



Sermon-Based Study Guide | Menlo.Church

This guide is designed to guide a group discussion around the weekend sermon. You can also use this as an individual but we highly recommend finding a friend and inviting them to discuss with you. Menlo Church has Life Groups meeting online using these guides. We'd love to help you find a group: [Click here for our group finder.](#)

What you will find in this guide:

A discussion guide for group and individuals. If you are using this as an individual be sure to engage with each question in a journal or simply in your mind as you prayerfully consider what you heard in the sermon and seek to discover what God is inviting you to know and do.

Following the Discussion Guide:

1. Tips for Application: Including pointing group members to the Spiritual Practices from The Way Series (<https://menlo.church/theway>)
2. Ideas for Group Prayer
3. Tips for Group Leadership
4. Tips for Leading a Group Online

Sermon-Based Discussion Guide for Groups and Individuals

July 18, 2021 – Matt Summers

Life Hacks: A Better Way to Live

Note to Leaders: *Every group is different, please choose the questions that relate best to your particular group and don't feel like you have to get to every question.*

Follow up from last week: What is an insight from this series on Proverbs that has deeply resonated with you?

Connect

- What is something that you added into your life in the last year to help cope with the pandemic? (Daily walks, a new pet, diet, reading schedule, etc.)
- What has brought you joy and excitement so far this summer?

Engage

Read Proverbs 2:1-5

“My child, if you accept my words and treasure up my commandments within you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; if you indeed cry out for insight, and raise your voice for understanding; if you seek it like silver, and search for it as for hidden treasures— then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.”

- Are the actions described here passive or active?
- How does the use of “fear” in the Bible make you feel?

- Do your feelings change when you think of “fear of the Lord” in the terms of reverence and trust?
- How do you think that trust leads to the knowledge of God?

Read Proverbs 2:6-8

“For the Lord gives wisdom;

from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;

he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;

he is a shield to those who walk blamelessly,

guarding the paths of justice and preserving the way of his faithful ones.”

- Fear of the Lord leads to gifts given in verses 6-8, what are those gifts?
- How have you experienced God in some of the ways described in these verses?
- Do these verses bring you peace? Why or why not?

Apply

- Which one comes more naturally to you, being right or being righteous?
- What are some characteristics of being righteous or wise that you see in others in your group?
- Thinking back to Proverbs 2, what are some spiritual practices that help you with the actions described in those verses?

Pray

Pray together:

Father, help us to be attentive children.

Eager to listen to your voice,

and to learn in the way of Jesus.

Help us to remember that the Spirit is with us,

eager to guard our paths, preserve our way,

and to give us wisdom for life in your blessed kingdom.

Amen

Going Deeper

Learning Opportunity

Want to explore ways to ‘accept God’s words’, ‘treasure commandments with you’, and ‘make your ear attentive’? Consider learning more about spiritual direction. Here is a link to a webinar and you can also find a great list of helpful resources on this page:

<https://renovare.org/events/learning-to-listen>

Tips for Application

Life Groups at Menlo exist to help people find and follow Jesus so that Jesus might be formed in them (Galatians 4:19). Our desire is not only to know Jesus but to also follow Jesus by imitating his way of life (1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:6; Colossians 3:3).

The invitation to imitate Jesus is not a striving, proving, or earning but an opportunity to become our true self. God created us in his image (Genesis 1:26-27) and this is our truest identity – to be like him, belong to him and live our life with him.

Applying God's Truth by Using the Transforming Practices of the Way

Menlo had identified nine transforming practices we believe will help us become more like Jesus. This is not a perfect list, but it is a place to start. You can go deeper and learn more at Menlo.church/theway. When you get to the application section of your group time:

1. Print out the following page with a list of the practices and put it before your group.
2. Ask if there is a practice you can agree to do each day individually (but also collectively as a group).
3. Make it do-able and practical: What will this look like each day for each person?
4. Set up a system to check in with one another during the week. Here are some suggested options:
 - Pair up and agree to text one another each day.
 - Pair up and set a time to meet for coffee or lunch at the mid-point before your next group gathering.
 - Agree to share at your next group gathering.

Applying God's Truth When Not Using The Way Practices

You may not always want to use The Way Practices, but you always want to apply God's truth. Here are some suggestions as you lead your group to application.

