

Date: 10/16/2022

Title: Week 4 - Life Groups

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Introduction

- Good morning everyone - hope everyone enjoyed the past couple weeks and enjoyed the Fall Break
- Well let's remember where we've been and where are we going now
 - Our first 3 weeks were really our foundations of what we believe
 - * Vision, Mission...Discipleship Pathway - Gospel, Grace, Joy, Righteousness, Love
 - So if our first 3 weeks were - **what we believe**...our next weeks together through December are more...**what we do** as a reflection of what we believe
 - * So we'll talk about over the next few weeks
 - Life Groups, Weekly and Yearly Rhythms, Corporate Prayer, Youth and Sunday School, Corporate Worship, and Mission
- Now, I wanted to start with "Life Groups" - partly because we want to hopefully start to pilot them here with our Core Team
 - But also because personally I just think that "Life Groups" are going to in many ways be the life blood of our church advancing towards the vision God has given us
- So let me start a little bit personally - to tell you my own journey with Small Groups and how I landed on this model we are calling "Life Groups"

Personal Story with Small Groups

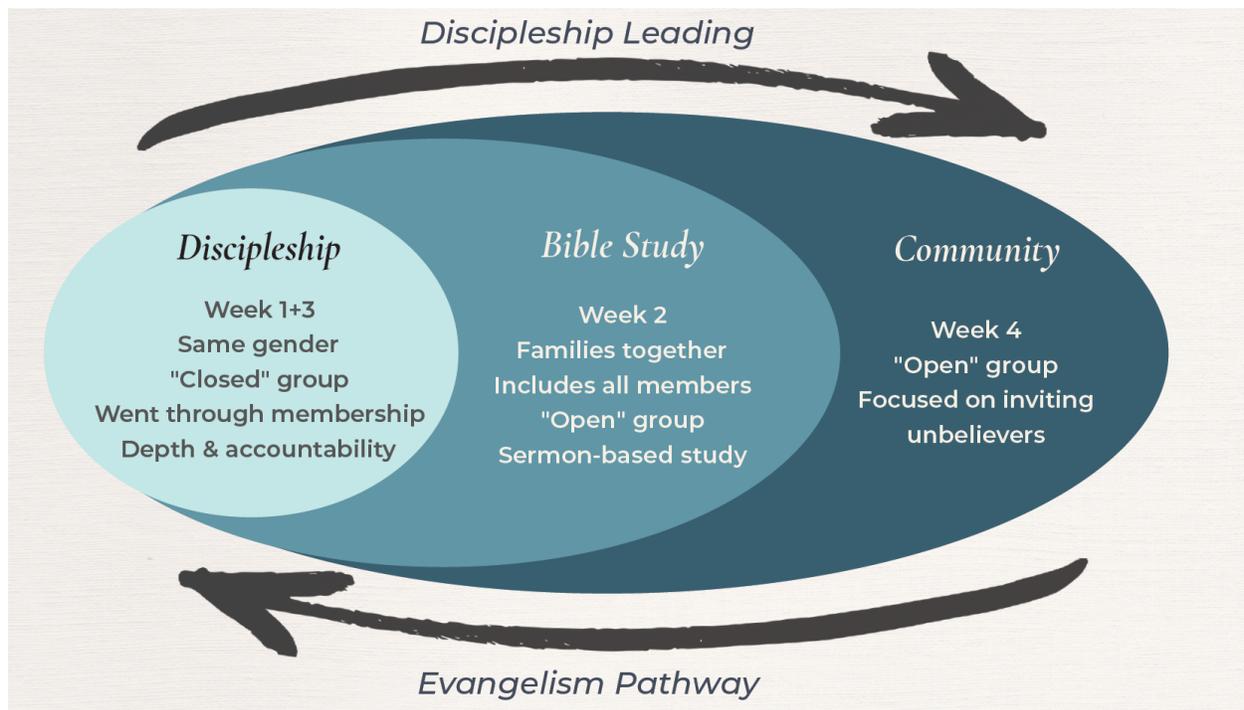
- **Bros Accountability** - I came to faith end of High School - and one of the first things the Lord provided for me was a group of other brothers to meet with regularly
 - There was 5 of us guys that were serving our church youth group and we decided to get together to say...OK if we are going to serve the youth - we need to know one another better
 - And our first meeting - and I can't remember what the question was - but essentially it ended up being a meeting sharing our deepest struggles of our life and past
 - * And we shared our mess and brokenness - but we closed that meeting rejoicing in the Gospel of grace that rescued sinners like us
 - And there was a deep love we had for one another
 - Because we knew we were deeply sinful, but deeply loved by God
 - * And from there that group of guys - we met weekly for almost 5 years - into my college years...and we'd worship and confess, encourage, pray, and hold each other accountable
 - And from there - for most of my walk with Christ...I've had other men I met with regularly to share
 - * And so one conviction about small groups for me was that...they should be places of not just content of material, but sharing the content of your life with one another
- **CFC Small Groups** - next major phase for me was being at my previous church Covenant Fellowship Church (CFC) where small groups were hugely emphasized

