



A Bible Study from the LCMS Northern Illinois District

Incarnate Community Bible Study Leader's Guide

Session II Community Around Christ



Helping congregations be more centered on a rich life of Word and Sacrament,
with congregational support in transitions as well as time of joys and sorrows.



Using Incarnate Community Leader's Guide

Welcome to Incarnate Community and thank you for your willingness to lead a group through this Northern Illinois District study. It is our prayer that our Lord will bless you and your group as you journey with us through this resource.

This leader's guide is designed to help you facilitate discussion of the materials with your group. In it, we've included the author's own responses to the questions with theological content to give you Pastor Kris' perspective on the questions your group will address in this study. Feel free to draw from this guide's content, making it your own, as you deem helpful for your group.

A few thoughts on your group:

- Ideally a small group consists of a leader and six to eight participants. This size allows for everyone to participate in discussion.
- The materials can be downloaded to a mobile device, printed for hard copy, or projected on screen.
- You may want to have a means of projecting the video portion of each session for ease of viewing and hearing for your entire group.
- Depending on the dynamic of your group's participation, you may not cover all the material in four one-hour sessions. If your group's goal is to work through the material in the course of four one-hour sessions, feel free to pick and choose sections and questions you think would be significant to your group and encourage participants to work through the remaining material on their own.
- It is the hope of your NID staff that many churches will participate together in this study during the Sundays of February 2022. If your group chooses to do this, you may wish to encourage them to then participate in the livestream discussion of the materials on our NID YouTube channel. (Go to the NID website at nidlcms.org to find the link.) This broadcast will feature President Buss and his panel of pastors and lay leaders who will go into more depth of discussion on each week's session.



Community Incarnate
Northern Illinois District Bible Study
Session II Community Around Christ
Leader's Guide

Focus Verse: *"For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them"* (Matthew 18:20).

Welcome and Fellowship [15 – 30 minutes in a 90 minute time frame]

Opening Prayer: Gracious heavenly Father, out of your steadfast love for the world You sent Your only Son, Jesus, into our midst. Through His incarnation and birth, you placed Him in a family and a greater community. He gathered this community to reveal the signs that His gracious reign had come, to proclaim Your Word salvation, and to fulfill Your plan of redemption through His sacrifice on the cross and resurrection. We praise You for the gift of Jesus, God with us, in the midst of community. As we walk with Jesus today through the Scriptures, may Your Spirit deepen our understanding of the blessings Christ gave to the neighbors of His incarnate ministry that we might also see the blessings He so imparts among us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Circles

They all attended the same event but saw it from very different perspectives, experienced it in different ways, and even identified with different groups at it. A pop music group came to town for a concert! Most who were part of the event were the audience. They came with their families. Some brought their dates. Others came in groups with friends and co-workers. Everything from the place of their seats in the concert hall to the conversations they had during the concert, to how well they knew the musical group shaped their impression of the event. Yet, they were not the only ones who attended. There were concert promoters and vendors, security details and ushering staffs. There were the stage crew, lighting coordinators, and sound engineers who all had their experiences of the event. Of course, there were the musicians and singers themselves, whose perspective and experience of the concert were vastly different compared to those who sat in the "nose bleed" balcony or those who never even saw the stage as they staffed the t-shirt booths. It was the same event, but many circles of community were a part of it.

1. What are some of the differences between being a part of an "inner" or "outer" circle of any event in life?
2. How does your community consist of different "circles?"

NOTE: Answers will vary with your group, but encourage members to share.

Video Segment [A three to five minute video or just one or two people discussing what it might have been like to be part of the outer and inner circles of Jesus' Incarnate ministry. Try to "concretize" a few details of what it must have been like to be at an "event" with Jesus. Note: there are positive aspects of being part of an "outer circle" at times. Try to steer clear of making the outer circle "bad" and the inner circle always "good."]

1. What stood out for you in today's video segment?
2. If you could have been in person at any event recorded in the Gospels, which would it be and why?

NOTE: Answers will vary. Encourage group members who may speak a little less to feel comfortable to share.

Gathered Around Jesus

Whether it was teeming crowds, a close circle of disciples, or intimate one-on-one encounters, Jesus is seen as regularly gathering community around Himself in the Gospels. No matter what the community, Jesus always used those "in person" encounters to carry out His gracious will.

Let's take a look at various communities in which Jesus lived and served.

