discipleship: living and loving like Jesus in every part of your life? You might each choose one way to practice this week.

5. Check-out and Closing Prayer (7 min)

For check-out, invite group members to share one word about the time they've spent together.

If time permits, offer this question for check-out: How has the group blessed you tonight?

Close with prayer, welcoming prayer requests from each person, which the group leader or a volunteer gathers and offers up. Pray spontaneously, choose your favorite prayer, or try the prayer below. It's called "A Morning Resolve," and it's full of examples of how to be a disciple every day.

Dear God: I will try this day to live a simple, sincere, and serene life, repelling promptly every thought of discontent, anxiety, discouragement, impurity, and self-seeking; cultivating cheerfulness, magnanimity, charity, and the habit of holy silence; exercising economy in expenditure, generosity in giving, carefulness in conversation, diligence in

appointed service, fidelity to every trust, and a childlike faith in God. In particular, I will try to be faithful in those habits of prayer, work, study, physical exercise, eating, and sleep, which I believe the Holy Spirit has shown me to be right. And as I cannot in my own strength do this, nor even with a hope of success attempt it, I look to thee, O Lord God my Father, in Jesus my Savior, and ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

6. Make It Yours: At-Home Engagement Opportunities

- For a deeper dive, encourage your group to review and reflect with Session 3 in the Participant Guidebook.
- Invite participants try to start each day with the “Morning Resolve” prayer as written above. (Feel free to copy and paste the prayer and send to participants via email.)

Part 2: Forming Loving Relationships with God, Neighbors, Fellow Disciples, and Ourselves

▶ Sessions 4-7



Session 4: Loving God Like Jesus Does

Core Theme: God – Jesus had an intimate, trusting relationship with God, his “Abba” (father) God, fostered through praying and turning again and again to God. We practice loving God by learning how God loves us and how God loves Jesus.

Core Scripture: Matthew 26:36-39

Suggested Session 4 Schedule

1. Welcome and Opening Prayer (3 minutes)

2. Meal (30 minutes, including Check-in described under #3)

Enjoy a meal together, following earlier guidance around the meal. About 15 minutes in, welcome people to shift gears and gather round for the check-in. Continue to notice who builds relationships quickly and who might need a nudge to connect. Continue to see if anyone seems disengaged, acutely quiet, or alone during the meal, and check in with them.

3. Check-in (15-20 minutes – if sharing meal, occurs during mealtime)

Following a brief review and reaffirmation of the covenant, offer one of the following questions for check-in:

- Since our last session, where have you seen Jesus in the context of community?
- How did the scripture from the last session show up in your life?
- How did you feel about your My Way of Love spiritual inventory results?
- How do you feel as you arrive here?
- What do you need to acknowledge before you can fully be present today?
- *Create your own check-in question.*

Heed earlier guidance around check-in, including using the talking piece, listening respectfully, and honoring each person’s time to speak. If you notice check-ins running long, offer a time limit (split the allotted time between the number present) and begin by modeling a check-in within that time frame. You may also gently remind people to return to the covenant to honor the time and others’ opportunities to speak.

4. Content Engagement (45 minutes)

Once everyone has checked in, it’s time to move into the next part of your small group meeting: content engagement. For the fourth session, we seek to know more about life with Jesus.

Show: Session 4: Part A Video

Note: To save time, participants can watch this video on their own before your gathering.

Discuss the following questions as a group, inspired by the Session 4: Part A Video. Remember: You need not cover all the questions in this relatively short time. If it would be helpful, break into pairs or trios for about 5 minutes to facilitate giving everyone a chance to speak. Then, come back to the larger group and share for the remaining 10 minutes. Use these questions or others, as appropriate:

Wondering Questions

- How do you love God?
- How can you more intentionally nurture that love and connection for and with God? Will it be through prayer? Community? Confession? Scripture reflection?
- What brings you closer to God, and God closer to you?
- What in this video resonated with or challenged you?

Show: Session 4: Part B Video

Watch the video as a group, then discuss the following questions together:

Wondering Questions

In the second video, we hear three leaders exploring what they have learned from Jesus about loving God.

