

PART I: THE PURPOSE OF LIFE GROUPS

Life Groups are one way that we’re “Doing Life Together.” We want to connect with God, with each other, and with the community through relationships.

1. CONNECTING WITH GOD

Whatever the type of Life Group, we encourage the leaders to look for **opportunities to connect people with God**. Even if the group is getting together for something recreational, the leader should be ready to share their faith with another person in a very real way.

Ways to Connect With God

- Prayer
- Worship
- Teaching
- Testimonies
- Acts of Service

Through relationships, people will give you permission to speak into their lives. When people feel that they are genuinely accepted and loved, they will begin to trust you and open their hearts to you. Through relationships we can lead people in salvation as well as mentor them in discipleship.

We want to help people find an area that they can serve God in. We want to encourage them to follow their passion for ministry. We don’t want to pressure them to volunteer in any area because of feelings of guilt or manipulation. The creativity and diversity in our Church Ministries and Life Groups give people the freedom and innovation to follow their heart in ministry. There should be joy in serving God.

2. CONNECTING WITH EACH OTHER

The bond between our relationships in church can get stronger through Life Groups. Even Bible studies, training classes, and ministry and outreach groups should include some kind of social get-together. Fellowship can help to bring down perceived or actual barriers between relationships. God wants us to relax and have fun so that our hearts will be open to one another.

We want people to “want to” be involved in Life Groups. Participation should come from the heart, not because of manipulation through guilt, fear, or shame. Our relationship with God is based on a loving surrender, not on rules and control. People have a free will, and we want them to enjoy the liberty found in making choices in Life Groups.

Life Groups provide opportunities to meet with people you can connect with. We want to be led by God to form relationships with the people He wants us to connect with. Sometimes He will connect us with people that have the same ministry or shared interests. Sometimes we connect with people because they complement us through their differences. Life Groups offer opportunities to get to know people we can connect with.

We want to make heart-connections. When we talk with people we want to get beyond shallow discussion and have conversations about things that people are passionate about. Learn to ask questions that pull at the dreams and desires that people have for God. Ask questions that require more than a yes or no answer. Ask specific questions about their faith, their family, their joys, their sorrows. If you feel them backing away from you, don’t push them to communicate with you. Let them open up as much as they want to. Share something about yourself with them as well. Heartfelt relationships require communication from both sides.

Life Groups help the church to care for people. The church can be more effective in ministering to people by doing it through small groups. It is impossible for church leaders to have connections with every person in the church. People can pray for one another, care for the needs of one another, encourage each other, visit people who are sick or in the hospital, and check on each other when they are missing. The Holy Spirit is here to help each one of us, not just the church leadership.

Life Group Leaders are not alone. If there is a problem that requires counseling or additional help, the Life Group Leader should notify the Life Group Pastor. We never give our opinion as advice, only direction from Scripture. We never tell someone what to do, only to encourage them to follow their heart. In any situation, the Life Group Leaders should have an assistant or another member of the group with him/her at all times to protect their reputation and the reputation of the church. We are accountable to each other and to God.

Life Groups enhance a team atmosphere. The church can accomplish more when people have a team mentality rather than looking to church leadership to do all the work. The Bible shows us that every Christian has a ministry (Ephesians 4:12,16; I Corinthians 12:12-31). Life Groups help to equip and empower the Christian in ministry.

3. CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Building relationships is the best way to reach people. People do not respond to our techniques or knowledge, they respond to the way we accept and care for them.

