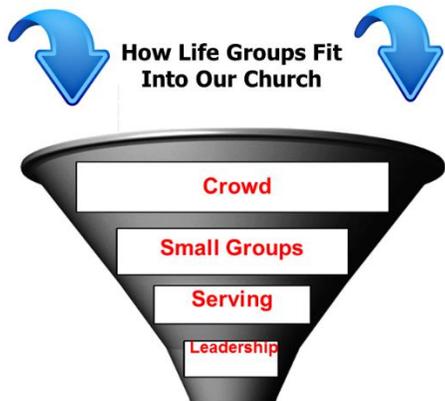


Life Groups

Overview

Life Groups can also be called cell group, small groups, home groups, discipleship groups, etc. The exact name is not important, but the principles are important.



Mission of a Life Group Ministry

To help turn people into fully committed disciples of Jesus Christ

Life Groups assist believers in fulfilling two great things Jesus taught:

- The Great Commission
- The Great Commandment

Five Elements as seen in the early church

1. Worship God
2. Impact God's world
3. Live by God's word
4. Contribute to God's work
5. Walk with God's people

Apply the Foundational Convictions:

1. The purpose of every group is to help produce fully committed disciples of Jesus Christ.
2. Life change happens best in Life Groups.
3. Every group should be committed fulfill the five elements of the church.
4. We need an intentional strategy for connecting people to group life.
5. The long-term success of the leader is determined by the support and resources he/she receives.
6. The best way to raise up future leaders is through shared ownership

Know the level of commitment of the people in your group.

Balance of the 5 W's is the key.

Understand it's not doing every purpose when your group meets. Evaluate your group health at least every six months to see the strengths and improvement areas.

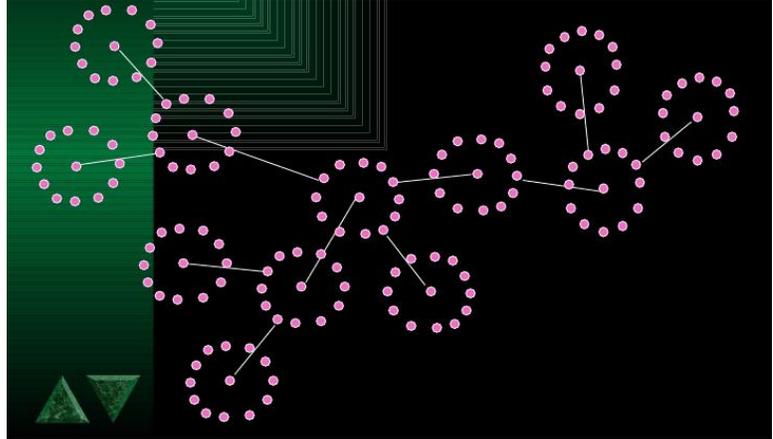


1. The Life Group Meeting has four basic purposes:
 - L-Love and care for one another
 - I-Instruction; apply God's word
 - F-Fellowship; Koinonia=community
 - E-Evangelize; reach people for Christ/invite others
- A. Growing Spiritually-Encouraging members to grow and become fully committed followers of Jesus Christ through the **study** and **application** of the Word to our daily lives. Learning together how to overcome the pressures and trials of this present life and become more and more Christ-like.
- B. The Discipleship Plan is a tool to facilitate a 1:1- face to face meeting for the purpose of furthering **relationship building**, **spiritual development** and **individual goal setting** especially once you identify a member of your Life Group to become your Apprentice ("Timothy").
2. The structure or format of the Life Group Meeting should be the same each week. It consists of the four W's.
 - A. **Welcome**: Ice breaker/fellowship
 - B. **Worship**: Praise reports, songs or sentence prayers of adoration or thanksgiving
 - C. **Word**: Bible lesson from Pastor's previous sermon or an approved life group booklet; includes application to life's situations
 - D. **Works**: Sharing/praying for needs, planning activities or community service events, evangelism/outreach/invite plans
3. Usually materials used for the lesson each week comes from the pastor's sermon the previous weekend or other materials as approved by the discipleship coordinator.
4. The Life Group Meeting
 - a. The Life Group Meeting should last between **one and one half hours**. The Life Group Leader has the option to allow those who need special ministry or fellowship to remain longer. However, others should be allowed to leave after the Life Group Meeting has ended.
 - b. Life Group Meetings occur **regularly**. It is best if they occur weekly or bi-weekly.
 - c. Life Group Leaders can have their meetings on any day of the week that is **convenient** for the leader and the members. However, the meeting time must not conflict with the regular Sunday worship services and the Life Group Summits (*quarterly gathering for life group leaders and apprentices ["Timothy"]*).
5. The Life Group should meet at the same **location**. This prevents confusion and to makes it easier for visitors and members to know exactly where to find the meeting.
6. Life Group Leaders must start the meeting **on time**, regardless of how many people are present.

