



Your Kingdom Come February 16 | Group Guide (Men)

Overview

For the weeks of February 16 – April 6, life group content will be different for men and women. The men will spend time discussing the book *Fighting Shadows* while the women will continue a study of Matthew, with a special emphasis on prayer.

In this guide, you will find leader notes with helpful information to explain the approach and rhythm of the evening. These notes will be in a gray box.

You will find specific instructions for how to guide members of your life group through each experience in *italics*.

Anything that you need to say/read to the group will be in regular type.

Leader Notes: Take a moment to explain and acknowledge the different rhythm your group may experience over the next eight weeks. Listen to any concerns (logistical or otherwise) your group may have but try not to get bogged down in “solving” all the problems in your precious and limited time together. Reach out to Clare or Rhett if dividing your group creates obstacles you can’t solve.

If your group contains both men and women, and if you are meeting at the same time and place, you may begin your time together with the questions below before separating. If you are sharing a meal before separating, you could discuss these questions over dinner.

If your meeting rhythm doesn’t allow for mixed group discussion, you may omit this section.



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

1. Where did you sense the Holy Spirit stirring you during the sermon on Sunday?
2. (For men to answer) What can you share that would be helpful for the women in your group to hear from your *Fighting Shadows* reading this week?
3. Before prayer and splitting apart, take a moment to discuss what confidentiality will look like within your smaller groups. Ask the following question and discuss: "What are the expectations for sharing (or not sharing) what's discussed here with others, including with spouses, so that everyone feels safe and respected?"

Pray for your time together. Invite one of the men to pray for the women's discussion and one of the women to pray for the men's discussion. Once finished, dismiss your group into separate discussion locations.

Leader Notes:

- Be sure to ask the men in your group to read the *Fighting Shadows* content each week in preparation for the conversation.
- This experience is bound to draw men into some vulnerable spaces. Please model vulnerability each week in how you personally respond to the questions and set up the conversation. For instance, don't talk about how loneliness is a real challenge for men, instead tell about a time when you experienced loneliness. Also, try to keep your personal challenges as near to this moment as possible. Remember, leadership is not taking someone where you have already been, it is bringing someone with you to where you are currently going and letting them see who you are becoming. In essence, godly leadership simply says, "follow me as I follow Christ."



Chapter 1 The Eclipse:

Ask someone in your group to read 1 John 1:5-7:

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

Key ideas: Satan's plan is to position something between you and God so that you cannot see his light. He wants the shadow of this substitute to fall over your life. He wants you to think that God is gone, that the problem is all there is, and that you are destined to struggle in the dark.

Let's start fighting these shadows together - naming them, identifying the lie that gives them power, and dragging every shadowed part of our hearts into the life-giving light of God's trustworthy, truthful diagnosis.

Prayer together for the conversation – Pray for courage, vulnerability, support, and a sense of urgency to become the men God calls us to be.

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



Chapter 1: Questions

1. How have you personally experienced the "spiritual eclipse" in your life, where cultural lies or personal struggles have obscured your view of God's purpose for you as a man?
2. How do cultural messages about masculinity influence the way you see yourself and your relationship with God and others? What stands out to you from this chapter that helps you realign with God's vision for your life?
3. (NOTE: This question is an "all-play." Tell the men in your circle that you'd like to have each person share). What is your relationship with failure? Can you recall a time when you failed or felt like a failure? How did this or how has this impacted your posture toward God and his call on your life?
4. In what ways do you find yourself living in the shadows instead of the light, and how has this affected your relationships, work, and spiritual life?
5. Reflect on a time when you felt most alive and aligned with God's calling. What were the key factors that contributed to this sense of purpose? How could you recapture that in your current circumstances?
6. What seems to be the most potent invitation for you based on this chapter and our conversation tonight? In other words, what has God spoken to you about and how will you respond to it?



PRAYER: Praying for one another and praying for the women in our life group and church

Tonight, we will ask each person to take a turn saying a brief prayer for the person to their right. Your prayer might simply be: "God, please help _____ to follow through with his commitments," or, "God, thank you for _____ and let him know this week that he is loved..."

Once you've finished praying for one another, ask someone to pray for each of the following:

1. For the women at The Creek to live into their calling, to grow in courage and passion for who God has made them to be.
2. For men at The Creek to honor women and serve them sacrificially
3. For any specific needs you see in the women in your group

Leader Notes: For some groups, the closing can be a time for the men and women to recongregate. For other groups, this won't be practical, possible, or desirable. Either way, the Scripture we've provided this week can function as a closing prayer of benediction.

