Reading Jesus Again with Grace and Mercy

A companion to *Jesus Said What?* by DeDe Jones and Jeff Jones

Eight Week Small Group and Class Study Guide

This guide helps a group move from reading Jesus Said What? to exploring Scripture together and trying its invitations in everyday life. Each week includes a leader overview, a Bible passage, questions connected to the book, a group activity and a practice for the days ahead. Participants don't need a theological degree or a tidy faith story. They need room to wonder and a willingness to listen.

Read the assigned chapters before each gathering. Bring the book and a Bible; a notebook is helpful. Leaders can use this guide as written for a 60-minute session or allow 75–90 minutes for more conversation. The Scripture passages are companion readings selected for this study. Book connections identify chapters and themes without page numbers or requiring a particular edition.

The reading schedule

Week 1 • Introduction and Chapters 1–2 • Hearing Jesus with fresh ears

Week 2 • Chapters 3–4 • Salvation and belonging

Week 3 • Chapter 5 • When love interrupts

Week 4 • Chapter 6 • Receiving what God already gives

Week 5 • Chapter 7 • Making room to be wrong

Week 6 • Chapter 8 • Trust after hurt

Week 7 • Chapter 9 • A different kind of conversation

Week 8 • Chapter 10 and Epilogue • Living what we've discovered

Preparing to lead

Read the week's chapters and Bible passage before the group meets. Mark one short book passage that connects with the session's focus. You can read it aloud or ask participants to find it; there's no need to prepare a lecture. The guide supplies enough context to begin, while the book and the participants' observations carry the conversation.

Choose three or four of the main questions ahead of time. You won't need every question. Give people time to think before inviting responses, and let a useful conversation breathe. Bring paper and pens for the activities. For a larger class, use groups of three or four and invite brief reports afterward. Offer a quiet writing option for anyone who prefers it.

Each session follows the same timing: welcome and opening question, 5 minutes; Scripture and book connection, 10 minutes; discussion, 20 minutes; group activity, 15 minutes; reflection, homework and prayer, 10 minutes. For 45 minutes, shorten discussion and the activity by five minutes each and

close in five minutes. For 75–90 minutes, use the additional questions and allow a fuller activity debrief.

If someone hasn't finished the reading, welcome them into the conversation. Briefly explain the book connection and read the Bible passage aloud. Avoid making preparation a test of belonging, especially in a study about belonging.

Making room for honest conversation

At the first meeting, ask the group to agree to these practices. Return to them whenever needed.

- Speak from your own experience. Leave room for another person's experience to be different.
- Listen to understand. Ask before offering advice, and resist turning someone's story into a theological problem to solve.
- Everyone may pass on a question or activity. Nobody owes the group a painful story.
- Keep personal stories private. Don't repeat someone else's story outside the group without permission. Explain that confidentiality has limits when someone's safety is at risk; follow your church's safeguarding procedures.
- Disagree with care. We can examine beliefs without questioning someone's dignity or treating their identity as a debate topic.
- Share the time. Make space for quieter voices without putting anyone on the spot.

A leader can say, “We don't have to settle every question tonight. Let's stay with what the passage shows us and what we're learning about loving people well.” If a discussion becomes hurtful, pause it, name the impact and return to the agreements. If someone shares a wound, thank them for trusting the group and ask what would help them in that moment. Avoid pressing for details or promising answers the group can't provide.

A simple reflection to use each week

Invite participants to keep a brief record between meetings: What caught my attention in the reading? What did I notice when I tried the practice? What question am I carrying? Begin Weeks 2–8 with an optional one-minute response to the previous week's practice. An unfinished practice can still teach us something.

Week 1

Hearing Jesus with fresh ears

Reading before the gathering: Introduction and Chapters 1–2

Scripture: Matthew 5:43–48

Question to carry: Which teaching or story unsettled an assumption I've carried?

The leader's focus

Help participants name what they've inherited about Jesus and consider how his teaching invites a fresh reading. The goal is curiosity grounded in Scripture. People may be grateful for their upbringing, hurt by it or both. Let them speak without requiring a verdict on their past.