1. How to Lead a Life Group

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them, saying... (Matthew 5:1,2)

Jesus made disciples in life groups. He also ministered to the individual disciple when the need arose. It is not enough for disciples to relate to Jesus, they must relate to each other. If we want to get past addition to multiplication, then we must minister to the twelve and to the one, to the group and to the individual.



What does a life group look like?

Just as a human body consists of small cells, the church body is made of life groups. To understand how we view life groups we must understand what a life group is and what it is not.

A life group is not a...

- **Leader-centered Bible study** where each person comes to listen to and learn from a Bible expert.
- **Need-focused care group** where each person comes to talk about problems and receive personal pastoral care.
- **Fellowship-based social time** where each person comes to meet Christian friends.
- **Spiritual gift experiment group** where people can try out spiritual gifts on each other.
- **Home group** where food is served and whole families gather for fellowship.
- **Mini-church service** complete with worship, offerings, and preaching.

Most of the above will happen in a healthy life group, but it is a by-product and not the prime product. The primary purpose of a life group is to build authentic relationships with those in the group **SO THAT** discipleship can take place.

A life group meeting has **FOUR** parts.

1. **WELCOME (10-15 minutes)**

Each life group begins with a warm-up question. The warm-up is designed to give everyone a chance to speak and to get to know each other. Each lesson includes two or three warm-up questions. Use only one warm-up question each meeting. The life group leader should introduce the warm-up question, designate who should answer first, and encourage everyone to answer. If the lesson takes more than one life group meeting to complete, use a different warm-up question each week.

Good warm-up questions:

- Have no right or wrong answers.
- Ask for opinion or experience
- Require no Bible knowledge
- Are not controversial
- Are connected to the topic for the life group

2. WORSHIP (5-10 minutes)

The worship time seeks to focus the people on God. They may have just come from work or another meeting, or they may be facing a variety of personal struggles.

Tips:

- The life group leader should plan this time in advance. Remember that the worship should not be longer than 10 minutes total. Don't use up your time asking for suggestions or volunteers during the meeting.
- Sing 1-2 songs. Have lyrics available for new people as they might not know the songs.
- Read a Psalm or another scripture passage
- Have a brief testimony of what God has done since the last meeting. If the person begins to talk too long, gently encourage them to bring their story to a quick end.
- Watch an inspirational video

3. WORD (30-45 minutes)

Part A) Study of God's Word

The word time is a short and practical Bible teaching on the text or topic of the week. Each lesson begins with key verses and introductory comments which can be read out loud or summarized. Don't pretend to be an expert or Bible know-it-all. How much of the Bible you obey is more important than how much you know.

Tips:

- The life group meeting is more than a Bible study. It requires a good leader/facilitator, not an expert teacher.
- Let the Bible speak for itself.
- Be led by the Spirit, not the material.
- If they talk more than you, you are on the right track. Remember, the goal is to minister to the needs of the people, not to finish a Bible lesson — it is all about connecting with the people in the group.
- Some lessons are too long to complete in one life group meeting. Take two, three, or four weeks if necessary.

Discipleship Materials

- **Sermon Notes**. The group leader should take sufficient notes from the previous sermon at church so that the sermon can be summarized in 3-5 minutes. The leader is not re-

teaching the sermon, but is helping everyone to recall the main teaching points. The leader should also prepare 3-5 open-ended questions based on the sermon. The questions should encourage discussion based on the biblical text. Encourage group members to share about how they are, or would like to, apply the truth or principle in their own life. Avoid discussions about how most people in general might apply the truth or principle. The goal is for them to apply God's word to their own life.

- **Approved Curriculum**. There are many quality biblically sound discipleship materials available through the internet or through local book stores. The curriculum needs to be reviewed and approved by the senior pastor (or the discipleship coordinator) before the curriculum is introduced in the life group. The goal is to keep the life group members growing in their personal faith and to avoid some of the false teaching that is common in society.

Part B) Application of God's Word

In a life group, we teach the Bible so people can do it, not so they can know it. The whole point of teaching is for practical and personal application.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

(James 1:22-25)

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. (Matthew 7:24-27)

Tips:

- Most lessons include several application questions. Choose one or two. You are free to add your own questions. An effective standby application question that can always be used is: "What did you learn from this lesson and how will it affect your life?"
- Do not allow people to argue or be critical of others.
- Remind everyone to apply the lesson to their own life, not to someone else's.
- Life Group leaders must cry out for wisdom to know when to balance or correct weird and unbiblical applications. Insensitive correction or criticism can kill the group, as can unchecked heresy.
- It is often very beneficial to divide the group into "prayer partners" to discuss and apply the lesson to their lives.

