

Lenten Leadership Materials



2026



Table of Contents

- Welcome Message
- Leadership Principles
- Session Outlines
- Discussion Questions
- Lent Sessions 1-6



Welcome Message

Thank you for your willingness to serve as leaders for the 2026 Lenten Discipleship Groups. We appreciate your leadership as we seek to experience the gift of God's mercy as we join together in small groups to experience prayer, scriptural encounters, and discussion. Your leadership will guide members as they explore their personal journey in relation to the Sunday sermon and scripture during each of the six weeks of Lent.

This guide will help you navigate the provided materials and your role as a facilitator.



Leadership Principles

As a facilitator, your job is not to be the master of all the answers, but to facilitate a discussion trusting the Holy Spirit's power to inspire everyone in your group through the scriptures, worship, the sermon, and the conversation.

Create a Safe Space: Opening up and sharing for someone new to a small group experience maybe uncomfortable. You set the tone and example of opening up honestly and listening intently to others. You don't have to spill your darkest secrets, but you also shouldn't hide yourself either. If you have had a terrible week, model honest sharing and don't just gloss over it and act like/say "I'm fine."

Foster Interaction: Start the discussion, ask the questions and then let others do the talking. Be mindful of not doing all the talking.

Look Who's Talking: Early on, in the first meeting, encourage the importance of everyone reflecting and sharing. Acknowledge to the group that for some, talking is easier than for others. These members may need encouragement to share. Some in the group may need to be challenged to be concise in order to allow time for sharing from other group members. Stating this early on will make it less invasive or personal if you, as the leader, gently guide the "talkers" and "non-talkers".

Friendly Silence: Don't be afraid of a moment of silence after asking a question. This silence is both a space for people to reflect and gather thoughts and is also a motivator.

Loving Accountability: As people begin to discover ways God is inspiring them to respond, provide loving encouragement and accountability to be faithful in their response. We are fellow disciples on this journey so this is not the place for guilt trips or having a posture of power, but one of loving accountability.

Time: Be faithful in starting and ending on time. Make sure the ending of the meeting is clear so that no one feels uncomfortable if they have to leave right after the group.

Challenge: The more people are willing to participate in honest sharing, willingness to listen, and deep reflection then the greater opportunity everyone will have of experiencing the transformational grace of God.

Willingness: You are the facilitator of the group, but be willing to hear God speak, and seek to be transformed by the means of grace expressed in the small group experience. Practice and foster a hunger and willingness to know God more deeply and to grow in relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Holy Spirit: Remember the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in you as the leader and in each individual in the group. You are not alone! God wants to use this small group immersion experience to bring transformation and healing into our lives. God wants you and this group to succeed, because it is God's will for us to live into the gift of God's sanctifying grace.



Session Outline

This outline is designed to fit a 1 hour to 1.5 hour time slot. It can be adapted to meet the specific needs of your group related to time and content.

- Opening Prayer (2 minutes)
- Scripture Encounter (4-8 minutes)
- Group Discussion (30-45 minutes)
- Wrap Up (10-15 minutes)
- Sharing and Praying (12-15 minutes)
- Closing Prayer (2-5 minutes)

Opening Prayer - Light a candle reminding everyone of God's presence through the Holy Spirit and then invite everyone to 1 minute of silence to center themselves. Then use the opening prayer or call to worship from that week's worship to open the small group time.

Scripture Encounter - Invite someone to read through the passage twice slowly and offer a minute of silent reflection. Invite anyone who is willing to share a word, a phrase, or emotion that stood out and captured their attention or imagination during this reading.

Group Discussion - Using the General Discussion Questions(see below) and the Weekly **Sermon/Scripture Specific Questions**. Lead the group in an encounter with the scripture and sermon reflection.

Wrap Up - Using the Wrap up Questions (see below) listen and encourage everyone to move toward discerning how they are being called to respond to God. Take time here to discuss any business of the group including making plans for serving together during Lent.

Sharing and Praying - Ask if there is something we can pray for each other or if there is something to celebrate and thank God for.

