

# When Jesus Went to Vegas

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## Overview

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This week we are going to take a break from questions and do something that a lot of you guys requested we do again. We are going to Encourage the Heart during the group time this week. When Jesus was on earth, He spent time in his small group not just to learn more about God but also to be encouraged by each other. Be prepared this week to have some of your burdens lifted. I don't know anyone who doesn't need or want encouragement. This is a good week for us to be truly thankful for the people in our groups. A night like this can go one of two ways; it can be very superficial, or it can be genuine sharing of the heart. I pray that the latter will happen within your group.

## Objectives

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- For *each* group member to leave the group time feeling 100% personally encouraged by you or the other group members.
- For the group to pray specifically for one another.

## Facilitators' Guide

**Encourage the Heart: Celebrating, challenging, and caring for group members**

- **This week we are going to do a group activity that is dear to my heart because it has kept me going in my Christian faith more than just about anything. We will not spend the group time answering questions as we normally do. Instead, we are going to make statements to one another. These statements are going to be very powerful as we practice *Encouraging each other's Hearts* by celebrating each group member. Here is the catch 22 of this whole activity: People typically have a very, very, very hard time encouraging other people personally. People in general also have a tough time receiving encouragement. Some people think they are above it. Some people think it is fake. Some people think it just isn't cool! So as the facilitator, you have to model the way**

**this week in order for your group members to get an accurate picture of what we are going after. Have fun! I have never encouraged someone personally and found that they were worse off for it! Have you? I didn't think so. This could be powerful if you model it correctly. No pressure! ☺**

When Jesus was in Vegas, he was surrounded by a small group. One of the primary functions of a small group is to encourage one another. Jesus knew that life in Vegas was hard and we would all need to be encouraged. That is our goal this week during the group session. Here is what we are going to do:

**1. Write down the names of each individual in your group.**

- Just write down EVERY PERSON'S name. My sheet will look like this:
- Rodney –
- Christa –
- Etc...

**2. Beside each person's name, write down the attributes that you enjoy and/or encourage you about each person. (Be very specific!) Be prepared to celebrate these attributes with each other during the group time.**

- First I want to give you an example of what I will write for one of my group members. Then, I will teach you how to facilitate a time of intentional encouragement.
- Rodney – Man, what can I say about you? You are absolutely one of the best friends I have ever had. You personally care for me and my life all the time. The thing I love the most about you is your genuine concern for my marriage, and you always ask how we are doing within the marriage. Thank you for all the times you have dropped what you are doing to come to my house to help me with small things. You are an amazing friend! I also love when you teach. I love hearing your perspective. Your teaching makes everyone feel as though they can become a little more like Christ. Your character and teaching have grown so much since I have known you, and I love you being my teaching pastor and friend. You are great.
- Tip: *You have to start first this week.* Start with about three people and encourage them personally first. Notice what I wrote above. I was very specific! I named what he did for a living and how he specifically contributes to my life. I noted how he made everyone feel. I told him *thank you* several times. Guys, this is powerful if done specifically. It is hard to look at someone and make these types of comments because it kills our pride. Giving encouragement is just as therapeutic as receiving it. It is better to give than receive! After I encourage Rodney, I will go to about two more people and be specific in encouraging them, too. Then I will say, "That's enough for me, let's encourage each other. Who else would like to encourage someone?" If you get major silence, that is normal; but don't let it beat you. Wait it out until someone speaks. You may even want to set up the whole activity by saying, "Guys or Gals, we are going to practice encouragement during our group time this week. It might be a little difficult for some of us, but we will all be better off by doing it!" Make sure EVERY SINGLE PERSON IS ADDRESSED. EVEN IF SOMEONE COMES IN FOR THE FIRST TIME, TELL THEM YOU

LIKE THEIR SMILE AND THE SIMPLE FACT THAT THEY ARE THERE. DO NOT LEAVE ANYONE OUT! Model the way in encouraging each other.

- Please email me at [Casey@mountainlakechurch.org](mailto:Casey@mountainlakechurch.org) if you need further help facilitating this week.
- 3. What is one specific area in your life that you want your group to pray for?**
- One area! Not ten! Ask for one area concerning their personal life. Move to this time after you spend at least a good 20-30 minutes encouraging each other. Then open up the prayer and get someone to close it. Let others pray (popcorn prayer) in between. Pray for each other!!! This is another significant part of encouragement.
- 4. Family Activity: Write down the names of the people in your immediate family and do the same activity during dinner one night this week. Involve your children too.**
- This is something we have never done. Just use this as a suggestion for building the family at home. The temptation is to think, "My family would never do this." Well, just take a risk and try it!
  - Tip for married couples: The best thing you can do for your marriage this week during group is to look at your spouse and tell them why they encourage you specifically. Tell them what you enjoy about their personality. Maybe others will follow your lead! This will heal wounds and start a good practice for marriages at home.