



Dear Partner in Ministry,

I want to thank you for your courage and willingness to be involved as a Life Group leader in our church!

As a Life Group leader, you are on the cutting edge of our church's growth. For years we have found that people involved in small groups experience more aggressive life change than anyone else. For this reason, *I consider Life Group leaders to be the most strategic people in the church!!*

The vision the Lord has given for this church will only be accomplished as we live in Jesus Christ and allow Him to live through us (John 15:4-5). We believe this happens best as each member becomes an active part of a Life Group where prayer, love and encouragement from God's Word create the atmosphere for growth in Christ and reaching out to befriend those who don't yet know Him.

The key element of our vision is that every member of Canyon Hills Community Church be involved in a Life Group where they can be loved and cared for! The only way we will accomplish this is by continuing to start new groups and continue to grow and multiply our existing Life Groups.

As you begin this ministry, pray that the Lord will work deeply in your life. Ask Him to give you a heart to shepherd His people, a deep faith to believe that He hears and answers prayer, a spirit of unconditional love and support for His people and a sincere passion to reach out those who don't yet know Christ as their Savior.

"Now to Him Who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen"
(Ephesians 3:20-21, NIV).

Together, let's work to fulfill the vision He has given, by caring for one life at a time!

OUR PURPOSE

“Canyon Hills exists to make more and better disciples of Jesus Christ.”

A. This mission involves a three-step process that begins with an individual's commitment to Christ. That commitment begins a lifelong journey of **Knowing Christ**, **Growing in Christ** and **Serving Christ**.

1. Committed to Christ:

Helping you to know Christ - through repentance, baptism, Foundations class, church membership.

2. Connected to His Body:

Life Groups – encouraging your growth in Christ by providing teaching, friendships, prayer and care.

3. Called to His Mission:

Canyon Hills School of Ministry – equipping classes to help you serve Christ in your home, the church, and the world.





Life Groups

Ministry Vision Summary

CORE PURPOSE:

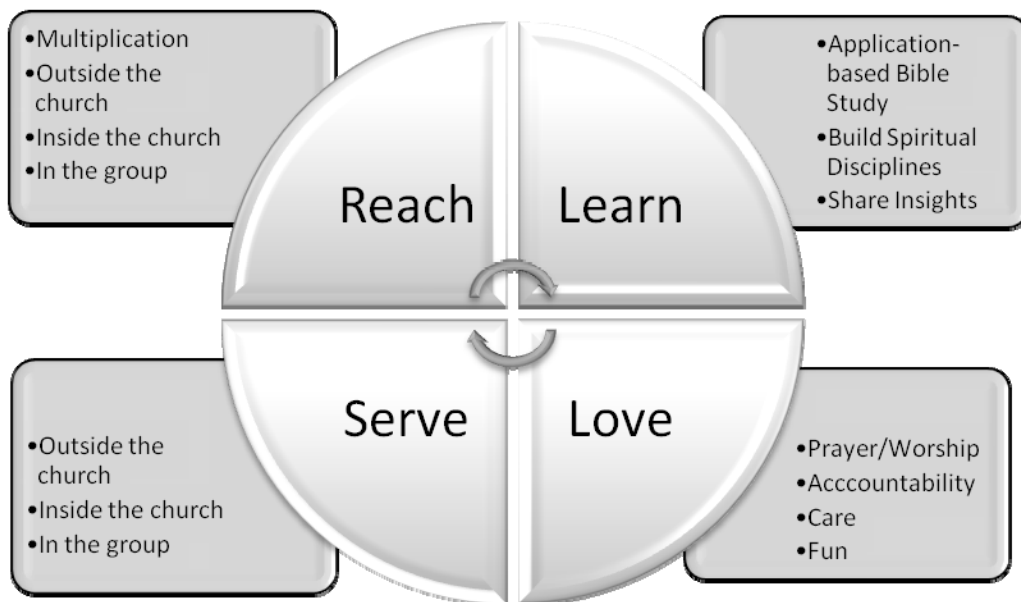
“Life Groups exist to connect people in Biblical Community so that no one stands alone.”
(Acts 2:42-47)

CORE VALUES: We value above all else that God be glorified through the development of significant Christian relationships centered on the study and application of His Word (Hebrews 12:24-25).

This happens through...

1. The developing of spiritual disciplines through application-based Bible study
2. Prayer for each other, our church and our world
3. Care for each individual member in a loving and “safe” environment
4. Open Community / inviting others to join in the experience of “Life Groups”
5. Service in our church and community

FOUR ELEMENTS OF A BALANCED LIFE GROUP:



TYPES OF LIFE GROUPS:

There are 5 types of Life Groups that exist within our church. Each serves a slightly different purpose but the Core Purpose of connecting people in Biblical community remains intact.

1. **Growth Groups** are primarily made up of believers who are seeking to grow in Christlikeness through Bible study, prayer and accountability. These include our home Life Groups, Sunday morning and evening Life Groups as well as our youth Life Groups.

2. *Service Groups* meet with the primary purpose of preparing for service or completing a task. Within the context of their preparation they also study God's Word and have the opportunity to develop community through praying for and caring for each other.
3. *Support Groups* exist primarily to assist members as they walk through personal difficulties. They also study God's Word and pray for one another, understanding that this is a major part of any true transformation. These groups are directed by Pastor Ben Marshall.
4. *Discipleship Groups* exist primarily to train the members in specific growth related areas. These groups typically meet for a specified period of time with a very structured curriculum. Many of our men's and women's groups are structured this way.
5. *Focus / Interest Groups* are organized around a specific area of interest, hobby, common focus or life situation. Examples may include a Life Group for businessmen, runners, golfers, hunters, quilters, a group for women with un-churched husbands, those investigating the Christian faith, or for parents of special needs children. Each group is still required to have a trained leader guiding group members toward spiritual maturity and "biblical community."

BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal):

Become a church OF small groups, with 80 percent of those regularly attending in a "Life Group" by 2012.

VIVID DESCRIPTION:

We will be a church where the vast majority of members are connected to a small group of believers and are developing significant Christian relationships centered around the study of God's Word.

We will be a church where each individual is known, cared for and ministered to by a small group of believers who are not just going to church but are experiencing Biblical Community. We want to be a church where "Nobody Stands Alone!!" is our battle cry.

We will be a church that is known for infiltrating and changing our community with the life-changing love of God.

We will be a church that is known as a church OF SMALL GROUPS where every ministry is built on the foundation of small groups and is all about making "More and Better Disciples of Christ Jesus."

LIFE GROUP SHEPHERD MINISTRY DESCRIPTION

Requirements:

- **Spiritual and Relational Warmth:** You must have a growing relationship with Jesus Christ and enjoy being around His people.
- Display evidence of gifts and abilities for teaching and / or shepherding people.
- Attend basic Life Group leadership training / orientation.
- Be a participating member of Canyon Hills Community Church.

Responsibilities:

1. Develop Your Life Group Leadership Team by...

- Vision Casting – this is why we exist...
- Recruiting, training and encouraging your host and apprentice
- Involving others in appropriate leadership roles within your Life Group
- Problem solving with your coach and apprentice

2. Lead and Shepherd Your Life Group by...

- Praying for your group (Philippians 1:3-11; Colossians 1:9-12)
- Encouraging your group through phone calls, personal notes, meeting needs, etc.
- Preparing to lead and facilitate your regular Life Group meetings or work with the person who is leading the study time.
- Ensure that your group meetings have at least these three elements...
 - **Sharing time** – take some time to catch up and share what is going on in the lives of group members.
 - **Study time** – our goal is to learn to apply and live out our Christian faith in our day to day experiences by studying the questions from each week's sermon or working through another approved curriculum.
 - **Prayer time** – each week you should have a concentrated time of prayer for one another.
- Encouraging occasional social functions for your Life Group (at least once a quarter)

3. Seek to Involve Your Life Group in Service by...

- Helping plan and execute at least one service project within the church and one outside the church during the ministry year.

4. Seek to be a Part of the Life Group Ministry Team by...

- Attending all Life Group Huddles and appropriate training opportunities.
- Maintain regular contact with your Life Group coach as he encourages through personal meetings, phone calls or e-mail.
- File weekly report of attendance with the Adult Ministries Admin Assistant.

Time Commitment Required: Minimum of 1 year

MARKS OF A HEALTHY LIFE GROUP

For our group to be healthy, we need to...

