

SMALL GROUP

LEADER GUIDE

DIRTY CHURCH · BELONG · BELIEVE · BEHAVE



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LEADING A GROUP

Welcome, Leader

Thank you for leading. Over four weeks, your group will walk through one story in Mark 2: four friends who carried a paralyzed man to Jesus and went through the roof to do it. Everyone in your group should have the *Dirty Church* book or Study Book.

You don't have to be an expert.
Your job isn't to have every answer. It's to ask good questions, listen well and point people to Jesus. If a question stumps you, say, "Great question. Let me find out," and follow up next week.

Belong first.
This whole series is about a church where people belong from day one. Model it. Learn names, notice who's new, and make sure no one is talked about instead of talked to.

Keep it about Jesus.
Conversations can drift into politics or church complaints. Gently bring it back: "What does Jesus show us here?" The ground is level at the foot of the cross.

Protect the group.
What's shared in the group stays in the group. If someone shares something that suggests they or someone else is in danger, talk to a pastor right away.

A Typical Meeting (about an hour)

5 min	Welcome and opener
5 min	Read the passage together
30–40 min	Talk It Over
5 min	This Week challenge
10 min	Pray together

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WEEK 1

The Church Becoming

Chapters 1–2: Grandma's House · The Order Matters · Matthew 16:13–18 · Romans 12:2

THE BIG IDEA

The church isn't a house to protect. It's a family Jesus is building.

Your goal this week: Help your group see the church as a family Jesus is building, not a building to protect, and name the unwritten rules that keep people out.

1. Open

What's a place from your childhood that you wish had never changed?

2. Read Together

READ — **Matthew 16:13–18**

13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"
14 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."
15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"
16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."
17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.
18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

3. Key Points from the Message

Underlined words are the fill-in blanks in the Study Book.

Grandma's house

- Some things deserve our nostalgia. But in a church, **nostalgia** is deadly. It leads to control, resistance to change and **irrelevance**.
- Church should be alive. If you miss a week, you should miss **something**.

A gathering, not a house · Matthew 16:18

- The rock is the truth that Jesus is the **Messiah**, the Son of the living God.
- The word Jesus used, *ekklesia*, means a **gathering**, not a building.
- You are God's **house**. The building is just where the family **gathers** (1 Corinthians 3:16).

The order matters · Romans 12:2

- The unwritten rules: **behave**, then **believe**, then **belong**.
- Jesus flipped it: **belong**, **believe**, **behave**.
- We're all **dirty**. Not *those* people. Us.
- Don't be **conformed**. Be **transformed**. Change comes through a relationship with **Jesus**, not a relationship to a church.

4. Talk It Over

1. Was there a "Grandma's house" in your life, a place you wanted to stay exactly the same? What made it so special?
2. Where have you seen nostalgia turn into a need to control, in a church, a family or a workplace?
3. What "unwritten rules" did you learn about church growing up, or the first time you walked into one?
4. What changes when you think of the church as *people* instead of a *place*?
5. What's the difference between being conformed to the image of a church and being transformed into the image of Jesus?
6. If you missed a week of your church family, what would you miss? What would they miss about you?

> LEADER NOTES
>
> - Expect laughter and nostalgia on the opener. Enjoy it. Then ask, "When does wanting things to stay the same become a problem?"
> - Some people have been hurt by churches with unwritten rules. Listen without defending. A simple "I'm sorry that happened" goes a long way.
> - Make sure the group lands on "we're all dirty." This isn't about *those* people. It's about all of us.

5. This Week

Get to church a few minutes early this week and talk with someone you don't know yet. Remember: they belong from day one.

6. Pray

Thank God for the church as a family. Ask him to show your group anyone who feels like they don't belong, and to make your group a place where they do.

WEEK 2

Belong

Chapters 3–4: Through the Roof · Four Friends · Mark 2:1–5 · Matthew 9:35–38 · Proverbs 3:5–6

THE BIG IDEA

The ground is level at the foot of the cross.