- As you listened to their conversation, what came up for you?
- How does your answer to that same question align or diverge from their experiences?
- What makes it hard to have intimacy with God?
- What helps you to form a close, vulnerable, and authentic relationship with God?

5. Check-out and Closing Prayer (7 min)

Follow earlier suggestions for check-out (confirm time and location for next session, share Make It Yours opportunities), especially inviting group members to share **one word** about the time they've spent together today.

If time permits, offer this question for check-out: *How has the group blessed you today?*

Close with prayer, welcoming prayer requests from each person, which the group leader or a volunteer gathers and offers up. Close with spontaneous prayer, choose your favorite prayer, or try the prayer below, which is a modified version of *For the Answering of Prayer* from the Book of Common Prayer.

God, you promised to hear the prayers of those who ask in your Son's name. We pray that you hear our prayers and supplications and answer us according to your will. Help us remember that your answer might not sound like the answer we want. Give us listening hearts to hear you more clearly. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

6. Make It Yours: At-Home Engagement Opportunities

- Encourage your group to review and reflect on Session 4 in the Participant Guidebook before your next gathering.
- Invite participants to practice Learn and Pray from the Way of Love between now and Session 5 by engaging in daily prayer and scripture reading. Find the readings for each day at <https://prayer.forwardmovement.org/daily-readings>. Many people do this in the morning, but it can be done at any time that is convenient.



Session 5: Loving Neighbors and Strangers Like Jesus Does

Core Theme: Love neighbor – Jesus had a heart full of compassion for everyone he met, and that flowed out in healing, feeding, listening, humbly serving all, and seeking justice for the most vulnerable. We learn from him how to love neighbors and strangers alike through our words and deeds.

Core Scripture: Mark 6:34-36, 41-42

Suggested Session 5 Schedule

1. Welcome and Opening Prayer (3 minutes)

2. Meal (30 minutes, including Check-in described in #3 below)

Enjoy a meal together, following earlier guidance. About 15 minutes in, welcome people to shift gears and gather round for the check-in described below. Continue to notice who builds relationships quickly and who might need a nudge to connect. Continue to notice if anyone seems disengaged, acutely quiet, or alone during the meal, and check in with them.

3. Check-in (15-20 minutes – if sharing meal, occurs during mealtime)

Following a brief review and reaffirmation of the covenant, offer one of the following questions for check-in:

- Since our last session, where have you seen Jesus in the context of community?
- How did the scripture from the last session show up in your life?
- Since our last session, what have you learned or tried out around the practice of prayer?
- How do you feel as you arrive here?
- What do you need to acknowledge before you can fully be present today?
- *Create your own check-in question.*

Heed earlier guidance around check-in, including using the talking piece, listening respectfully, and honoring each person's time to speak. If you notice check-ins running long, offer a time limit and begin by modeling a check-in within that time frame. You may also gently remind people to return to the covenant to honor the time and others' opportunities to speak.

4. Content Engagement (45 minutes)

Once everyone has checked in, it's time to move into the next part of your small group meeting: content engagement. For the fifth session, we seek to know more about life

with Jesus.

Show: Session 5: Part A Video

Note: To save time, participants can watch this video on their own before your gathering.

Discuss the following questions as a group, inspired by the Session 5: Part A Video. Remember: You need not cover all the questions in this relatively short time. If it would be helpful, break into pairs or trios for about 5 minutes to facilitate giving everyone a chance to speak. Then, come back to the larger group and share for the remaining 10 minutes. Use these questions or others, as appropriate:

Wondering Questions

- When have you joined in loving and truly caring for others, especially people you don't really know?
- "Do what Jesus did: allow our hearts to break in compassion for others, pause and allow the way to emerge before us." Reflecting on this directive, how can your community support each other in answering the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves?
- What in this video resonated with or challenged you?

Show: Session 5: Part B Video

Watch the video as a group, then discuss the following questions together:

Wondering Questions

In the second video, we hear three leaders discuss the challenges of "welcoming the stranger."

- As you listened to their conversation, what came up for you?
- What hurdles do you or your congregation face as you welcome groups who are different from your dominant culture?

5. Check-out and Closing Prayer (7 min)

Follow earlier suggestions for check-out (confirm time and location for next session, share Make It Yours opportunities), especially inviting group members to share **one word** about the time they've spent together today.