- 1. Focus on spiritual growth as a top priority (Romans 8:29).** We need to remember that our Life Group experience must be built around and centered on studying and applying God's Word to our everyday lives. This also should involve praying for each other, expecting to see God work.
- 2. Accept one another in love as Christ has accepted us (Romans 15:7; 1 Corinthians 12).** We are all so different and come from distinctly different backgrounds but there is great joy in learning to love and accept each other—warts and all! When I look at Jesus' group of disciples I think, "There is a diverse group who must have had to learn how to accept each other."
- 3. Take care of one another without crossing over the line into parenting or taking inappropriate responsibility for solving the problems of others (John 13:34).** You should see an increasing willingness to care for each other and meet each other's needs. You can help meet the needs of those you care for.
- 4. Treat one another with respect in both speech and action (Ephesians 4:25-5:2).** It is important to create an atmosphere where group members affirm and encourage one another, build each other up in Christ, and help each other grow.
- 5. Keep our commitments to the group – including attending regularly, doing any expected homework, participating in serving together and by carefully keeping confidences.** Our groups should be a safe place to share.
- 6. Have FUN!!** You should enjoy spending time together and find yourselves "doing life together."
7. _____

LIFE GROUP OPERATING PROCEDURES

1. HOW OFTEN DO LIFE GROUPS MEET?

The requirement for a group to be considered a legitimate Life Group is that it meets a minimum of twice a month. Beyond this, each group has the freedom to choose how often it will meet based upon schedules and needs within the group.

2. WHEN DO THEY MEET?

Life Groups can meet anytime during the week.

3. WHERE CAN THEY MEET?

The leader determines where the group meets. Most groups, of course, will meet in homes. Some may choose to meet in the workplace, on campuses and some in church facilities depending upon the nature of the group. Those meeting in homes may choose to meet at one location or rotate among group members' homes on a regular basis. The choice is up to the leader.

4. WHAT IS THE LENGTH OF THE MEETING?

The average length of a meeting is 90 minutes. Each LifeGroup decides together how long their normal meeting will be. People can stay longer, but those who have sitters or get up early need to have a set time by which they know they can leave. This length provides adequate time for sharing, study and prayer. The meeting should always end with people wishing they could meet longer.

5. IS THERE TIME OFF?

There is no official "off season" for our Life Groups. There will, of course, be occasions such as holidays and special church events when groups will not meet. But, other than that, groups can continue to meet regularly throughout the year. During the summer months and in December groups often meet less often or get creative about their time together (i.e., ball games, picnics, service projects, etc.). It's important to have a well thought out and agreed upon calendar plan. *The important thing is don't stop the caring or totally lose contact with one another!*

6. HOW LONG DOES THE GROUP STAY TOGETHER?

Many of our Life Groups have been together for years. Over the course of their existence each group tends to add and lose members for various reasons. It's also not uncommon for groups to naturally multiply as they grow. New groups are "birthed" as natural friendships grow into entire new groups. This isn't forced on our groups but sometimes happens quite naturally.

7. HOW DOES A GROUP CLOSE?

There are three ways a group might stop meeting together:

- A. The Life Group naturally multiplies into two groups.
- B. The leader decides to end his commitment; a new leader from in the group emerges, is trained and takes over leadership of the group.
- C. The Life Group pastor makes a decision to close the group based upon recommendations of the leader and/or coach.

8. WHAT TAKES PLACE IN A LIFE GROUP MEETING?

The goal of the Life Group meeting is to encourage growth of meaningful Christian relationships built around the study and application of God's Word and learning to "do life together." There are 3 basic ingredients for encouragement that are common in every group. They are:

- A. **Sharing.** The sharing of our lives is a powerful tool for building strong bonds of relationship in the small group. Take time to catch up and share what is going on in the lives of the group members. Relationships develop and deepen as we "tell our stories." Sharing opens our hearts to one another. This happens best when food is involved. Just kidding but "treats" are a normal part of most groups.
- B. **Study:** This involves Bible discussion and application. Life Groups discuss the Bible to grow in understanding of God's Word for the purpose of applying it in their lives. The goal is not completing lessons, but changing lives. Many of our groups study and discuss the sermon from that week or go through a pre-approved curriculum.
- C. **Prayer.** This conversational prayer is in response to God's Word, the needs of the group and for those that the group is reaching out to and helps to build strong relationships with one another.

PRINCIPLES FOR LEADING A LIFE GROUP

1. SHEPHERD AND CARE FOR THE PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE GROUP.

When asked which was the greatest commandment, Jesus responded, " *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.* ' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: *'Love your neighbor as yourself.'* All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37-40). The apostle Paul hones this down even further in Galatians 5:14 when he says, "The entire law is summed up in a single command: *'Love your neighbor as yourself.'* " The first and greatest command for every Life Group leader is the law of love!

This is the first and most important principle for growing a successful Life Group. The leader who loves as Christ commanded will shepherd and care for others even as Christ does us.

In John 10, where Jesus describes Himself as the Good Shepherd, we see three commitments of shepherding demonstrated in the life of our Lord:

- a. Shepherding is a commitment of unselfish giving to others.
"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (v. 11)
- b. Shepherding is a commitment to get involved in others' lives.
"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me..." (v. 14)
- c. Shepherding is a commitment to bring others in who are not yet a part.
"I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also..." (v. 16a)

2. MAINTAIN A CONSTANT AWARENESS OF THE LIFE GROUP OBJECTIVES.

Continually remind your group of the four primary objectives:

LEARN – Discovering biblical truth together

LOVE – By prayer, care, accountability and FUN!

REACH – To the world that needs to hear the Gospel, to bring in the "strays" within the church not yet connected and to pray about and plan for multiplication

SERVE – Within the LifeGroup, within the church and in the community

3. BE AN ENCOURAGER.

As a leader, ask God to make you a Barnabas (son of encouragement). Seek to build people up in the Lord. As you model what it means to be a Barnabas, others will follow. Remember, you are the one who sets the tone for your group.

4. MAKE SURE YOU ARE TUNED UP SPIRITUALLY.

We need to lead out of the overflow of a heart that is filled with the love of Christ. Only the Holy Spirit can make us a channel of His love as we yield ourselves to His complete control. Maintaining the spiritual disciplines of personal time in God's Word and in prayer with a spirit of dependence is essential if we are going to lead others effectively.

6. ENCOURAGE MUTUAL EDIFICATION AND PARTICIPATION.

The purpose of the leader is not to be the authority or the teacher but to be the guide – a facilitator. Participation is the key to success. As everyone participates in Bible discussion and sharing from their lives, the learning process is multiplied. A good leader will seek to facilitate this process. Asking good questions is essential for good participation. However, *an important point to remember is not to pressure anyone to pray, read or speak* if they are not ready to do so. The wise leader will know how to gently bring them along.

The arrangement of people will also make a difference in the way people participate. The best is a circle with one empty chair.

Delegating areas of responsibility is another way to affirm people and help them to take an active role in carrying out the "one anothers" of Scripture within your group.

7. RESPOND IMMEDIATELY TO NEEDS EXPRESSED.

Life Groups are a place where we can care for one another. When needs are made known, the leader must take the initiative to respond lovingly to meet those needs. The best time to respond is always now. Good intentions often go unfulfilled because we put off until later what we should do now. When someone is hurting, they do not need our intentions, they need our action. Love does not respond tomorrow, it responds today.

8. FOLLOW UP BETWEEN MEETINGS.

A quick phone call or a brief note go a long way in communicating, "I care." Make *"I care calls"* to those who are absent. Men should follow up on men and women should follow up on women. New people should always be contacted to thank them for coming and to let them know how much you would like them to become a part of your group. Follow up on regular attendees to give them words of appreciation or to check up on a prayer request. The point is that successful small group leaders are those who express genuine love and care for the people in their groups both in and apart from their small group meetings.

9. CREATE AN ATMOSPHERE OF LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE.

Understanding our own personal worth and acceptance before God is essential for offering genuine love and acceptance to others. You are of inestimable value to God, and so is every person in your group. Believing this is what enables you to reach out to others with love and acceptance, making them feel comfortable with who they are. A good leader learns to be shockproof and not overly reactive when someone says or does something that goes against the grain. If we create an atmosphere of love and acceptance, the Holy Spirit will do His work.

10. DEAL WITH DIFFICULTIES ON A PERSONAL BASIS.

There will be problems in every small group. You can count on it. When you are involved in ministering in the lives of people you are going to run into problems. The key for dealing with problems is to deal with them. Don't ignore them and think that they will simply go away.