4. WORKS (15-20 minutes)

Prayer is the most important part of the life group. Make sure you have plenty of time left so your prayer time is not rushed. This is not a "closing prayer", but a time to take specific requests to God.

Tips:

- The prayer time may begin with a brief reporting of answers to prayers to encourage and build the faith of each one present.
- Keep your prayers simple, sincere and short. Most non-believers have never heard an ordinary Christian just talk to God, and will be touched by the sincerity and simplicity.

- Use conversational prayer, not intercessory warfare prayer. Conversational prayer is generally thanksgiving and petition. No shouting at strongholds or binding devils; rather plenty of thanks, adoration, and specific petition.
- Spend your time praying for one another, not sharing prayer requests.
- Encourage each person to pray simple sentence prayers, not loud sermon prayers or long dissertations on theology addressed to God.
- Prayer in a language that people can understand. No tongues or hyperreligious jargon.
- Listen! Keep one ear turned to whoever is praying at the moment and the other to the Holy Spirit. Listen carefully during the warm-up and application time for things that may need prayer.
- Be creative. Don't pray in the same way and order every time.
- Expect God to answer your prayers.

Don't underestimate spiritual growth moments during your group meeting.

- A. Facilitate for life change
- B. It's not just about information, but transformation

How to Kill a Life Group

The following lessons were learned the hard way:

- No SHARING outside of the group. CONFIDENTIALITY must be maintained.
- No mixing GENDERS. It is best if men meet with men, and women meet with women.
- No BUILDING people, just have a meeting.
- No mixing BUSINESS with discipleship.
- No mixing POLITICS with discipleship.
- No PRIVATE ministry to the opposite sex.
- No MATCH-MAKING
- No borrowing MONEY
- No PROMOTION of para-church ministries or any event, spiritual or secular, through the life groups.
- No GUEST speakers.
- No receiving TITHES and offerings.

Remember to create a safe environment for all those who attend.

What is the GOAL of the life group time?

- To build RELATIONSHIPS and MAKE DISCIPLES

PERSONAL APPLICATION

What did you learn from this lesson? How will you put it into practice? When will you begin?
How will you know if you are being successful?

2. How to Start a Life Group

The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. (John 1:41,42)

The life group is the heart and soul of the local church. If life groups are healthy, then disciples will multiply. If life groups become ingrown, then the whole system shuts down. The purpose of a life group is to make disciples, and discipleship begins with engaging the lost.

Who are the Lost?

When Jesus sent his twelve disciples into the ripe harvest fields, he told them to go to the lost.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. (Matthew 10:5,6)

In the same way, we are also called to the lost. But, who are the lost? Jesus compared the lost in need of a Saviour to the sick who need a doctor. Who are the sick and lost that we are to reach?

- Unsaved
- Un-churched
- Backsliders
- **COMPROMISERS** and counterfeits
- **LOST** sheep
- **SICK** sheep
- **ABUSED** sheep
- **STARVING** sheep
- **WANDERING** sheep
- Sheep without a **SHEPHERD**

There are three keys to getting off to the right start.

1. IDENTIFY two or three other leaders.

Your life group can start with a maximum of four (you and three others) then must grow by reaching the lost.

2. INTERCEDE for your lost friends, family members, and acquaintances.

At the first meeting, each member of the new life group will make a list of **THREE** friends, family members, or acquaintances who are not active church members. The life group will pray together weekly for one month, specifically praying for everyone's list.

There are 3 ways to add people to your life group:

- A. People you choose
- B. People who choose you
- C. People God chooses

The Prayer of Three

- i. **IDENTIFY** as many people as you can think of who will potentially be interested in your life group.
 1. Relatives
 2. Old friends & family friends
 3. Church visitors
 4. Neighbors
 5. Office mates or class mates
 6. Social Contacts (sports, clubs, hobbies)
 7. Miscellaneous Contacts (barber, tailor, dentist)
- ii. **INTERCEDE** for three people from your list every day.
 1. The Prayer of Three list should never be more than 3 people at any time.
- iii. **INVITE** each of the three people to come to your life group
 1. If a person does not agree to come, or agrees to come but does not show up, continue to pray for them and continue to invite them. Do not give up on them too quickly!
 2. Pray and seek God before removing or adding anyone to the list.

3. INVITE friends, family, and acquaintances to your life group.

After some time of prayer some of the people you are praying for may be more open to the gospel and may be more interested in visiting your life group. Allow the Holy Spirit to work in their life and yours. Listen to what God is leading you to do regarding the other person. Don't force it, but be welcoming and encouraging.

4. INITIATE new leaders and groups

Allow the other leaders in the group to facilitate the meeting from time-to-time. This will help to prepare them to have their own group. A new group should be started when your group reaches 8 or more members. The maximum size of your group should not exceed 12. When the size of the group increases, the level of care decreases.

