

Group Discussion Guide

Face
to
Face



WELCOME

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this discussion guide is to help us move from distance to intimacy with Jesus. Throughout this series, we witness powerful, personal encounters between ordinary people and an extraordinary Savior. Each story reminds us that Jesus meets us where we are, loves us as we are, and refuses to leave us there. These conversations are not meant to simply analyze Bible stories. They are invitations to step into the scene, to see ourselves in the questions, struggles, shame, hope, and longing of those who met Jesus face to face.

As we gather, our prayer is that we would:

- Allow ourselves to be fully known by Jesus
- Recognize the barriers that create distance
- Experience the nearness of His grace
- Respond to His transforming love

Because when we encounter the real Jesus, distance gives way to intimacy and intimacy leads to transformation.



GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THIS GUIDE

- **Don't rush.** Leave room for silence, reflection, and prayer. Encounter cannot be hurried.
- **Step into the story.** Ask not only, "What happened?" but, "Where am I in this story?"
- **Be honest about barriers.** Shame, doubt, fear, pride — Jesus moves toward all of it.
- **Let grace land first.** Before asking what needs to change, notice how Jesus draws near.
- **Celebrate movement.** Any step toward Jesus — no matter how small — matters.

Remember: The goal is not to finish the questions. The goal is to encounter Christ together.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to help your group experience the heart of the Face to Face series, not just to study encounters with Jesus, but to step into them.

1. Focus Scripture – the main biblical text for the week’s theme.
2. Reflection – a short devotional thought to prepare your heart.
3. Discussion Questions – conversation starters for your group gathering.
4. Practice for the Week – a simple step you can take to live out the theme between meetings.

1

IN A SMALL GROUP

- Before the meeting: Ask group members to read the Focus Scripture and Reflection ahead of time.
- During the meeting: Begin with prayer, then read the scripture aloud together. Use the Reflection as a springboard for the Discussion Questions. Allow time for everyone to share without rushing.
- After the meeting: Encourage each person to engage with the Practice for the Week. Begin the next week by sharing insights or stories from the previous week’s practice.

IN A ONE-ON-ONE DISCIPLESHIP SETTING

2

- Meet with a partner and work through one week at a time.
- Share honestly about how the practice is shaping your prayer life.
- Pray for one another based on what comes up in conversation.

3

IN PERSONAL DEVOTION

- Use the guide as a 12-week prayer journey.
- Read the Focus Scripture each morning, linger over the Reflection, and choose one Discussion Question to journal about.
- Commit to doing the Practice for the Week as part of your rhythm of life.

THE 3 MOVEMENTS

Throughout the Gospels, encounters with Jesus follow a beautiful and consistent progression. This series traces that same spiritual journey through three intentional movements:



JESUS PURSUES THE DISTANT

Before anyone reaches for Him, Jesus moves first. He crosses social, cultural, religious, and personal barriers to draw near to the overlooked, ashamed, skeptical, and broken. These stories remind us that distance does not deter Him. He notices. He seeks. He initiates.
Weeks in This Movement: Weeks 01-04

Core Truth: Jesus moves toward us before we move toward Him.



JESUS INVITES INTO INTIMACY

Once He draws near, Jesus does more than solve problems He invites relationship. He engages in conversation. He restores dignity. He reveals truth. He allows Himself to be known and welcomes others to truly know Him.
Weeks in This Movement: 05-08

Core Truth: Distance gives way to intimacy.



JESUS TRANSFORMS LIVES

Encounter never leaves people unchanged. Some are healed. Some are restored. Some are challenged. Some are sent. But every true encounter with Christ carries the invitation to transformation. His grace comforts, but it also calls forward. His love restores, but it also reshapes.
Weeks in This Movement:

Core Truth: Intimacy leads to transformation.

Together, these movements form the heartbeat of the series: **Jesus meets us where we are, loves us as we are, and refuses to leave us there.**

SMALL GROUP GUIDE: FACE TO FACE WEEK 01: SEEN AND SOUGHT

Focus Scripture: John 4:1-26

Reflection

Jesus meets us where we are, even in the places we feel least seen or most unworthy. In John 4, He crosses social, cultural, and personal boundaries to meet a woman who likely expected avoidance, judgment, or distance. Instead, she encounters a Savior who knows her story, invites conversation, and reveals Himself without condemnation. The transformative power of this moment isn't found in fixing her situation immediately, but in her recognition: I am seen, I am known, and I am still wanted.

This week, reflect on where you may be carrying distance from God, areas of shame, avoidance, or assumed disapproval, and consider how Jesus' initiative invites you into relational openness.