- Here are my main takeaways from the power of CFC SGs
 - * **1. The power of sermon-based bible study**
 - So the bible studies were taking the passage that was preached at corporate worship and then digging into it and applying it to our lives
 - Here's what I found happened is - the teaching that was happening on Sunday was going MUCH deeper through SG
 - And so if we were in Romans or Nehemiah - it felt like we were truly swimming in that book together as a community
 - Even today...I remember some of the sermons and passages - BECAUSE I heard it on Sunday AND I processed it through small group during the week as well
 - * **2. The power of community for evangelism**
 - At CFC, we were not a seeker-sensitive church...Sunday sermons could be 45 min to even 1 hour long...worship services were 1.5-2 hours - and we met on Friday nights and Sundays...and had many other prayer meetings during the week
 - And its because the emphasis was to train kingdom workers
 - BUT, even with that emphasis - it was incredible to witness at our baptism services - how many people came to faith in Christ...just some of the most amazing testimonies
 - But here's the unique thing - I'd say maybe 90% of the testimonies started with...I was invited into a small group...and I was loved and accepted
 - And then the person started going to church and eventually came to believe - very, very few came to Christ through one-on-one evangelism
 - Here's what is unique in that evangelism compared to most Western, majority-culture approaches to evangelism
 - Most Western evangelism training tends to focus on one-on-one evangelism... having tools to share the Gospel with an unbeliever - the classic is the 4 Spiritual Laws from Cru or at Perimeter its going through "Life Issues"
 - Now please understand I DO believe in that and want our people to be equipped to do that well
 - But I think what is missing from that model of evangelism is what some people call "Belonging before Believing"
 - That before people really wrestle with the truth claims of Christ...they are moved by first belonging to Christian community
 - And especially Eastern cultures - Indian, Chinese, Korean - belonging and community is so integral to people's heart language
 - And then another factor is - while everyone I think should be able to articulate the Gospel one-on-one
 - Not everyone is gifted that way - some are gifted in serving, in hosting, in having good conversation, etc.
 - And so hopefully this model helps you feel like - you can still be part of evangelism even if you aren't the one directly leading someone in a sinner's prayer to receive Christ

- **JOAN Conviction**

- So those different models have been my experience - that SGs have the power of doing sharing of life in same gender groups...but also have the power of providing community and doing evangelism
 - * But what I found frustrating was that in order to have that - I needed to be a part of 3 different groups at CFC or at Perimeter
 - And especially this stage of life...I don't think people have the time to do that
- But I read an article that said it very simply - that they want groups that go "Up, In, and Out" - Up (worship, spiritual growth), In (community), Out (outreach).
 - * And so my desire was to create a model of SG that could do all those things
 - One for efficiency sake...yes...so we don't have to have 3 different groups
 - But two and more importantly - I just think a HEALTHY Christian life, a HEALTHY Church, a HEALTHY SG - has all those things happening in their life
 - And so actually that's why I picked the name "Life Group" (I'm not married to that so if someone has a better name...I'm open!)
 - But healthy spiritual life comes from all of these happening in your life - when you are going Up, In, and Out consistently and not neglecting one at the expense of the other

1. Life Groups: Model Overview



- So I want you to have this diagram in front of you to see the big picture of the Life Group Model
 - In a 4 week cycle - we have 3 components