If time permits, offer this question for check-out: *How has the group blessed you today?*

Close with prayer, welcoming prayer requests from each person, which the group leader or a volunteer gathers and offers up. Pray spontaneously, choose your favorite prayer, or try the prayer below – the *Prayer for the Human Family* from the Book of Common Prayer.

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

6. Make It Yours: At-Home Engagement Opportunities

- For a deeper dive, encourage your group to review and reflect on Session 5 in the Participant Guidebook before your next gathering.
- Invite participants to learn more about the Way of Love spiritual practice [Go](#). Ask them to consider how they can cross boundaries, listen deeply, and live like Jesus this week.



Session 6: Loving Other Disciples Like Jesus Does

Core Theme: Love other disciples – Jesus loved his friends; washed their feet; and invited them to tend, respect, forgive, and ultimately LOVE one another. He shows us how to be in relationship and partnership with fellow disciples.

Core Scripture: John 13:2-5

Suggested Session 6 Schedule

1. Welcome and Opening Prayer (3 minutes)

2. Meal (30 minutes, including Check-in described under #3)

Enjoy a meal together, following earlier guidance around the meal. About 15 minutes in, welcome people to shift gears and gather round for the check-in. Continue to notice who builds relationships quickly and who might need a nudge to connect. Continue to notice if anyone seems disengaged, acutely quiet, or alone during the meal, and check in with them.

3. Check-in (15-20 minutes – if sharing meal, occurs during mealtime)

Following a brief review and reaffirmation of the covenant, offer one of the following questions for check-in:

- Since our last session, where have you seen Jesus in the context of community?
- How did the scripture from the last session show up in your life?
- What did you learn about the Way of Love practice of Go?
- How do you feel as you arrive here?
- What do you need to acknowledge before you can fully be present today?
- *Create your own check-in question.*

Heed earlier guidance around check-in, including using the talking piece, listening respectfully, and honoring each person's time to speak. If you notice check-ins running long, offer a time limit and begin by modeling a check-in within that time frame. You may also gently remind people to return to the covenant to honor the time and others' opportunities to speak.

4. Content Engagement (45 minutes)

Once everyone has checked in, it's time to move into the next part of your small group meeting: content engagement. For the sixth session, we seek to know more about life with Jesus through his relationships.

Show: Session 6: Part A Video

Note: To save time, participants can watch this video on their own before the gathering.

Discuss the following questions as a group, inspired by the Session 6: Part A Video. Remember: You need not cover all the questions in this relatively short time. If it would be helpful, break into pairs or trios for about 5 minutes to facilitate giving everyone getting a chance to speak. Then, come back to the larger group and share for the remaining 10 minutes. Use these questions or others, as appropriate:

Wondering Questions

- How does Jesus show us how to be in relationship and partnership with fellow disciples?
- How have you been challenged to love other Christians?
- Where might Jesus be calling you and your Christian community to love one another more fully?
- What in this video resonated with or challenged you?

Show: Session 6: Part B Video

Watch the video as a group, then discuss the following questions together:

Wondering Questions

In the second video, we hear how three leaders learned to connect and love other Christians, even when it's challenging.

- As you listened to their conversation, what came up for you?
- Where is God calling you to build a bridge or to honor another person's story and journey?

5. Check-out and Closing Prayer (7 min)

Follow earlier suggestions for check-out (confirm time and location for next session, share Make It Yours opportunities), especially inviting group members to share **one word** about the time they've spent together today.

If time permits, offer this question for check-out: *How has the group blessed you tonight?*

Close with prayer, welcoming prayer requests from each person, which the group leader or a volunteer gathers and offers up. Pray spontaneously, choose your favorite prayer, or try the prayer below attributed to St. Francis.

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant

that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

6. Make It Yours: At-Home Engagement Opportunities

- For a deeper dive, encourage your group to review and reflect on Session 6 in the Participant Guidebook before your next gathering.
- Invite participants to learn more about the Way of Love spiritual practices of [Bless](#). Ask them to consider how it differs from the practice of [Go](#), and how they can apply these practices in their life between now and the next session.



