

LifeGroup Leader Guide

THE LIFE YOU WERE MADE FOR

Week 2: *Suffocating Systems*

Key Verses: Mark 2:27–28

“The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord, even over the Sabbath!” — Mark 2:27–28

Big Idea

God's good gifts—habits, routines, traditions, standards, and spiritual practices—can become **suffocating systems** when they stop serving our relationship with God and people. Jesus invites us away from legalism, perfectionism, and control and toward a life shaped by **freedom, grace, compassion, and love**.

Opening Prayer

Leader: Begin by inviting the group to quiet their hearts and become aware of God's presence.

Father, thank You that You created us for life with You—a life of freedom, grace, love, and purpose. As we talk tonight about systems, rules, habits, and expectations, help us to be honest about the ways these things can sometimes help us and the ways they can sometimes become burdens. Give us the courage to recognize where we may be striving, controlling, or trying to prove ourselves. Help us remember the words of Jesus: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” Jesus, You are Lord over our lives. Teach us to follow You rather than simply follow rules. Help us to receive your grace, extend compassion to others, and discover the freedom You came to give us. May our conversation tonight draw us closer to You and closer to one another.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Discussion Questions & Leader Insights

1. What ideas from the sermon caught your attention?

Leader Insight:

This is intentionally broad. Give people an opportunity to identify what God may have been saying to them through the sermon rather than immediately directing the conversation.

Listen for themes such as:

- Rules that have become burdens.
- Perfectionism or the pressure to get everything right.
- The difference between discipline and legalism.
- Systems that were created to help but have become controlling.
- Jesus' emphasis on grace and compassion.
- The freedom Jesus offers.

Follow-up:

"Why do you think that particular idea stood out to you?"

2. Read Luke 13:10–17. Jesus pointed out that the leaders were willing to bend rules for their farm animals, but not for a suffering person. Are there areas in your life where you tend to stick rigidly to expectations or “the way things should be done” at the expense of being patient or compassionate with a real person?

Leader Insight:

Jesus exposes a contradiction: the religious leaders could make reasonable exceptions for their animals but were unwilling to make room for compassion toward a suffering woman. The issue wasn't simply having rules. The deeper issue was **when rules become more important than people**.

This can happen in church, family, parenting, work, friendships, or even our own expectations of ourselves.

Follow-up:

"What makes it difficult for us to set aside our expectations when a person's needs don't fit our plan?"

Leader reminder:

Keep this from becoming a discussion about other people's rigidity. Encourage people to consider **their own hearts**.

3. Where in your life has a habit, routine, expectation, or high standard that was once helpful begun to feel more like a burden or a cage—leaving you feeling spiritually “bent over” or burned out? What might it look like to bring that to Jesus and experience greater freedom?

Leader Insight:

A helpful distinction is:

A healthy structure serves us.

An unhealthy structure controls us.

Something can begin as a good discipline and gradually become an obligation that produces anxiety, guilt, resentment, or exhaustion.

Examples might include:

- Exercise or health routines.
- Work expectations.
- Parenting standards.
- Church involvement.
- Bible reading or prayer.
- Keeping the house perfectly organized.
- Financial expectations.
- Trying to please everyone.

The goal isn't necessarily to abandon the practice. It may mean **releasing the pressure and rediscovering its purpose** – to bring you closer to Jesus.

Follow-up:

“What would freedom look like—not necessarily quitting the practice, but changing your relationship with it?”

4. How do you personally tell the difference between practicing a spiritual routine out of a genuine desire for connection with Jesus versus doing it out of a legalistic need to feel “good enough” or maintain control?

Leader Insight:

This is an important heart-level question.

The **same spiritual practice** can come from very different motivations.

For example, someone can read the Bible because:

- “I want to know Jesus better,” or
- “I need to check this off my list so God will be pleased with me.”

Helpful diagnostic questions:

- Does this practice draw me toward Jesus or simply make me feel religious?
- What happens when I miss a day?
- Do I experience grace or condemnation?
- Am I becoming more loving toward God and people?
- Is the practice producing spiritual fruit?

Key thought:

Spiritual disciplines are meant to help us **be with Jesus**, not help us **prove ourselves to Jesus**.

