

How to Have a GREAT LIFE Group!!!

**Jesus said,
“I have come that they may have LIFE,
and have it in its fullest!” John 10:10**

**LIFE GROUPS: We are designed for Community!
Communion with God, and community with others
(Matthew 22:37-40)**

**We fulfill the Great Commission by
* sharing * studying * praying * serving!**

What does that look like?! A LIFE group is growing. People are being *transformed*! “It is in authentic community that people find real hope in the midst of pain, loss, loneliness, depression, and sin in their lives. God gave us the gift of community to meet our needs. The real need of our culture is to *meaningfully connect* with a few other people. When we do, we are able to change, to grow, and to heal” (Michael Mack). As a result, the group does not just meet, it is actively involved in something outside itself – it has a heartbeat, a mission and a purpose! It reaches out to those beyond themselves to invite others on the sanctification journey, and reaches out to serve others in the name of Christ!

“Fruit-bearing groups are more than a meeting and more than a Bible study. They are spiritual families who really care for one another and look to one another’s interests. ... they love one another, flourish, grow, and multiply themselves” (Michael Mack).

Guidelines for LIFE Group Leadership

Information adapted from North Point Community Church Group Leader's Curriculum and Leading from the Heart by Michael C. Mack, Cell Group Resources, 2001, 2005

A LIFE Group is the place where people discuss real life and real issues - the place to celebrate the successes and good times of life and the place to comfort one another in the tough and disappointing times. Group members come to be encouraged, equipped, and challenged to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

As we considered how best to train our LIFE group leaders, we came up with some irreducible minimums - the essentials that are critical to leading well. If each of us will implement these priorities, we believe we will be effective in leading our groups.

LIFE Group Leader Essentials

Your best preparation for leading a LIFE group is to nurture your walk with God and remain open to the to His leading in your life. "A leader's knowledge, skills, personality, and looks are not as significant as what lies underneath all that: the heart and soul of the person." (Michael Mack, p.16)

Everything in our Christian life and service flows from our relationship with God. If we are not in vital fellowship with Him, everything will be out of focus." - J. Oswald Sanders

Think Life Change!

Bill Hybels has said that vision leaks. And that is definitely true when it comes to the vision and purpose for groups. It is easy for groups to drift away from their main purpose. So this value reminds us why we have groups: to create predictable environments where participants experience authentic community and spiritual growth; an environment where God is active in the lives of its members; a small group where people *change*. Keeping the life-change goal front and center challenges us to keep our groups purposeful.

Cultivate Relationships

This essential focuses on how we build a sense of community in our groups. Relationships are like bank accounts: they don't just happen. They require regular intentional deposits. Starting early to build the relational capital of the group is one of the most important steps we can take. Take time in the initial meetings to get to know one another, share fun stories, laugh -- when people laugh together, they can share more openly together! LIFE groups should be celebrations of God's work and goodness. Joy will draw people to God! As leaders, if we are to help others find their places in God's story, and then the first step in that effort is to understand the group member's story.

If the LIFE group would like to continue after their initial commitment together, planning an activity like an overnight in the first six months of a group's run is a terrific way to set the stage. Then we must make *ongoing* deposits to continually cultivate relationship among the group members. Planned deposits bring greater relational satisfaction to a group's balance sheet.

Promote Participation

This essential focuses on how we lead the group meeting. It reminds us that since shared participation creates broader ownership of the group, all group members should be encouraged to participate often in the facilitation and leadership of the group meeting. This essential also reminds us to promote participation by being navigators of discussion, not teachers of curriculum. The difference is critical. Every time we ask open-ended questions, we are inviting participation. More than sharing the right answers, we want people to share their lives.

Replace Yourself

This essential encourages us to intentionally apprentice someone in your group for future leadership. The apprentice is someone who has the potential to replace a leader, not simply assist him/her. Since adults often learn on a need-to-know basis, apprenticing is the most effective way to identify and train group leaders. When we put someone into the game, he or she learns quickly. Ideally, we should identify an apprentice within the first six months of the group. This assures that the group is fully prepared to multiply after a set time (usually one year or so) or when the group grows beyond twelve people.

Provide Care

This essential reminds us why we have LIFE groups: to share life with one another! It is as much about prayer for one another as it is about “being there” for one another, especially during times of stress for members of the group by providing meals, helping paint a house, clean, or just being there at 2 am when a friend is needed. If you have challenging situations in your group, please contact your coach or CCC Team Leaders.

Multiply Influence

This final essential reminds us that multiplying our groups opens the door for others to participate in group life. It also allows us the opportunity to multiply our influence. While we recognize this to be the most difficult aspect of group leadership, it can also be the most rewarding. When we are able to experience “life”, true community in our groups, that is something to be shared. And in this age of having appointments, and not relationships, living in houses and not homes, people are yearning to be a part of an authentic community – our hearts and doors must be open to receiving more people into our little flock!

How to Begin a LIFE Group Meeting!?!

Step 1: Preparation!!!