Welcome and opening question 5 minutes

Ask: “What's a saying about faith you heard often growing up, and how do you hear it now?” In a new group, invite names first and review the conversation agreements. Keep responses brief; someone can name a saying without explaining its whole history.

Scripture and book connection 10 minutes

Read Matthew 5:43–48 aloud. Ask participants to notice whom Jesus tells his listeners to love and what he says about God's generosity. Jesus is teaching within Jewish life and Scripture; avoid framing Judaism as loveless or contrasting a harsh Old Testament God with a loving Jesus.

Return to Chapter 1's treatment of enemy-love and Chapter 2's attention to context. Ask someone to identify a passage in either chapter that complicated an easy answer. Read a short selection. Ask: “How does this help us hear the demand of Jesus' words? What does compassion require us to notice about the people affected by our interpretation?”

Leader note: Enemy-love doesn't require giving a harmful person access to your life. Keep protection and boundaries in view. If “be perfect” raises performance anxiety, notice how the passage connects this language with love that reaches beyond familiar circles; Week 4 returns to grace and performance.

Discussion 20 minutes

Choose three or four questions.

1. What assumption about Jesus did the Introduction invite you to revisit? What makes that assumption difficult to loosen?

2. In Chapter 1, enemy-love reaches beyond liking people. What could loving an adversary look like while still resisting harm?

3. What do you notice about the sun and rain in Matthew 5? How does that image challenge the way we decide who deserves goodness?

4. Chapter 2 asks us to attend to context. What changes when we ask who is speaking, who is listening and what happens around a verse?

5. When has a familiar passage sounded different because you came to know someone affected by its interpretation? Share only what is yours to share.

6. What question could help you slow down before using a verse to settle an argument?

Additional question: How can we take Scripture seriously while admitting that our understanding of it may grow?

Group activity 15 minutes

An assumption worth revisiting

Give everyone paper. Allow three minutes to complete two sentences privately: “I've usually heard that Jesus…” and “This week's reading makes me wonder…” Invite pairs to share one thought each for four minutes. Each listener asks a curious question rather than correcting the speaker.

Bring everyone back together. Choose one volunteered assumption and reread Matthew 5:43–48. Ask what the passage supports, what it challenges and what would require further study. Leave an honest question open if the group can't resolve it.

Debrief: “What helped us listen? Where did we feel the urge to defend an answer?”

Closing reflection and prayer 10 minutes

Ask participants to name one question they'd like to carry into the week. Introduce the practice below and next week's reading. Pray: “Jesus, help us hear you with fresh ears. Give us patience with one another and courage to examine what we've assumed. Teach us to love wisely, especially when love is difficult. Amen.”

Between gatherings

Read Chapters 3–4. Reread Matthew 5:43–48 on two different days. Notice whether a word or detail catches your attention differently the second time.

Choose one safe practice of enemy-love: pray for someone's well-being, stop repeating a dehumanizing description or support fair treatment for someone you disagree with. Contact isn't required. Write a few sentences about what the practice revealed in you.

Week 2

Salvation and belonging

Reading before the gathering: Chapters 3–4

Scripture: Luke 19:1–10

Question to carry: How could I help someone experience belonging without making them prove themselves first?

The leader's focus

Explore how salvation reaches a person's present life and how belonging creates room for change. People may have treasured conversion experiences or painful memories of being pressured to produce one. Welcome both. This session asks how we communicate Jesus' invitation and how our actions make that invitation tangible.

Welcome and opening question 5 minutes

Invite a brief reflection on last week's practice. Then ask: “When you enter a new group, what helps you feel that there's a place for you?” Encourage concrete answers rather than general claims about being welcoming.

Scripture and book connection 10 minutes

Read Luke 19:1–10. Notice the sequence: Jesus sees Zacchaeus, invites himself to his home, the crowd grumbles and Zacchaeus speaks about generosity and restitution. The story brings welcome and responsibility into the same encounter.