In a survey, people in the United States were asked, “What or who was responsible for you coming to Christ?” These are the results:

<u> .5 </u>	%	Evangelistic crusade
<u> 1 </u>	%	Special need
<u> 2 </u>	%	Someone visited them
<u> 2.5 </u>	%	They randomly walked in the church
<u> 3 </u>	%	A church program
<u> 5 </u>	%	The pastor
<u> 5 </u>	%	Sunday School
<u> 81 </u>	%	A friend or relative

We want to reach people who would normally not come to a church, so we meet in places that are outside the church building. Church leaders can use their home or the home of a friend. Be creative for locations to meet. Remember to choose locations that are large enough to handle expected growth. Other ideas for locations are:

Library conference room
Subdivision clubhouse
Restaurants

Recreation center
Outdoor in a park
Workplace

Through relationships, you can know a person, locate where they are at spiritually, and bring them up one step higher toward God. You don’t want to overwhelm them with spiritual things that their natural mind cannot understand.

If your group is an outreach, be sensitive to how much time is spent on spiritual matters. The emphasis should be on patiently leading people to God as they’re ready. If someone doesn’t feel comfortable with spiritual things yet, be careful how much time is spent in prayer and worship. Be sensitive to unbelievers when the Holy Spirit is moving. Consider what they are thinking when you are praying in the spirit. We don’t want to scare them so that they’ll never come back. We are not saying that you should hinder the Holy Spirit. We are saying that we should have our focus on the spiritual comprehension of someone else instead of only thinking of ourselves. Take a moment to explain things to people who might not understand. If the Holy Spirit is moving, He knows what He is doing, and it will bless everyone.

Be careful not to use the “Christianese” language. Phrases that are common to Christians are not common to outsiders. For example, “spiritual warfare,” “keeping the flesh under,” “washed in the blood,” even “born again.”

Steer the discussion in a direction where everyone can participate. Be sensitive not to leave someone out because they don’t have anything to contribute to the conversation. Try to talk about things that they are interested in.

Don’t use your meetings to promote your sales or personal business. Our relationships are valuable. We don’t want people to feel like we’re using them for personal gain. People are on guard already for your motives for their friendship.

Do not take up offerings. If someone wants to give to the church, encourage them to bring their offerings to the service or mail it to the church office.

Don’t ask newcomer’s to volunteer their talents or skills. People will think you have an ulterior motive rather than just loving them. Just be a friend to them. Don’t try to pressure them in any way.

Don’t embarrass unbelievers or the spiritually immature. Don’t draw attention to people that are new or shy.

The primary goal is to get people to come again. Be prepared to change the direction of any group if unbelievers are visiting. In church services, if someone comes once, there is only a 10% chance that they will come again. If they come twice, there is a 20% chance that they will return. If they come three times, there is a 50% chance that they will come back. If they come four times, there is a 80% chance that they will return. Our goal is to adapt ourselves so that people will be drawn to return. This requires that we focus on the way unbelievers, young Christians, or wounded Christians are feeling. The Holy Spirit doesn’t push, He draws. We should do the same.

Proverbs 11:30 “...He who wins souls is wise.”

PART II: CHARACTERISTICS OF LIFE GROUPS

WHAT ARE LIFE GROUPS?

- Life Groups are small groups of people that meet together on a regular basis to build relationships with one another. Life Groups are one way that we are “Doing Life Together.”
- Life Groups are a smaller expression of The Life Church at Charlotte. All Life Groups have been approved by church leadership.
- We have a large variety of groups to choose from. Life Groups come under one of three categories:
 - Growth Groups – *Where you can learn*
 - Interest Groups – *Where you can relate*
 - Touch Groups – *Where you can serve*
- Life Groups have a topic, activity, or project that they complete by the end of the term.

WHY DO WE HAVE LIFE GROUPS?

- Relationships are built in Life Groups.

This is one way that we connect with one another in our church. We want people to have a sense of belonging, knowing that we value and accept them in the same way that God does.
- People can find ministry in Life Groups.

People can find a safe place where their gifts can be developed and expressed.
- Outreach takes place in Life Groups.

There are people who would come to a Life Group that would never set foot inside a church building. One purpose of Life Groups is to go to where people are instead of expecting them to come to us.

Unless otherwise specified, Life Groups welcome new people into their meetings. For example, some Bible studies, training classes, or activities are progressive and would require full attendance.
- People care for one another in Life Groups.