Your goal this week: Help your group see the four friends as a model and name a real "friend on the mat" they will pray for and carry toward Jesus.

1. Open

Who's a friend who showed up for you when you really needed it?

2. Read Together

READ — **Mark 2:1–5**

[1]A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. [2]They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. [3]Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. [4]Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. [5]When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

3. Key Points from the Message

Underlined words are the fill-in blanks in the Study Book.

Through the roof · Mark 2:1–5

- Capernaum was Jesus' adopted **home** base.
- The paralyzed man was talked **about**, not talked **to**.
- You can no more clean up your life before you come to Jesus than this man could **heal** himself.

Level ground

- Jesus planted his **cross** on our lines in the sand. The ground is **level** at the foot of the cross.
- The gospel divides: Jesus is the only **way**. The gospel unites: **anyone** can come.

Four friends · Matthew 9:36

- The **compassionate** friend: "God, break my heart for the world around me."
- The **accepting** friend: I see the person the way God does.

- The **loving** friend: I'm willing to be **inconvenienced**.
- The **faithful** friend: I don't give up.

4. Talk It Over

1. Have you ever been talked about instead of talked to? How did it feel?
2. Who are the people in your world today who get talked about but not talked to?
3. Where do you see Christians drawing lines in the sand? What would meeting people at the level ground of the cross look like instead?
4. Which of the four friends comes most naturally to you: compassionate, accepting, loving or faithful? Which is hardest?
5. Being a friend means giving people grace and space, while still taking responsibility to nudge them toward Jesus. What does that look like in a real relationship?
6. Who is your friend on the mat? Share their first name with your group if you're comfortable, and pray for them together.

> **LEADER NOTES**
>
> - When you talk about lines in the sand, keep it about Jesus, not parties or candidates. If the conversation heats up, say, "Let's meet at the level ground. What would Jesus want us to see?"
> - On the four friends, ask people to name one they're good at and one they need. Share your own first.
> - The last question invites people to share a first name. Keep it optional. Close by praying for those friends by name.

5. This Week

Write down the name of your friend on the mat. Pray for them by name every day this week, and look for one way to be a compassionate, accepting, loving or faithful friend to them.

6. Pray

Pray for each "friend on the mat" by first name. Ask God for compassionate, accepting, loving and faithful hearts.

WEEK 3

Believe

Chapters 5–6: "Son, Your Sins Are Forgiven" · Two Men Went Up to Pray · Mark 2:5–12 · Luke 18:9–14 · Ephesians 2:8–9

THE BIG IDEA

The man who knew he was dirty went home clean.

Your goal this week: Help your group understand that forgiveness comes only through Jesus, not being good, smart or in the right place, and that Jesus calls us chosen family.

1. Open

What's something that seemed "too good to be true" but turned out to be real?

2. Read Together

READ — **Luke 18:9–14**

9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable:
10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by
himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like
this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' 13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He
would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' 14 "I tell you that
this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled,
and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

3. Key Points from the Message

Underlined words are the fill-in blanks in the Study Book.

"Son, your sins are forgiven" · Mark 2:5–12

- Jesus left his mission with **people** like us.
- "Son" means **chosen** family.
- Jesus healed the man to show he has **authority** to forgive sins (Mark 2:10).
- Sin is any thought, action or **attitude** that separates us from God.

Two men went up to pray · Luke 18:9–14

- Self-righteous people are rarely self-**aware**.
- Being **good** does not equal forgiveness.
- Being **smart** does not equal forgiveness.

- Being in the right **place** does not equal forgiveness.
- **Salvation** through Jesus equals forgiveness.
- We are all dirty, saved by **grace** through **faith** (Ephesians 2:8–9).

4. Talk It Over

1. If Jesus left his mission with people like us, what part of that mission is yours this week?
2. Who in your life would you call chosen family? What made them family?
3. Where might you be "confident of your own righteousness" without realizing it?
4. Which do you lean on most: being good, being smart or being in the right place?
5. When was the last time you invited someone to church? What happened?
6. Some Sundays you'll get a lot out of church, and some Sundays you won't. How would it change things to remember that you might be there for someone else?

