

Basic Training
For Home
Life Groups

Woodland—The Community Church

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Introduction

Many thanks go to Joe Windham and those at Baylife Church in Brandon, Florida, who first developed the *Ten Basic Steps for Home Groups*.

In my first meeting with Joe, back in January of 2004 at a Starbucks he explained how he had been to most of the small group seminars and read practically every book that had been written on how to do small groups. But his observation was that most were theory *about* groups, and not a how to actually *do* them, step-by-step.

He explained, “People do what is simple. They don’t do what is complex.” Then he proceeded to slide across the table a small document that laid out a simple ten-step agenda for small groups sessions, a brief explanation of each step and a few tips. That was it. “If you do the ten steps each week, your home group will be healthy and will grow,” he said. And conversely, if your group isn’t healthy it was because you had stopped doing one or more of them.

I began using the Ten Steps myself three months later when I came to Woodland—The Community Church in Bradenton, Florida. And now after six years, I have to agree. The group I lead has birthed eight groups in those six years. That’s above average to be sure. But it would not have happened had I not used the Ten Steps to develop group members into active leaders and servants even as we did Group each week.

That’s the genius of the Ten Steps. You delegate nearly every aspect of Group life every week, for just the next week. The simple question, “Who will do ___ next week?” then waiting for a volunteer, is a powerful development tool! After a few months most everyone has taken on several of the small tasks that add up to a great Group. And weekly delegation means that the leader isn’t “stuck” with everything and others are learning to do the ministry tasks that make a healthy group.

Why Life Groups?

1. They are biblical.

Act 2:42 says the first church, came together in homes and they studied together, met each others needs, ate together, and prayed together. 4 vital elements!

*“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching
and to the fellowship,
to the breaking of bread
and to prayer.”
(Acts 2:42)*

2. Small Groups are the most effective way to minister.

In Exodus 18:13-26, Moses broke the people down into small groups to better meet their needs. The failed alternative—the model he had been trying his best to maintain—was having just “one giant group.” The result was burn out and poor quality ministry (but huge ego massages daily)! Finally, when he couldn't take it any longer, he put capable men over other men and these men over other men.

3. The Life Groups are the second of three environments we want everyone to experience through Woodland Church:

- The *large group* Worship
- The *small group* community
- A *place of service* for God using their gifts/talents

Three Environments at Woodland Church

We can't actually *make* people grow (that's up to them and God) any more than we can make the grass grow. But we can provide an environment in which growth happens: water, good soil, sunshine.

To simplify Woodland Church we have boiled everything down to just three environments that we provide where spiritual growth can happen:

large group worship on the weekends, small group community in Life Groups, and a place of service using your gifts/talents.

The three environments are also a path for people to take. Most come in through our weekend worship environment. There, we challenge them to get vitally connected into a Life Group. And finally, we challenge these to find a place of service that uses their gifts and talents.

Environment	God's Love	Relationships	Focus
Worship	Receive	God & Me	God
Small group	Share	One Another	The Body
Place of service	Give	Others	The World

From the chart above you can see why we want everyone to find all three environments. You need the balance.

Worship: “...Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.” (1 Chronicles 29:14)

Small group “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love *one another*.” (John 13:35)

Service “God so loved the world that He gave his only Son...As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.” (John 3:16; 17:18)

Because the enemy of men’s souls is powerful and constantly on the prowl, we shouldn’t try to do “service” without a strong foundation of worship and group life. Besides, we will have nothing to give a parched world if we’re as spiritually dry as an old sponge you found at the back of the cabinet under the kitchen sink. Gross! Who’d want to be “touched” by *that*?

The Purpose of Home Life Groups

Connect Your Group helps people genuinely connect with God through worship and heart obedience.

Reach: Your Life Group focuses outward to reach new people who connect with your Group and experience community. Your Group also fully uses our church's Intentionally Evangelistic Events to reach out to people in the community for Christ.

Equip: Your Group equips believers for living as fully devoted disciples of Christ.

Serve: Your Group serves "one another," and demonstrates God's love by ministry to the hurting around us.