Discussion Questions

- What stood out to you about Jesus' approach to the Samaritan woman? Why do you think He starts with need ("Will you give me a drink?") rather than instruction or correction?
- Where do you see yourself in the woman's posture—avoiding exposure, carrying shame, or expecting distance?
- How does it feel to know that Jesus pursues and initiates relationship even when we haven't sought Him?
- In your life, where might routine, isolation, or even religious activity be keeping you from encountering Jesus?
- How can we create spaces, personally or in our community, where people feel seen and sought rather than judged?

"One Small Step Toward Being Known"

This week, choose one intentional way to step out of hiding and toward God's presence or relational honesty:

- Pray a brief, honest prayer without editing or filtering your words.
- Pause during your day to notice where Jesus might already be present.
- Share one truth about yourself with someone you trust—a fear, hope, or struggle, without trying to fix it.

The goal isn't perfection, but relational openness. Like the woman at the well, the first step is simply to be seen and be willing to be known.

SMALL GROUP GUIDE: FACE TO FACE

WEEK 02: TOUCHED

Focus Scripture: Mark 1:40-45

Reflection

In Mark 1, a man with leprosy approaches Jesus with a bold request: “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” He doesn’t question Jesus’ power—he doubts only His willingness. Jesus responds first with compassion and then with touch, breaking social, religious, and personal barriers. This encounter shows us that intimacy with Jesus often begins where we expect rejection but receive mercy instead. Holiness is not threatened by brokenness; it moves toward it, bringing healing and relationship.

This week, reflect on the areas of your life you consider untouchable—where shame, fear, or isolation have created distance—and consider how Jesus’ willingness to enter those places invites you to step closer.

Discussion Questions

- What strikes you most about Jesus’ willingness to touch the leper? Why is this significant in the cultural and religious context of the time?
- Where in your own life do you carry a sense of being “untouchable” or unworthy of Jesus’ attention?
- How does it feel to know that Jesus moves toward brokenness rather than away from it?
- In what ways might we instinctively avoid what is messy, uncomfortable, or shame-filled in ourselves or others?
- How can we practice proximity over avoidance this week—in prayer, relationships, or personal reflection?

Simple Practice

This week, choose one intentional act that moves you closer to Jesus or toward someone you might normally avoid:

- Bring an unfiltered need to God in prayer, naming what feels shameful or off-limits.
- Identify one area of brokenness you’ve been keeping private, and invite Jesus’ presence there through honest reflection or journaling.
- Take one small step toward someone in your life who is marginalized, isolated, or hurting—simply presence without fixing.

The goal is relational courage. Like the leper, healing begins when we risk approach and allow Jesus’ compassion to meet us where we are.

SMALL GROUP GUIDE: FACE TO FACE

WEEK 03: WANTED

Focus Scripture: Mark 1:40-45

Reflection

Zacchaeus' story reminds us that Jesus sees beyond reputation, wealth, or past mistakes. He calls us by name, intentionally pursuing those who feel overlooked or condemned. Grace comes first—invitation precedes transformation. Zacchaeus responds not because he is forced, but because he encounters a Savior who values him personally. When Jesus calls, the heart is stirred, and life begins to realign. This week, reflect on where you long to be personally known and wanted by Jesus, and where you might extend that grace to others, even when it feels undeserved.

Discussion Questions

- What stands out to you about the way Jesus calls Zacchaeus by name? Why is this personal invitation significant?
- Where do you see yourself in Zacchaeus' story—hidden, curious, or longing to be seen?
- How does it feel to know that Jesus' pursuit is intentional, not random, and that grace comes before repayment or change?
- Where might we mirror the crowd's grumbling—resisting grace toward ourselves or others?
- How could your life change if you truly believed that Jesus calls you personally and wants to enter your story?

Simple Practice

This week, choose one way to respond to Jesus' personal call in your life:

- Pause each day to listen for God's promptings and respond, even in small ways.
- Extend grace or welcome to someone you've judged or overlooked.
- Reflect quietly on an area of life where you've been hiding, and invite Jesus to meet you there.

The goal is to cultivate responsive openness. Like Zacchaeus, transformation begins when we notice, respond, and allow Jesus' presence to touch the overlooked places of our hearts.

SMALL GROUP GUIDE: FACE TO FACE WEEK 04: CARRIED TO JESUS

Focus Scripture: Mark 2:1-12

Reflection

Sometimes faith is personal. Sometimes it is communal.