Session 7: Loving Ourselves Like Jesus Does

Core Theme: Love self – Jesus began his ministry hearing God proclaim him as “beloved.” Imagine if we saw and understood ourselves as beloved and honored our own and others’ belovedness?

Core Scriptures: Luke 3: 21-22, Matthew 11:28-30

Suggested Session 7 Schedule

1. Welcome and Opening Prayer (3 minutes)

2. Meal (30 minutes, including Check-in described under #3)

Enjoy a meal together, following earlier guidance around the meal. About 15 minutes in, welcome people to shift gears and gather round for the check-in. Continue to notice who builds relationships quickly and who might need a nudge to connect. Continue to notice if anyone seems disengaged, acutely quiet, or alone during the meal, and check in with them.

3. Check-in (15-20 minutes – if sharing meal, occurs during mealtime)

Following a brief review and reaffirmation of the covenant, offer **one** of the following questions for check-in:

- Since our last session, where have you seen Jesus in the context of community?
- How did the scripture from the last session show up in your life?
- How did you feel about what you’ve learned about the Way of Love practice of Bless?
- How do you feel as you arrive here?
- What do you need to acknowledge before you can fully be present today?
- *Create your own check-in question.*

Heed earlier guidance around check-in, including using the talking piece, listening respectfully, and honoring each person’s time to speak. If you notice check-ins running long, offer a time limit and begin by modeling a check-in within that time frame. You may also gently remind people to return to the covenant to honor the time and others’ opportunities to speak.

4. Content Engagement (45 minutes)

Once everyone has checked in, it’s time to move into the next part of your small group meeting: content engagement. For the seventh session, we seek to know more about

life with Jesus through loving ourselves like Jesus loves us.

Show: Session 7: Part A Video

Note: To save time, participants can watch this video on their own before the gathering.

Discuss the following questions as a group, inspired by the Session 7: Part A Video. Remember: You need not cover all the questions in this relatively short time. If it would be helpful, break into pairs or trios for about 5 minutes to facilitate giving everyone a chance to speak. Then, come back to the larger group and share for the remaining 10 minutes. Use these questions or others, as appropriate:

Wondering Questions

- Think of how you view yourself in relation to God. Do you see yourself as beloved?
- What is one way you can embrace your identity as a beloved by God this week?
- Is there an action or phrase that would help?
- What in this video resonated with or challenged you?

Show: Session 7: Part B Video

Watch the video as a group, then discuss the following questions together:

Wondering Questions

In the second video, we hear three leaders share how they reconnect with their identity as God's beloved.

- As you listened to their conversation, what came up for you?
- How can you treat yourself and others as beloved?

5. Check-out and Closing Prayer (7 min)

Follow earlier suggestions for check-out (confirm time and location for next session, share Make It Yours opportunities), especially inviting group members to share **one word** about the time they've spent together today.

If time permits, offer this question for check-out: *How has the group blessed you today?*

Close with prayer, welcoming prayer requests from each person, which the group leader or a volunteer gathers and offers up. Pray spontaneously, choose your favorite prayer, or try this prayer *For Quiet Confidence*:

O God of peace, who taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength: By the might of your Spirit lift us, we pray, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God; through Jesus

Christ our Lord. Amen.

6. Make It Yours: At-Home Engagement Opportunities

- For a deeper dive, encourage your group to review and reflect on Session 7 in the Participant Guidebook before your next gathering.
- Invite participants to learn more about the spiritual practice of [Rest](#). Pose these questions: How is practicing Rest a way to love yourself? How does turning to God help you to turn toward yourself in love?

Part 3:
Grow in Love: Living
an Intentional Life
with God - Together
▶ **Sessions 8-9**



Session 8: Creating a Sustainable Rule of Life

Core Theme: Rule of life – Following Jesus takes intentionality and practice (one reason why the words “disciple” and “discipline” are so close). That’s why we need an intentional pathway like a rule of life *and* a community with which to live it out.

Core Scripture: Matthew 11:28-30

Suggested Session 8 Schedule

1. Welcome and Opening Prayer (3 minutes)

2. Meal (30 minutes, including Check-in described under #3)

Enjoy a meal together, following earlier guidance around the meal. About 15 minutes in, welcome people to shift gears and gather round for the check-in. Continue to notice who builds relationships quickly and who might need a nudge to connect. Continue to notice if anyone seems disengaged, acutely quiet, or alone, and check in with them.