Trust: Your Group develops a culture of genuine Christian community as they come to trust one another in strong relationships.

These five purposes should sound familiar. They are similar for the entire Woodland Church. That's because your Life Group is like a cell in the larger body of believers at Woodland. It's where "life happens" in the body.

What Life Groups Are Not

Here's a few of my favorite:

1. The group is not my personal pulpit
2. The group is not my private clique
3. The group is not a "dead end."

Like the mother eagle, you want them to fly one day. So work with God's Spirit and prod new leaders or an apprentice to step out of the nest when it's time and launch their own Life Group!

How Do Life Groups Help Our Church?

1. They shepherd and care for the body.

Small groups disperse the shepherding and care to members of our church. If people are in a Life Group, they are cared for, and encouraged in a variety of ways. We don't need to create a special ministry for every specific type of need. If they have illness, calamity, grief issues, suffer financial setbacks, or just need encouragement a healthy Life Group is the front line of care, prayer, and encouragement.

2. They produce disciples, not just “learners”

“Leader” and “teacher” are not synonyms. A teacher merely informs but a “leader” takes people on a journey together. A teacher has “students” while a leader produces disciples—followers--of Christ. The first is like someone watching the Discovery Channel, but the latter is like an NFL team breaking down videos for an upcoming game. Disciples are prepping to take the field and win at the most important contest of the ages!

3. They impact the community.

Life Groups impact our community by inviting friends, by doing a local service project together at least once a year, and by taking part in church-wide outreach IEE's (Intentionally Evangelistic Events). Part of your discipleship training process for your Group is to involve them in hands on ministry. Jesus did this with His own disciples. He stretched the faith of those 12 men by sending them out into unfamiliar situations where failure was a possibility, but where they could learn dependence on God's power. We have a simple method to help you do this.

4. They assimilate newcomers.

Assimilation is connecting people in genuine community. How do you know when someone is connected? They shift mental gears. They no longer call it “your group,” or “your church,” but “our group,” and “our church.” Small Groups are the best way to assimilate and connect new

people in our church. Without that connection they tend to drop out after a few months and look for a church where they do connect relationally.

5. They develop lay leadership.

Life Groups are a natural training ground for future small group leadership because of the consistent weekly modeling using the *Delegation Sheet* and the *10 Steps* approach that you will learn. A doctor friend told me that in medical school the plan was:

Watch one.

Do one.

Teach one.

If that's good enough for training surgeons it should work pretty well for Life Group ministry—since it's not brain surgery, or rocket science for that matter!

Ten Steps For Effective Life Group Leadership

Overview:

1. Home/room Set Up early
2. Welcome & Name Tags
3. Start on Time/ end on Time
4. Icebreaker
5. Practical Bible Study
6. Praise & Worship
7. Evangelism (empty chair)
8. Prayer/Testimony
9. Leadership/Delegation moment
10. Fellowship

That's it! It's simple. We tend to do what is simple.

“...things that are valuable don't come that easily...break them down into steps that are easy...obvious...and strategic.”

Andy Stanley, 7 Practices of Effective Ministry

On the next pages we will look at each step in more detail. Items 4-9 are really agenda items you do during group. Items 1-3 & 10 are actually “practices” that lead to group health.

Step One: Pre-Meeting Set-Up

Here's a quick check list for having your home set up:

- Home or room set up early.
- Make sure home/room is well lighted.
- Pets removed from meeting area.
- Drinks and snacks ready
- Life Group Leader(s), apprentice, and greeter arrive 15 minutes early.
- Prayer with Host.
- Have background music on.

Have the room set-up completely at least 15 minutes before Group time, so that you can relax and be available to engage in conversation and fellowship as people arrive

Martha Stewart Isn't Coming. So relax! You don't have to have your entire house clean either. Just make sure the guest bathroom and meeting areas are clean and tidy. But feel free to just close the door to the teenagers room. And let's be honest, probably your bedroom too! And no one is going to see your messy laundry room or garage unless you take them there. If they try, trip them. You are not giving a home tour when you host a group, so you have permission to be normal and put your energy into the people. Think "Mary," not "Martha Stewart" (Luke 13:41).