- * Week 1 and Week 3 are Discipleship Week - men with men, women with women for greater depth
- * Week 2 - Bible Study Week - everyone together, anyone can come...sermon-based bible study
- * Week 4 - Community Week - A time where the focus is in inviting and connecting with unbelievers in a welcoming setting
- Now one of the things I want to actually show through this model is this
 - * Sometimes people might say - well you only have 2 weeks of discipleship...that's not enough to disciple people
 - And my claim is this...actually I think all 4 weeks are discipleship
 - D-Group together doing Week 1-4
 - Week 1 + 3 - the believers together sharing and having accountability
 - Week 2 - the D-Group together is helping to lead this Bible Study which includes believers and unbelievers (think of it like mini-church)
 - Week 4 - the D-Group with the other believers are welcoming and connecting with unbelievers
 - In my mind the discipleship is much more holistic than a lot of discipleship groups which I think are much more insular and narrow
 - * The 2nd thing I'd want to say is - for the unbeliever...we are creating a pathway for them to believe
 - First to belong in a safe environment...but then they can come to Bible Study
 - Then we'd want them to join Sunday Services and membership - and eventually discipleship
- OK next, let me deeper dive into each of the components

2. Life Groups: Discipleship Week (Week 1 & 3)

- **Purpose of Discipleship Groups**
 - A time to go deeper, have encouragement, vulnerability, and accountability with same gender and smaller groups
- **Size of Discipleship Groups**
 - I think ideally they are not larger than 6, but probably 3-5 is an ideal size
- **Admittance into Discipleship Groups**
 - These groups are for believers
 - * So we'd keep them "closed"
 - Our gateway most likely would be - people who have gone through membership
 - * So we confirm they are believers
 - * It gives them a chance to learn about our church
 - * And then it also allows groups to have consistency and intimacy - where they are not continually adding people
 - So groups might "open" once/semester possibly
- **Format of Discipleship Groups**
 - I am open to other formats, but here's where I would want to lean
 - **Switching between in-person and Zoom for men and women (if it will help)**

● **Sharing-driven over content-driven**

- * Personally, I don't think the groups need to have specific "content" to drive the groups (i.e. Perimeter's Journey)
 - My desire would be - everyone is doing their own spiritual disciplines that makes sense for them - and the group can help keep them accountable to how they are growing in that
 - Now if the group finds - hey it would be helpful if everyone did the same study or book (like the women are doing Paige Brown) - then we'd encourage that

● **Annual Reflection Guide - "Flourishing Tree Discipleship Pathway"**

- * I've not yet shown this to you all, but based on what I taught, I created basically a yearly reflection tool to walk us through Gospel, Grace, Joy, Righteousness, and Love
 - It helps you reflect, journal, evaluate the past year, and make new commitments for the new year
- * My hope is each D-Group will start with using that Pathway then for weekly sharing

● **Meeting Guide**

- * Time: 1-1.5 hours
- * 1. Worship
- * 2. Sharing
 - 1. Are you coming this week with anything pressing where you need to confess, need prayer, or need encouragement?
 - 2. What from our discipleship pathway (Gospel, Grace, Joy, Righteousness, Love) is relevant for you to share what is on your heart this week?
 - 3. How are you being missional and thinking of connecting someone to our "Community Week"?
- * 3. Praying for one another
- * 4. Worship

1. Is there any shame, condemnation, guilt you need to apply the Gospel to?
2. Is there self-righteousness or judgmentalism you need to apply the Gospel to?

1. Gospel

2. Grace

3. Joy

4. Righteousness

5. Love

1. Are there any of the "spheres of love" that you want to share about that bring joy or challenges?

1. Are there areas of moral integrity you need to process or confess?

1. How is your engagement in the means of grace (Word, prayer, church, mission)?

1. Is your heart in a place of contentment, desire, delight in the Lord?
2. Is there discontent, envy, or temptations lurking in your heart?