Here are a few suggestions for handling E.G.R.'s (Extra Grace Required people):

- Love them.
- Talk with them one-on-one away from the group in a spirit of gentleness (Gal. 6:1).
- Go to your Life Group coach or pastor for help when you need it.

11. DON'T ALLOW ANY DOCTRINAL DISCUSSION THAT IS DIVISIVE OR ARGUMENTATIVE.

Paul warned Titus to, "*avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless*" (Titus 3:9). As the leader, you may need to say at times, "The direction this is taking us is not profitable. We need to direct our attention to that truth which is clear and can be applied to our lives. It's the application of that which we do understand that God holds us responsible for." Discussion that leads to division is unprofitable. Discussion that leads to personal discipleship is our pursuit.

12. PUT A STOP TO ANY CRITICISM OR GOSSIP.

If this does happen, it must be stopped quickly. Sometimes gossip or criticism can be dressed in the form of a prayer request. The wise leader will handle this problem before it arises by laying the ground rules for the group right from the start. Sharing the following passages will help cement this principle:

"But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken." (Matthew 12:36)

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." (Ephesians 4:29)

13. ENJOY YOURSELF.

Your group ought to be a fun place to be. So, watch out that you not take yourself too seriously. It's OK to laugh. In fact, laughter is a vital ingredient to a healthy group. Listen to this counsel from the Proverbs:

"A joyful heart is good medicine (literally - "that causes healing") but a broken spirit dries up the bones." (Proverbs 17:22)

"A joyful heart makes a cheerful face, but when the heart is sad, the spirit is broken. All the days of the afflicted are bad, but a cheerful heart has a continual feast." (Proverbs 15:13, 15)

14. KEEP LEARNING.

A good leader is a good learner. Be on constant lookout for ways you can improve your leadership skills. Don't miss scheduled leaders' meetings. Your attendance is mandatory, but beyond that it will help you to grow as a leader. Read relevant recommended materials to sharpen your skills. Find out what works and what doesn't work from other leaders. Don't be afraid to ask or admit that you need help. As one has said, "When you stop learning, you stop living."

15. REMEMBER WHO IS IN CHARGE.

A good leader is a good follower of Christ. Never forget that He is the One Who is in charge. We are simply His servants. As we lead, we serve Jesus Christ. He is the One Who makes us adequate for the task, not we ourselves. There is no room for pride in leadership. It always precedes a fall. James tells us, *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* We lead in humility, depending upon Christ, seeking to be the servants of all.

KEY TO EFFECTIVE BIBLE DISCUSSION

Two misconceptions get in our way when trying to understand who will be effective at leading a small group Bible discussion. Most of us think those with strong, charismatic personalities will be the most effective discussion leaders. Actually these types often are ineffective discussion leaders because they tend to dominate discussions. Others think a good discussion leader must have an in-depth knowledge of Scripture to be effective. Although we should constantly work to be better equipped with God's Word, the person who is the "scholar" often has the hardest time leading a discussion because others hesitate to share their insights with such a knowledgeable person present. The group will tend to always look to the answer man.

What then is the key to leading an effective discussion? Two phrases...

GOOD QUESTIONS and GOOD LISTENING!

GOOD QUESTIONS

No matter how long you've been a Christian, you can be effective in leading a Bible discussion if you learn to ask good questions.

The uniqueness of a Life Group discussion is that the group members learn from each other. The key to the group's success is the leader's ability to draw people into the discussion.

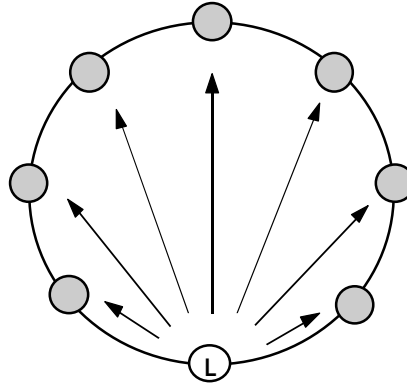
Good questions are the key. Four types of questions lead to effective Bible discussion:

- **SHARE QUESTIONS – Who are you?**
- **DISCOVERY QUESTIONS – What does it say?**
- **UNDERSTANDING QUESTIONS – What does it mean?**
- **APPLICATION QUESTIONS – How does it apply to me?**

Good curriculum will help you ask good questions. But, not all curriculum asks good questions. Carefully read the material and the suggested questions. If the questions need to be "tweaked", then "tweak" them. Work hard on crafting good questions - they are the lifeblood of good discussion.

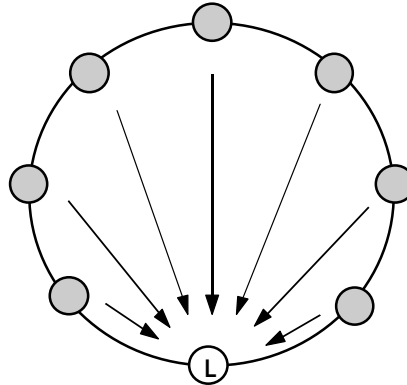
SUCCESSFUL GROUP DISCUSSION

NOT THIS:



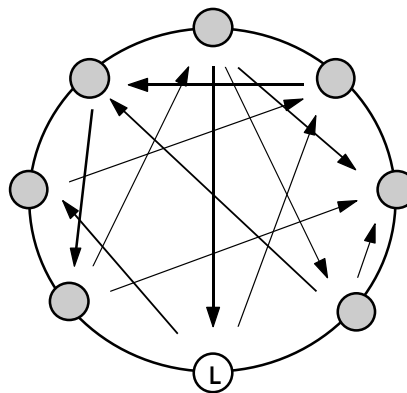
...The leader doing all the talking and the people all the listening.

NOR THIS:



...Each of the group members responding only to the leader in answering question.

BUT THIS:



...Group members interacting with each other, the leader guiding the discussion.

GOOD LISTENING

Active listening involves not only what you hear, but also what you say. This means actively engaging with the person who is speaking, setting aside your personal agenda, and keeping yourself from distracting thoughts (particularly thinking about what you are going to say next!). It's important to not anticipate an answer or interrupt but rather listen. Here are some tips for active listening.

What you say...

1. Invite comments from the group.

Examples:

- “How have others in the group dealt with grief you have experienced?”
- “Bob has shared some deep feelings tonight. How might others of you have responded to a similar confrontation at work?”
- “Does anyone in the group want to add to what Hank has said about this question?”

2. Empathize with people's emotions.

Examples:

- “That was a very painful episode in your childhood, wasn't it, Greg? How did you deal with it? How do you face it today?”
- “It is exciting to be part of a victory like you shared, Sharon. How does that impact your relationship with your husband, Scott?”

3. Explore their statements, seeking more information.

Examples:

- “Sam, that was a terrific insight; could you share how you came to that realization?”

4. Clarify what has been said.

Examples:

- “June, if I heard you correctly, I believe you stated something similar to what Keri shared last week. Do you share the same feelings as Keri on this matter?”
- “Jim, here is what I hear you saying – is that what you mean?”

What you hear...

1. *Verbal*: the content of what is said. Sometimes we are so interested in what we are about to say that we fail to hear the simple facts in a discussion. As you listen, focus on people's names, events, dates, and other specific information that is being shared.

2. *Nonverbal*: how the content is expressed. Here you are listening for congruity; that is, do the nonverbal messages match the verbal messages? Listen for this in three areas:

- **Facial expressions.** When someone says “I’m okay,” does their facial expressions actually communicate “I’m a little sad”?
- **Tone of voice.** Listen for tones of sarcasm, anger, sadness, enthusiasm, hesitancy, fear, etc.
- **Body movements and posture.** Are arms and legs crossed and closed? Are people fidgety or relaxed? Does their posture indicate interest or boredom? Remember, you can “hear” a lot just by watching people’s actions.

10 WAYS TO BE A BETTER LISTENER

Listening is a crucial skill for **Life Group** leaders to master. Here are ten practical tips for improving our listening habits.