Connect Chapter 3's examination of the phrase “ask Jesus into your heart” with Chapter 4's VIP section image. Ask participants to locate a paragraph about salvation as a changed life or about the conditions we attach to belonging. Read one short selection and ask: “What kind of doorway does our language create? What kind of doorway do our habits create?”

Leader note: The title of Chapter 3 can sound like a dismissal of a meaningful experience. Invite participants to consider what church shorthand communicates and what it leaves unexplained. Belonging also requires protection from harmful behavior. Welcoming a person doesn't remove accountability.

Discussion 20 minutes

1. What has the word “saved” meant to you? What does Zacchaeus' story add to that understanding?

2. Chapter 3 considers how familiar religious language can narrow an invitation. Which phrase has helped you? Which one has needed more explanation?

3. How does Jesus' initiative affect the way you read Zacchaeus' response? Where do you see grace and responsibility meeting?

4. In Chapter 4's VIP section image, what functions like a velvet rope in faith communities? Consider expectations around appearance, family, beliefs or knowing the unwritten rules.

5. Who carries the burden of making belonging happen in your group: established members or newcomers? What would shift that burden?

6. How could someone experience welcome here while still having questions about faith? What would we actually do differently?

Additional question: What distinguishes protecting people from harm from protecting a group's comfort or image?

Group activity 15 minutes

Walk through the doorway

In groups of three or four, choose one imagined newcomer: someone who knows no church vocabulary, a parent arriving alone with children, or someone returning after a painful church experience. Don't assume you know that person's whole story.

Spend five minutes tracing the person's first encounter with your class: finding the room, entering, joining conversation and leaving. List what helps and what could quietly communicate, “You should already know how this works.” Spend five minutes choosing one change your group can make. For example, explain the reading without embarrassment, introduce people by name or avoid inside jokes that leave newcomers outside the conversation.

Share the changes and choose one to try before the next gathering. Assign a volunteer to carry it out. Debrief: “How will we learn whether this helps instead of simply assuming it does?”

Closing reflection and prayer 10 minutes

Invite everyone to finish privately: “I can make room for someone by…” Explain the practice and next reading. Pray: “Jesus, you see people we overlook. Open our eyes to the barriers we've become used to. Help our welcome carry your grace into another person's life. Amen.”

Between gatherings

Read Chapter 5. Make one concrete gesture of belonging: learn a name, explain an unfamiliar practice or invite someone into a conversation without demanding agreement. Respect their choice about whether to respond.

Reflect on this question: “Where did I offer welcome freely, and where was I waiting for someone to prove they belonged?” Notice what happened with the group's chosen change.

Week 3

When love interrupts

Reading before the gathering: Chapter 5

Scripture: Mark 3:1–6

Question to carry: Where have I confused keeping things pleasant with loving someone well?

The leader's focus

Help the group distinguish discomfort from harm and consider a thoughtful response when people are being hurt. Chapter 5 challenges the picture of Jesus as endlessly agreeable. Keep attention on whom love protects and what an action accomplishes. Anger alone doesn't tell us whether an action is faithful.

Welcome and opening question 5 minutes

Invite a quick update on the belonging practice. Ask: “Can you remember a time when someone spoke up and made a situation better, even though the moment became uncomfortable?” Participants can use a public or fictional example.

Scripture and book connection 10 minutes

Read Mark 3:1–6. Ask the group to name the person at the center of the healing, Jesus' question and the response of those watching. His question brings doing good and preventing harm into a dispute about what is permitted on the Sabbath.

Return to Chapter 5's discussion of table turning and respectable religion. Invite participants to find a short passage that explains why love sometimes interrupts. Ask: “Whose well-being is at stake in the chapter's examples? What happens when keeping the peace becomes our highest priority?”

Leader note: Jesus' conflicts occur within his Jewish community. Avoid presenting Jewish observance as inherently cruel or casting every religious leader as a villain. Examine our own habits. Table turning isn't a blanket endorsement of destructive behavior or an excuse to act without regard for consequences.

Discussion 20 minutes

1. What do you notice about Jesus' anger and grief in Mark 3? What seems to concern him most?

2. In Chapter 5, which example helped you distinguish being agreeable from being loving? What made the distinction clear?

