



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?"