Casserole Confessions! I have heard that a successful Life Group leader once snuck a dirty casserole dish out into the garage just before group. No one knew! The Holy Spirit didn't boycott the house that night! Whatever it takes!

Step Two: Welcome & Name Tags

- Friendly greeting at the door as guests arrive.
- Name Tags available when guests come in.
 - Creative computer name labels
 - Clip on name tags
 - Blank peel & stick (best!)

We find for most cases the plain old “peel and stick” are actually the best type. That way everyone has the same type of tag and you also don’t have a basket full of tags of “group members past.” Just have a couple sharpies and blank tags near the door or near the snacks table as people enter. The greeter reminds everyone to have a tag.

Why name tags? It helps new people get to know people’s names and vice versa. And who hasn’t blanked on a name you should know. Tags level the playing field and help everyone relax.

“But everyone already knows everyone.” Then pray the empty chair prayer for new folks to fill a seat next week and keep the practice of inviting new people alive. Or if the group is full (12-14 average attending a home group) start casting the vision for the “empty house” that someone in the Group can open up to birth a new group. Actually, you should cast that vision from day one of the group: “We’re not here to grow old together. We’re trusting God to raise up new Group leaders out of this group.”

Step Three: Start and End On Time

- If you don't start on time, it gives reason or license for latecomers.
- If you start late, you'll have to possibly cut vital elements short.
- If you finish late, problems could arise with childcare & babysitters.
- Many times attendees are looking for you to finish on time. It's a point of respect.

“They all arrive late.” Why are some Group leaders or even Sunday School teachers able to get their people to arrive on time? Did they just get lucky and get a “good group?”

No. Surprisingly it has nothing to do with age, having kids, not having kids, or meeting time. I've seen “on time” groups in every conceivable life stage, meeting time and place. They have bucked the trend. I had one college/career leader who had a room packed with 45 people at precisely 9:00am every Sunday morning. How in the world did she pull it off? Did she fast all day Saturday to drive out the demon of drowsiness and forefend the Prince of Procrastination? No.

It's all in the expectations and what you are doing in those first few minutes. To get people there on time, rule one is start on time with whoever is there. Don't wait for latecomers....ever. If five people are there out of ten, start with the five. Rule two is do something worth being there for. That's why we start with the ice breaker. It's fun, and you can't “get it later” from a book. Rule three is love them and be involved in their lives. They will get there on time for a Group where they are affirmed.

The exception on start time is your very first night. Allow some buffer time by extending fellowship and snacks as people arrive. But then explain at the end of your first meeting that next week you'll start with the Icebreaker right at __ pm/am. Make sure that time works for everyone. Adjust it if necessary. Then stick to it.

Step Four: Ice Breaker

Why?

- It levels the playing field.
- It creates an atmosphere of ease and relaxation.
- It helps everyone get to know each other better.

The icebreaker plays a valuable role in a healthy small group. Let's face it. Anyone coming in new to your group, especially if they don't have a lot of church background, thinks you are all probably Bible experts who can quote the books of the Bible backwards. And they probably think that's your idea of a fun evening.

But then you surprise them. Instead of beginning the evening with, "OK, now everyone share about the first chapter of the Bible you ever memorized" you ask something that's just fun, that tells us a little about each other, and that everyone can share about. There's just something about sharing with the Group "What special super-power would you have if you could be a superhero?" that drops the masks. (I want to be Captain Do-Over, with the ability to re-do anything in life I need to.)

A group that starts by laughing together is more likely to go deep together too, and trust each other later on. And, it's something I don't want to miss by being late.

"...you ask something that's just fun, that tells us a little about each other, and that everyone can share about."

Resources for Icebreakers:

- See "Ice Breaker Samples" on following page.
- Websites. Just search the Internet
- Allow people to come up with their own when they take the Icebreaker. Just remember: fun, something everyone (even a non-Christian) could answer, and everyone answers in turn.