3. When have you avoided a needed conversation because you feared being seen as difficult? What did that avoidance cost?

4. How do you tell the difference between a preference you dislike and harm that needs to be addressed?

5. Before speaking for someone, how could you learn what support they actually want?

6. What would accountability look like when the person causing harm is well liked, influential or important to the group?

Additional question: How can we acknowledge anger without allowing it to decide the timing, tone and method of our response?

Group activity 15 minutes

Practice a loving interruption

Present this scenario: During a class discussion, a member repeatedly mocks a group of people. Someone affected by the comments grows quiet. Others laugh nervously and change the subject.

In groups of three, spend four minutes considering who is affected and what the leader needs to address. Write a two- or three-sentence response that names the behavior and sets a clear expectation without humiliating the speaker. One possible beginning is, “Let's pause. That description reduces people to a stereotype. We can discuss this question without speaking about people that way.”

Practice the response twice, switching who leads. Discuss a follow-up with the person affected and with the person who made the comments. Don't require the affected person to explain or prove the harm. Debrief together: “What protected dignity? What would we do if the behavior continued?”

Closing reflection and prayer 10 minutes

Allow a minute of quiet: “Where am I being invited to act, and what preparation would help me act wisely?” Introduce homework. Pray: “Jesus, give us courage to notice harm and care enough to respond. Help us speak with clarity and protect those whose voices have been ignored. Amen.”

Between gatherings

Read Chapter 6. Identify one situation where silence has become easier than care. Take a proportionate step: ask a clarifying question, check on someone privately or raise a concern with an appropriate leader. If direct action could put you or another person at risk, seek support before proceeding.

Write what you hoped the action would accomplish and what you learned. You don't need to share identifying details with the group.

Week 4

Receiving what God already gives

Reading before the gathering: Chapter 6

Scripture: Luke 10:38–42

Question to carry: What am I still trying to earn that God has already offered?

The leader's focus

Give participants room to recognize performance pressure and receive grace. This session connects God's love with growth that doesn't depend on proving our worth. Avoid adding a new spiritual assignment to someone's already exhausting list. The practice should make room to breathe.

Welcome and opening question 5 minutes

Invite an optional reflection on last week's practice. Ask: “Where do you feel pressure to be useful, impressive or always available?” Let people answer without needing to name a workplace or family member.

Scripture and book connection 10 minutes

Read Luke 10:38–42. Ask what Martha says and what Jesus notices. Her work matters; the passage also names worry and distraction. Resist reducing the sisters to “bad busy person” and “good quiet person.” Consider the burden Martha is carrying and the attention Jesus makes possible.

Connect the scene with Chapter 6's exploration of grace before growth and the feeling that God's love is always under review. Ask participants to find a passage about shame or the pressure to perform. Read a short selection. Ask: “What happens to our picture of God when love seems to depend on our output?”

Leader note: Rest is harder for people with caregiving duties, financial strain or little control over their schedules. Don't turn unequal access to rest into a measure of faith. Help participants identify a realistic practice and the support it may require.

Discussion 20 minutes

1. What did Chapter 6 help you notice about the ways you measure your worth?

2. What do you hear in Martha's request? What do you hear in Jesus' response to her?

3. How does shame speak to you? How is that different from an honest recognition that you've done something you need to repair?

4. What belief about God shows up when you make a mistake or disappoint someone?

5. If you trusted that you were already loved, what responsibility would you approach differently? What could you release?

6. How can grace make it possible to take responsibility for harm without deciding that our worst moment defines us?

Additional question: What could this group change so that serving here doesn't become another test of someone's value?

Group activity 15 minutes

Set down one burden

Invite everyone to divide a sheet into two sections: “What I feel I must prove” and “What receiving grace could make possible.” Allow four minutes for private writing. Examples might include always having the answer, never disappointing anyone or making every contribution flawless.

Invite participants to choose one pressure and write a compassionate, believable response to it. For example: “I can ask for help and still be responsible,” or “One mistake doesn't cancel the good I can do.” Give pairs five minutes to share if they wish. Ask listeners to offer attention rather than solutions.