The Feeding of the 5,000 – Luke 9:10-17

1. Who were the various communities who were gathered around Jesus in this text?

NOTE: There were Jesus' own disciples and certainly the 5,000 men and women and children. With such a large crowd, you could image that there were entire families who were together. Their neighbors were likely with them, but because of the size of the crowd, there were people gathered there around Jesus who likely did not know each other at all. There were also those who had various diseases.

2. What were some of the various blessings that each community received from Jesus?

NOTE: Participants might note that the disciples received the blessing of participating as Jesus' disciples in the blessing and care He provided. Those who were in need of healing received the gift and joy of being healed by Jesus, as did their family and friends. Everyone received both the blessing of being fed the meal, but they also received the blessing of hearing Jesus teach about the reign of God in their lives, as well as the sheer honor and joy of spending time in the presence of God Incarnate. Someone may note that the boy not mentioned in Luke [from whom the disciples receive the fish and bread in the first place in John] received the blessing of seeing his small offering used so wonderfully by Jesus.

3. How might Jesus' instructions to gather the largest circle of people into groups of fifty for the meal be a teaching moment for the crowd?

NOTE: According to meal practices of the day, one would only dine with someone with whom they had a relationship [and even more, someone they'd consider to be their equal]. In getting the people together in groups of 50, Jesus may be teaching that there will be a new fellowship coming [and had already arrived] which would be based on Himself where people of varying walks were considered equals because they all were connected to the Messiah. It may also be that because Israel in their 40 years of wilderness wanderings were broken up into orderly group sizes and Jesus is hinting that He is shaping a new chosen people, again, built on Himself as the Messiah.

The Healing of the Paralytic – Mark 2:1-12

1. Who were the various communities who were gathered around Jesus in this text? What might have been their understanding or perspective of Jesus before the miracle?

NOTE: While Jesus' disciples are not specifically mentioned in the text, as Jesus had come home to Capernaum, it is safe to believe at least some of His disciples witnessed this event. There were the people that had crowded into the home. There were also religious leaders, the scribes, who were there. There were the four friends of the paralytic and the paralyzed man himself.

These various groups may have held various views of whom Jesus was, from a prophet from God, to a healer or miracle-worker, to a false teacher, and some may have wondered if He was the Messiah.

2. How did Jesus address the paralyzed man's deepest need first? Why might it be said that Jesus' forgiveness was the greater of the two miracles He did that day?

NOTE: Jesus addresses the paralyzed man's deepest need first by forgiving him his sins. If the man did not receive forgiveness from Jesus, even if Jesus physically healed him, his renewed legs would again eventually stop working in death with no hope for eternity. With Jesus' forgiveness, now the healed legs are a sign of Christ's gift of eternal life, as Jesus will return one day to call this man [and all humanity] to life with glorified bodies that will work for us forever in His eternal presence. This is one reason the gift of forgiveness might be considered the greater of the two miracles that happened that day. It could also be considered the greater of the two miracles from the perspective that healing paralyzed legs for Jesus is an exercise of divine will. His forgiveness comes at the cost of His own life, therefore forgiveness is the greater miracle from the perspective of its cost.

3. What blessings do the various communities who witnessed and later read about this event receive from Jesus' care for the paralyzed man?

NOTE: The greater community receives the blessing of discovering that Jesus indeed does have authority on earth to forgive sins and does so graciously. They also catch a reflection of the life of the Church in this episode in Jesus' ministry. Jesus has gathered people in His house to hear His Word. Out of love for others and faith in Jesus, four friends have worked together to bring someone in need of Jesus' compassion. Our Lord freely grants His gift of forgiveness as well as a sign of what that forgiveness brings, eternal healing and wholeness.

The Woman at the Well – John 4:1-30, 39-42

1. What “community boundaries” did Jesus stem to speak to the Samaritan woman?

NOTE: Jesus crossed several “community boundaries” to initiate the conversation with the woman at the well. There were boundaries of gender [men do not speak with women they do not know]. There were boundaries of nationality and faith [no self-respecting Jewish person would strike up conversation with a Samaritan]. Yet, perhaps the greatest boundary crossed was the one of Jesus as the holy Son of God, graciously speaking to any unholy sinful person.

2. Share one or two highlights of the blessing Jesus' teaching brings into her life.

NOTE: Participants' answers will vary here. However, as group leader, you may want to point out, if it's not brought up by others, that Jesus speaks to her the Gospel that wells up to eternal life. He affirms that He knows her sinfulness, and yet will graciously deal with her. Jesus reveals to her the nature of true worship of God which flows from the truth of His Word. Jesus gives this woman the gift of the Gospel which does well up in her and overflows to others as she goes into town and tells others about Him, and they in turn come to confess Jesus is the Savior of the world!