Closing Prayer - Either invite everyone to pray the Lord's Prayer together to close or invite one person to say a short prayer incorporating elements from the scripture and what was shared in the group.



Discussion Questions

Provided here are some suggested questions for you to lead your group each week. Each week we will also provide a set of discussion questions that will relate directly to that week's scripture and sermon. These are available online and will be in the bulletin each week. The Basic Questions are to help the group reflect on the sermon and scripture opening us up to what God is saying. The Wrap up Questions are intended to move the group toward discerning our response to God. The Scripture Questions below are available if you would like to extend the Scripture Encounter time and go deeper into the Word.

Basic Questions:

- What stood out to you as the main point (or points) of the sermon?
- Describe what you understood to be the main point of the sermon?
- What story or illustration resonated with you and why?
- What was your favorite part of the sermon and why?
- Besides the main scripture that was used in the sermon, what other scripture passages came to mind?
- Was there a noteworthy quote or phrase that you remember? Why did this strike you as important?
- What, if anything, did you learn that was new to you about God or yourself? What is significant about this learning in your life right now?
- What, if anything, were you reminded of about God or yourself? What is significant about this learning in your life right now?

Wrap up Questions:

- How would you summarize what we have shared together today?
- How has this sharing and reflecting provided either confirmation or a challenge in your life?
- From the small group discussion, scripture and sermon what are your big "take aways"?
- What have you learned from the sermon, scripture, and our discussion that you don't want to forget?
- What change in life has this sharing and reflecting inspired?
- What is God saying to you right now? What are you going to do in response to what God is saying?
- How has this Lenten experience helped you feel closer to Christ this week?
- How might you be called to respond to God in light of this week's encounter with God in worship and our discussion?
- What do you sense God might be saying to you?



Session One

Session One supports the Sunday, February 22, 2026 Sermon

Opening Prayer

Today, we follow Jesus into a wilderness full of isolation, fatigue, hunger, thirst, and temptation. **We follow, trusting in God's mercy.**

We witness Jesus resist the siren calls of sensationalism, notoriety, and misuse of power for selfish gain. **We recognize God's mercy at work in the face of temptation.**

We notice the angels who tend Jesus, messengers of care in a harsh and lonely place.

We pay attention to God's merciful presence that did not abandon Jesus and does not abandon us now.

We come to the wilderness together, clinging to the truth that we are not alone—God is with us. **We gather to worship God, whose unfailing mercy journeys with us into the wildernesses of our lives.**

Thanks be to God! Amen.

Scripture Encounter:

Matthew 4:1-11

1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

4 Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.

6 “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

“He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.””

7 Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

10 Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Session One cont.

Session One supports the Sunday, February 22, 2026 Sermon

Group Discussion (Also see Basic and Wrap Up Questions p. 6)

This Week's Reflection Questions

1. Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. Share an experience of a wilderness time in your life.
2. Jesus and the devil both quote scripture. What are the differences? What are the implications for us?
3. What does temptation look like in your life and what helps you resist temptation? What does this story of Jesus show us regarding our hope in the midst of our temptation?

Wrap Up (respond to one of the following)

- How would you summarize what you learned today?
- How has this sharing and reflecting provided either confirmation or a challenge in your life?
- From the small group discussion, scripture and sermon what are your big "takeaways"?
- What do you sense God might be saying to you?

Sharing and Praying

Spend some time sharing things we can be in prayer for or celebrate in each others lives.

Closing Prayer

Either invite everyone to pray the Lord's Prayer together to close or invite one person to say a short prayer incorporating elements from the scripture and what was shared in the group.



Session Two

Session Two supports the Sunday, March 1, 2026 Sermon

Opening Prayer:

God of mercy, as we journey in the wilderness of lent remind us again that our salvation is your free gift. Help us to lay down the burden of gaining your love. You meet us in the dark of night when we struggle with questions and our doubts keep us from walking in new life. Guide us today by your promise that has been fulfilled by Christ. So in loving response we walk Christ's path of life. Amen

Scripture Encounter:

John 3: 1-17

1 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2 He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with that person." 3 Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." 4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?"

5 Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' 8 The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"

10 Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

11 "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen, yet you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 17 "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Session Two cont.

