

## **What is a Life group?**

God has called us into relationship with Himself and with others. Life groups are a key way we can grow in our relationship with God and with others in community.

The most important relationship is a personal relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ -- a vertical relationship.

The Bible, our guidebook to daily living, repeatedly confirms the importance of relationships with others. Relationships provide us the opportunity to live out our faith and to live as a witness to the world. These horizontal relationships give us opportunities to care, to serve, to grow and to receive.

Life groups are our best setting to explore and experience both of these types of relationships.

### *Purpose of Life Groups*

#### **Discipleship** (Matt 28:18-20, 25:31-46)

Becoming more like Christ is the goal of discipleship. As we open ourselves up to God's work in our lives, He transforms us from the inside-out. Life Groups provide a consistent venue for this ongoing apprenticeship.

#### **Edification** (1 Cor 14:3-5, 1 Thess 5:11, Eph 4:11-12)

Edification is building one another up and growing mature in your faith. The Holy Spirit equips us with gifts that we are to use for the benefit of others. Life Groups act as an important place to encourage one another and use the gifts we've been given.

### *Commitments*

#### **Authenticity** (Philippians 4:8)

Life groups are a place for openness and transparency. Unfortunately, in our culture, façades and superficiality can become the norm in our relationships. Life groups provide an environment for people to relate to one another in a transparent atmosphere.

#### **Transformation** (Romans 12:2)

The process of becoming more Christ-like is a journey, one that none of us are at the end of. Being in community can provide an excellent atmosphere for spiritual growth, growth that rarely happens in isolation. Group members who anticipate and are open should experience the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

#### **Sacrificial Care** (1 Peter 5:1-4)

This is a commitment to see Christ's healing touch in the lives of imperfect people. If the need goes beyond the resources of the group, then the larger community will be asked to participate in meeting the need.

#### **World** (John 15:12)

The group is to partner with God's work in the world. Purposefully reaching out to the people God puts into our circles of community (neighborhoods, work places, relatives) to show them God's love and truth in actions and word.

#### **Multiplication** (2 Timothy 2:2, Matthew 9:37-38)

Groups should be open and actively seeking new people, having multiplication in mind from the very beginning. Multiplication will expand the opportunities for people to exercise their gifts and ensure that everyone has an opportunity to share, be prayed for, and is able to invite others to the group.

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**Biblical emphasis on community**

- God seeks community with man (Gen.1:26)
- God seeks community with Israel (Deut.6:4)
- God himself lives and works in community (John1:1-3)
- Christ himself came to provide community and live with us (Matt.1:23)
- Jesus called a small group of disciples to live and walk with him (Mark 3:7-10, 13-14)
- Jesus prayed that we may be one as He and the Father and Holy Spirit are one (John 17:11)
- Christ sees our unity and community as our message to the world (John17:21, 23)
- God wants people to seek a relationship with Him (Acts 17:24-27).
- God wants us to have relationships with others (Genesis 2:18).
- God reveals His emotions to us (Ephesians 4:30, Zephaniah 3:17)
- God intervenes when we can't communicate (Romans 8:26-27)
- God strengthens us for the storms of life (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)
- God provides wisdom for making good decisions (Proverbs 15:22)
- God provides confidentiality and accountability for spiritual health (Proverbs 27:17)
- There is strength, reliability and assurance in community (Proverbs 18:24)
- God's ordained way to provide infrastructure to assure the workload is shared (Exodus 18:9-22)
- Insures that everyone receives care (Acts 6:1)
- Provides leadership (Titus 1:5)
- Promotes unity in the body of Christ (Eph. 4:1-6, 11-16)
- Promotes a sense of belonging to one another (Rm. 7:2-4)
- Provides a place to edify, bless, grow, serve and challenge each other through the exercise of each person's spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:12-27)

## ∞ covenant ∞

### *Why bother with covenants?*

A major way God cultivated relationships with humanity was through covenants (in the Old Testament with Israel and then Jesus becomes the new covenant, Mt. 26:28). Making a covenant expresses our commitment to one another as those under God's love.

The life group covenant is a shared agreement between group members, so that everyone is clear about how the community functions. A covenant helps shape expectations and appropriate behaviors.

### *When should our group create a covenant?*

It is helpful to create the Covenant at some point between the 4th and 8th weeks that the group has existed. This provides enough time for the group to get to know each other without allowing so much time that the group loses its enthusiasm.

### *How does a group create a covenant?*

1. Read over the Group Covenant Worksheet and the purpose of life group pages above prior to the meeting to give you a head start as you prayerfully prepare to lead your group.
2. Talk with your group about the purpose of life groups and how they fit into discipleship at Community Church.
3. Finally, you will want to walk your group through the creation of the covenant.
4. If there is disagreement on an issue, write it down and come back to it later. Often an issue resolves itself in the process. If disagreement persists, determine if the issue is one worth fighting for. If not, let it go as non-essential. If it is a major issue, take time to consult your mentor and encourage the group to pray about it.
5. Make sure that everyone gets a copy of the covenant the week after it is created. Completing the covenant can be a time of celebration as the group anticipates the journey they are beginning and looks forward to what God will do in their midst.