1. Your best preparation for leading a LIFE group is to nurture your walk with God and remain open to the to His leading in your life. Please see *Guidelines for LIFE Group Leadership*.
2. Pray for each member of the group! Begin by acknowledging to God that the group is His, the people are His, the time is His. Ask for His power to help you facilitate the group. He has entrusted YOU with the stewardship of the group, so receive the group as God's gift and charge to you from heaven. He is investing in you to invest in His people! What kind of return will make on His investment?!
3. Recognize that your role is to grow the group, maturing in faith, and then allow the life cycle to start all over again with another group! The role of the leader is to use his or her gifts to "prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become *mature*, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. *Then we will no longer be infants...*" Ephesians 4:12-14

*"A gathering of eight to twelve people does not [necessarily] constitute a group. A true small group consists of a certain number of people who have committed themselves to one another and to a **common goal**. In essence they have agreed to **struggle together** . . . and **care for one another**."*

(Growth Through Groups, William Clemmons and Harvey Hester)

Step 2: Call people PERSONALLY!!!

Especially make meaningful time with new people to the group by introducing yourself, and give directions to your home, phone number, whatever may be helpful in getting them to your home and making them feel welcome!

Step 3: The Meeting

** Be sure to **begin and end the meetings on time**, except for unusual circumstances. Those who want to share further can stay by afterwards.

1. Food and General Sharing as eat (around 15 minutes)
2. Confidentiality!!! Before you begin, state that what is said in the group, stays in the group! In addition, do not share e-mails with others, even spouses that may be in different groups. Do we want a covenant to sign?
3. Ice-Breaker Activity (see lists of ideas at the end of the packet!!!)

WHY do we need to do an Ice-Breaker? *(from Serendipity Small Group Ice-Breakers and Heart-Warmers by Steve Sheely)*

Ice-Breakers get the group off to a good start. Instead of jumping immediately into the study and discussion of your group's topic, Ice-Breakers help everyone prepare for the meeting. Ice-Breakers are fun and interesting ways for people to learn more about each other. Ice-Breakers encourage everyone to talk in a lively, non-threatening way. Ice-Breakers help people move out of the business of the day and begin the exciting task of small group conversation.

Imagine your relationships as a house full of rooms. Most day-to-day relationships only visit a few of the rooms. We share information, we talk about the weather, we discuss a purchase, etc. The relationships in a small group can offer much more than that. A healthy small group allows each member to bring more of themselves into the protection of Christian fellowship. A small group should open doors to many rooms, such as playfulness, accountability, prayer, confession, encouragement, affirmation, reminiscing and dreaming.

An Ice-Breaker begins this process. Ice-Breakers create opportunities for sharing those parts of ourselves we normally keep locked up. Ice-Breakers open doors which remain shut during the day. **Ice-Breakers begin an important process: making your small group a place where you can let down your guard and be yourself.**

During a small group meeting something special should gradually happen. From the time the group gathers to the time they dismiss, a certain magic should occur. Hopefully, by the time the group is ready to close with prayer, the group has become a safe, trusting community. This process, of course, does not happen accidentally.

An Ice-Breaker gets the "community ball" rolling. Bible study and discussion should continue the momentum, moving toward opportunities for personal response to the Scripture and the topic. The prayer time should be the culmination of the community building for each meeting. This is a special time, under God's protection, for the group to share their concerns, express gratitude for God, and pray for each other. If the group has moved through the "trust process" during the course of the meeting, the prayer time should be a powerful spiritual experience.

4. Study Time: Insert DVD, then lead the discussion questions

(The following is from *Spiritual Body Building* by Kim Johnson)

“**Active listening**” means giving people your full attention while they are talking and making an effort to listen for the meaning and feeling *behind* their words. Concentrate on what they are saying rather than simply waiting for a chance to share your own thoughts.

Be slow to give advice and counsel on how others should deal with their problems. Be sure you have listened well and remember that you cannot fully appreciate someone else’s struggles until you’ve walked a while in their shoes.

There are **various roles** that different people can play in a group—Encourager, Tension Reliever, Communication Helper, Harmonizer, Summarizer, Information Giver, Information Seeker, Hospitality Giver, Trust Builder, Process Observer, Reminder, Schedule Keeper . . .

It is helpful if **discussion flows between group members** rather than always being directed back to the group leader. Build on each other’s comments. Help to gently draw each other into the discussion.

Each member of the group is as responsible for how a particular meeting goes as is the group leader. It is a shared responsibility. Don’t be a spectator. **Invest in the success of your group.**

5. Prayer

Evaluation of Your Group:

The key question: how are the individuals growing in their *relationship* with God?

Then -- what is the next step for the group? Is it to continue... doing deeper relationship building times? Is it time to multiply? Is it time for closure?

Multiplication Ideas

Throw “Connecting” Parties to invite new people to the group – game nights, BBQ block parties, pool parties, etc. Build relationships with those that do not yet know Christ – and once they know you care about them, they will be more open to knowing more about Christ! We are the light of the world to those in darkness – let’s gently lead them to THE source of true LIFE!

Service Ideas

Whether it is serving meals together at a shelter, building a Habitat house, refereeing basketball games for inner-city youth, to hosting a neighborhood block party, there’s something about coming together to serve others that just naturally deepens our relationships in our groups. Please check out Colonial’s website, the newspaper, etc. to find ways that make your heart beat in anticipation to serve that group of people! E-mails for service ideas will also be sent to the group leaders each month.