

Small Group Guide: Wolves at the Gate

Overview

This guide is based on the sermon Wolves at the Gate, exploring how Christians can remain spiritually alert in a world full of deception, distraction, and the pull of other people's approval. Drawing from Matthew 7:13-27, the sermon challenges us to examine what we are allowing to shape our lives and calls us back to a focused, genuine relationship with Jesus -- the Good Shepherd.

Key Takeaways

- The broad road is comfortable and crowded, but the narrow road leads to life. The path we choose is shaped by what we allow to influence us.
 - Deception rarely announces itself. Wolves come dressed as sheep, and a lie only needs to contain enough truth to feel believable.
 - Fruit is the test. Whatever is influencing your life -- relationships, habits, content, beliefs -- ask where it leads and what it produces in you.
 - Approval-seeking can quietly become the governing authority over your decisions, identity, and obedience.
 - Distraction does not have to destroy your faith to weaken it. Even good things can crowd out the most important thing.
 - You cannot change what you are unwilling to confront. The wolf within requires honest self-examination.
 - The answer is not simply better self-protection. The answer is knowing and following the shepherd.
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Discussion Questions

Opening

1. When you heard the phrase "wolves at the gate," what came to mind before the sermon began? How did your understanding of that phrase shift as the message unfolded?

Part One: Deception

2. The sermon described how a lie does not have to be completely false to be completely destructive. Can you think of a half-truth you have believed or repeated that sounds right on the surface but points in the wrong direction?
3. The pattern of deception described in James 1:14-16 moves from a question, to distortion, to desire, to disobedience, to death. Where in that progression do you find it hardest to stop?
4. Jesus says in Matthew 7:16-20 that we will know things by their fruit. Think about something that currently has a significant influence on your life -- a relationship, a habit, a source of content, a belief. What fruit is it producing in you? Is it drawing you closer to Jesus or pulling you away?

Part Two: Approval

5. The sermon made the statement that it is possible to care more about how you look than who you are becoming. Where do you see this tension in your own life?
6. The approval diagnostics list included things like checking who liked your post, replying differently in public settings, and going into debt to maintain an image. Which of those hit closest to home for you, and why?
7. The sermon asked: why does someone else's opinion have so much authority over how you feel about yourself? How would you answer that question honestly?
8. Galatians 1:10 warns that seeking to please people conflicts with being a servant of Christ. How do you personally distinguish between healthy encouragement from others and approval-seeking that starts to govern your decisions?

Part Three: Distractions

9. The sermon drew a distinction between familiarity with truth and obedience to truth. Can you identify an area of your life where you know what God is calling you to do but have not yet acted on it?
10. Martha in Luke 10 was distracted with much serving -- good work that crowded out the main thing. What good things in your current season of life are consuming so much space that the most important things are getting less of you?
11. The sermon posed these questions directly: If Jesus says forgive, who do you need to forgive? If he says trust God, why are you still trying to control certain areas? If he says seek first his kingdom, what is actually receiving your first attention? Take one of those questions and discuss it honestly with your group.

Part Four: The Wolf Within

12. The sermon said you cannot change what you are unwilling to confront. Is there something in your own heart or history that you have been avoiding rather than bringing into the light? You do not have to share details, but what does it feel like to acknowledge that it is there?

13. The prayer from Psalm 139 -- asking God to search the heart and reveal anything that needs to change -- is an act of vulnerability before God. How comfortable are you praying that kind of prayer? What makes it difficult?

Closing

14. The sermon ended with a simple charge: guard the gate, know the shepherd. Of those two, which one feels more urgent for you right now, and what would it look like to take one concrete step in that direction this week?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to put into practice before your group meets again.

- Conduct a fruit audit. Identify two or three things that currently have significant influence over your time, attention, or beliefs. For each one, honestly ask: where does this lead, and what does it produce in me? Write down your answers and bring them back to the group.
- Do a phone fast. Choose one evening this week to put your phone away when you arrive home and leave it until the next morning. Pay attention to what you notice about your own restlessness, your presence with your family, and your ability to pray or read.
- Pray Psalm 139:23-24. Make that prayer -- asking God to search your heart and reveal any wicked way in you -- a daily prayer for the next seven days. Keep a brief journal of what surfaces.
- Identify one area of approval-seeking. Choose one specific situation where you have been making decisions based on what others think rather than what God has called you to. Talk to a trusted person in your group or in your life about it this week.
- Respond to one thing you already know. Pick one truth from Scripture that you have heard and agreed with but have not yet acted on. Write it down. Write down one concrete step you will take this week to move from familiarity to obedience.
- Pray with someone. If there is something within you that you have been unwilling to confront, ask a trusted friend, your small group leader, or a pastor to pray with you this week. Bring it into the light.

Scriptures

- 1 Peter 5:8 - the enemy prowling like a lion seeking someone to devour
- Acts 20:28-31 - keeping watch, warning about savage wolves distorting truth
- Matthew 7:13-14 - the narrow and wide gates
- Matthew 7:15 - warning about false prophets in sheep's clothing
- Matthew 7:16-20 - knowing false prophets by their fruit
- Matthew 7:21-23 - "I never knew you"
- Matthew 7:24-27 - the wise and foolish builders
- 1 John 4:1 - testing the spirits
- James 1:14-16 - the pattern of temptation leading to sin and death
- Galatians 1:10 - pleasing men versus being a servant of Christ
- Luke 10:38-42 - Mary and Martha, distracted with much serving
- Psalms 139:23-24 - "Search me, O God, and know my heart"
- 1 John 1:9 - confession and God's faithfulness to forgive and cleanse
- John 10:11 - Jesus as the good shepherd who lays down his life
- John 10:27 - the sheep hear the shepherd's voice and follow him
- John 14:6 - Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life