Use the final minutes to identify one small adjustment: asking for help, leaving a nonessential task unfinished or accepting kindness without explaining why it's undeserved. Debrief: “What made this difficult? What would help it become possible?”

Closing reflection and prayer 10 minutes

Leave a minute of silence without requiring participants to produce an insight. Explain homework as an invitation to receive. Pray: “God of grace, you meet us in our tiredness. Help us loosen the demands that keep us afraid. Let your love become a place from which we can grow. Amen.”

Between gatherings

Read Chapter 7. Try one realistic act of receiving: accept help, ask for an accommodation or take ten quiet minutes without using them to improve yourself. If rest requires another person's help, make a specific request.

Notice the voice that objects. Write its words, then answer with what Chapter 6 helped you understand about grace. Bring an observation next week, even if the practice felt awkward.

Week 5

Making room to be wrong

Reading before the gathering: Chapter 7

Scripture: Luke 18:9–14

Question to carry: Who have I dismissed whose experience could help me see more clearly?

The leader's focus

Explore humility as a practice of teachability. Participants don't have to surrender every conviction to admit that they have more to learn. Encourage attention to the person in front of us, especially when certainty gives us permission to stop listening.

Welcome and opening question 5 minutes

Invite an observation from the grace practice. Ask: “What's something you've changed your mind about, serious or ordinary? What helped you reconsider?” Keep examples low stakes at first so people can enter without defending a major belief.

Scripture and book connection 10 minutes

Read Luke 18:9–14. Begin with the audience named in verse 9: people who trust in their own righteousness and regard others with contempt. Ask what each person says about himself and others. The parable invites examination of our posture before God.

Connect the reading with Chapter 7's exploration of mistaking being right for being faithful. Invite participants to identify a paragraph where certainty obscures a human being. Ask: “What does being right give us emotionally? When does that become more important than the person affected?”

Leader note: Don't turn the Pharisee into a caricature of Jewish people or a stand-in for another denomination or political group. The parable loses its force if we use it to congratulate ourselves for being better than someone else. Keep the questions personal and specific.

Discussion 20 minutes

1. Where do you recognize yourself in the parable, including in the temptation to compare yourself favorably with others?

2. Chapter 7 examines the costs of certainty without compassion. Which cost became clearer to you as you read?

3. What makes “I could be wrong” difficult to say? What do you fear it will cost you?

4. Think of a time someone's experience changed your understanding. What helped you hear them?

5. How can you hold a conviction with integrity while staying open to correction? What would that sound like in conversation?

6. Who do you tend to dismiss before they've spoken? What assumption are you making about them?

Additional question: How can a group encourage questions without treating every claim as equally well supported or ignoring the effects of a harmful claim?

Group activity 15 minutes

Listen without preparing your reply

Form pairs. Use a gentle prompt: “Tell about a time you changed your mind or discovered that you had misunderstood someone.” Allow one person two minutes to speak while the other listens without interrupting. The listener then has one minute to say, “What I heard was…” The speaker can correct the summary. The listener asks one open question, such as, “What helped you see it differently?” Switch roles.

Use the remaining time to debrief together. Ask: “When did you begin preparing your response? What did you notice when you waited? How did it feel to hear your experience reflected accurately?” Remind participants that an accurate summary doesn't require agreement.

Closing reflection and prayer 10 minutes

Ask participants to finish privately: “One place I need to become more teachable is…” Introduce the practice and next reading. Pray: “Jesus, help us recognize what we haven't understood. Keep our convictions connected to compassion. Give us courage to learn from people we have overlooked. Amen.”

Between gatherings

Read Chapter 8. Choose a safe opportunity to listen to someone whose experience differs from yours. Ask one sincere question and summarize what you heard before offering your own perspective. You can also listen to an interview or read a first-person account if a conversation isn't appropriate.

Write one assumption the encounter complicated. You don't have to reach a final conclusion; name what you understand better and what you still need to learn.