A paralyzed man cannot reach Jesus on his own, but his friends refuse to let obstacles stop them. When the door is blocked, they go to the roof. When access seems impossible, they make a way. Mark tells us Jesus “saw their faith.” Faith here is persistent trust expressed through action. What’s surprising is that Jesus first addresses the man’s deeper need: “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Before healing his body, Jesus restores his soul. He sees beyond the visible problem to the greater restoration needed.

This story reminds us that encounter often happens through community. Sometimes we need to be carried. Sometimes we are called to carry others.

Discussion Questions

- What stands out to you about the friends’ determination? What risks or costs did they accept to bring their friend to Jesus?
- Why do you think Jesus addressed forgiveness before physical healing? What does that reveal about His priorities?
- When have you experienced being “carried” by someone else’s faith through prayer, encouragement, or support?
- Where in your life do you feel spiritually stuck or unable to move forward on your own?
- Who might God be asking you to carry right now — through prayer, persistence, or practical help?

Simple Practice

This week, choose one intentional act of persistent faith:

- Commit to praying daily for one person who feels spiritually distant or stuck.
- Reach out to someone who may be struggling, not to fix them, but to walk with them.
- If you are the one feeling immobilized, ask for prayer or support instead of carrying it alone.

The friends did not create the miracle. They created access.

Sometimes intimacy with Jesus begins because someone refused to give up.

SMALL GROUP GUIDE: FACE TO FACE WEEK 05: RECOGNIZED

Focus Scripture: John 20:1-18

Reflection

On the first Easter morning, Mary Magdalene approaches the tomb in grief and confusion. Amid fear and darkness, Jesus meets her where she is and calls her by name: “Mary.” In that personal recognition, confusion turns to intimacy.

This story reminds us that encounter with Jesus often begins with His initiative, not our readiness. Misunderstanding, doubt, and sorrow are not barriers—they are entry points for relationship. When He calls, hearts are transformed, and intimacy leads to mission.

Discussion Questions

- What stands out to you about Jesus calling Mary by name? Why is personal recognition so powerful?
- Where do you relate to Mary’s grief, fear, or confusion?
- How does it feel to know that Jesus meets you even in uncertainty or misunderstanding?
- In what ways have you experienced Jesus’ personal initiative in your life?
- How can you respond to His call in ways that move you from recognition to participation in His mission?

Simple Practice

This week, choose one intentional act to notice Jesus’ personal call:

- Spend a few minutes each day listening for His voice in prayer, journaling, or quiet reflection.
- Remain present in a season of uncertainty or grief, inviting His awareness and comfort.
- Share a story of how Jesus has met you personally with someone else, extending hope and witness.

Intimacy with Jesus transforms sorrow into recognition, and recognition into mission.

SMALL GROUP GUIDE: FACE TO FACE WEEK 06: NO LONGER HIDDEN

Focus Scripture: Mark 5:25-34

Reflection

The bleeding woman had suffered for twelve years, isolated by illness and shame. Yet she approached Jesus quietly, reaching for Him with courage and persistence. In the crowd, her faith drew His attention. Jesus stops, turns, and affirms her directly: *“Daughter, your faith has healed you.”*

Her story reminds us that intimacy with Jesus begins when we step forward in faith, even when hidden, hesitant, or unworthy. Persistent, humble faith invites personal recognition, restores dignity, and transforms fear into courage.

Discussion Questions

- What stands out to you about the woman’s courage in approaching Jesus?
- Why do you think Jesus made a point to address her directly in the crowd?
- Where in your life do you feel hidden, hesitant, or unseen?
- How can persistent, humble faith open space for Jesus to meet you?
- How might you notice and affirm those around you who are quietly seeking Jesus?

Simple Practice

This week, choose one small act of relational courage:

- Take one step toward Jesus that you’ve been hesitant about, in prayer, confession, or service.
- Pay attention to someone who feels overlooked and acknowledge them intentionally.
- Trust that quiet, persistent faith opens the door for encounter and restoration.

Jesus transforms hiddenness into healing, fear into courage, and isolation into intimacy.

SMALL GROUP GUIDE: FACE TO FACE

WEEK 07: STILL SEARCHING

Focus Scripture: John 3:1-17

Reflection

Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night, cautiously and quietly, reflecting a searching heart. Jesus does not shame or dismiss him; instead, He patiently explains the way of spiritual rebirth, inviting Nicodemus into understanding and relationship.

This story reminds us that intimacy with Jesus often unfolds through patient teaching and personal invitation. Even hesitant seekers are welcomed. Encounter is relational: Christ meets curiosity with clarity, doubts with care, and hesitation with guidance.