- **Personal sharing example**

- So the bros we met this Wednesday and that time was a little more getting to know each other, having some fun and embarrassing stories, but also going deeper with vulnerability
- But how about I model for you all - what if we did this question...what I would share with my group?
 - * And mine I guess deals with the “church” sphere...which is my “work” sphere too... but I think you’ll see it relates to my own joy too
- So this week and I’d say the last 2 weeks probably since Preview Service - to be honest was kind of hard...I’ve been kind of discouraged
 - * Because to be honest from May to September - I really mean it when I say I’d been encouraged and energized - things were mostly really positive
- But after Preview Service, I thought the feedback was good - but my hope again was OK we do need more people...but I am hoping there’s going to be people willing to jump in
 - * We had the Zoom call and I’m asking you all to be OK with people joining us - 5-6 families maybe
- Then I send the survey out and reach out to some people - and first of all, not a ton filled out the survey. Then those that did most said they need more time to think about it. And then some I reached out to that I really hoped would join us - without getting into all the details it seems unlikely they might join us
- And so, honestly I’m starting to feel down and discouraged - there something wrong with our church? Wrong with me? Was the sermon bad? Did we turn them off?
 - * Is our church going to be small? Be ineffective?
- All these questions and doubts and fears are coming up in my heart - so Thursday morning I journaled - I’ll read a little bit
 - * And I shared with Marilyn and we prayed together Thursday morning
 - And I felt encouraged and strengthened to keep going

- **Application**

- So I wanted to share that with you all for a few reasons
- One is just to be open with you all - that hey your pastor is a broken, sinful, weak person
 - * And I need your prayers
- But also, to let you know and model for you - the type of vulnerability that I think we need in our church to be healthy
 - * Because I could have buried that struggle and ignored what I was feeling and tried to move on
 - * But I knew I couldn’t really move on without addressing it before the Lord...and then also addressing it with Marilyn, my best friend, my deepest accountability partner... and then praying together
- And so, brothers and sisters - this is what I long to see happening in our groups - this level of opening up the wounds and pains and struggles in our heart
 - * But in community we get healed, we get strengthened, and we go on in His strength
- And so...I don’t know why things had to be hard like this the last 2 weeks for me
 - * I’m sure there’s 1000 things God is doing in that

- * But I was thinking and praying - that I wanted to share this struggle with all of you... and I thought OK Lord, maybe one reason I needed to go through this was so I could just share that with you all
 - And so we can learn as a community, as a Core Group - and I can be the lead in saying how needy I am for grace, for help, for community
- Do you think we can aim to be that sort of community with one another?
 - * It might take some time...so its OK if it does
 - * But that's where I hope we get to, amen?

3. Life Groups: Bible Study Week (Week 2)

- **Purpose of Bible Study**

- A time of community among families (marrieds and singles) through fellowship, worship, and the Word
- Again, my concern and lack I saw in Perimeter D-Groups was the lack of bringing together families (marrieds and singles)

- **Size of Bible Study**

- I think a good size may be 5-7 family units, but maybe as large as 10

- **Admittance into Bible Study**

- These weeks are “believer-oriented, but seeker-sensitive”
- Meaning - we want to have it be a time of worship and sharing over God’s Word that feeds believers, but it is definitely a place we welcome unbelievers to be a part of
- Also I said this once before, but maybe it will make more sense - but one of our membership covenants is for EVERY church member to belong to a Life Group
 - * Because small groups is our best way to shepherd and know the sheep in the church
- Now does that mean if you are a church member...you have to commit to every single week?
 - * And the answer is while we’d love and I think its healthy if you were part of Week 1-4
 - Some seasons of life you just may be unable to do that - so you may opt out of Discipleship and even the Outreach weeks possibly
 - * So we’d say - at minimum come to Week 2 - so a once/month commitment

- **Format of Bible Study**

- **Sermon-based Bible Study**

- * As I shared earlier, I do believe in the power of sermon-based bible studies
- * So one of the convictions we have about the Church is - while individual bible study you may do is good - we actually believe the corporate gathering and what God is speaking to His people - is God's Word for this community
 - That's why we believe in being connected to a local church - not just listening to a Bible teacher on podcast - because that preacher doesn't know you and the needs of this community
 - And so what we want to do is take that Word from Sunday...and let it marinate and go deeper into our bones and marrow

- **Meeting Guide**

- * Time: 1.5-2 hours

- * 1. Food and Fellowship
- * 2. Worship
- * 3. Bible Study (Sermon-based)
- * 4. Prayer
- * 5. Worship

- **Children**

- I will say that this is up in the air a little bit, but originally I was thinking children may be able to be present as well at these gatherings, but I am realizing that due to MinistrySafe policies - it might become just too difficult for us to manage that
- So we'd encourage finding babysitting and something I had put in the budget was babysitting vouchers to help offset some of that cost - because we do think its important and valuable for married couples if both spouses can be there

