

SOLID

Foundations for Following Jesus

At the very beginning of the book of Acts, just before He is about to ascend back into heaven, Jesus tells His followers that they will change the world. Jesus' followers, a group of jacked up, uneducated, freaked out, Galilean peasants, had no clue what to do next. They gathered together in a stuff room on the roof of a house to pray.

After several weeks of praying, God showed up in power. And, these freaked out Galilean peasants stepped out in the market place with supernatural boldness. They proclaimed the Gospel and 3000 people became Christians in one day. Once again, Jesus' followers had no clue what to do. What are we supposed to do with all these people? How are we going to make sure that these new Christians grow? How can we continue to bring Gospel to more people in our city, country, and world?

The early church's answer to that question was Life Groups. The early church met in groups of 10 to 20 in various houses throughout Jerusalem. And, in these groups, men and women lived life together, they studied God's Word together, they challenged each other to grow together, and they lived on mission together.

What was true then, continues to be true today. Real growth, life changing growth, happens in the context of Life Group Communities. I became a Christian the summer after my freshman year of college. And, at the first Christian event that I attended, I met a group of guys who would take me under their wing. We didn't have formal times when we met together. But, we lived life together, we challenged each other, we encouraged each other, and we grew spiritually together. Later that same year, I got plugged into a college ministry. They invited me to be a part of a Life Group on campus. This Life Group was significantly more formal. We met for an hour and a half every week. We walked through a lesson, sometimes with a video. Both of these Life Groups, one more informal and one more formal, were integral in me growing in my faith as a young believer. From then until now, I have been in some sort of Life Group Community and the Lord has consistently used that community to draw me closer to Him.

Our dream at Fellowship is that every neighborhood and people group in Southwest Missouri would have some sort of Life Group Community. This is our dream because we long to see lives changed in Southwest Missouri and life change happens in Life Groups.

This curriculum is designed to make our Life Groups as effective and life changing as possible both for the participants and for you, the leaders.

CONTEXT OF A LIFE GROUP

Life Groups that flourish have three characteristics in common:

1. They are vulnerable. In our world of social media and staged instagram pictures, almost nobody has a place to be real. Our Life Groups must be a place where people can be real. They must be places where people can share the hard, messy, ugly parts of their lives, in addition to the fun, exciting, and easy parts. Leaders, this starts with you. Your Life Group will only be as vulnerable as you are.
2. They are compassionate. In our world of marketing, people feel used almost constantly. Almost nobody has a place where they are genuinely cared for. Our Life Groups must be one of those places. They must be places where people don't need to be fake, but where they can know that they are cared for. Leaders, this starts with you. You must genuinely care for people in your Life Group.
3. They are exciting. In our world of cynicism, almost nobody has a place where they can be genuinely excited about what God is doing in and through them. Our Life Groups must be one of those places. They must be places where our eyes are lifted out of the ho hum of our daily lives to the bigger picture of how God is changing us and changing our world through us. Leaders, this starts with you. No one will be more excited about your Life Group than you.

CONTENT OF A LIFE GROUP

We have all been to Life Groups that are nothing more than sterile Bible Studies. A fill-in-the-blank question here and a Sunday School answer there. And, we have all been to Life Groups that are essentially just hanging out. Frozen espresso drinks are great but coffee shops and various levels of caffeine don't change lives. Real Life Groups, Life-changing Life Groups have deep relationship and challenging engagement with God and His Word. You must have both.

The following curriculum is designed to foster both engagement with God's Word and deep community with those involved in the Life Group. Every Life Group will have four parts:

1. Connect (10 min). This usually happens at the very beginning. Much of this will be informal as people are eating cookies or just hanging out for the first several minutes. But, some should be formal. You should try to begin every Life Group with a fun or funny introductory question.
2. Discuss (35 min). Every Life Group will spend some time in God's Word. This should happen through reading a passage of Scripture and asking open-ended questions to discern what that passage means and how it applies to our life. For each passage, this curriculum will give you around 7 questions to choose from. You do not need to use all these questions. They are meant to give you tracks to run on as you plan your Life Group.
3. Relate (25 min). Every Life Group will have time when those who come can be real and vulnerable about their lives. This should be done in all male or all female groups. The two questions that should guide this time are: What has been the highlight of your walk with the Lord this week? and What has been the biggest struggle this week? Remember, leaders, you must lead out in this. This is intended to be an opportunity to confess sin/temptation and celebrate growth. And, leader, you will need to model vulnerability and engaging in heart issues not simply surface

issues.

4. Impact (5 min). Every week, your Life Group should pray about people that they are going to invite next week. Life Group is not an island. It is a launching pad for impacting people. That starts with this part of Life Group.

IMPACT OF A LIFE GROUP

There are some people in your Life Group who will become Christians because of your leadership. There are others who will be challenged to live on mission for a lifetime and they will. There are others who will become missionaries in their workplaces or overseas because of what they experience in your Life Group.

Leading a Life Group is a weighty responsibility. We prepare well for Life Group because the potential for impact is so great! But, the ripple effects of leading a Life Group this year could be felt to the ends of the earth and into eternity. Welcome to a great adventure!

GOSPEL (EPHESIANS 2:1-10)

CONNECT—Think of a fun-icebreaker question to ask. For example, what is something about you that most other people consider weird, but you think is totally normal?

DISCUSS

What most stood out to you from Justin's sermon this past week? What was one of your big takeaways?

What strikes you about Ephesians 2:1-10? Is there something that particularly resonates with you or is particularly confusing to you?

Paul says that we were "dead" in our sins before Christ. For many this seems like an overstatement. What evidence from your life can you point to to say that this is true? What are some ways that you were "following the course of the world," following "the prince of the power of the air," or enslaved to your passions in the past? Why is it important to understand all of this about ourselves?

According to Paul, who saved us?

Read John 3:1-8. According to Jesus, what does it mean that we have been made alive? How is this a different picture of salvation than we hear in a lot of churches?

What do you think it means that we are raised up and seated with Christ?

Justin talked about the "through what" question: "Through what are we saved?" What are some different ways that people in our culture answer that question?

How would you define faith? Why do you think God would choose to save us through faith? Why is faith different than every other way of answer the "through what" question?

We are not only saved from something but to something. What are some ways that you have seen God take your unique gifts and abilities and give them a new passion, power, and purpose? What is one action you can take to use one of your strengths for God's glory?

RELATE—Consider splitting into guys and girls for this section.

What has been your biggest spiritual highlight this week? What has been your biggest spiritual struggle this week?

IMPACT (Invite, Engage, Share)

Have everybody in your Life Group think of someone that they are going to invite to church next week.