

THE LIFE YOU WERE MADE FOR

LifeGroup Leader Discussion Guide

Week 4: Do the Hard Thing

Key Verse: Mark 8:33

"Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." (NIV)

Sermon Summary

When the future feels scary, our instinct is to grab what's easy, comfortable, and immediate. But the expedient path is a slow drift toward compromise. True meaning isn't found in comfort; it's forged when we voluntarily sacrifice the present for a better future.

Rejecting shortcuts doesn't mean sitting still. It means faithful stewardship. We plant and water with diligence, while trusting God with the growth.

Opening Prayer

Leader:

"Let's begin by asking God to give us the courage to be honest with ourselves and open to what He may want to show us tonight."

Prayer:

Father, thank You that You care about not only what we accomplish, but who we are becoming.

We confess that we often want the easy way. When we are tired, afraid, impatient, or uncertain about the future, shortcuts can look very attractive. Give us wisdom to recognize when convenience is becoming compromise.

Help us to follow Jesus, even when His way is difficult. Teach us the difference between faithfully doing what You have called us to do and trying to control the outcome ourselves.

Give us honest hearts tonight. Help us listen to one another without judgment, encourage one another with grace, and challenge one another toward faithfulness.

Show us one step You want each of us to take this week.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

1. What idea from this week's sermon caught your attention?

Leader Insight

Start here and let the group warm up. Don't rush to the deeper questions. Listen for themes that emerge naturally—shortcuts, patience, sacrifice, fear, diligence, control, or trusting God.

Follow-up prompts if needed:

- What made that idea stand out to you?
- Did anything challenge you or make you uncomfortable?
- Was there something you hadn't thought about before?

Leader reminder:

You don't need to correct or expand on every response. Sometimes the best leadership is simply saying, "Tell me more about that."

2. Read Proverbs 7:1–27.

The young man doesn't sprint into compromise; he drifts toward it step by step. What does slow drift actually look like in everyday life, and what early warning signs do you notice in yourself?

Leader Insight

Proverbs 7 doesn't describe a person who wakes up one morning and decides to destroy his life. He moves progressively closer to temptation.

That's an important picture of spiritual drift: **we often don't choose the destination—we simply keep taking small steps in its direction.**

Drift can look like:

- gradually neglecting prayer or Scripture
- normalizing unhealthy thoughts or behaviours
- becoming increasingly cynical
- avoiding difficult conversations
- allowing resentment to grow
- making small compromises because "it's not really a big deal"
- surrounding ourselves with influences that pull us away from Jesus

Listen for:

The early warning signs are often emotional before they become behavioural—rationalizing, secrecy, defensiveness, impatience, isolation, or repeatedly telling ourselves, "I can handle this."

Follow-up:

"What is usually the first sign that tells you you're beginning to drift?"

3. Expedience rarely announces itself as evil; it presents as efficiency.

Where has a shortcut dressed itself up as wisdom in your life lately—in your finances, health, marriage, or work?

Leader Insight

This question gets underneath the idea of **expedience**.

Shortcuts often sound reasonable:

- “I don't have time for this.”
- “This is just being practical.”
- “Everyone does it.”
- “I'll deal with it later.”
- “This is the fastest way.”
- “It'll be easier if I just...”

The issue isn't that efficiency is always wrong. The question is whether **speed and convenience are causing us to neglect what actually matters**.

Helpful distinction:

Wisdom asks, “What is faithful?”

Expedience asks, “What is easiest right now?”

Invite people to share without turning the conversation into confession or shame.

Leader note:

If someone shares a significant personal struggle, resist the temptation to solve it immediately. Ask, “What would faithfulness look like here?” before offering advice.

4. Read Genesis 25:29–34.

Esau traded his entire birthright for a single bowl of stew because he was hungry right now. What's a “bowl of stew” trade you've made—or feel tempted to make? Something cheap and immediate that costs you something that actually matters?

Leader Insight

Esau wasn't wrong to be hungry. The problem was allowing an **immediate appetite to determine a long-term decision**.

We all have “right now” desires that can compete with “what matters most.”

A “bowl of stew” might involve:

- comfort instead of discipline
- spending instead of saving
- pleasure instead of purity
- avoidance instead of reconciliation
- scrolling instead of being present
- recognition instead of integrity
- immediate relief instead of long-term health
- keeping peace instead of having a necessary conversation

The goal isn't to make people feel guilty about ordinary pleasures. It's to help us recognize when **something temporary is being given authority over something valuable.**

Follow-up question:

“What makes the ‘bowl of stew’ especially tempting when we're tired, stressed, lonely, or discouraged?”