4. Life Groups: Community Week (Week 4)

- **Purpose of Community Week**

- This week is focused on a creating an intentional space for inviting unbelievers into community and that is safe and friendly for them to take a first step
- And a few thoughts of where this came from for me
 - * One, again was - at Perimeter, I loved that the discipleship groups were focused on mission - but I noticed it was always individual...doing it on your own and then reporting back
 - But, I felt either people didn't do it, or it felt overly individualistic which wasn't that helpful as an easy first way to engage an unbeliever
 - * Second, I wanted it to be built into the Life Group - because if this was just another bible study week - I feel like it is easy to SAY we'll invite unbelievers, but easily it doesn't become that
 - Randy Pope from Perimeter says this about mission in the church...its like pushing a boulder up a mountain
 - Things like worship, fellowship, community, spiritual growth - all are things everyone NATURALLY wants from a church
 - But, being on mission and reaching people for Christ - is almost always neglected in the church WITHOUT intentionality
 - So the job of every church is to ask - how do we constantly find ways to push the boulder up?
 - And so us doing Week 4 Community Week is to say - Joy of All Nations - we WILL not neglect mission...it is going to be built into our rhythms

- **Size of Community Week**

- 8-10 family units, but maybe as large as 12

- **Admittance into Community Week**

- "Open" groups
- Unbeliever-oriented

- **Format of Community Week**

- Let me say that again this is a bit of an experiment, so I think we'll learn together, but here's my idea
- If Life Groups run every Spring (January-May) and every Fall (September-December) - there was about 3 Community Weeks every semester, 6 per year
- Some ideas can be:
 - * Picnic or Hiking
 - * Game Night at someone's house
 - * Holiday Parties - Easter, Christmas...also consider religious holidays like Diwali
- Also, I think we can be open to consider - some of those can be split by men and women - if the group thinks that is more effective
- Also, I would say - if there are 6 events in a year - 2 out of the 6 - give liberty for the group to not doing it all together with your Life Group
 - * Maybe its a couple of people with a smaller group going to dinner or doing a movie night - it can be more organic
 - * This helps with not feeling overly burdened for a group to plan 6 events in a year - might be difficult to pull off

5. Life Group Pilot for 2022

- The key thing here I'd want to think about is that this is a 2 cycle pilot in some sense
 - And one of the hopes is to give other opportunities to invite especially the Preview Service folks into gatherings that are more intimate and communal
 - Also we have opportunities to even invite unbelievers into community
- Something else that needs to be figured out from this is:
 - Is everyone here committed to be part of Life Groups?
 - Are we going to have multiple Life Groups and if so how do we divide them and who will host them?
 - What day of the week should we meet?

	Event / Holiday	W	e	o	u	C	Life Group Type	Life Group Topic	Sunday Passage / Topic	Special Event
Oct 16, 2022							Discipleship W / M		Life Groups 1	
Oct 23, 2022							Bible Study	John 6:4-14 - Feeding the 110,000	Life Groups 2	
Oct 30, 2022	Halloween / Reformation Day						Discipleship M / W		Corporate Prayer	

Nov 6, 2022			Off		Off / Advance Initiative	Church-wide Picnic
Nov 13, 2022			Discipleship W / M		Sunday School	
Nov 20, 2022			Bible Study	Psalm 1	Corporate Worship	
Nov 27, 2022	Thanksgiving		Discipleship M / W		Off	
Dec 4, 2022			Community	Christmas Party	Mission / Strategic Targets	
Dec 11, 2022			Off		Preview Service	
Dec 18, 2022			Off		TBD	
Dec 25, 2022	Christmas		Off		Off	
Jan 1, 2023	New Years		Off		Watch Night Service	

6. Life Group Proposed Schedule for 2023

- The 2023 Schedule I have is still tentative to some extent, but I wanted to give some ideas of where we are leaning
- The main thing to notice for now is - for the first 4 weeks after Public Launch - we won't start Life Groups apart from Discipleship groups
 - Just because I want our Launch Team to be able to handle all the changes and not have too much on your plate to handle

7. Roles

- Finally, I want us to take time - now that you have an idea of what is coming for Life Groups
 - To get back on what roles you think you can fulfill based on your desire and margin as well

- And here's what we'll do:
 - A survey will be sent after today asking about roles, Life Groups, etc.

Conclusion

- Sorry, I know this may be like drinking from a fire hydrant, but I really, really want to hear from you all in discussion your thoughts, feedback, questions, concerns - everything
- Lets pray and go into communion