LIFE GROUPS
LEADER GUIDE

Heads Up: Sacrifice is not the same as submitting to abuse.
The kind of sacrifice that God calls us to creates spiritual health in us and demonstrates love toward God and others. Unfortunately, it is common for people (and even leaders) in the church to advise others to stay in abusive and harmful situations in the name of "sacrifice." This is simply not biblical. Jesus came to set the captive free, not the other way around. Please keep this in mind as you lead your discussion this week.

BIG IDEA

Selfishness is the enemy of sacrifice.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT ME TO KNOW?

What is your favorite book or movie about sacrifice? Why do you love it?

Read Matthew 26:1-16. Where do you see examples of selfishness and sacrifice? How can you empathize with the different people in this passage?
Jesus- This passage begins with Jesus telling his disciples that he is about to be crucified. Jesus was preparing to offer himself up as the ultimate sacrifice.
Chief Priests and Elders- It may not be clear from this text, but an overview of the gospels reveals the chief priests and elders to be people who were threatened by Jesus and committed to eliminating him in order to preserve their power and position.
Woman- The woman who anoints Jesus sacrifices her very precious and valuable perfume in an act of love for Jesus.
Disciples- The disciples were indignant at the woman's behavior.
Judas- After the beautiful sacrificial act of the woman in this story, Judas heads to the chief priests and elders to strike a deal for the betrayal of Jesus. His selfishness is highlighted when compared to the generous act of the woman.

WHAT IS MY INITIAL REACTION?

Take a moment to reflect on the decisions you have made in your life. Identify one or two decisions you made that were selfish. Then identify one or two decisions you made that were sacrificial. What were the motivations behind those decisions?
It may be hard to identify "selfish" moments in our lives. We tend to judge ourselves by our motives and judge others by their behaviors. Being honest about our own selfishness allows us to see the fears and insecurities that cause us to behave this way so that we can overcome them in the future.

Is it possible to be selfish *while* "sacrificing" for others? Support your answer.

Sometimes we can be tempted to do things for others that they should do for themselves because it gives us a sense of meaning, value or control. This is called paternalism and it is not the kind of sacrifice to which Jesus calls us. When our "sacrificing" enables others to stay in harmful patterns, we may actually be sacrificing their well-being for our own codependency. This is actually selfish behavior that can be harmful to everyone involved.

Read Ephesians 5:1-2 before discussing the following quote. What words or phrases grab your attention (in the passage or the quote)?

"The difference between an admirer and a follower still remains, no matter where you are. The admirer never makes any true sacrifices. He always plays it safe. Though in words, phrases, songs, he is inexhaustible about how highly he prizes Christ, he renounces nothing, gives up nothing, will not reconstruct his life, will not be what he admires, and will not let his life express what it is he supposedly admires."
-Søren Kierkegaard

WHAT AM I GOING TO DO?

When was the last time you gave up something you love for something you love more?

Read James 3:13-16. What is selfishness costing you? How can sacrifice increase the quality of your life and relationship with others?
James 3:16 says, "For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice." It seems that living sacrificially has the potential to help us purify our lives and orient ourselves around the things that really matter.

What are some small sacrifices you could start making in order to combat selfishness in your life? Who in our Life Group are you willing to let hold you accountable for this?