1. **Reiterate the Gospel.** Dallas Willard says God is opposed to earning, not effort. We do not apply the Scripture to earn God's favor but because we have been graced with God's favor (Ephesians 2:1-10; Romans 9). Because of God's favor we exert effort in partnership with God's Spirit to become more like Jesus.
2. **Use the Google Map Method.** Meditate on the Scripture in the context of your particular life circumstances. Zoom in and zoom out on the context of your life. Zoom in to your immediate circumstances and ask, "How does this Scripture call me to behave within my home, my family, my workplace, my neighborhood, and local context?" Then zoom out to the farthest distance and ask, "How does this Scripture call me to behave within my institutional, national, and global context?"
3. **Name What You Will Do.** Compose a simple statement that describes a practical action, such as "Help my roommate with her homework," or "Buy coffee for my co-worker this week," or "Pray for children in Uganda." Write it down and commit to sharing with your group how you did when you meet again.
4. **Pray.** In your group, pray for the person immediately after they share their application and then move to the next person. Invite God to help each person and your group.
5. **Encourage Patience and Persistence.** God is patient. Change takes time. Aristotle said, "We are what we repeatedly do." And Mark Twain commented, "Nothing so needs reforming as other people's habits."

The Way Practices

menlo.church/theway

Surrender

Main Idea: “Your will be done” is the foundational and daily prayer of a disciple.

Study

Main Idea: To have my mind renewed by being immersed in Scripture.

Prayer

Main Idea: To improve my conscious contact with God and to live the ‘with-God’ life by conversing with God.

Community

Main Idea: To commit to a ‘shared life’ through worship, learning, praying, confessing, sharing and serving with other disciples.

Accountability

Main Idea: To enter into a relationship with those who will call me to live up to my values and commitments.

Confession

Main Idea: To regularly engage in self-examination; confession to God, myself and another; and to make amends to those I’ve harmed

Everyday Trials

Main Idea: To allow the challenges of everyday life (large and small) to become places where I meet God and allow him to grow my patience, strength, and joy.

Serving

Main Idea: To serve and bless others, growing in humility without worrying about getting credit.

Giving Back

Main Idea: To carry the Good News to others in word and deed, in response to what God has already done for me.

Ideas for Group Prayer

Adapted from the Navigator's Conversational Prayer Guidelines for Groups

Guiding the New Believer or Non-Prayerer in your Group

We always want to be sensitive to the person who is not comfortable praying out loud. Many of us remember that sinking feeling when we first started going to Bible Study-type groups and fearing that we would be called on to pray. Here are a few things you can do as the leader to care for those who might be uncomfortable:

1. **Address the Situation Directly:** Simply acknowledge what people are feeling and let them know that you'll never call on them to pray and you don't ever want them to feel obligated to pray out loud. But, let them know that you've felt this at some point in your journey and you hope that ultimately, they will join in.
2. **Model Simple Prayers:** Make sure that you don't set a precedent for prayers that sound like only you and the Pope could ever pray this way. Keep your prayers short and simple - avoiding pious/churchy/Thee-Thou language. Pray a simple prayer and then leave a pause so others can join in - avoid the temptation to fill the silence too quickly.
3. **Guide the Prayer Time:** Introduce how you will pray. Let the group know that you just want to go in a circle and pray a simple prayer that begins...."God thank you for....." or "Jesus I am thankful that you are....." You go first and stick to the pattern or you'll throw everyone off.

The 3x5 Card

This is a simple way to gather prayer requests and to keep these prayers before the group during the next week. It also helps members of your group connect outside of the meeting time. Pass out 3x5 cards and ask each person to write their name and phone number along with 3 prayer requests. Sometimes it is helpful to suggest that at least two requests need to do with the person (rather than a relative, etc.). Let them know that you want them to write down their phone number and not their email because you want them to talk during the week not just live out their relationship in cyber-space. If they feel comfortable encourage them to pray for one another over the phone (this helps us see that prayer does not have to happen at a prayer meeting or as a long event). Encourage them that we want to make personal connections and email often hinders this. Have them pass their card to the right or left. This should help each person connect with two people that week and to know that they are being prayed for.