Discussion Questions

- What stands out to you about Nicodemus' approach to Jesus?
- How does Jesus' patience and willingness to explain deepen intimacy?
- Where might you be hesitant to bring questions, doubts, or curiosity to God?
- How can patient, relational engagement with Scripture, others, or God help you grow in understanding?
- In what ways can you model this kind of gentle invitation for those who are still searching?

Simple Practice

This week, choose one small act of relational curiosity or engagement:

- Approach God in prayer with a question or doubt you've been hesitant to voice.
- Engage in a faith conversation with someone who is exploring or unsure.
- Spend time in Scripture or devotional study, asking the Spirit to illuminate understanding patiently.

Jesus shows that relational patience and openness create space for transformation and deeper intimacy.

SMALL GROUP GUIDE: FACE TO FACE WEEK 08: OVERFLOWING LOVE

Focus Scripture: Luke 7:36-50

Reflection

In Luke 7, a woman known only for her sin enters a Pharisee's home and approaches Jesus with bold vulnerability. She weeps at His feet, anoints them with perfume, and wipes them with her hair, an act of humility, gratitude, and courageous love.

While others judge her, Jesus receives her. He affirms her faith, declares her forgiven, and sends her in peace. Her love overflows because she recognizes the depth of grace she has received.

This encounter reminds us that intimacy with Jesus often requires honesty and risk. When we bring Him our shame, gratitude, and devotion openly, He meets us with mercy, not condemnation. Love becomes the evidence of forgiveness, and vulnerability becomes the pathway to transformation.

Discussion Questions

- What stands out to you about the woman's courage and vulnerability?
- Why do you think her love was so expressive and bold?
- Where might shame or fear keep you from expressing gratitude or devotion openly?
- How does Jesus' response challenge the way we sometimes judge ourselves or others?
- What might "overflowing love" look like in your life this week?

Simple Practice

This week, practice one intentional act of relational courage:

- Express gratitude to Jesus in prayer without holding back.
- Share honestly with a trusted person about a struggle or failure.
- Offer a tangible act of love in response to God's grace in your life.

When we recognize how deeply we are forgiven and loved, intimacy grows, and love overflows.

SMALL GROUP GUIDE: FACE TO FACE

WEEK 09: CHALLENGED

Focus Scripture: Mark 10:17–27

Reflection

A wealthy, morally serious young man runs to Jesus with an urgent question: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” His posture is eager and respectful. Yet Jesus looks at him, loves him—and challenges him. “One thing you lack... go, sell what you have... then come, follow me.” Jesus does not reject him; He exposes what competes for his trust. The man’s sorrow reveals a divided heart. What he owns has begun to own him.

This encounter reminds us that the love of Jesus is not merely comforting—it is refining. Intimacy leads to transformation, and transformation requires surrender. Jesus will always put His finger on the one thing we hope He won’t address, not to shame us, but to free us.

Discussion Questions

- What stands out to you about Jesus “looking at him and loving him” before challenging him?
- Why do you think the man walked away sad?
- What might be a modern equivalent of “great wealth” that competes for our trust?
- Where are you tempted to substitute moral performance for wholehearted surrender?
- What would it look like for you to take one concrete step of obedience this week?

Simple Practice

This week, practice courageous inventory:

- Ask in prayer, “Lord, what is my one thing?”
- Identify one area where trust, identity, or security is misplaced.
- Take one tangible step of surrender, through generosity, confession, release, or obedience.

Jesus challenges what competes with Him because He desires your whole heart. What feels impossible with us becomes possible with God.

SMALL GROUP GUIDE: FACE TO FACE WEEK 10: RESTORED

Focus Scripture: John 21:15–19

Reflection

After denying Jesus three times, Peter returns to fishing, the familiar rhythms of his old life. But the risen Christ meets him there. Around a charcoal fire, Jesus asks him three times, “Do you love me?” The questions are not meant to shame Peter, but to restore him. Each denial is met with an opportunity to reaffirm love. And each affirmation is followed by a calling: “Feed my sheep... Follow me.” This encounter reminds us that failure is not final with Jesus. He does not ignore our sin, nor does He define us by it. He restores personally and recommissions purposefully. Transformation is not just surrendering idols; it is receiving grace after collapse. In Christ, repentance becomes restoration, and restoration leads to renewed calling.

Discussion Questions

- What stands out to you about Jesus’ tone and posture toward Peter?
- Why do you think Jesus asked the same question three times?
- Where does past failure still try to shape your identity?
- How does Jesus’ restoration of Peter change the way you view your own mistakes?
- What responsibility or calling might you be avoiding because of shame?