Session Two supports the Sunday, March 1, 2026 Sermon

Group Discussion (Also see Basic and Wrap Up Questions p. 6)

This Week's Reflection Questions:

- Nicodemus came at night to Jesus with his wilderness questions about who and what God is up to. What are some of your hard wilderness questions for Jesus?
- Jesus talks about being born of water and Spirit, and those born of the Spirit are like the wind. Share how you have experienced the Holy Spirit leading you or witnessed the Spirit leading someone else.
- Nicodemus was struggling with letting go of his old understandings and welcoming this new teaching that included the Son of Man being lifted up and God giving his only Son in order that the world might be saved through him. What are old understandings of God and salvation that you have had to let go of, or struggling to let go of right now?

Wrap Up(respond to one of the following)

- How would you summarize what you learned today?
- How has this sharing and reflecting provided either confirmation or a challenge in your life?
- From the small group discussion, scripture and sermon what are your big "takeaways"?
- What do you sense God might be saying to you?

Sharing and Praying

Spend some time sharing things we can be in prayer for or celebrate in each others lives.

Closing Prayer

Either invite everyone to pray the Lord's Prayer together to close or invite one person to say a short prayer incorporating elements from the scripture and what was shared in the group.



Session Three

Session Three supports the Sunday, March 8, 2026 Sermon

Opening Prayer :

Gracious God, at the right time, while we were unable to do this on our own, you showed love for us, made us righteous, and made peace with us through Jesus our Christ. We come today with our problems, afflictions, and struggles because we know that your love has been poured out and our hope will not turn to shame. Amen.

Scripture Encounter:

ROMANS 5: 1-11

1 Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. 8 But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. 9 Much more surely, therefore, since we have now been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. 11 But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Session Three cont.

Session Three supports the Sunday, March 8, 2026 Sermon

Group Discussion (Also see Basic and Wrap Up Questions p. 6)

This Week's Reflection Questions:

1. Share an experience of suffering from your own life, and how has that experience shaped you?
2. Describe how you experienced God's presence in the midst of suffering?
3. How does embracing the reality of God's grace revealed in this passage change how you relate to others or see yourself?

Wrap Up(respond to one of the following)

- How would you summarize what you learned today?
- How has this sharing and reflecting provided either confirmation or a challenge in your life?
- From the small group discussion, scripture and sermon what are your big "takeaways"?
- What do you sense God might be saying to you?

Sharing and Praying

Spend some time sharing things we can be in prayer for or celebrate in each others lives.

Closing Prayer

Either invite everyone to pray the Lord's Prayer together to close or invite one person to say a short prayer incorporating elements from the scripture and what was shared in the group.



Session Four

Session Four supports the Sunday, March 15, 2026 Sermon

Opening Prayer:

Gracious God of light, we once walked in darkness, but now in your mercy we walk as children of light. Guided by your grace we come to worship you, as we hear your invitation of resurrection: "Wake up, sleeper! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!" Amen.

Scripture Encounter:

EPHESIANS 5: 8-14

8 for once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Walk as children of light, 9 for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. 10 Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness; rather, expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly, 13 but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

"Sleeper, awake!

Rise from the dead,

and Christ will shine on you."

Session Four cont.

Session Four supports the Sunday, March 15, 2026 Sermon

Group Discussion (Also see Basic and Wrap Up Questions p. 6)

This Week's Reflection Questions:

1. In what areas of your life has Christ's light shined?
2. The fruit of the light is found in all that is good, right, and true. How have you experienced the fruit of the light in your life, or where have you shared it?
3. How do we help each other walk in the light?

Wrap Up(respond to one of the following)

- How would you summarize what you learned today?
- How has this sharing and reflecting provided either confirmation or a challenge in your life?
- From the small group discussion, scripture and sermon what are your big "takeaways"?
- What do you sense God might be saying to you?

Sharing and Praying

Spend some time sharing things we can be in prayer for or celebrate in each others lives.

Closing Prayer

Either invite everyone to pray the Lord's Prayer together to close or invite one person to say a short prayer incorporating elements from the scripture and what was shared in the group.