3. Check-in (15 minutes – if sharing meal, occurs during mealtime)

Following a brief review and reaffirmation of the covenant, offer **one** of the following questions for check-in:

- Since our last session, where have you seen Jesus in the context of community?
- How did the scripture from the last session show up in your life?
- What stayed with you about the Way of Love practice of Rest?
- How do you feel as you arrive here?
- What do you need to acknowledge before you can fully be present today?
- *Create your own check-in question.*

Heed earlier guidance around check-in, including using the talking piece, listening respectfully, and honoring each person’s time to speak. If you notice check-ins running long, offer a time limit and begin by modeling that time frame. You may also gently remind people to return to the covenant honoring time and others’ opportunities to speak.

4. Content Engagement (45 minutes)

Once everyone has checked in, it’s time to move into the next part of your small group meeting: content engagement. For the eighth session, we seek to know more about life with Jesus by creating a sustainable rule of life.

Show: Session 8: Part A Video

Note: To save time, this video can be watched by participants on their own before your gathering.

Discuss the following questions as a group, inspired by the Session 8: Part A Video. Remember: You need not cover all the questions in this relatively short time. If it would be helpful, break into pairs or trios for about 5 minutes to facilitate giving everyone a chance to speak. Then, come back to the larger group and share for the remaining 10 minutes. Use these questions or others, as appropriate:

Wondering Questions

- How can an intentional pathway like a rule of life and a community with which to live it out help?
- What would go into your own rule of life?
- Why does having a rule of life make a difference for your faith?
- What in this video resonated with or challenged you?

Show: Session 8: Part B Video

Watch the video as a group, then discuss the following questions together:

Wondering Questions

In the second video, we hear three leaders discuss creating a rule of life – a rule that helps us receive and give the love of Jesus, and intentionally center our lives on his life.

- As you listened to their conversation, what came up for you?
- How could a rule of life help you to become more intentional about your spiritual growth?

5. Check-out and Closing Prayer (7 min)

Follow earlier suggestions for check-out (confirm time and location for next session, share Make It Yours opportunities), especially inviting group members to share **one word** about the time they've spent together today.

If time permits, offer this question for check-out: *How has the group blessed you today?*

Close with prayer, welcoming prayer requests from each person, which the group leader or a volunteer gathers and offers up. Pray spontaneously, choose your favorite prayer, or try Hebrews 13:20-21 from *An Order for Compline*:

*May the God of peace,
who brought back the great shepherd of the sheep,
our Lord Jesus,*

*from the dead by the blood of the eternal covenant,
equip you with every good thing to do his will,
by developing in us what pleases him through Jesus Christ.
To him be the glory forever and always. Amen.*

6. Make It Yours: At-Home Engagement Opportunities

- For a deeper dive, encourage your group to review Session 8 in the Participant Guidebook before your next gathering.
- Invite participants to consider creating a draft of their own rule of life. In addition to reading the handout on [Rule of Life](#), participants may use [Living Intentionally: A Workbook for Creating a Personal Rule of Life](#) by Br. David Vryhof of the Society of St. John the Evangelist. This short, practical tool has helped many people draft such a rule.



Session 9: Looking and Acting Like Jesus – Together

Core Theme: Community covenant – We gather, covenant, and commit to support and bless each other in the power of the Spirit, not just for a program but for a season and even for life. This is the only way we can hope to live and love like Jesus in everyday life. What we do in small groups supports our faithful living as individuals, members of congregations, and members of society.

Core Scripture: John 14:15-17

Note about the last session: This is an excellent time to initiate a conversation about starting an ongoing group and to assess potential first steps for that process. If you've already begun this, blessings! Not every group needs to continue, but some groups might have developed a strong rapport and wish to commit to continue following Jesus together. You might also find that some people or subsets of the larger group want to be leaders and start their own groups. Given this extra content, facilitators should get everyone's agreement ahead of time to add 15 minutes to this final session.

