

Better Together

Life Group Leaders Guide

Objective

This guide contains the information and questions you will need to lead a life group study during our current sermon series. Our aim is to spark Spirit-led, Bible-centered conversations that anyone can participate in regardless of how biblically literate they may or may not be. **The win** that we want you to experience is when your group members **connect** more closely with each other and with God so that they are encouraged to move forward in living out their faith.

Directions

The *Purpose* and *Move* sections are for the leader to read to the group to provide clarity. **Do not feel pressured to cover all the questions.** Decide which ones may work best for your group. You will see brief notes interspersed between groups of questions to help give the group context for their answers. The *Notes and Commentary* section (when included) is optional reading for the leader to get background information and better understanding of the passages before leading the discussion.

Series Overview

While Jesus does save us individually, he saves us into a people. It is only when we understand who we are together as the people of God that we truly understand the access to God we have, the hope we have, and just how strong we are together. In Christ, we are BETTER TOGETHER.

Better Together Series Schedule

Week	Sermon Date	Topic of sermon and life group
1	9/16	Better Experience
2	9/23	Better Hope
3	9/30	Better Life

The Point Church Life Group Curriculum

Better Hope

Purpose of Study

Today's discussion centers around the HOPE that is to be found and nurtured through having real relationships in the church.

Flow of Study

Icebreaker: What feels like the most hopeless endeavor you've ever tried to tackle?

Move #1: Since the sermon series and life groups are covering similar topics, it might be a good idea to begin the discussion unpacking some questions from this Sunday's sermon.

1. Did anything stand out to you from the message this weekend?
2. Is there anything from the message this weekend that you want to apply?

Move #2: Let's take a brief look at a text in Hebrews 3, where we see how having positive relationships within the church helps us hold on to our HOPE in Jesus Christ.

Read Hebrews 3:6-14 NIV

6 But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.

7 So, as the Holy Spirit says:

"Today, if you hear his voice,

8 do not harden your hearts

as you did in the rebellion,

during the time of testing in the wilderness,

9 where your ancestors tested and tried me,

though for forty years they saw what I did.

10 That is why I was angry with that generation;

I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray,

and they have not known my ways.'

11 So I declared on oath in my anger,

'They shall never enter my rest.' "

12 See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. 14 We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end.

3. From what we read here, what are some reasons why holding onto our hope is a really big deal?
4. Discuss the contrast you see in this text between positive and negative influences on our hope from the company we keep. (Contrast especially verses 8-11 with verse 6 & 13.)

Move #3: Next, let's look at a text from Revelation in which holding onto hope is a significant theme. This is one of the messages given by Jesus to each of seven churches during the late first century through the Apostle John. Don't get distracted by details that you may not understand. Instead, focus on the gist of the message as Jesus addresses this small church in the ancient city of Philadelphia in Greece.

Read Revelation 3:7-13 NIV

7 "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. 8 I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9 I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. 10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.

11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name. 13 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

5. As Jesus sends this message to the church at Philadelphia, what are some hints in the letter as to the kind of conditions in which they found themselves?
 - (Leaders Note: The "synagogue of Satan" (v. 9) is likely referring to the Jewish community that was ostracizing and persecuting the followers of Christ there.)

Note: Jesus acknowledges that this community of believers had "little strength" (verse 8), that is, little political power or influence to change their circumstances.

6. Put yourself in their shoes. What do you imagine it would feel like to be one of the persecuted minority?
7. How dangerous would it be in hostile circumstances like these to be connected relationally to other believers? What obstacles might arise?

Note: Jesus applauds these believers, saying "you (collectively--it's plural) have kept my word and not denied my name."

8. What are some very practical ways they may have had to depend on each other to victoriously persevere in such circumstances?
9. Can you describe a time when belonging among a group of fellow believers helped give you hope during trying circumstances?

Note: In verse 11, Jesus urges them to (collectively) "hold on" to what they have in him, and not let anyone steal their "crown."

10. How are the relationships in our group helping you to move forward, and not backslide, in your pursuit of God and the rewards he wants to give you?

Note: Re-read verse 12. The temple was where people went together to experience the presence of God.

11. If our eternal hope is all about being in the presence of God among the people of God, how should that translate into our priorities in the here and now?

Next Steps: The following are things you could challenge your members to do in order to take what you studied in this curriculum farther.

- Send an encouraging message to two different people in the group this week. (Next week, we'll ask how receiving those messages affected you.)

Prayer: End your study with a time of praying with and for each other. Take requests, but be sure to pray also about what you've discussed today.

Notes and Commentary

The following are pieces of commentary, facts, and links based on the passages of this study in order. Use them to help supplement your group time or for your personal preparation.