1. **Be quiet.** This should be obvious, but it often is the biggest obstruction to listening. The leader should be a part of a discussion without monopolizing it.
2. **Try to understand.** The goal of listening is to understand what the person is really saying.
3. **Eliminate distractions.** People feel comfortable sharing when they are not interrupted. Turn the phone ringer off. Make sure you have child care arranged. Don't look at your watch or lesson plan when someone is speaking.
4. **Empathize.** Interject short statements to show you understand and accept what the person is saying. "That sounds exciting!" or "That must have been a hard decision to make" are good examples of how to show empathy.
5. **Don't judge.** Especially when someone is already hurting, a judgmental attitude can do more harm than good. Don't condone sin, of course, but recognized the difference between acceptance and approval.
6. **Avoid advising.** Unless they ask for it, people usually do not want or need you to try to solve their problem. They just need someone to listen.
7. **Verify and clarify.** If you don't understand what someone is saying, ask. "Here's what I hear you saying. Am I right?" is one good clarifier.
8. **Listen for what is not said.** Try to hear the meaning behind the words. Watch body language and listen to tone of voice. Sometimes what person is saying is lost behind a clutter of words.
9. **Watch body language.** Sometimes a person's posture or gestures can say more than words.
10. **Affirm.** "Thanks for sharing that. I'm sure it isn't easy to talk about right now." This builds acceptance for talking about difficult things and makes it easier for someone else to share.

LEADING A LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION

There are certain things a leader must do in order to be effective. Here are six “dos” for leading a group discussion.

1. Acknowledge all contributions. Never refuse an answer or put someone down for being “wrong.”
2. Encourage the beginner or shy member by asking direct, simple questions. Give special encouragement to these persons. Give everyone a chance, but never force. Some people love to talk, but others are reticent.
3. Welcome pauses. Minutes of silence quite often are followed by deep times of sharing. Don’t rush to fill the silence.
4. Focus on spiritual growth and action, not on simply answering questions. Make sure that at the end of a discussion everyone has some “take-away application” from your time together.
5. Be flexible. While staying on the format and within the time schedule is important, don’t let form override the moving of the Holy Spirit in your group. Remember getting through all the material is not the main goal of your discussion. Don’t be afraid to stop and pray for someone in your group when issues arise as part of your discussion.
6. Learn to listen. Listening to someone is one to the highest compliments you can give them.

Listen attentively. Use your eyes to look at a person. Don’t glance off because he doesn’t seem eager to respond. Be observant of what people say, and use their statements to formulate other questions. It was said that President Kennedy made you think he had nothing else to do except ask you questions and listen, with extraordinary concentration on your answer. You knew that for the time being he had blotted out both the past and the future.

Be prepared to wait for an answer. Waiting demonstrates your real interest and concern. Give a person time to think. You may want to re-state the question. Also be attentive to second thoughts. Often a person will think of more to say on an issue or be able to clarify his position after he makes his first statement. It is common for people to think of what they should have said. If you sense this, be alert enough to come back for more information. “Do you have any more thoughts on that?” or “Would you like to add anything else?”

SHARE QUESTIONS

Icebreakers, or what we call “**Share Questions**,” are helpful in promoting sharing. They are especially useful when a group is just beginning or when there are new people who have come into the group. They allow everyone to participate in the sharing time in a non-threatening way, helping the group to have greater freedom and openness with one another. Using “Share Questions” will deepen your group’s fellowship time, and beyond this, they can be fun! Here are a few guidelines:

- 1. Choose questions that are appropriate for your group.**
Be careful to not use a question that would put someone on the spot. There are some questions that could be appropriate for those who have been together for a while, and yet quite intimidating for someone new to your group. Be especially sensitive when your group is just beginning or when there is a first time visitor.
- 2. Some questions can be used several times.**
For example: “What is the most exciting thing that happened in your life last week?”
- 3. Always go around the circle, so that everyone has the opportunity to participate.**
This gets the quiet person involved who might otherwise avoid sharing. However, remember it is important never to force anyone to share if they do not want to.
- 4. Be sure to watch the time.**
It would be easy for the group to spend all of its time in sharing, if you would allow it. Try to maintain a good balance with the elements of your Life Group format.
- 5. Carefully listen for needs in people’s lives.**
Often needs will surface during sharing times. In some cases, you may choose to respond immediately and offer encouragement or have prayer right then and there. Or the need may be such that it requires follow up with the person apart from the group at a later time. Regardless, the sharing time opens the doors of ministry and encouragement for the leader who is alert and listening carefully.

NINETY-NINE SHARE QUESTIONS

1. What foreign country would you like to visit? Why?
2. What's the story behind the longest time you've gone without sleep?
3. Describe the circumstances around your first kiss.
4. Who is the most famous person you've known or met? How did it happen?
5. When I go into a restaurant, what I really like most is _____.
6. When I dated, I was considered _____ because _____.
7. If you could do one miracle (other than make the whole world Christian) what would you do?
8. What do you miss about your childhood?
9. If given a choice, how would you choose to die? How do you not want to die?
10. What is your biggest fear about death?
11. If you could go to college (again), what would you study?
12. Who is your number one advisor in life? Why?
13. What is the worst storm or disaster you've been in? What was it like?
14. Describe the most boring day/event/period of time you can remember.
15. What day of your life would you most like to relive? Why?
16. What's the smallest space you've lived in? What was it like?
17. What would you have been voted "most likely to _____" in high school?
18. One of my biggest pet peeves is _____.
19. Just for the fun/thrill of it, before I die I'd like to _____.
20. My number two career choice would be _____.
21. As a time-traveler, I would like to visit _____ because _____.
22. People might be surprised to find out that I _____.
23. I am most like my mom in that I _____.
24. I am most like my dad in that I _____.
25. I wish that before I got married someone had told me _____.
26. I am a bundle of nerves/all thumbs when it comes to _____.
27. I will probably never _____, but it would still be fun if I could.
28. What are a couple of things you remember about your grandparents?
29. What does your name mean? Why were you named that?
30. What is a favorite quote or motto?
31. If you were to describe yourself in terms of a flavor, what would your flavor be?
32. What was the best gift you ever received as a child?
33. What kind of tree best typifies your life so far (strong oak, wispy willow, fruitful apple, etc.)? Why?
34. If you could eliminate one kind of animal from the earth, which animal would you choose? Why?
35. If you could raise one person from the dead, who would you raise and why?
36. If you suddenly went blind, what would you miss most about sight? Why?
37. What has been one of the greatest adventures you have ever been on?
38. What is the nicest thing anybody ever said to you?
39. Who was one of the most interesting persons you or your family ever entertained?
40. Share what you would choose if you had three wishes and why those three?
 - Happiness: a life full of surprises
 - Close family: warm and secure
 - Friend: one abiding friendship
 - Travel: all expenses paid
 - Recognition: success and fame

Wealth: a vast fortune
Job: secure and fulfilling
Health: long life/no sickness
Contribution: my life to count

41. What one thing would you like your obituary to say about you? Why?
42. What is your favorite city? Why?
43. Where do you go or what do you do when life gets too heavy for you? Why?
44. Which do you value most - sight or speech? Why?
45. Using a fruit or vegetable as a metaphor, how would you describe your life this week (dried fig, ripe cantaloupe, smashed banana)?
46. When you were growing up, who was the neighborhood bully? What made that person so frightening?
47. What is the fondest memory of a picnic? Why was it so special?
48. What is the most daring thing you have ever done? What made it so daring?
49. What is the best news you have heard this week? The worst news?
50. What do you like best about your children? Why?
51. If your house were on fire, what three items (not people) would you try to save?
52. What was your first job? What do you remember most about it?
53. Who was the best boss you ever had? What made him or her so good?
54. When you were a child, what did your parents want you to be when you grew up? What did you want to be?
55. Who was one of your heroes when you were growing up? How did you try to imitate him or her?
56. It's very difficult for me to discipline myself with regards to _____.
57. Tell the group briefly the story of your wedding day. (If you warn them in advance, each couple can bring their pictures to share with the group - a great way to get background on them.)
58. What is your greatest fear? Why?
59. Who is your hero or role model today?
60. What have you learned this week?
61. What is an early memory of your childhood play? Where were you and what was it like?
62. What is your favorite Sunday afternoon pastime and why?
63. What improvement would you like to see in your present vocation by this time next year?
64. What hobby was most enjoyable in your teens?
65. After a hard day at school/work, how do you relax with your friends?
66. If you were to take a vacation with a friend, where would you go and what would you do?
67. If you could do any job you wanted to do, what would you be doing in five years?
68. What favorite animal did you have in your childhood? What made it special?
69. Who is the most influential person (besides Christ) in your life? How?
70. What one quality in your Christian life do you want to be good at in five years?
71. What is one thing that has helped your prayer life and one thing that has hindered your prayer life?
72. When you are 50, what do you hope to be doing?
73. Was there a situation in the recent past in which you were instrumental in the growth of another person? If so, in what way were you instrumental?
74. Observing your present ministry, what one area do you feel needs the greatest amount of attention?
75. If you had the ability to do anything you desired in terms of ministry, no matter how far-fetched it might seem, what would that area of ministry be?
76. In junior high, where did you live and what is one thing you remember about that time?
77. If you knew you could not fail, what are two things you would like to do or accomplish in the next 10 years?
78. Where did you go to school as a child and what do you remember about it?
79. What three adjectives could best describe your past week? What triggered good feelings? Bad?