Week 6

Trust after hurt

Reading before the gathering: Chapter 8

Scripture: Genesis 45:1–15 and 50:15–21

Question to carry: What do I need others to understand about healing, trust or boundaries?

The leader's focus

Make room for the slow work of healing without requiring personal disclosure or reconciliation. Chapter 8 uses Joseph's story to explore broken trust, truth-telling and accountability. The session should help participants distinguish forgiveness from restored access and consider what makes trust possible over time.

Welcome and opening question 5 minutes

Remind everyone that they may pass or answer through a fictional example. Ask: “What behavior helps you begin to trust a person or a group?” Avoid opening with a request to describe a betrayal. Let participants decide whether to share the previous week's listening practice.

Scripture and book connection 10 minutes

Read the selected Genesis passages, dividing the reading between two volunteers if helpful. Briefly explain that Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery years earlier. Their reunion follows a long story involving separation, changed circumstances and encounters in which Joseph observes how they respond to one another.

Return to Chapter 8's treatment of Joseph and its discussion of boundaries. Read a short passage selected in advance. Ask: “What does this chapter help us distinguish among forgiveness, trust and reconciliation?” Notice that Genesis 50 names the brothers' intention to harm. Don't use the language about God bringing good to suggest that abuse was necessary or should be accepted.

Leader note: Joseph's story describes a particular reconciliation; it doesn't set a deadline or require every wounded person to reconcile. Someone may continue to need distance. The group can't determine another person's readiness or certify that a harmful person has changed.

Discussion 20 minutes

1. How does Chapter 8 help separate Jesus from the people who claim to speak for him? Where is that distinction difficult?

2. What does Joseph name honestly in Genesis 50? Why does naming harm matter even when good later becomes possible?

3. What pressures do faith communities sometimes place on wounded people? What would a more patient response sound like?

4. What behaviors would make an apology credible over time? Consider ownership, repair and respect for another person's limits.

5. How can a boundary support healing? What happens when a boundary is treated as punishment or a lack of faith?

6. What could our group do to become more trustworthy for someone who has experienced religious harm?

Additional question: What support can a faith community offer while recognizing that some wounds also need professional care?

Group activity 15 minutes

Notice what rebuilds trust

Use a fictional situation: A volunteer's private story was shared publicly by a leader without permission. The leader apologizes, then insists the volunteer return immediately to their role because “we need to move on.”

In small groups, spend five minutes identifying the harm, what the apology acknowledges and what the demand overlooks. Spend five minutes drafting a better response from the leader that takes responsibility and respects the volunteer's choice. Include one practical repair and one change in future behavior.

Share responses. Debrief: “Which actions could begin to make trust possible? What still belongs to the volunteer to decide?” Nobody needs to play the wounded person or draw on a personal experience.

Closing reflection and prayer 10 minutes

Invite quiet reflection rather than a round of required sharing. Say, “You don't need a completed healing story to belong here.” Introduce the private practice. Pray: “Jesus, meet us where trust has been wounded. Give us companions who tell the truth and honor our boundaries. Help us become people whose care can be trusted. Amen.”

Between gatherings

Read Chapter 9. Privately write what helps you feel safe in a relationship and one limit or form of support that matters to you. You may share it with a trusted person if that feels helpful. You aren't being asked to contact someone who harmed you, forgive on demand or reopen access.

If you have caused harm, consider one responsible step toward repair that respects the other person's boundaries. In either case, notice what patience would ask of you this week.

Week 7

A different kind of conversation

Reading before the gathering: Chapter 9

Scripture: James 1:19–20

Question to carry: Which conversation could I approach with more curiosity and less defensiveness?

The leader's focus

Practice listening and speaking truth with care. Chapter 9 brings the book's themes into disagreement. Keep the activity at a manageable level so participants can practice a skill rather than reenact a conflict. Curiosity can deepen understanding while leaving a clear conviction intact.

Welcome and opening question 5 minutes

Invite a brief, optional observation from last week's private reflection without asking people to reveal a boundary. Ask: “How can you tell when you've stopped listening and started trying to win?” Invite observations about our own behavior rather than diagnoses of other people.