5. Read Matthew 4:1–11.

Hungry, tired, and alone in the wilderness, Jesus rejected every shortcut Satan offered. When you're depleted and tempted to take the easy way, which of Jesus' answers do you most need: trust, worship, or obedience?

Leader Insight

Jesus faced temptation when He was **hungry, tired, and alone**. His vulnerability didn't make Him less faithful, but it did make the temptation more pressing.

The three responses give us helpful categories:

Trust:

“God will provide. I don't have to force the outcome.”

Worship:

“God is more important than what I want right now.”

Obedience:

“I will do what God says even when another option looks easier.”

Ask people why they chose their particular word.

Follow-up:

“What tends to happen to your decision-making when you're depleted?”

Leader takeaway

Sometimes the most spiritual thing we can recognize is that **we are more vulnerable to shortcuts when we are tired, hungry, stressed, isolated, or discouraged.**

6. Striving is: forcing the outcome, skipping the process, measuring success by speed.

Stewardship is: preparing the ground, embracing small daily steps, trusting God with the results. Where are you manufacturing outcomes instead of stewarding your responsibility?

Leader Insight

This is one of the central ideas of the sermon.

Striving says:

“If I don't make this happen, it won't happen.”

Stewardship says:

“I will faithfully do what God has entrusted to me, and I will leave the outcome with Him.”

This doesn't mean passivity. Stewardship is active. We prepare, practice, work, communicate, save, apologize, pray, study, exercise, serve, and show up.

But we recognize that **we cannot manufacture the results.**

A helpful question for the group:

“What part of this situation has God actually entrusted to you—and what part are you trying to control?”

Leader note:

This question can expose anxiety and control without requiring people to disclose everything happening in their lives.

7. Where have you drifted toward spiritual passivity—praying without acting—or shortcut striving—acting without praying?

Leader Insight

This question helps avoid two opposite errors.

Spiritual Passivity

“I've prayed about it,” but we never take the next faithful step.

Examples:

- praying for reconciliation but avoiding the conversation
- praying for financial provision without changing spending habits
- praying for spiritual growth without engaging Scripture or community
- praying for someone to know Jesus without ever having a conversation

Shortcut Striving

“We're going to make this happen,” while leaving God out of the process.

Examples:

- controlling people
- forcing an outcome
- making decisions without prayer
- relying entirely on our own ability
- believing everything depends on us

Healthy discipleship holds both together:

Pray like it depends on God.

Act like you've been entrusted with responsibility.

Follow-up:

“Which side are you naturally more likely to lean toward?”

8. Read 1 Corinthians 3:6–7 and Proverbs 21:31.

What does faithful, diligent preparation look like for you this week without trying to control the outcome?

Leader Insight

1 Corinthians 3 gives us a beautiful picture: **Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.**

Our responsibility is real, but it has limits.

We may:

- plant the seed
- water it
- prepare the soil
- show up faithfully
- do the work
- make the wise choice
- have the conversation
- practice the discipline

But **God gives the growth.**

Proverbs 21:31 similarly reminds us that preparation matters, but ultimate security doesn't come from our preparation—it comes from God.

Ask each person to identify a specific area where they need to prepare faithfully while releasing control of the result.

Leader prompt:

“If you couldn't guarantee the outcome, but you knew you could be faithful, what would you do?”

9. What's one shortcut you will deliberately refuse this week—and what faithful, unglamorous step will you take instead?

Tell the group, and decide who will check in with you before next week.

Leader Insight

End with action. The goal isn't simply that people leave thinking, **“I should try harder.”**

The goal is:

“I know what faithfulness looks like for me this week.”

Encourage people to make their answers **specific and measurable.**

Instead of:

- “I'm going to work on my marriage.”

Try:

- “I'm going to initiate the conversation I've been avoiding and listen without becoming defensive.”

Instead of:

- “I'm going to get better with money.”

Try:

- “I'm going to review my spending for 30 minutes on Wednesday.”

Instead of:

- “I'm going to spend more time with God.”

Try:

- “I’m going to spend 15 minutes in Mark 8 each morning before checking my phone.”

Accountability

Have each person identify:

The shortcut I will refuse:

The faithful step I will take:

The person who will check in with me:

When they will check in:

Leader reminder

Follow up next week. Accountability works best when it is **simple, specific, and gracious**.

The goal isn't perfection. It's helping one another keep taking the next faithful step.

Closing Thought for Leaders

The heart of this week's discussion is not **“Do harder things so God will be pleased with you.”**

It is:

Follow Jesus faithfully even when the shortcut looks easier.

We plant.

We water.

We prepare.

We take the next step.

We refuse compromise.

And we trust God with the growth.

That is faithful stewardship.