80. If you could be doing anything you want this time next year, what would it be?
81. If you could go back in time and change any particular year of your life, which would it be and what would you do differently?
82. What are the two or three most valuable possessions you have? Why are they valuable to you?
83. What is one thing you are looking forward to that you know will happen in the near future?
84. When you were in high school, what activity did you most enjoy doing with your folks?
85. What do you do to release tension at the end of the day or week?
86. If you had to describe one frustration you've had with this group, what would it be?
87. What was your favorite TV program when you were 12 and why?
88. What was something you did last week in which your Christian faith did/did not make a difference?
89. What one aspect of your marriage do you see needs a change? What are your current plans to bring this about?
90. What kind of dreams for your future did you have when you were 12?
91. If you went home and found a check written to you in your mailbox for \$1,000,000, how would you use the money?
92. When you were an adolescent, what did you want to grow up to be? How does that influence you now?
93. What is the one thing you did this week with another person that you wish you had the chance to do over again?
94. What was your favorite subject in school? Why?
95. What prompted you to think about God today?
96. How did you feel whenever you were introduced to someone new when you were a child? How do you feel now when introduced to someone new?
97. What experience today gave you a happy moment? Why?
98. If you could make up any title in the world to hang outside your door, what would it be? Why?
99. What did you or your family do on Sunday afternoons when you were between the ages of six and 12? How did you feel about doing it?

DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

Discovery questions answer the question, "What does it say?" Discovery is simply looking at Scriptures to see what they say. That sounds simple enough, but it is often the one thing we neglect to do. The key to discovery is looking at the passage with an open mind.

Discovery questions are questions that can be answered directly from the passage. Remember this; if you ask a question that cannot be answered from the passage the group is studying, it is not a discovery question. The purpose of the discovery question is to initiate discussion on the passage. Other types of questions will always follow them.

Key words for discovery questions: "Observe," "see," "discover," "impress," "what"

EXAMPLES OF DISCOVERY QUESTIONS:

What are some of the exhortations Paul makes in these verses?

From this passage, what new insights have you seen on prayer?

How is Jesus described in this passage?

What impressed you as you read this passage?

What does this passage say to about rejoicing?

SUMMARY OF KEY PRINCIPLES FOR DISCOVERY QUESTIONS:

Discovery questions essentially ask, "What does it say?"

Discovery questions can always be answered from the text.

Discovery questions usually contain words like "observe," "see," "impress," "discover," "what."

Discovery questions launch discussions.

UNDERSTANDING QUESTIONS

Understanding is the second step of Bible study. Understanding answers the question, "what does it mean?" and helps deepen your grasp of the Scripture being studied.

Understanding questions are the heart and soul of the Bible discussion. They are based on a previous discovery. Understanding questions should be stated briefly and clearly. They should be questions that cannot be answered with "yes" or "no" or a single pat answer. Be careful not to look for the *perfect answer* or appear disappointed with response other than the one you anticipated.

Key words for understanding questions are: "Why," "how," "feel," "think," "mean," "respond," "relate" and "differ."

EXAMPLES AND TYPES OF UNDERSTANDING QUESTIONS

Synonym	What are some synonyms for "anger" that come to mind?
Definition	In a sentence or two, what do you think peace really means?
Difference	What do you think is the difference between joy and happiness?
Similarity	In what ways would you say that praise and thanksgiving are alike?
Opposites	What do you think is the opposite of faith?
Relationships	What do you think is the relationship between faith and love?
Examples	What are examples of serving that you have seen in everyday life?
Why	Why do you think trials are so important?
Explain	How would you explain the change of attitude that Paul had in this passage?
How	How is conflicting counsel of any value to us?

SUMMARY OF KEY PRINCIPLES FOR UNDERSTANDING QUESTIONS:

Understanding questions essentially ask, "What does it mean, or how does it relate?"

Understanding questions should never have a single pat answer.

Understanding questions are based on a previous discovery. They provide the bulk of the group discussion.

Understanding questions contain words like "why," "how," "feel," "think," "relate," "respond," "differ."

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Application is answering the question, "What does God want me to do?" Since God is concerned with our attitudes and obedience more than He is with our knowledge, application is the key part of Bible discussion. As one said, "Acquisition (of Bible knowledge) without application is an abomination." Whenever we come to the Bible our key question must be, "God, what do you want me to apply from this passage?"

Application questions cover the bottom line of a Bible discussion and will almost always come at the close of a study. They should always require a specific personal response. Because most of us struggle with applying what we already know, there should generally be only one application question per study. Remember, to emphasize everything is to emphasize nothing.

Key words in application questions are: "Can," "will," "you," "do," "apply."

EXAMPLES OF APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

What can you do to allow the light of Jesus to shine in your life this week?

In what area of your life do you need Jesus to turn "the water into wine?"

From our study, what is God telling you to apply?

Is God telling you to pray for something you've been anxious about? Would you be willing to share that with us?

SUMMARY OF KEY PRINCIPLES FOR APPLICATION QUESTIONS:

Application questions essentially ask, "What does God want me to do?"

Application questions should generally call for a specific, personal response.

Application questions usually contain words like "can," "will," "you," "do," "apply."

Application questions normally close the discussion. There will usually be only one application question per discussion.

COMMON ERRORS IN LEADING A BIBLE DISCUSSION

1. Not Making the Questions Sound Conversational

Even though you are asking questions that are written down and prepared, it is possible to ask them in a conversational tone. Use your own vocabulary. Know the questions well enough so that it doesn't sound like you're reading.

2. Being Afraid of Silence After Asking a Question

Don't be impatient or nervous. You must give people time to think.

3. Limiting Yourself to Asking Questions and Leading

The leader is also a participant in the group. It is important for you to share your answers and observations, but not dominate the discussion.

4. Combining Two "Understanding" Questions Into One

Be careful to ask only one question at a time.

5. Trying to Maintain Too Much Control

If the group "takes off," don't worry as long as it is in a direction you want it to go. You may need to step in from time to time to clarify the direction.

6. Not Explaining What You Expect the Group to Do

You are in charge. Don't hesitate to call on someone to pray, ask individuals to respond to a particular question or bring the discussion back if it gets too far a field.

7. Not Participating When You Feel the Group May Be Wandering

The leader needs to be participating and completely involved, even in the tangents.

8. Asking a Question Which Can Be Answered "Yes" or "No"

This type of question hinders discussion. "How" and "why" questions are excellent. "Who," "what," "where" and "when" questions can also stimulate discussion.

9. Asking Too Complex a Question

State the question simply and clearly.

10. Tending to Stress Your Own Personal Application

The leader should not expect the rest of the group to be impressed deeply with the same things that deeply impressed him.

HANDLING PROBLEMS

In every Life Group you will run into problems. These obstacles can turn into opportunities with proper handling. Here are suggestions to help you solve problems:

HOW TO DRAW EVERYONE IN

Your role as leader is one of a guide, not a teacher. Beware of dominating situations, or appearing to be the final authority on questions that arise. Keep a mental note of those who have not been contributing and direct questions to them. Be sure the questions are easy so that they are not embarrassed. If necessary, call the group members by name to help them participate. Leave enough time for them to answer.

HOW TO CONTROL THE TALKATIVE

This is a difficult task. You can call for a contribution from others by asking, "What do others think?" or refer questions specifically to other people. If this doesn't work, you may have to have a private conversation with the talker explaining the necessity of group participation and getting that person to help you draw others out. A proven method is to wait until the person takes a breath, and then be ready to blurt out a question or comment that moves the discussion forward.