Scripture and book connection 10 minutes

Read James 1:19–20 twice, leaving a short pause between readings. Ask what participants notice about the order and pace of listening, speaking and anger. Consider why being angry doesn't automatically make our response just or effective.

Return to Chapter 9's practical guidance on disagreement. Invite participants to locate a passage about listening before reacting or telling truth with care. Read one selection. Ask: “Which practice could change the first thirty seconds of a difficult conversation?”

Leader note: A gentle tone can still conceal manipulation or contempt. Look at whether people have room to speak and whether the truth is being addressed. Nobody owes an endless conversation to a person who is harassing them. Ending an exchange can be a responsible choice.

Discussion 20 minutes

1. What did Chapter 9 help you notice about the goal you bring into disagreement?

2. What happens in your body or thoughts when you feel challenged? How could recognizing that response help you pause?

3. What distinguishes a sincere question from a question designed to trap someone?

4. When have you felt heard even though the other person didn't agree? What did they do?

5. How could you name your conviction and its reasons without reducing another person to a label?

6. What tells you a conversation needs a pause, a different setting or an end?

Additional question: How does an online audience change the way we speak? What would you post differently if care for the people involved shaped the decision?

Group activity 15 minutes

Try the conversation again

Form groups of three: speaker, listener and observer. Choose a low-stakes disagreement, such as whether a class should meet earlier or whether an event needs assigned seating. Avoid debating anyone's identity, dignity or painful experience.

Allow one minute for the speaker to explain a preference. The listener pauses, summarizes the concern and asks an open question. The speaker responds; the listener then states a different preference with one reason. The observer offers feedback: Did the summary fit? Did the question invite understanding? Was the difference clear without a personal attack?

Rotate roles so everyone can practice. Allow about four minutes per round, then debrief briefly: “Which move changed the tone? Which move will take more practice?” For a large class, leaders can demonstrate one round before groups begin.

Closing reflection and prayer 10 minutes

Ask participants to name privately one conversation and one practice they could bring to it. Explain homework. Pray: “Jesus, slow us down enough to hear the person before us. Give us honest words and the wisdom to know when to speak, when to listen and when to pause. Amen.”

Between gatherings

Read Chapter 10 and the Epilogue. In one safe conversation, use a deliberate pause, an accurate summary and a sincere question before giving your response. You can practice in an ordinary planning conversation; it doesn't have to be your hardest disagreement.

Reflect afterward: “What did I learn? What did I still need to say? Did my response serve the relationship and the truth?” If you choose an online practice, draft a response and reread it before deciding whether to post.

Week 8

Living what we've discovered

Reading before the gathering: Chapter 10 and Epilogue

Scripture: Matthew 6:9–13 and Luke 12:32–34

Question to carry: What will I carry forward, and how will it change something specific in my life?

The leader's focus

Help the group turn reflection into a sustainable practice of love. Chapter 10 asks what the kingdom looks like in ordinary choices, including our relationships and resources. The Epilogue leaves readers with an invitation to keep listening and living. Make space for unfinished questions alongside concrete next steps.

Welcome and opening question 5 minutes

Invite a brief observation from the conversation practice. Ask: “What idea or moment from these eight weeks has stayed with you?” People can name a question as readily as an insight.

Scripture and book connection 10 minutes

Read Matthew 6:9–13 and Luke 12:32–34. Ask how the prayer connects God's kingdom with daily bread, forgiveness and deliverance. Then notice that Luke's invitation to generosity begins with reassurance about the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom.

Connect these readings to Chapter 10's attention to everyday discipleship, generosity and what we hold too tightly. Invite participants to identify an ordinary choice discussed in the chapter. Then read a short selection from the Epilogue's invitation to continue. Ask: “Where could what we've read take shape in a calendar, a relationship or the use of a resource?”

Leader note: People have different financial means and different demands on their time. Release doesn't always mean giving money or taking on another obligation. It may mean relinquishing control, making room for help or changing a habit. Don't pressure people to announce gifts or commitments publicly.