On Hebrews 3:

With verse 7 the preacher moves quite naturally from the positive examples of Moses and Jesus to the negative example of those unfaithful wanderers who because of their disobedience failed and fell in the desert [during the Exodus from Egypt]. To change the direction of the discussion, the author employs Psalm 95:7c–11 as a catalyst. This Old Testament quotation begins with its own exhortation: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...” The “so” (dio) of Hebrews 3:7 builds on the implicit warning of the previous verse. In essence the author is saying, “since we cannot be considered Christ’s house if we do not hold fast, therefore” we must heed the admonition of this Old Testament passage. The phrase “as the Holy Spirit says” demonstrates the author’s view that this admonition provides a direct, fresh, contemporary word to his listeners. He understands Psalm 95:7c–11 as an important warning for those who are in danger of drifting.

...(T)he psalm’s author does not include his listeners in the negative example. Rather, the example is that of a former generation—“their fathers,” who had “tested and tried” the Lord in spite of his miraculous works on their behalf. Therefore, “do not harden your hearts as those people did in the rebellion” offers a better translation at this point. (3) The final segment of the psalm confronts the hearers with the judgment experienced by that rebellious generation. God “was angry” with them because of their wandering hearts and their lack of understanding his ways (Ps. 95:10). Therefore, he swore that they would not enter his rest (95:11).

...The unit begins with the twin exhortations to “see to it ... that” (lit., “take care lest”) and “encourage one another” (vv. 12–13). The first of these confronts the listeners with a general warning directed at the community. The believers should “take care” or “beware” (*blepo*, “see,” used metaphorically) because within any Christian community there may be those whose outward association does not reflect the inward condition of the heart. The danger lies in anyone who might possess “a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.”

The second exhortation comes in the form of a positive admonition. The hearers are to “encourage one another daily” so that none of them will experience a spiritual hardening brought on by sin’s deceitfulness.

Taken from the psalm, the word “today” speaks of the present time of opportunity for a right relationship with God. The author’s conviction that this psalm directly addresses this Christian congregation may be seen in the phrase “as long as it is called Today,” suggesting the contemporary relevance of the passage as the Word of God. For this community struggling with the problem of spiritual drifting, hardening of the heart was both a real danger and avoidable. If it was to be avoided, however, the recipients of Hebrews had to relate to one another in an atmosphere of encouragement.

Continuing with another sober word of warning, in 3:14 the author writes: “We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.” At 3:1 the author addresses the community as “sharers of the heavenly calling,” but in 3:14 he places a condition on that designation. ...The condition placed on being companions of Christ has to do with holding “firmly ... the confidence we had at first.” The word translated “hold” in 3:14 is the same as that used in 3:6, but here “firmly” is added. This word was used to refer to what was solid, durable, valid, confirmed, or guaranteed. In a legal or business sense it connoted the stability of a contractual relationship. It was something on which one could depend, and it speaks here of the dependability or firmness of the Christian’s commitment, a commitment that had been expressed with assurance at the inception of each believer’s relationship with the Lord. Thus, real Christian experience contains the quality of durability, lasting “till the end”—a reference to the death of the one holding the confidence or to the time when Christ returns (9:28).

(George Guthrie, *NIV Application Commentary on Hebrews*)

On Revelation 3:7-13

In contrast to churches strong in their own sight (3:17), but like the Smyrnan Christians who acknowledged their poverty (2:9), the Philadelphian church has only a “little strength,” but has proved successful in standing in that strength (3:8). ...

As in Smyrna, believers in Philadelphia experienced conflict with the local synagogue. Probably they were like the Jewish Christians for whom John first wrote his Gospel, many of whom were likely expelled from their synagogues (similar to the formerly blind man of John 9:34). But Jesus defended that man as one of his sheep, noting that he as the divine shepherd had the right to determine who belonged to his people and who did not (10:1–15). In the same way here, though these synagogues may have expelled Jewish Christians from their houses of worship, Jesus welcomes the believers into his own household....

Despite Jesus’ praises for the Philadelphian Christians’ perseverance to this point, however, “it’s not over till it’s over.” They must continue to hold fast what they have (3:11), that is, to continue to keep the message that demands their perseverance (3:10), lest their persecutors seize from them their crown (3:11; cf. 2:25). The “crown” is a victor’s wreath appropriate to overcomers (see comments on 2:10, where the crown of life contrasts with the second death in 2:11), and losing it means roughly the same as the warning to the preceding church: exclusion from the kingdom (3:5).

Those who do overcome, however, will not only be welcome in Jesus’ household, God’s temple; they will constitute a part of it (3:12). Thus, though expelled from “Satan’s synagogue” (3:9), they remain in God’s temple. This image directly recalls Isaiah 56:5, in which foreigners and eunuchs will have a place and an eternal name within God’s house, better than that of Israelites. Although Gentiles were permitted in the Old Testament temple (1 Kings 8:41–43), the architecture of the second temple (destroyed a few decades before Revelation’s writing) had separated even Israelite women from Israelite men. It placed the women on a lower level than Jewish men and placed Gentiles even further from the sanctuary (see Acts 21:29).

(Craig Keener, *NIV Application Commentary on Revelation*)