HOW TO GET BACK ON TRACK

Look upon tangent issues as a possible fish bone you may put aside in order to get at the meat. Recognition of the situation generally helps. "This is interesting; however, we have left our topic. Perhaps we can discuss this further after the group has completed its discussion." Or you might suggest that the question be tabled until you complete the idea being discussed. If you do this, don't fake it. Actually go back to the question, and handle it if they wish. General rule: Never sacrifice the progress of the group for the curiosity of one person.

HOW TO HANDLE WRONG ANSWERS

Never contradict a person flatly and tell him he is wrong. You might want to direct the same question to someone else in the group. For example, "Okay, what do others think?" Or, "Does anyone have Scripture that may help us here?" Or, "What does someone else have to say about this?"

HOW TO HANDLE SILENCE

Don't be afraid of pauses. Don't try to fill in verbal voids. Give people time to think. The silence may do more good than the discussion has done. The silent times may be uncomfortable times, but they are productive.

HOW TO ANSWER QUESTIONS

Don't ever be afraid of saying, "I don't know." You may not know the answers, so don't try to fake one. You don't always have to have the answer. You can tell them you will find out and discuss it with them later. Or someone else in the group may have the answer!

HOW TO COVER THE LESSON

Make a simple lesson plan so you don't get bogged down in the details. Remember, lives are more important than getting through a lesson.

HOW TO HANDLE CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECTS

When a group faces a serious quest for truth, there is a fear that fellowship may be broken. There is a temptation to skirt the difficult issues of life and to rely on superficial answers. The best way to handle these when they come up is to see what the Word of God has to say and rest the verdict on principles or commands in the Bible, which apply to the situation. God's Word is the ultimate authority. Let them react to Scripture, not your opinions.

HOW TO SPARK A LETHARGIC GROUP

Generally, the group will respond to your attitude. Pray for enthusiasm and respond enthusiastically. If you want them to be a little enthusiastic, then you have to be overly enthusiastic.

HOW TO DRAW OUT APPLICATIONS

First, make good solid applications to your own life from the portion being studied, and share them with the group. Then learn to ask effective application questions like, "What does it mean to you?" or "Is there anything you can do about this today?"

PRAY FOR YOUR GROUP!!

DISCUSSION EVALUATION CHECK LIST

1. Was I able to deal with the core elements of the material?
2. Was I prepared well enough for the discussion that I felt freedom in leading?
3. Was I able to keep the group "on track" (for the most part)?
4. Did I avoid dominating the discussion?
5. Did I use primarily understanding questions?
6. Was I able to make the discussion applicable? Did I feel good about the application "take-aways"?
7. Was I able to draw everyone into the discussion?
8. Was I able begin and conclude on time and allow time for effective prayer?

A Bible Discussion Leader should be like a train engineer...

- He gets the discussion going -
- He keeps it on track -
- He stops it on time!

GUIDELINES FOR CONVERSATIONAL PRAYER

Prayer is the most important and indispensable thing that your Life Group can do together. Marvelous things happen as Christians unite in concerts of small group prayer. You experience the joy of coming before the throne of God and witnessing His promised answers to your prayers. You find your hearts knit together in a oneness that only united prayer can produce. You discover increased power for victorious Christian living that is the result of believers praying together for one another. These are some of the fruits of the Life Group that prays together.

Here are several guidelines for effectively praying in your LifeGroup:

1. **FOCUS ON THE PRESENCE OF GOD.** Prayer is talking to God. It is communing with Him. Making this our focused objective helps to remove the intimidation of praying with others. There is great freedom in the presence of God to just be yourself and not worry about seeking to impress. In prayer, our hearts are what really matter, not our words.
2. **PRAY CONVERSATIONALLY.** Conversational prayer is a format of informal prayer where the objective is to speak conversationally to God. In conversational prayer everyone takes turns praying aloud in a conversational manner sharing with the Lord what is on their hearts. It is much like how friends would sit and talk and share their lives with one another.
3. **AGREE IN PRAYER.** Agreement in prayer can be either audible or silent. How you do this is not as important as simply doing it. When you are agreeing in prayer, your attention is not on what you are going to say, but on what is being prayed. The entire group is united in praying with one mind for whatever the issue of prayer might be. There is tremendous power that results when a group learns to pray in this way.
4. **EXPECT GOD TO ANSWER.** This is what it means to pray by faith. When we pray by faith expecting God to answer our prayers, we can have great confidence that He will hear us and answer our requests. That is what God's Word promises us (1 John 5:14-15).
5. **PRAY BRIEFLY.** God is not impressed with many words (Matthew 6:7). Praying short sentence prayers enables us to communicate our hearts to the Lord and at the same time allows others the opportunity to pray as well. The idea is that one person should not dominate the prayer time, but that everyone would be able to participate together in prayer.
6. **PRAY ABOUT ONE TOPIC AT A TIME.** This helps to keep your prayers from becoming too long. It also allows others, who would like to, to pray about that same issue as well. As you pray in this manner, more prayer is centered on the topic that you are praying for.

7. **ALLOW FOR SPONTANEITY.** In conversational prayer there is more freedom to pray when you are ready to pray and to pray for those things that are on your heart. No one should ever be forced to pray. Let people pray for what interests them.
8. **ALLOW FOR SILENCE.** Don't fear the silent moments when no one prays. Encourage your group to quietly enjoy God's presence and listen for His voice during those times. God still speaks to us in "a still, small voice" as we learn to patiently wait upon Him.
9. **VARY YOUR PRAYER TIME.** Pray in a large group; break into smaller groups; break up into groups of men and women; pray through Scripture; use a written prayer as a model; lay hands on individuals in your group as you pray for them. Allow God to lead you.

RESPONDING TO A CRISIS

Crisis Care Giving

From time to time in a small group, an emergency or crisis may occur. As a small group leader, others will look to you in times of crisis.

► **Handling a Crisis**

In cases of impending physical danger - contact the police immediately

Such crises would include:

- Life-threatening situations
- Severe accidents or emergencies
- An attempted suicide or threatened suicide
- Present threats of violence by a person to him– or herself or to others.

Though it is very unlikely that you would ever experience any of these in the context of a group meeting (or even with members of your group), please be aware of the possibility and know that you should contact the police immediately.

Other serious situations

If you have a serious situation that may require further help and guidance to address (e.g., child abuse or neglect, spousal abuse, etc.), contact your coach and church immediately for help in discerning the severity of the crisis and for assistance in reporting the incident to the proper authorities (if needed).

Remember, in most situations, your first point of contact should be your coach. If your coach is unavailable, contact your ministry leader. But if there is any threat of violence or danger, call the police immediately.

► **Support versus Counseling**

As small group leader, you are expected to provide support and encouragement to members of your group. However, you are not trained to be a professional counselor, so you should not assume such a role. Instead, your responsibility is to provide opportunities for your members to receive the appropriate care they require. Situations that may require professional help:

- Serious marriage problems
- History of past abuse
- Addictions

- Severe personality disorders
- Mental disorders or dysfunctions

If you should encounter anything that resembles the examples above, contact your coach to see what steps should be taken. Together you can determine a plan for encouraging a group member to participate in counseling or another type of help. Never contact a church leader directly and give a member's name to them. In such cases, it is imperative that you do not violate a person's right to confidentiality.

Just because you think someone is in need of counseling does not mean they will be willing to participate in counseling. Work with your coach and with ministry leaders at the church to determine how to approach an individual with the suggestion of counseling or other help.