Session Five

Session Five supports the Sunday, March 22, 2026 Sermon

Opening Prayer:

We come to worship you with our whole selves. We bring to you our minds and attitudes even when they are set on things less than life and peace. We come trusting in your mercy that meets our wholeselves that we may be filled with the Holy Spirit and the power that raised Jesus from the dead. Amen

Scripture Encounter:

ROMANS 8: 6-11

6 To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.
7 For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed, it cannot, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.
9 But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you, then the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Session Five cont.

Session Five supports the Sunday, March 22, 2026 Sermon

Group Discussion (Also See Basic and Wrap Up Questions p. 6)

This Week's Reflection Questions:

1. Where do you need to actively set your mind on the Spirit of life and peace?
2. The promise is that the Spirit of him who raised Jesus dwells in you. How does this change how you understand your life?
3. How are you experiencing resurrection in your life? (or where in your life do you need to experience a life of resurrection?)

Wrap Up(respond to one of the following)

- How would you summarize what you learned today?
- How has this sharing and reflecting provided either confirmation or a challenge in your life?
- From the small group discussion, scripture and sermon what are your big "takeaways"?
- What do you sense God might be saying to you?

Sharing and Praying

Spend some time sharing things we can be in prayer for or celebrate in each others lives.

Closing Prayer

Either invite everyone to pray the Lord's Prayer together to close or invite one person to say a short prayer incorporating elements from the scripture and what was shared in the group.



Session Six

Session Six supports the Sunday, March 29, 2026 Sermon

Opening Prayer:

Lord, as we remember how Christ our King entered Jerusalem to the sounds of joyful shouts, we enter into your presence offering our praise. You came in, not on a war horse, but a humble donkey revealing a new way of peace. You are worthy of our praise today as we celebrate that your kingdom comes through life, death, and resurrection. Amen.

Scripture Encounter:

MATTHEW 21: 1-11

1 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." 4 This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet:

5 "Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 7 they brought the donkey and the colt and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

10 When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" 11 The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Session Six cont.

Session Six supports the Sunday, March 29, 2026 Sermon

Group Discussion (Also see Basic and Wrap Up Questions p. 6)

This Week's Reflection Questions:

1. When Jesus entered Jerusalem they asked "Who is this?" How would you answer this question? And Why?
2. How does answering "who is Jesus?" shape how you live?
3. Having shared this season of Lent together, how have you grown as a disciple of Jesus?

Wrap Up(respond to one of the following)

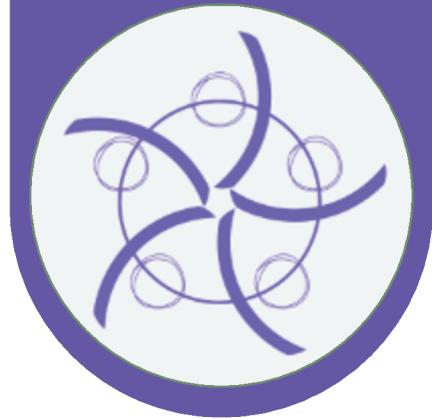
- How would you summarize what you learned today?
- How has this sharing and reflecting provided either confirmation or a challenge in your life?
- From the small group discussion, scripture and sermon what are your big "takeaways"?
- What do you sense God might be saying to you?

Sharing and Praying

Spend some time sharing things we can be in prayer for or celebrate in each others lives.

Closing Prayer

Either invite everyone to pray the Lord's Prayer together to close or invite one person to say a short prayer incorporating elements from the scripture and what was shared in the group.



Thank you

Thank you for giving of yourself to lead a Lenten Discipleship Group. Because of your leadership people at Aldersgate had the chance to avail themselves to God's grace.

By gathering a group of 12 people Jesus modeled the transformative power of doing discipleship in the context of a small group. Thank you for being part of creating such an opportunity for others.

It is our hope that you have grown in knowing and loving God revealed in Jesus Christ and experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in this season of Lent.

Again, we say thank you!

Peace in Christ,

Pastor Steve Murphy
and our Adult Christian Formation Team