Prayer Requests

Taking prayer requests is a great way to get to know one another - and to know how to pray for one another. But as a leader you will need to guide this time so that one person doesn't dominate the time. Keep requests from turning into counseling sessions. Here are some suggestions: (1) Encourage a time limit - let's each take 2-3 minutes to share what we need prayer for this week; (2) Guide the number and content of the requests - we'll each share 2 requests and let's be sure that at least one is for you personally; (3) Break into smaller groups of 2-3 so that each person can share more fully.

Remind the group that time is limited and that what is said here stays here (the Vegas rule of prayer requests). Avoid making "taking requests" your normative way of prayer. Use the other methods suggested.

No Prayer Requests

Feel free at times not to take requests. Some groups do this every week. If your group is comfortable praying out loud - just dive into prayer and let people pray to God what they would have requested to the group. Just be sure to remind your folks of the "Circle Not a Line" approach [see below].

The Immediate Prayer

Sometimes it's appropriate to just stop and immediately pray. Someone might share something during your discussion that prompts you to stop the group and pray. For example - he might mention that he's lost his job, or she might say that things have been difficult with one of her children. It is often appropriate to say, "Let's just take a second and pray for Jennifer about that." You might be the one to pray but if there is someone in the group who feels comfortable praying and is particularly close to the person you might ask them to pray [as a leader be sure you don't always lead out in prayer - share this with this role with others in your group].

Praying as a Community: A Circle not a Line

When a person prays for a really long time it is often hard for the rest of the group to stay engaged. As a leader you can help avoid this by suggesting that to pray in community should be viewed as being in a circle with God rather than a line.

When we view ourselves in a line, we tend to see ourselves lining up to talk to God like a kid visiting Santa. When this happens, we try to say everything we want to say in one long monologue. The line-up version of prayer causes us to pray as individuals rather than as a community. In a WBS Table we want to pray as a community.

Another helpful picture is of a gathering with friends at Starbucks. When we gather as friends for conversation, we don't launch into monologues with no regard for the others who are with us (or at least we shouldn't). Instead, we have a group conversation. We build upon and respond to what others in the group are saying. We don't have to say everything all at once because we'll get other chances to speak. This is how communal prayer can look - a group conversation with God. We'll find ourselves saying things like: "...and just like Matt said, I

Always remember that prayer is a conversation. It will have pauses for listening and invitation for all to participate. As a leader you'll have to help guide this kind of communion.

Tips for Group Leadership

PREPARING FOR YOUR GROUP GATHERINGS

You don't have to be the expert.

We've provided an easy-to-follow study guide with special leader tips (in blue). Please keep up with the book reading and review the discussion questions before each meeting so you're familiar with the flow of the content.

The goal is not to get through the entire study guide each week.

Prioritize the questions for the time available. The goal is authentic conversation where each person feels heard, not getting through all the material. As you get to know the group, choose questions that are appropriate.

The four areas of this study include:

1. **Connect** - to warm up the group and get to know one another more fully.
2. **Engage** - to help the group engage with and learn from the Bible.
3. **Apply** - to put into practice what you're learning.
4. **Pray** - to invite God's help and to give him thanks. Ideas for prayer are included each week.

It's easy to spend most of the discussion on the first two areas, but the secret sauce of Life Groups is the time spent on the third area - **apply**. This is how we help one another grow in faith.

Email Participants

1. **When Someone Reaches Out to Join the Group**
 - Welcome the person to your group and express your excitement to get to know them.
 - Include the link to the online platform you will use.
2. **The Day Before Your Group Meeting**
 - Send a reminder email of the time and the online platform link (do this every week).

PRAYING FOR YOUR GROUP

It's normal to feel anxious or even inadequate about leading the group, especially if you are leading for the first time. Here are some good reminders:

Philippians 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Matthew 28:19-20

¹⁹ [Jesus said:] Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Pray every time you feel anxious, asking God to give you his peace.
Pray, thanking Jesus for always being with you.

This curriculum is designed to be easy to use, but we encourage you to **always** go into your meeting having prayed and worshiped God. Commit the meeting to God, invite his presence and watch him work.

GUIDING THE LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION

As the leader, your role is to facilitate the discussion. You want to make sure everyone gets to contribute and that no one dominates the discussion, including yourself. If someone tends to jump in on every question, politely say something like, “Let’s hear from a few of you who haven’t had a chance to share”. If the person continues to dominate, you may need to talk with him/her outside of the group meeting.

