

Let's Go Group Studies

Leader's Notes

1. We're providing this material to you to remove some of the stress and frustration of developing a plan to lead a specific group study. It isn't meant to replace your individual preparation to lead. Our hope is that you would use it as a guide to your engagement with the text and the Holy Spirit and allow Him to lead you as you help your study's participants to have their own relevant encounter with scripture and the Holy Spirit.
2. This plan isn't meant to constrain you to lead in any specific way. **Please do modify it to better meet the needs of your group and to honor your gifting and authentic style.** For example, when and how you pray and share prayer needs should be in a rhythm that is good for your group as long as you are praying as a group. For another, who reads and how scripture is read should fit your group and its needs as long as it is read somehow.
3. **Be authentic.** If you find yourself saying "They are asking" as in, 'I didn't write this question and I don't really understand why it is being asked.' Don't ask it. Ask something else. It is okay not to understand everything. No one understands everything. If you don't believe in what you're saying, why should anyone else believe it? One way to turn this into a positive is to admit to the group that you are struggling with figuring out a particular bit and allow someone else to contribute their God-given wisdom.
4. Some questions, especially earlier in the study, aren't meant to be a mile deep or transformative. These questions are intended to prompt the participants to notice what is there. They give the participants a way to begin to care about the specific words on the page and to begin to discuss the relevance of the scripture to their needs.
5. Portions of the plan in quotes are meant to be spoken out loud to the group as in, "Who's buried in Grant's Tomb?" You don't have to repeat the question or statement exactly as it appears. Restate it in a way that feels comfortable and natural for you.
6. Portions of the plan in *italics* are meant to be notes to you that you can use as prompts in aiding group discussion and aren't intended to be read verbatim to the group. They may not be the definitive answer but should be a good possible answer. As part of your preparation, please add to and edit the notes to fit where you intend to lead the discussion.
7. A **Follow up question** helps participants open up a little more and look a little deeper and is meant to be asked after there has been some discussion of the prior question.
8. The last two pages are the participant handout.
9. Please remember that our focus, purpose and practice is to **Love God, Love Others and Make Disciples.**

How Can Christ Followers Honor Political Leaders?-Let's Go

- 1) Scripture: Mark 12:13-17; Acts 5:17-21 & 28-29, Acts 22-28
 - A. Parallel accounts- Matt 22:15-22; Luke 20:20-26
- 2) Objective: After studying the listed scripture and participating in the discussion, each person will have identified at least one situation in their life where they think the legitimate human authorities in their life might be directing them to act or think in ways that are contrary to God's clear direction.
- 3) Resources: Book of Mark, Grassmick. The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Walvoord & Zuck
- 4) Preparation:
 - A. Pray for guidance
 - B. Review Leader's Notes and read entire lesson plan
- 5) Prayer requests & Open in prayer
- 6) Intro:
 - A. "Last time I asked you to identify a change that needs to happen in your life in light of God the Father sending His Son to call us back to Him. Would anyone be willing to share if you were able to do that and tell us how you feel about the results?"
 - i) *If you closed last time's study with a different question or application, substitute your closing for this one.*
 - B. "This time, Jesus uses a very short object lesson to teach us a foundational principle when His calling on our life comes into conflict with the various human authorities God has placed over us. The question meant to trap Jesus was about paying a controversial poll tax to the Romans. Jesus uses it to show us that some things truly do belong to the authorities of this world, but some things belong exclusively to God. Learning to navigate the difference between the two is one of the ways that we grow towards maturity in Christ."
 - C. Again, when we are done, each of us will have identified at least one situation in our life where we think the legitimate human authorities in our life might be directing us to act or think in ways that are contrary to God's clear direction."
- 7) The study
 - A. Ask for a volunteer to read Mark 12:13-17
 - B. Ask everyone to complete question 1 on the handout. Allow 3-5 minutes for them to finish and then ask for volunteers to share their answers.

i) “It’s kind of fun to watch the Pharisees and Herodians put so much effort into seeking to trap Jesus into something worthy of arrest when He only needed one short lesson to bring their plans to nothing. But look deeper at just Jesus’ words. What do you think Jesus is telling us about what is important?”