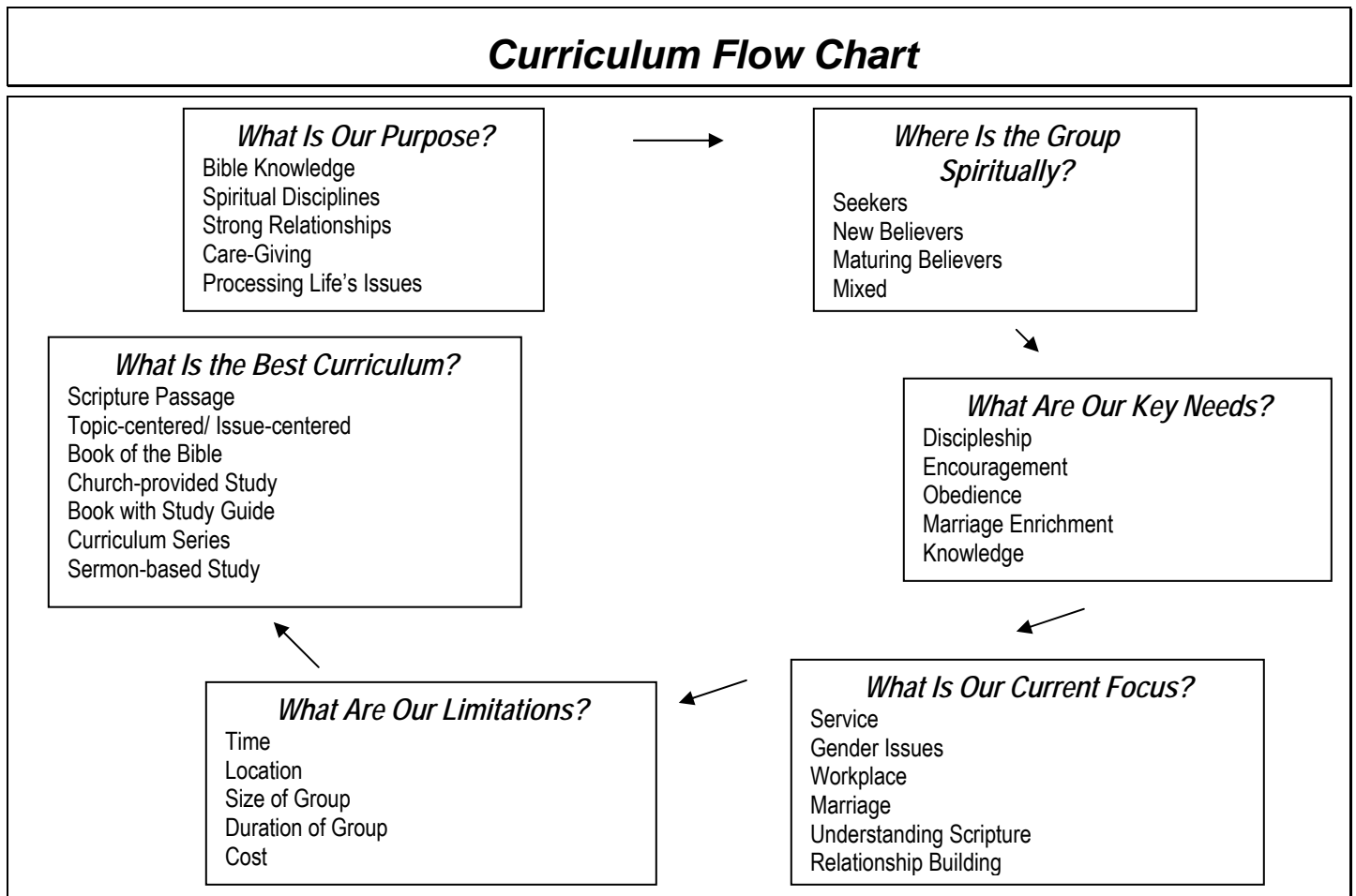
CHOOSING AND USING THE RIGHT CURRICULUM

Choosing what your Life Group is going to study together can be an overwhelming task. We are encouraging all our Life Groups to do one of two things. Either use the sermon based questions that we supply our leaders each week or go through a pre-approved study using prepared curriculum. We have compiled a list of materials that our LifeGroup leaders have used in the past and enjoyed. We also have several video / DVD based curriculums available from the Life Group curriculum library. The *Choosing a Curriculum* flowchart on the next page was designed to help you sift through the myriad of materials to find something your group needs. Our first desire is that your Life Group would use our sermon based material but as you get to know your group it may become clear that there is an area of study you want to explore together.

► A Few Tips About Curriculum

1. If you're using our sermon based curriculum, each week you will receive a list of questions for your group that correspond to last Sunday's sermon. Using this approach helps your group to discuss and apply the message from our Sunday services. With the pastor's teaching still fresh in your mind you are able to dig a little deeper and apply what you learned to your individual lives.
2. Curriculum should never "drive" a group. It is a mistake to forfeit opportunities for extended prayer or service, or to cut short a necessary community-building activity because "we have to get through all the curriculum." Remind the group that Jesus did not say, "Go therefore into all the world and complete the curriculum!" Your goal is ultimately to make disciples – Christ followers – who are obedient to Jesus, yielded to the Spirit, and loving toward others.
3. Never substitute a curriculum for the Bible. Curriculum and study guides should be used to enhance the group's purpose and move people into the Scriptures.
4. Don't feel obligated to finish all the questions. As you get a feel for leading your group you will learn what questions to use and how many of them to use. If a curriculum has too many questions, then choose a few good ones (five to seven questions at most). Many times, two to three good questions followed by the right kind of group discussion are more than enough. Better to have a great discussion grappling with a few good questions than answering all the questions at a superficial level. The goal is to actively engage people with the truth of God's Word as it relates to their own heart and growth.
5. Make sure the curriculum you use is "group friendly." Many small group studies are designed for understanding the Bible, not building relationships or generating a deep sense of community and caring. Look closely at not only the questions but also the process. Does the curriculum allow for lots of interaction? Does it ask personal disclosure questions that challenge people to open up and share their lives? Or is it filled with content-based "what" questions, often ignoring personal "why" questions?
6. An application section that simply asks, "How would this apply to your life?" is weak. But if the writer asks questions like, "It's clear from this passage we need to share our faith with

others. And it is clear that we all know how and that it would please God. But let's talk about why it is so hard for you and me to start spiritual conversations with seekers. Are there fears or other barriers you face in communicating the Gospel? How does it feel when you picture yourself talking to an unsaved person about Christ?" These questions will get at people's motives, thoughts, feelings, and needs. Only then can we truly encourage and pray for one another.



► **Key Questions When Choosing a Curriculum**

What is our purpose?

Each group has a purpose, and the curriculum should support the purpose. This purpose may change as the group moves through seasons of growth, maturity, and experience. If a group starts out as a grief support group for people who have lost loved ones, the curriculum should reflect that purpose. But as people move through the stages of grieving, a leader may see that the group members need to understand more about God. As a result, a curriculum on the attributes of God may be appropriate.

Where is the group spiritually?

It is wise to take the spiritual pulse of your group to determine the level of curriculum appropriate for it. If new believers dominate the group, then make sure the questions are basic. Listen without making judgments; don't appear to have all the answers all the time, and deal with the issues facing them as newer believers. Allow them to process information, ask hard questions, and raise objections.

New and growing believers can handle more difficult Bible discussions and are more willing to tolerate religious jargon. Even so, try to avoid using a lot of religious terminology. While believers who have been around the church longer may feel comfortable with terms like *redemption* or *justification*, avoid using them too much with newer Christ followers unless you expect to spend the time to adequately explain what those terms mean.

What are our key needs?

This question relates to the purpose question but allows a group to tie in real needs with the purpose of the group. For example, a couples group may desire growth in marriage relationships. But they may actually be in a serving group designed to help meet needs at a local homeless shelter. As couples, they could meet for thirty minutes prior to serving together for a brief study and discussion about marital issues.

What is our current focus?

Sometimes we choose a curriculum based on needs but fail to consider the long-range vision for the group. Your group may be currently completing a study on Christianity in the workplace. Now some in your group want to study Galatians. Why? How does this fit with the overall group direction for the coming year? Are there elements in Galatians that would be appropriate to focus on, or would it be better to study this book when it makes more sense in the life cycle of the group?

One of the advantages of using the sermon based curriculum is that you stay on track with a majority of the people in the church. And whatever the emphasis of the church is at the time that is what you are focusing on in your Life Group.

What are our limitations?

Don't waste your time looking at curriculum designed for a two-hour study when your group only has 40 minutes to meet each week. Make sure you have considered the time, location (are you in a distracting environment?), and size of group (four people can deal with more questions than nine people can, assuming you want to allow everyone to participate).

What is the best curriculum?

Once you have chosen your curriculum, remember that it is your servant, not your slave. Use it to help people grow. Regularly evaluate and adjust your expectations. Set it aside if it gets in the way. Focus on biblical truths and life change and you won't be disappointed. Regardless of your approach – Scripture study, topical, or sermon questions – you won't go wrong if you apply truth to life.

Remember, all materials used must be approved by the Life Group pastor before you use them in your Life Group.

YOUR FIRST LIFE GROUP MEETING

The first couple of meetings with your new group are extremely important. You only have one chance to make a first impression.

Your first meeting should focus on allowing the group to get acquainted with one another in a casual, non-threatening environment. It's also important to cast the vision of Life Groups before the group as a whole.