Discussion 20 minutes

1. How has Chapter 10 affected the way you hear “your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”?

2. Which ordinary choice has become more significant as you've read the book? What does love ask of you there?

3. What are you holding tightly that limits your freedom to respond? What would releasing a little of it make possible?

4. How could generosity become a practice you can sustain within your actual circumstances?

5. What does the Epilogue leave open for you? Which question deserves more time rather than a quick resolution?

6. What could this group continue doing together that would help its learning reach beyond this room?

Additional question: Who could tell us whether our intended help is useful? How could we listen before designing a response for them?

Group activity 15 minutes

Make a next step you can live with

Give everyone paper and five minutes to complete these prompts:

- One insight or question I'll carry forward is…
- One specific action I'll take in the next month is…
- I'll begin by this date…
- I'll need this support or adjustment…
- I'll review what happened on this date…

Examples include arranging a regular check-in with someone isolated, reconsidering a spending habit to make generosity possible, asking an excluded person what would improve access or returning to a Gospel passage with a trusted conversation partner. Choose one manageable action.

Invite optional sharing in pairs. Each listener asks, “Is this specific enough to begin, and does it fit your real life?” Use the remaining time to consider a group action. If the group chooses one, agree on who will begin, whose input is needed and when you'll review it. Participation should remain voluntary.

Closing reflection and prayer 10 minutes

Invite anyone who wishes to finish: “I came with… and I'm leaving with…” Make room for gratitude, tension and uncertainty. Explain the month-ahead practice and discuss whether a follow-up gathering would help. Pray: “Jesus, keep shaping our lives through what we've heard. Let your love reach our ordinary choices and the people who share our days. Give us companions and courage for the next step. Amen.”

After the study

Carry out your next step over the coming month. Return to the question you named rather than assuming the study has settled it. On your review date, ask: “What happened? Whom did it affect? What did I learn, and what needs to change?”

If the group wishes, gather again in four weeks. Spend time listening to what participants tried, including what didn't work. Celebrate practical faithfulness without turning the gathering into a report on who accomplished the most.

Leader tools for difficult moments

When the discussion becomes a debate

Say, “Let's pause and hear what each person is trying to communicate.” Ask each speaker to describe their own understanding without assigning motives to someone else. Return to a specific passage or question. If the conversation keeps circling, name what remains unresolved and move on. You can invite further study without requiring the group to vote on the answer.

When someone shares a painful experience

Say, “Thank you for trusting us with that. Would you like us simply to listen, or is there another way we can support you right now?” Allow a pause. Don't ask the group to explain why it happened, defend the institution involved or offer a forgiveness timetable. Follow up privately if appropriate, and use your church's safeguarding process when safety concerns arise.

When one person takes most of the time

Say, “I'm going to make room for some other voices.” Invite a moment of writing before asking for volunteers; this gives people time to form a thought. Use pairs or small groups when a large discussion makes participation difficult. Avoid putting a quiet person on the spot to balance out a talkative one.

When nobody responds

Wait longer than feels natural. Then ask a more concrete question, such as, “Which word in the passage caught your attention?” You can offer your own brief observation without answering the whole question. Quiet can mean people are thinking, especially when the subject is personal.

When someone hasn't read the book

Give a short description of the chapter's theme and read the selected passage. Invite a response to the Scripture or opening question. Make participation possible without a public explanation for unfinished reading.

When the group asks a question you can't answer

Say, “I don't know enough to answer that well.” Write down the question and identify a useful next step, such as looking at the full biblical passage or asking a pastor about its context. If you promise to follow up, do so. Leaders model humility by taking questions seriously and being honest about their limits.

An optional four week follow up gathering

Allow 45–60 minutes. Begin with a brief prayer and revisit one passage the group found meaningful. Invite each person to share what they tried, what they noticed and what they're still wondering. Ask whether any group action needs adjusting in light of feedback from the people affected. Finish by choosing a next point of connection, which could be another gathering, a shared practice or continuing friendships. Leaving room for unfinished growth honors the invitation of the book.