

Small Group Guide

The Shema

September 6, 2026

Background and Context

This guide is based on a sermon exploring the Shema, drawn from Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The Shema is one of the oldest and most central expressions of faith in the life of God's people. Jesus himself quoted it when asked about the greatest commandment. This session invites your group to examine what it means to truly hear God's word, love Him completely, and pass that faith on to the next generation.

Opening Scripture

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9 aloud together as a group before beginning discussion.

Key Takeaways

- 1. Hearing Requires a Response** The Hebrew word "Shema" means more than simply hearing a sound. In the ancient Hebrew mindset, true hearing always leads to action. There is no separation between receiving a command and obeying it. Genuine faith is not passive.
- 2. God Is One -- and He Is Enough** Moses reminded the Israelites, surrounded by cultures full of competing gods, that the Lord alone is God. He is complete. He does not need to be supplemented by other allegiances, priorities, or sources of security. This was true entering the Promised Land, and it remains true today.
- 3. Loving God Is a Response to Being Loved First** The command to love God with all of your heart, soul, and strength is not a burden imposed on the undeserving. It flows naturally from understanding that God chose us and loved us first -- not because we earned it, but because of His own faithful character.
- 4. Faith Must Be Planted in the Heart, Not Just the Mind** Moses instructs that God's commands are to be on the hearts of His people -- not simply memorized or checked off a list. A faith that is only going through the motions is a faith that is only partially engaged.

5. Faith Is Meant to Be Passed On Intentionally Moses calls parents and community members to impress faith on their children through consistent, everyday conversation and practice. Spiritual formation happens in the rhythms of daily life, not only in formal settings.

Discussion Questions

Getting Started

1. Had you heard the word "Shema" before this sermon? What was your initial understanding of it, and how did the sermon shape or expand that understanding?
2. The sermon described the difference between hearing something and truly listening to it. Can you think of a time when you heard something important but did not really take it in until later?

Going Deeper

3. In the ancient Hebrew understanding, hearing and obeying were essentially the same act. How does that challenge the way you typically think about listening to a sermon, reading Scripture, or receiving counsel from a fellow believer?
4. The sermon pointed out that God did not choose Israel because they were impressive or numerous -- He chose them in spite of their weakness. How does that truth shape the way you understand your own relationship with God? Does it change how you approach Him?
5. Moses warned the Israelites about the gods of the surrounding culture -- Baal, Asherah, and others -- that competed for their devotion. What are the modern equivalents of those competing allegiances? What things most commonly pull your heart away from full devotion to God?
6. The sermon used the image of a level to illustrate the idea of balance and priorities. If you held a level up to your current life, where would the bubble be sitting? What areas feel off-center?
7. The sermon made the point that faith can become unbalanced in either direction -- either neglecting God for the sake of everyday life, or withdrawing so completely from the world that we fail to engage the people around us. Have you ever experienced either of those extremes, personally or in a community you have been part of?

On Passing Faith to the Next Generation

8. Moses tells God's people to talk about His commands when they sit at home, when they walk along the road, when they lie down, and when they get up. What does that kind of everyday, woven-in faith formation look like practically in your home or relationships right now?

9. The sermon shared two very different family stories -- one of a person raised in a home where faith was consistently modeled, and another of a person who came to faith as a child largely on her own. What do those two stories say about how God works, regardless of our background?
10. Whether or not you have children of your own, you are part of a church community that has made a shared commitment to the spiritual growth of the next generation. What is one specific way you could invest in someone younger in the faith this season?

Reflection and Personal Application

11. The sermon asked several diagnostic questions. Take a moment to reflect on these as a group:
- What does your faith look like when life gets hard?
 - Where do you turn when you are disappointed or afraid?
 - What matters most to you, and does that reflect a heart fully devoted to God?
12. The pastor described his father's simple but direct words of blessing and encouragement as a kind of faith conversation -- not always Scripture and formal prayer, but intentional and meaningful. Who in your life has spoken words like that over you? Is there someone you could offer that kind of encouragement to?
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Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to practice individually or as a group before your next meeting.

Memorize the Shema Commit Deuteronomy 6:4-9 to memory this week. Consider reciting it in the morning and evening, as was the practice of God's people throughout history.

Conduct a Priority Audit Set aside 15 to 20 minutes this week to honestly examine how you spend your time and attention. Ask yourself what your daily rhythms reveal about what you love most. Bring your observations back to the group.

Start a Faith Conversation Identify one person -- a child, a grandchild, a younger friend, a coworker -- with whom you can have a genuine, intentional faith conversation this week. It does not need to be formal. It simply needs to be honest and purposeful.

Establish a Daily Rhythm The Shema was recited morning and evening. Choose one spiritual practice -- reading a psalm, praying through a passage of Scripture, or simply pausing to acknowledge God -- and commit to doing it at the same time each day for the next two weeks.

Pray for Someone Far from Faith The sermon referenced the Gideons distributing Bibles to people who are searching for truth. Identify one person in your life who does not yet know Jesus and commit to praying for them by name each day this week.

Closing Prayer

Close your time together by praying through the themes of the Shema. You may pray as a group or have one person lead. Ask God to move His word from your heads to your hearts, to help you love Him fully and completely, and to give you the courage and intentionality to pass that faith on to those around you.