Suggested Session 9 Schedule

1. Welcome and Opening Prayer (3 minutes)

2. Meal (30 minutes, including Check-in under #3)

Enjoy your last meal together, following earlier guidance around the meal. About 15 minutes in, welcome people to shift gears and gather round for the check-in. Continue to notice who builds relationships quickly and who might need a nudge to connect.

3. Check-in (20 minutes – if sharing meal, occurs during mealtime)

Following a brief review and reaffirmation of the covenant, offer **one** of the following questions for check-in:

- Offer one word or simple thought on how you feel about our last session together.
- Share your favorite commitment or intention from your rule of life. How did you feel about creating or revising it?
- How do you feel as you arrive here?
- What do you need to acknowledge before you can fully be present today?
- *Create your own check-in question.*

Heed earlier guidance around check-in, including using the talking piece, listening respectfully, and honoring each person's time to speak.

4. Content Engagement (52 minutes)

Once everyone has checked in, it's time to move into the next part of your small group meeting: content engagement. For the ninth session, we seek to know more about life with Jesus in community.

Show: Session 9: Part A Video

Note: To save time, participants can watch this video on their own before your gathering.

Discuss the following questions as a group, inspired by the Session 9: Part A Video. Remember: You need not cover all the questions in this relatively short time. If it would be helpful, break into pairs or trios for about 5 minutes to facilitate giving everyone a chance to speak. Then, come back to the larger group and share for the remaining 10 minutes. Use these questions or others, as appropriate:

Wondering Questions

- How can we as followers of Jesus gather, support, and bless each other, so we can center all parts of our lives on Jesus – not just for a season but for the long-term?
- How can your small group or faith community intentionally move forward, centered on Jesus, together?
- What in this video resonated with or challenged you?

Show: Session 9: Part B Video

Watch the video as a group then discuss the following questions together:

Wondering Questions

In the second video, we hear three leaders discuss how transformative it can be to commit to a rule of life in the context of an intentional, faith-based, small group of siblings on the way.

- As you listened to their conversation, what came up for you?
- How could your group continue to gather, support, challenge, and bless each other so that you can all be centered on Jesus moving forward?

5. Check-out and Closing Prayer (15 min)

Offer this question for check-out: *How has the group blessed you over the last nine sessions?*

If you have not addressed it earlier, confirm who would like to be part of an ongoing group or potentially serve as a leader for a new group. The session leader should follow up with the group of people who indicate interest so they can link and plan together.

Close with the [Way of Love Covenant](#), or create your own covenant together, one that will support your efforts to follow Jesus within the context of a small, intentional community.

Way of Love Covenant

Leader: Jesus' way is the way of love. In him, we find more love, freedom, and abundant life. You are invited to turn toward Jesus and commit to following his Way of Love in the context of Christian community, trusting in his power to change each of our lives and change this world. After each bidding, all who desire to make this commitment should join in proclaiming: *By the Spirit's power, we will.*

Leader: Will you turn and center your life on Jesus, falling in love with our Lord again and again and again?

People: **By the Spirit's power, we will.**

Leader: Will you ground your life in the life and teachings of Jesus, as revealed in scripture? And will you pray and simply listen for God's voice in your life and in the world?

People: **By the Spirit's power, we will.**

Leader: Will you gather together in worship, to break bread and to thank and praise God? And will you bless this world with your story, your resources, and your labor?

People: **By the Spirit's power, we will.**

Leader: Will you cross boundaries and fearlessly become God's Beloved Community? And will you take rest, receiving God's gift of grace and restoration, and letting God be God?

People: **By the Spirit's power, we will.**

Leader: May the God who formed all things in Love draw you near to God's own heart, empower you by the power of the Spirit to live the Way of Love with fellow travelers, and send you to participate in the resurrection and healing of God's world. And may the blessing of our Lord – loving, liberating, and life-giving – be with us and remain with us forever and ever.

All: Amen.

6. Make It Yours: At-Home and Ongoing Engagement Opportunities

- For a deeper dive, encourage your group to review Session 9 in the Participant Guidebook.
- Make a plan for gathering again with members of this group, or pray about forming another group to continue on the discipleship journey. Be sure you ask for contact info for anyone you need to follow up with.