(1) *Don’t worry about money. It comes and it goes.*

(2) *I am to learn what belongs to God so I can give Him what is His.*

(3) *We need to honor our earthly obligations, but our obligations to God are more important.*

(4) *I really hope I get to ask Jesus if He got any joy out of helping evil people look silly, or if it just broke His heart.*

C. Ask someone to Read Romans 13:1-7.

D. Ask “What do we own rulers?” “What else do you notice?”

E. Ask for volunteers to read Acts 5:17-21 and 5:28-29

F. Ask “The apostles had a choice to make regarding who to obey. How did they choose and why?”

i) *God over human authority. (See also Acts 5:40-42)*

G. Ask everyone to complete question 2 on the handout. Allow 3-5 minutes for them to finish and then ask for volunteers to share their answers.

i) “On the back of your handout, please read a very abbreviated summary of Paul’s response to civil and religious oppression meant to get him to stop preaching the Good News. What do you notice about how Paul responds to and uses that oppression?”

(1) *Where God led Paul followed.*

(2) *Suffering didn’t stop him.*

(3) *He shared at every opportunity that God provided.*

(4) *He kept a clear conscience by honoring God’s law and man’s when they weren’t in conflict.*

(5) *He looked after the interests of friends and enemies alike.*

H. Ask everyone to complete question 3 on the handout. Allow 3-5 minutes for them to finish and then ask for volunteers to share their answers.

i) “We live in a highly charged political atmosphere where people’s feelings are easily hurt and that often appears antagonistic to our beliefs and ideals. What is the most important thing we should keep in mind if we are to act in a way

that brings honor to God and keeps our consciences clear?" *Ideally, these answers come from the participants. Whether they get them from the study, the Sunday sermon or elsewhere, the best thing that can happen here is they are verbalized by the participants. If they struggle to answer...*

- (1) *(Our) Suffering is authorized.*
- (2) *As believers in Jesus Christ, our informed participation in our political system is beneficial to the outcome and secondary to our calling in Christ.*
- (3) *Pray for and develop wisdom.*
- (4) *Keep first things first.*
- (5) *Please keep in mind the potential for a discussion like this to go sideways. It is okay to respectfully move the conversation further on if it seems people might be choosing sides or other bad things are about to start happening. This isn't meant to be about traditional Christian values disappearing from our culture so do your best to keep the discussion focused on how best we can demonstrate our love for God and those around us.*

- I. Ask everyone to complete question 4 on the handout. Allow 3-5 minutes for them to finish and then ask for volunteers to share their answers.
 - i) "Is there any situation in your life where human authority (employers, laws, government, social or family pressures, institutional rules) conflicts with how you believe God would have you act or think?"
 - (1) *As you discuss these situations in your group, try to help your participants discern between very real conflicts with God's calling and situations where it is our preferences that are in conflict with human authority. A good start for this is to pray for discernment and look for clear Biblical teaching about what we think the conflict is.*
 - (2) *An example of this might be pointing out that the news or social media are only an authority over us if we give them that authority.*
 - (3) *Another might be pressure from family members to not take the Bible so seriously.*

8) Summary:

- A. Encourage your group members to apply the ideas or principles they developed from question 4. Plan on asking them next week about the results.
- B. Close in prayer

How Can Christ Followers Honor Political Leaders?-Let's Go

Mark 12:13-17

- 1) It's kind of fun to watch the Pharisees and Herodians put so much effort into trying to trap Jesus into something worthy of arrest when He only needed one short lesson to bring their plans to nothing. But look deeper at just Jesus' words. What do you think Jesus is trying to tell us about what is important?