It may take a few moments for some group members – especially internal processors – to put their thoughts together. Don’t feel the need to fill the silence. And kindly invite the non-talkers to share.

Praying Together as a Group

Praying as a group is a powerful practice we see modeled by the early church in Acts. We’ve provided prayer ideas each week to help you keep prayers brief and on topic.

We encourage the following:

- First, make sure people feel comfortable praying out loud. It’s okay if they don’t. You might say, “I’d love for us to pray together as a group but I know that can be intimidating and I don’t want anyone to feel pressure. If you aren’t comfortable praying out loud just let your prayer group know. If no one is comfortable, no big deal, you can set a minute for silent prayer.
- If you have people who are not comfortable praying out loud, try this week 3: Invite everyone to pray a simple pray such as, “God I thank you for _____.” You start and do NOT pray anything more than this sentence prayer. You set the tone.
- Break out into groups of 3 or 4 maximum*
- Think of creative ways to change things up (i.e. when online, use the chat feature to submit prayer requests to minimize time*, etc.). See Ideas for Prayer.
- Don’t force people to pray, as many people aren’t comfortable praying out loud.
- Limit prayer requests to what is personally affecting the group member

Sharing Leadership

We work better together! You shouldn’t lead the group alone. Delegate as much as you can, including things like leading the discussion, video chat host*, tech host*, organizer, etc.

As group members become more involved in leadership, they will feel a stronger sense of ownership in the group and commitment will increase. The group will go from being “your group” to “our group”.

Tips for Leading a Group Online

If you haven't decided on a virtual platform, please contact your Groups Director. Though it takes some adjustments, virtual technology has opened opportunities for groups to authentically share life, encourage one another, study together and go beyond geographical boundaries.

Virtual meetings add a different layer of complexity, so we have included this section with best practices and a sample format and agenda. Use this as a reference and to help prepare for your first meeting.

Best Practices for Video Calling and Online Etiquette

- 1. Before the Meeting:** Have participants download and get familiar with the software you will use. Send them links for online tutorials on YouTube or any other helps.
- 2. At the First Meeting:** Briefly review etiquette at the beginning of your first few meetings.
 - Mute when not talking.
 - Be aware of your background – will people be walking behind you?
 - If you are eating or walking around, turn off video.
- 3. Assign a co-host:** Someone who can help with tech issues, breakout rooms, and monitor the chat.
- 4. Breakout Rooms:** Use breakout rooms for groups of more than 6 people (see leader notes in your leader participant guide for timing).
- 5. Be Aware of How You Look on Camera:**
 - Make sure your face has sufficient lighting. In general, lighting works best in front of your face, not behind. Brighter light is preferred to yellow/warm light.
 - Make sure your face is centered in the video camera. It's best to position the camera to eye level or slightly above.
 - Speaking tip: When talking, look directly into the camera. When not talking, look at the computer screen to watch others.
- 6. Select the Quietest Location You Can Find:**
 - Turn off anything making noise in the background (TV, radio, appliances).
 - Put pets in a different room or have them in a place where they will be most quiet.
 - Have a plan for childcare so as to minimize interruptions – or meet after bedtime!
- 7. Mute Your Computer Unless You're the Person Talking:**
 - Whichever platform you're using, know how to turn off and on your mute button.
 - If everyone's microphone is turned on at the same time, the sound quality can be an issue and it can be hard to hear the person who is talking.
 - If you are muted, make sure to nod your head and listen well so people can recognize you are following them. Find creative ways to practice non-verbal communication.
 - Recognize that the moderator can mute individual participants if needed.
- 5. Be Both Positive and Assertive as the Leader:**
 - Your demeanor will set the stage for the attitude of everyone else in the group.
 - The leader of the group needs to be welcoming and in charge. Make sure you jump on a few minutes early to welcome everyone (15 minutes to check tech and get chatter out of the way is great).
 - Redirect the conversation or mute participants as necessary. This may feel rude, but it is sometimes necessary to manage a good online experience.
 - As a rule of thumb, the leader should talk 20% of the time and listen 80% of the time.