Simple Practice

This week, take one step toward living from grace instead of guilt:

- Confess lingering shame honestly to Christ in prayer.
- Receive His forgiveness fully, without minimizing or rehearsing your failure.
- Step into one act of obedience or responsibility you’ve been avoiding.

Jesus does not ask, “Why did you fail?” He asks, “Do you love me?” And then He says, “Follow me.”

SMALL GROUP GUIDE: FACE TO FACE

WEEK 11: AWAKENED

Focus Scripture: Mark 10:46-52

Reflection

As Jesus passes through Jericho, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus cries out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Though the crowd tries to silence him, he shouts even louder. Jesus stops.

When asked what he wants, Bartimaeus replies simply, “Rabbi, I want to see.” His request is honest and focused. Jesus restores his sight and says, “Your faith has made you well.” Immediately, Bartimaeus follows Him on the road.

This encounter reminds us that transformation begins with recognition. Bartimaeus sees who Jesus is before he ever sees him physically. And once his eyes are opened, he does not return to the roadside; he joins the journey. Awakened faith does not remain seated; it follows.

Discussion Questions

- What stands out to you about Bartimaeus’ persistence?
- Why is it significant that Jesus stopped for him?
- Where might you have grown silent instead of crying out for mercy?
- What “cloak” (security, comfort, fear, identity) might you need to lay aside?
- What would it look like for you to follow Jesus more actively this week?

Simple Practice

This week, practice awakened faith:

- Persist in prayer where you’ve grown discouraged.
- Clearly name what you are asking Jesus to heal or reveal.
- Take one tangible step of obedience that reflects new sight.

Jesus still stops for those who cry for mercy. And when He opens our eyes, He invites us onto the road with Him.

SMALL GROUP GUIDE: FACE TO FACE WEEK 12: AWAKENED

Focus Scripture: John 8:1-11

Reflection

A woman is dragged before Jesus, exposed in public shame and surrounded by accusers holding stones. The question is legal, but the moment is deeply personal. After inviting anyone without sin to cast the first stone, Jesus is left alone with her. “Neither do I condemn you,” He says. “Go, and from now on sin no more.”

Jesus does not ignore her sin, nor does He crush her with it. He removes condemnation and restores dignity. The only One qualified to judge chooses mercy.

This encounter reminds us that grace is not permissiveness; it is transformation. Forgiveness removes the sentence of shame and redirects the future. When people encounter the real Jesus, condemnation ends and a new way of living begins.

Discussion Questions

- What stands out to you about Jesus’ response to the accusers?
- Why is it significant that Jesus addresses the woman directly and personally?
- Where do you identify more—with the accused or the accusers?
- Have you truly received Christ’s “Neither do I condemn you,” or are you still carrying shame?
- What might “go and sin no more” look like in your life this week?

Simple Practice

This week, practice grace-shaped obedience:

- Release one area of lingering shame to Christ.
- Lay down one “stone” of quiet judgment toward someone else.
- Take one tangible step that reflects a new direction and freedom.

Jesus does not excuse sin—but He does remove condemnation. And when condemnation ends, transformation begins.

GOING DEEPER

Recommended Books

Who Is This Man? — John Ortberg

Ortberg explores the identity and impact of Jesus, helping readers rediscover who Christ truly is beyond cultural assumptions. As this series invites us to encounter the real Jesus, this book deepens our awe of the One we are meeting face to face.

Gentle and Lowly — Dane Ortlund

A meditation on the compassionate heart of Christ toward sinners and sufferers. This book reinforces the series theme that Jesus moves toward the broken, drawing us from distance into intimate assurance of His mercy.

The Divine Conspiracy — Dallas Willard

Willard expands our understanding of life in the Kingdom and what it means to follow Jesus relationally. It connects to the transformational movement of this series, showing how sustained intimacy with Christ reshapes everyday life.

Domestic Monastery — Ronald Rolheiser

Rolheiser reminds us that encounter with Jesus is not limited to dramatic moments, but happens in the ordinary rhythms of life. This book helps translate face-to-face encounters into daily faithfulness and lived transformation.

Jesus Through the Eyes of Women — Rebecca McLaughlin

McLaughlin highlights how Jesus consistently saw, valued, and restored women in a culture that often overlooked them. This aligns closely with the series emphasis that Jesus notices the unseen and crosses barriers to draw people near.

Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes — Kenneth Bailey

Bailey provides cultural insight into Gospel encounters, helping us better understand the courage, tenderness, and authority of Jesus. By clarifying the historical setting, this book helps modern readers step more fully into the intimacy of the stories.