Closing

Tonight, we will close by reading **Isaiah 61**. This passage reflects on themes addressed in Matthew 10 and chapter 1 of *Fighting Shadows*.

You may choose to read it aloud as a group, divide the reading among several readers (there are 11 verses, so in many groups everyone could read a verse), or have one person read it as a benediction over the group.



Your Kingdom Come February 16 | Leader Guide (Women)

Overview

For the weeks of February 16 – April 6, life group content will be different for men and women. The men will spend time discussing the book *Fighting Shadows* while the women will continue a study of Matthew, with a special emphasis on prayer.

In this guide, you will find **leader's notes** with helpful information to explain the rhythm of the evening. These notes will be in a gray box. We encourage you to read these notes *before* group starts.

You will also find **specific instructions** for how to guide members of your life group through each experience during your meeting in *italics*.

Anything that you need to say/read to the group during your meeting time will be in regular type. You may of course put these thoughts in your own words.

Encourage each member of your group to print or download this week's group guide; if possible, you may wish to provide a copy for each person.

Leader's Note: Take a moment to explain and acknowledge the different rhythm your group may experience over the next eight weeks. Listen to any concerns (logistical or otherwise) your group may have but try not to get bogged down in “solving” all the problems in your precious and limited time together. Reach out to Clare or Rhett if dividing your group creates obstacles you can't solve.

If your group contains both men and women, and if you are meeting at the same time and place, you may begin your time together with the questions below before separating. If you are sharing a meal before separating, you could discuss these questions over dinner.

If your meeting rhythm doesn't allow for mixed group discussion, you may omit this section.



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

1. Where did you sense the Holy Spirit stirring you during the sermon on Sunday?
2. (For men to answer) What can you share that would be helpful for the women in your group to hear from your *Fighting Shadows* reading this week?

Pray for your time together. Invite one of the men to pray for the women's discussion and one of the women to pray for the men's discussion.

Dismiss to your separate discussion locations.

Listening to God's Word (10 minutes)

Leader's Note: As we provide space for your group to develop rhythms of Scripture meditation and prayer, we encourage you to take advantage of our prompts for times of silence and reflection. If this practice is new to people, it can feel awkward or uncomfortable. That's OK. Do your best to explain the "why" behind the silence – to quiet our minds and hearts and prepare them to listen to God's Word, the Holy Spirit, and each other.

Don't be discouraged if you meet with a bit of resistance initially. Don't be frustrated if there are giggles or eye rolls. And don't dismiss the practice if it doesn't "click" the first time. If you continue to provide space for silence and reflection, you may discover that those moments become the most precious, valuable, and productive times in your group.

Tonight, we are reading Jesus' words to his followers as he sends them out on mission. As you listen, imagine you are one of the disciples, hearing these word the first time.

As we provide space to listen to what Jesus has to say to us, let's take a moment to quiet our hearts and welcome the Holy Spirit.

Provide about 60 seconds of silence.

Read Matthew 10 out loud. Invite several people to take a section or have one person read the entire chapter.



What did you notice as we read? (*Discuss*)

Leader's Note: After reading the entire passage, you will have the chance to go back through it, praying in response to the Scripture. For this week, we've divided this experience into four "movements." We have allotted about 25 minutes for this entire section (all four movements). If women are hesitant to pray out loud, this may be far more time than you need; for other groups, you may only complete Movement 1. That's OK. Prioritize engagement and listen to the Spirit rather than "getting through" the material.

Often in life groups, participants spend so much time sharing "prayer requests" that they never actually pray. A beautiful alternative is to simply begin to pray for your own needs. In other words, "pray the request." Talk to the Father and let your sisters "eavesdrop" on the conversation. Then others can join you, praying for the need that you have voiced.

We've discovered something intimate and beautiful happens when we engage in this three-way conversation, and we encourage you to try it. You will be provided with specific prompts in each prayer movement, and occasionally a chance to answer discussion questions, but for the most part you will be talking to God together rather than directly to each other.

As a leader, please be prepared to lead the way. As with times of silence, this new experience might be awkward at first. Feel free to acknowledge that and even laugh together. Then continue the conversation with your loving Father!

Praying God's Word (25 minutes)

Let's go back through the passage again, more slowly. As we read it, we will look for invitations to pray in response to the words of Jesus. After each section is read out loud, we will give space for silent reflection and prayer before we begin our discussion.