- 6. Create a Plan for Participants to Indicate that They'd Like to Talk:**
 - You may try things like raising a hand, answering in a specific order, or another signal.
 - Since participants will often be muted, having a plan will help you know when to mute and unmute.
- 7. Encourage Group Participants to Give Their Full Attention (i.e. don't multitask):**
 - When participants are not giving their full attention, it can be a big distraction with an online group.
- 8. Have a Plan to Stay in Touch Outside of Your Scheduled Gathering:**
 - Leverage resources and platforms like calling, texting, emailing, GroupMe, Facebook Groups and Messenger, WhatsApp, etc. as a place to stay connected and keep the conversation going throughout the week.
 - Assign group members to follow up with one another and engage in prayer requests.

Suggested Online Group Schedule and Format

I. Practice Session/First Meeting (30-45 minutes)

- It can be helpful to have a 30-45-minute practice session together or take the first half of your first online group to get everyone acquainted with how an online format will work.
- Review the best practices/online etiquette (listed above). You may want to review these practices the first several meetings until they become more natural to people.
- Help people learn how to use the technology and answer any questions.
- Introduce yourself, share your name, and share how you got connected with Menlo Church and this online group.
- End your group time by sharing prayer requests; have one person pray.

2. Typical Meeting (60-90 minutes)

1. Moderator/Host Welcomes Everyone to the Online Group (5-10 minutes)

- Buffer time is important, as people tend to arrive late online (as with in-person groups).
- Allow for people, if necessary, to adjust their lighting, camera, and microphone settings.

2. Warm Up/Connection Time (10-20 minutes)

- This is where you'll ask a Connect question. The key here is to get everyone talking. This also allows the group members to get comfortable learning how to mute/unmute themselves when talking and listening.

3. Discussion Time (30-40 minutes)

- Discuss the corresponding questions
- Remember that the objective of group isn't to get through all the questions - rather it's to hear from everyone in the group.
- Listen well and ask great follow up questions. Let the conversation flow among your group members and redirect/keep-on-track as needed.

5. Take Prayer Requests and Close in Prayer (15-20 minutes)

- Break out into smaller groups.
- Have a designated person write down/record these prayer requests.
- Have one person pray for the group, or assign prayer requests to different people with the contingency that someone can "pass" (not everyone is comfortable praying out loud, and virtual prayer adds another layer of complexity)

BEFORE YOUR FIRST MEETING AS A LEADER

- Reach out to all your group members - send them a reminder of the time and online link.
- Get familiar with **your** participants guide that includes Leader Notes in blue. It starts on the next page. It would be wise to be uber-familiar with week one - but scan the upcoming weeks so you are prepared for where you are headed.
- Add your own notes to the participants guide so you are prepared to lead.

GUIDE FOR A TECH ASSISTANT

Tech Assistant Coordination

If your online group has more than 10 people, we recommend having a Tech Assistant who will:

- Create and maintain meeting links
- Put people into break out rooms during discussion time
- Monitor chat and waiting room (if using that feature)
- Share screen to show slides, videos or other media needed to run the group

Finding a Tech Assistant:

- Ask a friend or group member that you know is comfortable with online meeting platform you are using to do it
- Ask the Menlo Staff Group director if they have a volunteer that can assist
- In intro email to registrants ask if anyone is interested in helping in this way - this option models our value that everyone should contribute to the group.

A few tips:

- Meet with Tech Assistant and decide ahead of time what features are needed (i.e. Breakout Rooms, Screen sharing, muting all participants)
- Tech Assistant should familiarize themselves with features a week before the meeting and hold a practice session to try out functions
- If you are the meeting host, when you start the meeting transfer host status to the Tech Assistant or make them a co-host

Break out rooms:

- Zoom seems to be the only platform that currently has breakout rooms
- Assign participants to groups prior to first meeting. Share that info with your Tech Assistant prior to group start.
- Leave enough time at beginning of meeting for Tech Assistant to add any one not on your original list into groups.
- Only people in individual break out rooms can share screen. If there is anything you want shared on screen in break out rooms please identify someone in each breakout room to share their screen.
- Break out rooms work best if there is a designated host. You can accomplish this in three ways:
 1. Recruit hosts for number of rooms you have prior to start of group
 2. Identify people on the registration for this group to be break out room hosts
 3. Before groups go to break out rooms call on one person per room to be the host

Tutorials on ZOOM Meetings:

[Zoom Breakout Rooms Video tutorial](#)

[How to pre-assign Break out room groups – written description](#)

[Sharing your screen](#)

[Taylor's Tips from her experience as Tech Assistant](#)