

The Danger of Almost

South Jersey Small Group Guide

Warm-Up Questions

1. Think about a time in your life when you were *almost* somewhere — almost finished something, almost committed to something, almost ready to make a big decision. What kept you from going all the way? How did it turn out?
2. Growing up, what did "being a good person" or "being religious" look like in your home or community? Was it more about rules, rituals, or relationship?

Key Passage: Mark 12:28-34

Recap

In Mark 12, Jesus has spent an entire day fielding trap questions from the Pharisees, the Herodians, and the Sadducees — each group trying to catch Him, corner Him, or discredit Him. Then something shifts. A scribe steps out of the crowd — not to trap Jesus, but to genuinely ask: *"Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"* Jesus answers with the two great commands: love God with everything you have — heart, soul, mind, and strength — and love your neighbor as yourself. The scribe responds with surprising wisdom, even going further than Jesus by saying these two commands matter more than all the religious rituals and sacrifices combined. And Jesus, who had been fending off enemies all day, looks at this man with what feels like genuine warmth and says: *"You are not far from the Kingdom of God."*

It sounds like a compliment. And it is. But it's also a warning. Because "not far" is not the same as "in." The scribe had the right answers. He understood the heart of Scripture better than most religious leaders around him. But there's no record that he ever actually followed Jesus. The story just ends. That silence is loud — and it raises a question that this week's discussion is built around: Is it possible to be close to God your whole life and still miss Him? Most of us in this room aren't hostile to God. We're not cynics or skeptics. We're just people who, if we're honest, are somewhere between "close" and "all the way in." This guide is an invitation to close that gap — not through pressure, but through honesty.

Questions for Discussion (Choose several that are relevant for your group):

1. When you heard the phrase *"you are not far from the Kingdom of God,"* what was your gut reaction? Did it sound like a compliment, a warning, or both? Why?
2. Jesus says to love God with heart, soul, mind, *and* strength — every dimension of who you are. Which of those four feels most natural for you, and which one are you most likely to hold back? Why do you think that is?

3. The scribe understood the law better than most people around him, but understanding isn't the same as surrendering. Where in your life do you know the right answer but haven't fully lived it out yet?
4. The sermon drew a contrast between religion and relationship — religion can inform your mind, shape your ethics, and correct your behavior, but only Jesus can close the gap between you and God. Have you ever experienced religion without real relationship? What did that feel like?
5. The rich young ruler came running to Jesus, knelt at His feet, and still walked away sad — because there was one thing he couldn't let go of. If Jesus asked you today, "*There's still one thing you haven't surrendered*" — what do you think that thing might be?
6. Think about the part of yourself you keep locked — the room nobody else gets to see. What would it mean for you to actually open that room to God? What are you afraid He'd find, or ask you to change?
7. Is there someone in your life who is close to Jesus — maybe they grew up in church, they know the Bible, they're a good person — but something is still keeping them on the outside? What do you think that something is? How do you love that person well without pushing them away?
8. The sermon ended with an open question: *What will you do with "not far"*? Be honest — where would you place yourself right now? Not far? All the way in? Somewhere you're not sure? What would it take to take the next step?

Pray