Tonight, we will pray in four "movements."

Movement 1

Read Matthew 10:5-10. Provide a brief time of silence after the reading for each person to reflect on what she's heard. Then ask the question, but instead of discussing the answers, pray them!

The message the disciples were given was "The kingdom of heaven is near" (v. 7). They were also given power to "reverse the curse" of sin that put a barrier between



God and humanity, between heaven and creation. Sin brought sickness, death, and evil. Those things can't exist in the kingdom of God.

- As you enter a time of prayer, reflect on the following question: Where is the "curse" making itself felt in your life? Are you or someone you love experiencing illness, grief, or a demonic stronghold? What do you want to ask your Father for?

Spend time praying out loud for places in your life where you want the kingdom of heaven to come near.

Allow the other women in your life group to hear your heart's cry to God and pray silently along with other women as they offer their prayers, too. No need to explain or offer "prayer requests." Just begin to pray together.

Movement 2

Read Matthew 10:17-23. Provide a brief time of quiet after the reading for each person to reflect on what she's heard.

In larger groups, break into groups of 3-4. Share responses to the following questions:

- Are you facing opposition to the message of the kingdom?
- Is the Gospel causing distance in any of your relationships?
- Do you need boldness and confidence to talk about the kingdom to others?

After a time of sharing, pray together over what was shared. If you did not divide into smaller groups earlier, divide into groups of 3-4 now.

Movement 3

Read Matthew 10:26-31. Provide a brief time of quiet after the reading for each person to reflect on what she's heard.



Jesus reminds us we don't need to be afraid, because He is engaged in the intimate details of our lives. He even knows the number of hairs on our head.

Let's spend some time thanking God for the specific ways we've seen His protection and provision.

Provide space for people to offer their prayers of thanksgiving out loud. You may wish to go first to model the practice of thanksgiving.

Movement 4

Read Matthew 10:37-39. Provide a brief time of quiet after the reading for each person to reflect on what she's heard.

Break into groups of 3-4. Share responses to the following questions:

- What does it mean to love Jesus more than our parents and our children?
- What does it mean to take up our cross and follow Jesus?
- How do we find our lives by losing them?

Ask yourself, "What is Jesus inviting me to die to tonight?" In other words, what or who am I placing above him?

Provide a few moments of private reflection. As a leader, you can encourage women to bring their journals and/or provide them with pen and paper.

Invite people into a time of confession. Give them the opportunity to say, "I need to die to . . ." Consider modeling this yourself first. Don't be afraid of some silence.

When the sharing has ceased, pray, "Thank you, Jesus, for dying for us. Help us to die to that which distracts us from you. Amen."



Praying for the Men's Study (5 minutes)

Leader's Note: Each week while the men read and discuss *Fighting Shadows*, we've provided space for the women to pray for this experience. Women in your group may have specific and profound hopes for their husbands, sons, brothers, and fathers walking through the study. Please pray together for those needs as appropriate. But we also encourage you to pray for *all* the men engaging in the book study, not just those with whom you have a personal connection. What would it look like if men at The Creek began walking in freedom and fellowship with the Lord? Dream (and pray) big! (The men will be setting aside time to pray for the women, too!)

Each week as the men of The Creek walk through the book *Fighting Shadows*, we are inviting the women of The Creek to pray in alignment with that week's topic.

This week, the men are reading and discussing chapter 1 of *Fighting Shadows*. In this chapter, the authors challenge men to identify places where cultural lies or personal struggles have eclipsed God. These areas are their "shadows."

Ask someone to pray for each of the following:

- For the men at The Creek to have the courage to be vulnerable with each other and honest with themselves during the next eight weeks.
- For men at The Creek to recognize their "shadows."
- For men at The Creek to see how destructive it is to live in the shadows and to long for the light of Jesus.

Leader's Note: For some groups, the closing can be a time for the men and women to recongregate. For other groups, this won't be practical, possible, or desirable. Either way, the Scripture we've provided this week can function as a closing prayer of benediction.

Closing

Tonight, we will close by reading **Isaiah 61**. This passage reflects on themes addressed in Matthew 10 and chapter 1 of *Fighting Shadows*. *You may choose to read it out loud*



as a group, divide the reading among several readers (there are 11 verses, so in many groups everyone could read a verse), or have one person read it as a benediction over the group.