> **LEADER NOTES**
>
> - The Pharisee and the tax collector can turn into "those people" again. Ask, "Where do we see a little Pharisee in us?"
> - Some in your group may not be sure they're forgiven. Be ready to share the gospel simply: we're all dirty, Jesus died and rose for us, and salvation is a gift we receive by faith (Ephesians 2:8–9). See the box below.
> - The church-attendance questions can feel like guilt. Keep the tone hopeful: you might be there for someone else.

5. This Week

Pray the tax collector's prayer each morning: "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Then tell one person this week what Jesus has done for you.

6. Pray

Pray the tax collector's prayer together: "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Then thank God for forgiveness through Jesus.

WEEK 4

Behave

Chapters 7–8: Costumes · The Shepherd's Voice · Mark 2:10–12 · John 10:1–11 · Romans 12:2

THE BIG IDEA

A costume changes the outside. Jesus changes the inside.

Your goal this week: Help your group see that real change comes from following the Shepherd, not wearing a costume, and send them out to invite someone.

1. Open

What's the best costume you ever wore, as a kid or a grown-up?

2. Read Together

READ — **John 10:1–5, 9–11**

[1]"Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. [2]The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. [3]The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. [4]When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. [5]But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."
[9]"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. [10]The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. [11]I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

3. Key Points from the Message

Underlined words are the fill-in blanks in the Study Book.

Costumes · Mark 2:11–12

- Costumes are for **kids**. Jesus wants to **transform** us, not dress us up.
- Three challenges: **legalism**, **culturalism** and **traditionalism**.
- The real test of faith is how the people **closest** to you see your life.

The Shepherd's voice · John 10:1–11

- Jesus is the **gate** and the good **shepherd**.
- We follow because we **trust** him. There's a difference between believing in God and believing God.
- We follow because we **love** him. Agape love is a choice.

- We follow because we **like** him.

How we follow

- Choose your **friends** carefully.
- Develop your own **convictions**.
- Use an **ellipsis** on the non-essentials.
- Your faith is personal, but it's not **private**.
- Live for an audience of **one**.

4. Talk It Over

1. What "costumes" do you wear during a typical week? Which one is hardest to take off?
2. Which challenge does your church, or you, struggle with most: legalism, culturalism or traditionalism?
3. If you asked the people closest to you whether Jesus is changing you, what would they say?
4. Do you believe *in* God, or do you believe God? What's the difference in your life?
5. Who can do the heavy lifting in your life when the weight gets too much?
6. Who are you bringing? Name one person you'll invite to church or to your group in the next month.

> **LEADER NOTES**
>
> - Legalism, culturalism and traditionalism are easier to see in others. Ask, "Which one is my default?"
> - "Do you like God?" may surprise people. Give space. Some have only known God as a judge. Point them to the Good Shepherd who calls his sheep by name.
> - End with action. Ask each person to name one person they'll invite in the next month, and plan to follow up.

5. This Week

Text one friend who can "do the heavy lifting" in your life and thank them. Then invite your friend on the mat to church, or to coffee.

6. Pray

Thank Jesus for being the Good Shepherd. Ask him to help each person hear his voice and to give them courage to invite their friend on the mat.

Helps for Leaders

If someone wants to follow Jesus

- Celebrate! Then keep it simple. Read Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23 and Ephesians 2:8–9 together.
- Invite them to tell God, in their own words, that they've sinned, that they believe Jesus died and rose again for them, and that they want to follow him.
- Pray with them, and let a pastor know so they can be encouraged and take next steps like baptism.

When someone is hurting

- This series can stir up old church wounds, family conflict or grief. You don't have to fix it. Listen, pray and stay in touch.
- If someone mentions abuse, self-harm or danger to anyone, talk with a pastor right away.

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