We encourage people to pray for one another, care for one another, and call to check on one another if they are missing.

WHEN AND WHERE DO LIFE GROUPS MEET?

- Life Groups run in three terms – Spring, Summer and Fall. If someone wants to change Life Groups, we ask that they wait until the entry point of the next term.

Spring – March, April, May
Summer – June, July, August
Fall – September, October, November
- Most Life Groups meet weekly but there can be exceptions. Life Groups can last anywhere from 4 to 12 weeks, but they all have starting and stopping dates. This way people know what to expect before they choose to get involved.
- Times and locations will change from group to group. The variety of times and locations help to fit the lifestyles and schedules of different people. Most groups are about 1 ½ hours in length, depending on the group. If we give set times, we do our best to keep our word and promptly start and finish at the promised times.

WHO CAN GO TO A LIFE GROUP?

- Life Groups have three or more people attending, including the leader. There is no limit to the size a Life Group can grow to.
- Anyone can join a Life Group. People do not have to be members of THE LIFE to participate in our Life Groups, but coming to our services is the best way to experience what we’re all about.
- Some people choose to go to more than one Life Group, but we believe that people will get the most out of the groups by limiting themselves to one or two groups a term.
- At the end of a term, people can choose to go to a different Life Group, or if their Life Group is running for another term, they can choose to rejoin their same group. If someone’s schedule is demanding, they can choose to skip a term and start up again the next season.
- Childcare is available in some Life Groups. For the care and safety of the children, all childcare givers must go through the same screening and training process as our children’s ministry workers. If a LG Leader wants childcare, they need to contact the Children’s Ministry’s Human Resource department.

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE A LIFE GROUP?

- Approved Life Groups are promoted on the website and at the church Welcome Center. To join a group, a person fills out a Life Group Connection Card and turns it in to the Welcome Center or church office.
- From time to time the church will have a Life Group Rally Day where Life Group Leaders can set up a display table for people to visit after church services.
- We encourage people to start their own Life Groups. We want people to have opportunities to do something for God in a way that fits their own style and gifting. We also want to reach people that haven’t been reached yet, and maybe one group will touch their life that another one won’t. We are open to new ideas!

PART III: LEADER RESPONSIBILITIES

GETTING STARTED

1. Go to Discovery 101 so that we know we agree on the fundamentals of the church.
2. Attend the LG Leadership Orientation.
3. Fill out a LG Leadership Application and agree to keep the Honor Code.
4. Once your application has been approved, work on the details of your group and fill out a LG Request Form. Return the form to the church office.
5. You may be asked to meet with a church pastor to work out any details for your Life Group. Once your Life Group has been approved, your group will be advertised on the website and in the LG Directory available at the Welcome Center.
6. If you are doing a Bible study, a copy of your curriculum must also be approved.
7. From time to time we will have a Life Group Rally Day and you will be asked to participate by setting up a table display for people to visit after service. We ask that you be creative with your presentations. Some serve food or pass out candy, some set up a TV and play a DVD, some use clowns and balloons...use your imagination!
8. Leaders should have a sign-up sheet and contact interested people after the Rally Day.
9. Continue to recruit people to your group both inside and outside of the church. Don't rely on church advertisement alone.
10. Identify an assistant leader. This person will help you with your group and accompany you in ministry. Assistant Leaders are encouraged to consider starting their own Life Groups in the future.

STAYING CONNECTED

1. Each week ask if there is anyone who has not filled out a LG Connection Card for this term. When a visitor comes to your Life Group, have them fill out a LG Connection Card. The LG Leader should turn the card in to the church office.
2. If anyone receives salvation or the baptism of the Holy Spirit, fill out a LG Connection Card and turn it in to the church office.
3. If someone requests counseling or needs pastoral care, fill out a LG Connection Card, stating the need in the comment section, and turn it in to the church office.