Keys to a successful Small-Group

1. **INVITE** people
2. Be **CONSISTENT**
3. **IDENTIFY** where people are in the discipleship process.
4. **FOLLOW-UP** with calls, SMS and e-mail, etc

What is the GOAL for the group? What do I want to encourage them to do?

INVEST in and **INVITE** people.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

What did you learn from this lesson? How will you put it into practice? When will you begin?
How will you know if you are being successful?

3. Discipleship Priorities

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”
(Matthew 28:19-20)

What are we trying to accomplish in our life groups? What are our goals? If we do not understand the basic discipleship priorities then life groups will become just another lifeless church activity. The following five priorities represent what we are trying to accomplish in our life groups.

1. FOUNDATIONS

The first goal of discipleship is to establish spiritual foundations in the life of each disciple. Obedience establishes spiritual foundations.

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against the house: yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.” Matthew 7:24,25

2. FREEDOM

One goal of discipleship is freedom from all destructive habits and sin patterns. Discipleship produces breakthrough when we realize that freedom comes from Jesus.

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” (John 8:36)

3. FAITH

Faith was always an issue when Jesus disciplined the twelve. He stretched their faith, commended people who had faith, and rebuked little faith.

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

4. FRUITFULNESS

Disciples are known by their fruit. If we do not have fruitful lives we are not disciples.

“I am the Vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing . . . This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” (John 15:5,8)

5. FAMILY

Jesus expected his disciples not just to follow him, but to walk with one another. He spoke of them as family.

Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.” He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” (Matthew 12:47-50)

PERSONAL APPLICATION

What did you learn from this lesson? How will you put it into practice? When will you begin?
How will you know if you are being successful?

4. How do we make disciples?

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. (2 Timothy 2:2)

Having looked at the priorities of discipleship, we can now look at the process of discipleship. This is what we are focused on in the group behind the scenes.

How should we make disciples?

1. ENGAGE the lost

It is important to understand that the discipleship process begins with evangelism. When Jesus told His disciples to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19), they did not interpret this to mean that they should help people who were already following Jesus to follow Him better. They knew they were sent to the world, not to the church, to make disciples.

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." (Luke 19:10)

2. ESTABLISH new believers

It is not enough to evangelize the lost. If we want to make disciples, we must help establish them in the faith, in the Word and in the Church.

... if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. Colossians 1:23

3. EQUIP to minister

The discipleship process begins with evangelism and establishing, but it must not end there. In order to make disciples, we must equip all believers to minister.

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service (Ephesians 4:11-12)

4. EMPOWER to expand

The whole point of equipping to minister is so that each disciple will be empowered to make disciples.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19)

How might this work in the local church?

	Principle	Process	Goal	Activities
Engage	Every soul is valuable to God	Intentionally and strategically engage the culture and community	Share the Gospel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worship Services • 1-to-1 Discipleship • Life Groups • Social Responsibility
Establish	Foundations first	Establish spiritual foundations	Establish believers in the faith, the Word, and the church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-to-1 Discipleship • Life Groups
Equip	Every believer a minister	Equip all believers to minister	Basic ministry and discipleship skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life group "Timothy" • Life Group Summits
Empower	Every disciple should make disciples	Empower all disciples to make disciples	Confidence & competence to make disciples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start a life group • Leaders groups • Life Group Summits

We make disciples when we:

1. **IDENTIFY** where everyone is in the discipleship process.
2. **IDENTIFY** what the next step is for everyone.
3. Helping them **MOVE** to the next step.

The reason I have a life groups is to make **DISCIPLES**

PERSONAL APPLICATION

What did you learn from this lesson? How will you put it into practice? When will you begin?
 How will you know if you are being successful?

5. Principles for 1-to-1 Discipleship

1. Prayer is important.

- Pray before meeting. Remember that it is the Holy Spirit who changes the person, not you or the material.
- Pray after the meeting. It is a way of teaching them to pray or talk to God through your example by showing them how.

2. Partner with the Holy Spirit.

- The goal is to make a disciple, not to finish a material.
- You can always finish the lesson another time but you may not have the opportunity again to minister to that person's current need.

3. Understand the lesson.

- Make sure they understand the lesson.
- Turn one page at a time.
- Have the person read the Bible verse occasionally.
- Read, comment, and make illustrations as much as possible.

4. Encourage personal application.

- The goal is not transfer of information but application of God's word.
- It would be good to ask them about the last topic and how they applied it.
- You may also go through the application questions.

5. Develop a spiritual growth plan

- Identify specific area of spiritual growth, one at a time
- Develop SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time-bound) goals
- Monitor and evaluate the growth plan for progress and challenges
- Identify new area of spiritual growth when appropriate

PERSONAL APPLICATION

What did you learn from this lesson? How will you put it into practice? When will you begin?
How will you know if you are being successful?