Your Kingdom Come February 16 | Participant's Guide (Women)

*For the weeks of February 16 – April 6, life group content will be different for men and women. The men will spend time discussing the book *Fighting Shadows* while the women will continue a study of *Matthew*.*

Opening questions (for mixed groups beginning their time together)

3. Where did you sense the Holy Spirit stirring you during the sermon on Sunday?
4. (For men to answer) What can you share that would be helpful for the women in your group to hear from your *Fighting Shadows* reading this week?
5. Take a moment to discuss confidentiality within your group. Ask the following question and discuss: "What are the expectations for sharing (or not sharing) what's discussed here with others, including spouses, so that everyone feels safe and respected?"

Your group leader may guide a time of prayer before the men and women separate.

Listening to God's Word

Your group will read Matthew 10 together, guided by prompts from your group leader.

Praying God's Word

As a group, you will go back through Matthew 10 in four distinct "movements," during which you will be invited to engage in an experience of prayer that may be new to you. Rather than sharing prayer requests with each other, you will speak directly to God in response to a prayer prompt. The other women in your group will join you in your prayer. Your life group leader will guide you through this.



Movement 1

Your leader will guide you through a reading and reflection on Matthew 10:5-10.

- As you enter a time of prayer, reflect on the following question: Where is the "curse" making itself felt in your life? Are you or someone you love experiencing illness, grief, or a demonic stronghold? What do you want to ask your Father for?

Spend time praying out loud for places in your life where you want the kingdom of heaven to come near. Allow the other women in your life group to hear your heart's cry to God and pray silently along with other women as they offer their prayers, too. No need to explain or offer "prayer requests." Just begin to pray together.

Movement 2

Your leader will guide you through a reading of Matthew 10:17-23, after which you will share your answers to the following questions. If you have a large group, you may wish to break into groups of 3-4.

- Are you facing opposition to the message of the kingdom?
- Is the Gospel causing distance in any of your relationships?
- Do you need boldness and confidence to talk about the kingdom to others?

After a time of sharing, pray for each other over what was shared. If you remained in a larger group for the discussion, break into groups of 3-4 for prayer.

Movement 3

Your leader will guide you through a reading of Matthew 10:26-31.



You will then be invited into a time to thank God for the specific ways you've seen his provision and protection.

Movement 4

Your leader will guide you through a reading of Matthew 10:37-39, after which you will share your answers to the following questions. In larger groups, you may wish to break into groups of 3-4.

- What does it mean to love Jesus more than our parents and our children?
- What does it mean to take up our cross and follow Jesus?
- How do we find our lives by losing them?

Ask yourself, "What is Jesus inviting me to die to tonight?" In other words, what or who am I placing above him?

When your discussion is over, your leader will guide you through a time of prayer and confession.

Praying for the Men's Study

Each week as the men of The Creek walk through the book *Fighting Shadows*, we are inviting the women of The Creek to pray in alignment with that week's topic.

This week, members of your group are encouraged to pray for each of the following topics.

- For the men at The Creek to have the courage to be vulnerable with each other and honest with themselves during the next eight weeks.
- For men at The Creek to recognize their "shadows."
- For men at The Creek to see how destructive it is to live in the shadows and to long for the light of Jesus.



Closing (5 minutes)

You will close your time together with a reading of Isaiah 61.

Your Kingdom Come February 16 | Couples Discussion Guide

To help us stay connected with our spouse during these weeks when life groups are separated by gender, we are providing a small conversation piece for couples. Whether it's a brief moment at home or during a night out for dinner, use this content to check in with one another, discuss how the men's and women's lessons are connected, pray together, and share what Jesus is doing in your lives.

In Matthew 10, we see Jesus sending his disciples out to share the love of Jesus with others. As Christians, this is one of the greatest honors we have. At some point there was a family member or friend who shared Jesus with us. To share that gift is amazing! Jesus also recognizes that many of those people the disciples will be connecting with are not faithful followers of Jesus. They have been blinded to the truth. They have been lied to and believe the lie.

The chapter the men read this week talked about how the world interferes with us having a clear view of Jesus, explaining that things preoccupy us or distract us, some of us have been lied to, and we have all been blinded to the truth. In some ways, we may look like the people Jesus is warning the disciples about.

1. Are there ways you have allowed the world to influence your marriage more than Jesus has?
2. Are there people in your life you need to establish boundaries with?
3. Pray together asking God to help you both pursue a deep relationship with Jesus.