5. Read Luke 6:1–5. How does viewing spiritual practices (like Sabbath, Bible reading, or fasting) as tools built to *serve your life* change the way you approach your daily walk with Jesus?

Leader Insight:

This connects directly to Mark 2:27–28.

Jesus isn't dismissing Sabbath or spiritual practices. He's restoring their **proper purpose**.

A spiritual practice can be thought of as a **trellis**: it provides structure that helps something living grow. But the trellis isn't the plant.

Bible reading, prayer, fasting, Sabbath, worship, and community are intended to help us become more like Jesus—not become another list of requirements we must perfectly maintain.

Follow-up:

“Which spiritual practice has been life-giving for you? What makes it life-giving?”

6. Is there a “safe” tradition, expectation, or comfort zone you need to step out of in order to follow Jesus into a season of deeper faith and growth?

Leader Insight:

Following Jesus sometimes requires us to leave what is familiar.

A “safe” system isn't necessarily a bad system. It may simply be something that has become **comfortable enough that we no longer need faith.**

Stepping Out could involve:

- Trying something new.
- Serving in a new way.
- Building a relationship with someone different from us.
- Having a difficult conversation.
- Taking a step of generosity.
- Inviting someone into our home.
- Joining a group or community.
- Letting go of a long-held expectation.

Follow-up:

“What makes stepping outside our comfort zone difficult, even when we believe God may be leading us there?”

7. Read Micah 6:6–8 and Matthew 23:23–24. What is a “gnat” (a minor detail, pet peeve, or rigid expectation) you tend to over-focus on, and how can you shift your energy toward the “weightier matters” of grace and kindness?

Leader Insight:

Jesus' point in Matthew 23 isn't that details don't matter. It's that we can become so focused on **minor things that we neglect what matters most.**

Micah 6 gives us a beautiful summary of what God desires:

- **Act justly**
- **Love mercy**
- **Walk humbly with God**

Encourage the group to consider where they may spend disproportionate energy on things that matter less while overlooking opportunities to show love, mercy, patience, or kindness.

Important:

Don't let this become an opportunity to name other people's "gnats." Keep the focus personal.

Follow-up:

"Where might God be inviting you to major in the majors?"

8. How comfortable are you with not having all the answers in your spiritual journey, and what helps you rest in God's grace when life feels uncertain or unfinished?

Leader Insight:

Suffocating systems often appeal to us because **certainty feels safe**.

If we can create the right rules, routines, plans, and answers, we may feel like we can control the outcome.

But following Jesus involves trust. Faith doesn't mean having every answer; it means knowing **Who we are trusting**.

Remind the group that spiritual maturity isn't necessarily having fewer questions. Sometimes it means becoming more comfortable bringing our questions to God.

Follow-up:

"What helps you trust God when you don't understand what He's doing?"

9. Read James 1:27. If "genuine religion" is measured by active mercy to those in need, what is one tangible step of compassion or service you could take in this direction, or where is this already present in your life?

Leader Insight:

James brings the discussion full circle.

True faith isn't simply about having the right beliefs or following the right religious routines. It becomes visible through **how we love and serve people**.

The question moves us from:

"Am I doing religion correctly?"

to:

“Am I becoming a person who looks more like Jesus?”

Encourage people to think concretely rather than abstractly.

Possible responses:

- Check in on someone who is struggling.
- Help someone practically.
- Volunteer.
- Invite someone into your home.
- Encourage someone who is lonely.
- Give generously.
- Serve someone without expecting anything in return.

Follow-up:

“Is there a particular person God may be bringing to mind as you think about this?”

Closing Thought for Leaders

The heart of this week's discussion is not **“rules are bad.”**

Jesus isn't calling us to a life without structure, discipline, or spiritual practices. He's calling us to make sure those things remain **servants rather than masters.**

A helpful way to summarize the teaching:

We don't follow Jesus to earn His love. We follow Jesus because we have already received His love.

As you close the discussion, invite everyone to consider:

“Is there an area of my life where something that was meant to help me follow Jesus has started to keep me from experiencing His grace, freedom, or love?”

Then pray for the courage to surrender that area to Jesus.