The agenda for the first meeting should be kept simple and include an atmosphere that allows everyone to participate. It might look something like this...

SUGGESTED AGENDA:

1. Food!!!

It's always a good thing to start your time together enjoying some snacks. Who doesn't like a pile of cookies and a veggie tray to help break the ice?

2. Get Acquainted

Share names, work, birthplace, etc. It can be fun, helpful and break the ice by asking some non-threatening "share questions". You can choose from this quick list of questions or from the list of 99 share questions in your manual or you can write some of your own. Here's a quick list to whet your imagination.

- My favorite movie of all time is...
- My idea of a great vacation is...
- My favorite food is...
- If I could spend an evening with anyone who has ever lived, I'd like to spend it with _____ because...
- If I could have any job in the world I would want to...
- Growing up I saw God as...
- One thing I have learned about God in the past year is...
- One thing I've learned about myself in the past year is...
- Just for fun, before I die, I would like to...
- If I could visit any era in history, I would visit...
- The one aspect of my spiritual life that I would like to strengthen is...
- One character quality that I would like to develop is...
- My favorite childhood memory is...
- My greatest strength is...
- If I could live another life, I'd come back as...
- My favorite free time activity is...

- The greatest challenge I have ever faced is...
- One thing I really appreciate about my spouse...
- If I could change one thing about myself, I'd change...
- The two most important things that I would like from my involvement in this Life Group are...

3. Share the Vision

Hopefully, you will have had a time to establish where you are headed with your core couples. Your first official meeting is a good time to state the purpose and objectives of the Life Group ministry, so that they all hear it together.

a. What is Our Purpose:

As a Life Group: "Life Groups exist to connect people in Biblical Community so that no one stands alone." (Acts 2:42-47) Our desire is to establish meaningful friendships with other Christians built around the study and application of God's Word.

As a Church: Our purpose is to make more and better disciples of Jesus Christ. It is what we are to be about both as a church and as believers in Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 1:8). It is what our Life Group ministry is about as well.

Take a little time to talk through the highlights in the Ministry Vision Summary statement.

b. What will our Meetings look like:

We want to always do 3 things...

1) Share with each other

We want to take time at our regular times together to "catch up" with each other and share what's going on in our lives.

2) Study with each other

At our regular meetings we want to spend some time with our Bibles open studying it and talking about how it applies to our lives.

3) Pray with each other

At our regular meetings we want to take time to hear each other's praises and concerns and take time to thank God and pray to Him on behalf of our needs.

4. Information about the group

Discuss any information about the upcoming weeks together such as...

- a. Dates, times, places. When, where and how often will we meet?
- b. Child care issues: What do we want to do in the future in regards to child care?
- c. What will we be doing for our first “set of curriculum”? Will we be a “Sermon Based” study group or choose specific studies for us?
- d. What to bring: Bible, pen, materials
- e. Maybe talk about sharing the leadership roles. Look for others who want to plan activities, take down and send prayer requests, create a snack schedule - etc.
- f. It can be helpful to establish an e-mail list to communicate with each other.

5. Prayer

Close in prayer, asking God to:

- a. Continue to give us His vision
- b. Give success toward our objectives
- d. Help us grow in our relationships with one another and God.

Some other quick suggests helping get you ready for the first meeting...

1. Be “prayed up” – make sure you are ready spiritually for the arrival of your group.
2. Have one of your “core couples” commit to arrive early and help with any last minute details.
3. Have someone at the door welcoming your guests.
4. Have nametags and large markers available for everyone as they enter. For a couple weeks it helps to have nametags.
5. Have a “roster sheet” for everyone to fill out with their name and phone number and e-mail address.
6. Limit distractions by asking everyone to turn off or silence cell phones. Make sure your home phone won’t be a distraction as well.
7. Do not have any pets in the meeting area.
8. Have light refreshments for your group members.
9. Seating, lighting, and the temperature of the room are all important. Make certain you have a comfortable setting for your group.
10. Some people may not have a Bible, so have a couple extra Bibles available as needed.



Life Groups

START-UP CHECKLIST

- Prayer:** Ask for the direction and leading of God before, during and after you start your Life Group.
- Identify a Mentor / Coach:** A mentor or coach is an experienced Life Group leader who you can call on with any questions or concerns you have as you begin your Life Group. Your coach/elder will be assigned to you by Pastor Kent.
- Core Members:** You need to have at least two other couples or 3-4 other people committed to begin the Life Group with you.
- Core Members meeting:** You will need to meet with your core members and share the vision of Life Groups with them. You will want to decide with them the details of your regular meetings such as day, time and how your Life Group meeting will be structured.
- Host Home:** It is usually best to have a home other than yours designated as the host home. It can work to lead and host but it requires a lot of work. For continuity sake it is best to have one host home.
- Curriculum:** You need to prayerfully choose a curriculum that is easy to use and focuses on application. God may have already have placed something on your heart or you may ask your coach/elder or Pastor Kent for some help.
- Start Date:** When you have settled all the above details you are ready to select a start date. This needs to be done with the concurrence of Pastor Kent.
- Information to Jessica Ruble:** When everything is ready to go and you have filled out your “Life Group Planning Sheet,” you need make sure that Jessica has all your information. After that we will identify your group on the Life Group display and list your information in the Life Group brochure, if you are open to new members.
- Invite others to join in:** With your core members you should create a “hit list” of others you want to invite to join your group. It may include people from your neighborhood, friends at church, from work or whomever God brings to your mind.
- Prayer:** Pray more; trust me you can’t do this enough.



CONTACT INFORMATION

Pastor Kent Kolstad

kentk@chccb.org

425.488.4121

Jessica Ruble

jessicar@chccb.org

425.488.4121 (ext. 106)



Date of Application: _____

Name: _____ Age: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____

E-mail Address: _____

1. When did you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior? _____
2. Are you a member of CHCC? _____
3. How long have you attended CHCC? _____
4. Are you: Married? _____ Single? _____ Divorced? _____ If divorced, how long? _____
If divorced, briefly explain the circumstances of your divorce: _____

5. Are you involved in any situation, at the present time, which could hinder your work with the Life Groups at CHCC? _____ If yes, please explain: _____

6. Is there anything that has happened in your past that could come back to question your "above reproach" standing as a shepherd? _____ If yes, please explain: _____

7. Are you currently involved in any treatment for an addiction of any kind? _____ If yes, please explain: _____

Spiritual Life:

1. Do you have a quiet time: daily ____ often _____ occasionally _____ never _____
2. Do you memorize Scripture: consistently _____ occasionally _____ never _____
3. Have you been through a program that teaches you how to share your faith? _____

Ministry Experience:

1. What ministry are you currently involved in (if any)? _____
2. Previous ministry experience and length of service: _____

3. Have you previously been through training to lead small groups? _____
If so, briefly explain: _____

LifeGroup Ministry Interest:

1. Why do you desire to shepherd a Life Group? _____

2. Do you prefer to be involved either on Sunday mornings, midweek home groups, or both, or another group, such as a men's group? _____
3. What special gifts or abilities do you feel God has gifted you with that He might use in ministry (music, counseling, administration, teaching, etc.)?

Please write down the name and phone number of two people who could be character references on your behalf:

Name: _____ Phone Number: _____

Name: _____ Phone Number: _____

I understand that as a shepherd of a Life Group, I am looked to as God's representative to the members. I will be careful in what I do and say, both on and off church property, understanding that at all times, I am recognized as a Life Group Shepherd. I will strive to be above reproach in every area of my life, knowing the seriousness of this position.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Time Commitment Required: Minimum of 1 year

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY:	
_____References Checked	_____Leadership Interview
_____Approved for Leadership	_____Date completed
Additional Comments: _____	



Leadership

Leader Information	
Name/Spouse's Name	
Home Phone	Cell Phone
Email Address	Alternate Email Address
Address	

Coach/Mentor	Phone	Apprentice	Phone
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Location

Host/Hostess	Phone	Email Address
Address of Meeting Location		

When will you start/resume meeting?	How often will you meet?
Regular Meeting Time	
Day	Time

Childcare?	If yes, please explain how you handle childcare.
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What's This Life Group All About?

What material will you be using?
Brief description of your Life Group.

Members

Core Members	Phone
Name(s)	
Is your Life Group open to newcomers or is your group closed?	

Comments

Is there any other information that you would like us to know?

11/7/2011