

Life Groups Tenants

The primary focus of Life Groups is to cultivate an environment where people can build strong, lifelong, Christ-centered relationships with one another. The size of the groups will be very important to cultivating that environment. Only in “small” groups can these intimate relationships begin to form. Because our primary focus is building such relationships, the number of members in a specific Life Group should not exceed 12 members. As a group begins to approach this number of members, they will be directed to begin praying for and considering how they can multiply their group and expand into another Life Group. Another important aspect of the Life Groups is that they will meet consistently and continuously. They will meet either weekly or every other week. Meeting consistently and frequently with the same members will provide the opportunity for these relationships to solidify. All Life Groups will have the following tenants as their guiding principles.

- **Strive for Unity with God**

- Unity with fellow brothers/sisters in Christ doesn't just happen. You can't just create programs and expect the program to bring us to unity. Unity with each other can only come if we pursue unity with God first. For a group of people to be unified, they must have something to find unity in. As Christ-followers, Jesus is that thing that we'll be united by. In our Life Groups, one of our priorities will be to grow closer to God, individually. Within the Life Groups, we will learn, study, discuss scripture and relevant life issues through a scriptural lens. We will grow together, encourage each other and hold each other accountable to continue to push forward in our faith journey. The Life Group facilitator will also provide tools and resources for individuals to pursue a deeper intimacy with Jesus outside of the Life Group context. Whether it be within the Life Group or outside, we will be spurring each other on to engage in spiritual disciplines, deepen intimacy with God, and strive to be more united with Jesus.

- **Strive for Unity with Each Other**

- There are a lot of distractions and obstacles when it comes to pursuing unity with our siblings in Christ. One of the biggest hindrances to unity is us, you and me. We're all coming into these Life Groups with our own baggage and idea of what unity is and what it looks like. As we enter Life Groups, it's important that we recognize that and come to the place where we are willing to set aside our wants, preferences, opinions for the sake of unity.
- If we are going to be able to pursue unity with others in our Life Group, it's going to be so important that we create a trusting environment where others feel safe sharing their hearts and being vulnerable. To create that safe environment, we need to be able to listen to each other. So often when we're talking with someone else, while they're speaking we're already trying to manufacture our response or for some other reason just not fully listening. We need to be able to fully listen to others, to truly hear what they are saying. To respect and love them enough to give them our full attention.
- We also have to be willing to be open, honest and vulnerable with each other. Of course, there is a process of building trust that we must work through before we can feel safe to be open and vulnerable with each other, but we should enter into our Life Group experience with an understanding that it takes honesty and vulnerability to cultivate strong interpersonal relationships. It's easy, in a small group context, to have discussion and conversation “hijacked” by those who are more outgoing and opinionated. In our Life Groups, we want to give everyone an opportunity to be heard and share. This isn't about pressuring all members of our groups to participate in every discussion, but simply creating the space for them to feel like they have the ability to speak when they feel comfortable.

- Our desire for Life Groups is that they become little families. Life Groups should be a source of support, encouragement and accountability. Life Group members should be looking for ways to serve each other, praying for one another, and helping meet needs when others in our group are in need.
- A lot of people equate unity with conformity. It is the thought that we can only come together in unity if we're all thinking the same way. If we have the same belief system, political affiliation then we can achieve unity. That's not unity. Unity is coming together as one even though we are different. We don't have to agree on everything to find unity in Christ. In Romans 12, Paul talks about how we as Christians are the body of Christ. He illustrates this concept by using a human body. He says that, on the body, there are many different parts and each part serves a different purpose but is just as important as any other part. The same is true for the body of Christ. We all have different roles and purposes within the greater body of Christ, and none is more significant than another. We have to keep this in mind as we continue forward in Life Groups. This requires us to approach our participation in Life Groups with love and humility. We have to be willing to set aside our preferences, opinions, etc and prioritize unity with others who may not be exactly like us. Group members need to first reflect on their own opinions and biases and be conscious of whether or not their words or actions could be taken as divisive or judgmental. We have to be willing to function out of love and grace towards each other if we are going to be able to move forward towards unity.
- Unity is difficult and all Life Groups will struggle, at times, in their pursuit of unity. That's why we have to be willing to protect unity within our groups. This means that we have to be prepared to call out divisive words or behavior and take active steps to correct the issue(s). Conflict will occur and when it does we will rely on Jesus' guidance in Matthew 18:15-17 to instruct us on how we will approach conflict and correction. In dealing with conflict, restoration must always be the end goal. To restore the individual back to Jesus and to the group. Jesus's approach in Matthew 18 tells us to first lovingly confront someone who is engaging in divisive behavior, personally and privately. Then, if the individual isn't open to the conversation, bring a couple other people with you to confront them again. If, once again, the individual isn't receptive it is necessary to take the issue to the group. We are fallen, sinful, selfish people and because of that our default is to be divisive. We must watch ourselves for divisive words or behaviors, as well as be open to receiving correction when we may be in the wrong. Whether we are addressing division, or in all our words, we must speak the truth in love.
- **Prayer**
 - Prayer is such a gift. To have the ability to speak to the creator of the universe, it's quite an incredible reality. Prayer will be a large part of what we do in Life Groups. Each group will take time to pray together. To pray for each other's needs and just to seek God together. We will also be prayerfully holding up other Life Groups, our church, community and world.
- **Outreach**
 - Jesus calls us to lives of service. To look for opportunities to serve those around us. In Life Groups, we will be ready to serve those in our groups and outside of it. Life Groups will be mindful of opportunities to serve their church and community. They will pursue opportunities to serve both as a group and individually.