3. How did this woman's encounter with Jesus impact her, and in turn, her community?

NOTE: Jesus' conversation leaves her a changed woman. Now, no longer concerned simply with the mundane things that drew her to the well in the first place, she now leaves Jesus and goes into town where she does become herself a wellspring of the Good News. She invites the town out to see Jesus, even suggesting to them that He may indeed be the Christ. The Spirit uses her to draw others to Jesus and bring them to faith in Him, and to the confession that Jesus is the Savior of the world. Note how all this comes as a result of "in person" encounters – Jesus with the woman, then the woman with the town's folk, then the town's folk with Jesus.

The Healing of the Man with Leprosy – Mark 1:40-45

1. What was a leprous person's lot in life (especially in regard to community) once they were labeled as "unclean?" [Leviticus 13:45-46]. Share what it might be like to live in isolation from one's community while dealing with an infectious disease, and the label of being "unclean."

NOTE: In two short verses, Leviticus paints a stark portrait. Someone who had been diagnosed as a leper was banished from their community. They were not to go back and say "good-bye" to family, could not give a last hug to their children. Their attire and their customary call of "unclean" was designed to keep others from exposure to them or even from coming close enough to be exposed. It was in its rudimentary way an early attempt at physical distancing. A leper was to go outside the camp or town and stay there alone until they should be rid of the disease. They were left without care to deal with what may be going on for them physically as the disease ran its course. All the while, they would also be grappling with the label of unclean, which carried with it the stigma of being unclean before God, left in their sinfulness. Being cut off and unable to enter towns meant that they could not come to Temple and participate in the sacrifices which were the signs of God's forgiveness. To be labeled a leper was devastating.

2. Discuss the significance of Jesus' physical touch to heal the man.

NOTE: The commonly held belief was that if a person came in contact with someone who was leprous, the other person would also become infected, and thus would be labeled unclean and cut off from the community of God's people. In His healing touch, Jesus reveals that He is the One who makes clean that which is unclean. The way He chooses to heal the man, in touching him, not only reveals this, but is also a beautiful example of God's tender compassion. This leper may not have been touched by another person since the moment he'd been labeled a leper. Now Jesus brings not only the merciful gift of healing, He does in a tenderly, compassionate way that again alludes to the reality that our life is not fully experienced virtually, but is lived out in the context of the physical bodies with which our Lord has given us.

3. How does Jesus' healing impact the man and his community?

NOTE: The man in joy rushes back to his community. He is not only physically restored from the disease, he is physically restored in his relationship to family and friends. He is clean even before God which would be apparent to all who knew he had the dreaded disease. He also comes with the amazing story of his healing at Jesus' touch which results in others drawing near to Jesus.

4. Where do we find Jesus at the end of the miracle? What might this imagery foreshadow? How does it result in "community" according to Mark's description in verse 45?

NOTE: Mark reports that as a result of the man freely speaking about how Jesus healed him, that Jesus could no longer enter a town openly. Rather, we find Jesus out in "desolate" or "lonely" places. This is the very place that Jesus found the leper, so in a sense, Jesus has taken his place. This foreshadows the truth that, in order to bring us to the touch of His grace that restores us as clean, Jesus will take our place in the desolate place of God's judgment on the cross. The result of telling of Jesus' merciful touch is that people are drawn to Him from everywhere as He remains in the desolate places. Again, this foreshadows how our Lord draws people from everywhere today to Himself [and thus to one another] around His sacrifice on the cross.

5. How does Jesus bring His touch today through His Church?

NOTE: Answers to this question will vary. Encourage a few different responses.

6. How does His compassion through us draw together people “from every quarter”?

NOTE: Answers to this question will vary. Encourage a few different responses.

Final Thought

The Lord faithfully sent His Word among His people through the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures. Throughout their messages, God painted a picture, gave a promise, that one day He Himself would come among His people. Jesus did not come merely spiritually or even virtually. He came in flesh and blood, fully taking on our human nature yet sinless. As He came, Jesus constantly drew community around Himself. He sometimes addressed great crowds with His teaching of God’s forgiving mercy. He sometimes instructed His disciples on their own. He sometimes brought the touch of His mercy to just one individual. Yet through all of His Incarnate earthly ministry Jesus was drawing and shaping a new community ... one that would be founded upon Himself, especially His cross and empty tomb ... and a community that would “in person” go with the Lord and in His Name to the various communities of the world with His message of hope and everlasting life.