### GROUP COVENANT WORKSHEET

- We affirm the purpose and commitments

*Five Commitments of life groups:*

- Authenticity  We will seek to be authentic with each other
- Transformation  We seek to use our spiritual gifts to serve and edify those in the group and in the world
  - We give permission to others to speak the truth in love to us
- Sacrificial Care  We seek to care and meet the needs of group members
- World  We are committed to reaching out to the world as a group  
Frequency: \_\_\_\_\_
- Multiplication  We understand the need for groups to multiply once the size is prohibitive for the group to reach its vision

*We agree to the following ground rules:*

- Meetings  We will meet on \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ . Involvement of children: \_\_\_\_\_ .
- Attendance  We will make attendance at life group a priority by scheduling other activities around the life group, whenever possible.
- Participation  We agree to share responsibility for the group.
- Confidentiality  We agree to keep here whatever is shared here. (NOTE: The only time that this ground rule is to be broken is when an individual is putting themselves or others in real danger.)
- Evaluation  We will evaluate the status of the group in \_\_\_\_ months.

## ≈ evaluation ≈

### *Why bother with evaluations?*

Without occasional check-ups a group can become stagnant, unaware that, for some reason, the group is losing its vitality. What's worse is when the group knows there is something wrong, but they are afraid of doing an evaluation for fear that it might reveal something about them that they don't want surfaced. Group leaders sometimes feel defensive about an evaluation since it might challenge their style of leadership or their vision for the group. The mature group evaluates itself.

### *When does a group do an evaluation?*

We suggest an evaluation at least every 12 months, though some groups have found benefit in doing an evaluation every time they complete a curriculum.

### *How does a group do an evaluation?*

Set a date and review the worksheet. This process allows for a healthy expression of what people feel the positives and the areas of struggle are for the group, and to do some fresh thinking about the group's future.

#### **GROUP EVALUATION WORKSHEET**

##### *Instructions to leader*

1. Give a brief overview of this activity
2. Explain that it is an opportunity to celebrate what God has been doing in the group and to critique those areas that the group needs to grow in
3. Encourage everyone to participate

##### *Question #1 – Let's Celebrate!*

- What have you liked best about our group? How have you seen God at work?

##### *Question #2 – Let's Be Honest....*

- What has been missing for you in this group? Have we been faithful to the values of life groups and our Covenant?

##### *Question #3 – Let's Be Creative!*

- How can we work through some of the difficulties? What ideas do you have for new activities you want to try? Are group members willing to take ownership of their ideas? Does the Covenant need to be revised?

##### *Note to Leader – Leader's Reflections*

It is also important for you as the leader of the group to do your own personal evaluation of the group. Have you felt supported by group members? Do you have the sufficient resources to lead effectively? Have you been able to lead the group through the various life cycle stages?

## XX multiplication XX

*What is multiplication?*

Group multiplication is when one group intentionally starts new groups that will intentionally start new groups that will make more and better followers of Christ. The following are some possible ways to plant a group.

### **Some methods**

- Send off a leader-in-training with a few people from the existing group to start a new one.
- Send off the leader to start a new group while turning over the existing group to the leader-in-training.
- Multiply your group into two groups that meet in separate locations with the idea of bringing in new people into both groups.
- Multiply your group into numerous groups after preparing new leaders through a time of training and modeling group life.
- Be creative...the group may come up with its own way to multiply.

*Why is group multiplication important?*

- Because when groups become much larger than 15+ people, personalized care starts to become less possible.
- Because certain people, especially new visitors, will probably not return because the group is just "too big".
- Because new groups mean new people will have an opportunity to use their gifts of leadership, hospitality, administration, mercy, intercession, etc.

*When should our group multiply?*

There is no concrete timeline that will be appropriate for all groups. Some groups multiply in their first year and other groups take 2-3 years. However, when your group begins having 12-15 adults attended regularly, it will be time to start forming a multiplication plan.

*How should our group prepare the ground for group multiplication?*

- Talk about it as early on as possible. Begin to cast vision for group multiplication on your first meeting.
- Use the Leader Manual in actively training up a leader-in-training who will lead a group.
- Encourage your leader-in-training to be active in bringing others to your group. These people will connect with him/her and then likely remain with him/her when the new group is planted.
- Celebrate new believers.
- Make plans to stay connected with the multiplied group.

*How do we address the concerns that we are "splitting"?*

Assure people that you won't break up the closest of friendships and that true friendships in the group will exist whether you are meeting formally as a group every week or not. In addition, your group and the new group will probably want to get together occasionally for reunion gatherings. Perhaps you can worship, fellowship, or do some kind of service activity together. Ongoing interconnectedness is important.

What is the multiplication process in detail?

- **Assess the current condition of your group:** Who is the leader-in-training? Who are the others growing in their walk with Christ?
- **Set a Target Time for your plant:** In what three-month period is multiplication likely to happen if everything continues to develop like it is now?
- **Decide on a Multiplication Method:** Refer to the methods section above. Ask God for direction and be prepared to change as your plans progress. Begin praying for new workers, hosts, etc.
- **Make specific plans with your Mentor:** What details still need to be considered? What hesitations does the group feel? What training is needed?
- **Cast vision with your group:** What will you do to get agreement on this goal? Have you chosen an actual date to plant? Whom has God prepared to help you influence the others? Is your Leadership Team on board?
- **Expect opposition:** Spiritual forces and human nature often work against the planting of groups. Pray for insight and God's preparation in the lives of others. Are you presently aware of the unseen forces?
- **Plan a multiplication party:** What will you do to celebrate? This is a great occasion. Share what God has done in your group and what you expect the future to hold.