- 2) On the back of your handout, please read a very abbreviated summary of Paul's response to civil and religious oppression meant to get him to stop preaching the Good News. What do you notice about how Paul responds to and uses that oppression?

- 3) We live in a highly charged political atmosphere where people's feelings are easily hurt and that often appears antagonistic to our beliefs and ideals. What is the most important thing we should keep in mind if we are to act in a way that brings honor to God and keeps our consciences clear?

- 4) Is there any situation in your life where human authority (employers, laws, government, social or family pressures, institutional rules) conflicts with how you believe God would have you act or think?

For next time... Read Luke 2:1-7

The story of how Paul went from preaching the Good News to the crowds in Jerusalem to his visitors to his captivity in Rome spans the last six chapters of Acts. It covers several years, religious and civil courts, an ocean voyage with a shipwreck, prison cells and finally house arrest. Through it all he is the model of a believer in Jesus Christ who is an obedient citizen who obeys God first.

We see Paul as a skilled debater who knew how to read his audience and appeal to them at a level that got a response.

- 23:6-7 Paul realized that some members of the high council were Sadducees, and some were Pharisees, so he shouted, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, as were my ancestors! And I am on trial because my hope is in the resurrection of the dead!" This divided the council,
- 24:10-13 The governor then motioned for Paul to speak. Paul said, "I know, sir, that you have been a judge of Jewish affairs for many years, so I gladly present my defense before you. You can quickly discover that I arrived in Jerusalem no more than twelve days ago to worship at the Temple. My accusers never found me arguing with anyone in the Temple, nor stirring up a riot in any synagogue or on the streets of the city. These men cannot prove the things they accuse me of doing."
- 25:10-11b But Paul replied, "No! This is the official Roman court, so I ought to be tried right here. You know very well I am not guilty of harming the Jews. If I have done something worthy of death, I don't refuse to die. But if I am innocent, no one has a right to turn me over to these men to kill me."
- 26:28 Agrippa interrupted him. "Do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian so quickly?"

Keeping his conscience clear of moral ambiguity was important to him.

- 23:1 Gazing intently at the high council, Paul began: "Brothers, I have always lived before God with a clear conscience!"
- 23:5 "I'm sorry, brothers. I didn't realize he was the high priest," Paul replied, "for the Scriptures say, 'You must not speak evil of any of your rulers.'
- 27:10-11 "Men," he said, "I believe there is trouble ahead if we go on—shipwreck, loss of cargo, and danger to our lives as well." But the officer in charge of the prisoners listened more to the ship's captain and the owner than to Paul.

Undergirding everything he did was solid commitment to serve God.

- 22:21 "But the Lord said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles!'"
- 23:11 That night the Lord appeared to Paul and said, "Be encouraged, Paul. Just as you have been a witness to me here in Jerusalem, you must preach the Good News in Rome as well."
- 25:11c-12 I appeal to Caesar!" Festus conferred with his advisers and then replied, "Very well! You have appealed to Caesar, and to Caesar you will go!"
- 26:32 And Agrippa said to Festus, "He could have been set free if he hadn't appealed to Caesar."
- 28:16 When we arrived in Rome, Paul was permitted to have his own private lodging, though he was guarded by a soldier.
- 28:30-31 For the next two years, Paul lived in Rome at his own expense. He welcomed all who visited him, boldly proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. And no one tried to stop him.

Paul sought to honor God's laws and man's. He looked after the welfare of friends and enemies alike and he preached the Good News at every opportunity. He could've gone free if he had stopped preaching the gospel. He could've gone free if he hadn't appealed to Caesar and been sent to Rome as God had told him he would. There are many more lessons in these chapters and I encourage you to read them in full as you have opportunity. I hope the obvious lesson for you is that, like Paul, we are called to live in obedience and peace with the laws of the land even if we must suffer under them, but that obedience only extends to the point where it conflicts with what God calls us to.