Some Ice Breaker SAMPLES

- Most favorite hobby and why...
- Most memorable vacation...
- If you could have any super power what would it be? Why?
- Most favorite TV show ever as a kid...
- My favorite TV show now...
- If you had one wish, what would it be?
- Craziest thing you ever did as a kid...
- Describe your dream vacation...
- What is your most favorite movie ever?
- If you could have dinner with anyone in history who would it be?
- Tell about the last traffic ticket you got...
- What is your favorite cereal and why?
- What's a dream you have...
- What is your favorite food?
- Most inspiring person in your life...

Other Sources for Ice Breakers

- Internet. Try, www.pmchurch.org/sg/pages/icebreakers/short.html
- The *Serendipity Bible for Groups* has them for every Bible passage
- Many small group studies have ice breakers included
- Allow people to come up with their own that fit the pattern above

Step Five: Practical Bible Study

- Choose a topical study or short Bible book study (James, Philippians, etc.).
- Use a small group curriculum or the Serendipity Bible for Groups versus crafting your own lesson. You want to model a simple method that an apprentice can copy.
- Start by going through our **Core Curriculum** studies, page 42, or at woodlandgroups.com/resources. We keep samples of these in the Life Group office, as well as some DVD studies you can borrow.
- Be sure to have any studies outside of the Core Curriculum or what are listed on groupcurriculum.org **approved** by the Life Group pastor.
- Lead or facilitate the study and discussion vs. “teach.” Use discussion, not lecture. Adults learn best when actively engaged in the process.

“Use discussion, not lecture. Adults learn best when actively engaged in the process.”

- Learn the art of asking penetrating questions. Then listen! Silence is OK.
- Do not choose controversial topics. Unity is very important.
- Choose common denominators.
- Delegate Bible passages to be read. Always ask for volunteers.
- Promote positive discussion.

- Consider breaking into sub-groups for part of the discussion if the group is more than 10 people. Dividing men and women can give variety and greater depth too.
- Six to eight week studies are best.
- As the leader, talk as little as possible (others to talk more).
- Make sure everyone has a study guide with questions if there is one.
- Have extra Bibles available.
- Consider curriculum with short video segments (10-20 minutes).
- Graciously redirect if someone is dominating
- For ways to handle difficult types of personalities (EGR's) see the section on page 54.

How Jesus Taught As far as we have recorded in Scripture, Jesus was a *topical* Bible teacher. He accurately applied relevant passages to situations at hand, or important questions. He deflected subjects that didn't matter, as when the woman at the well tried to get Him into a pointless discussion over whether Jerusalem or Samaria was God's "official" headquarters for worship.

For the two discouraged disciples on the Emmaus Road, Jesus didn't launch into a verse-by-verse study of Isaiah. He pulled relevant truths from the entire body of the Old Testament and applied it. The result was hope, encouragement, and insight.

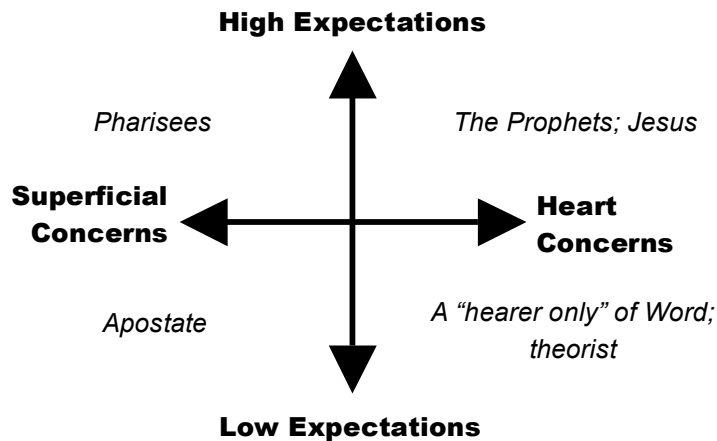
Why did Jesus take this approach to Scripture in training the Twelve in private, and in speaking to the multitudes?

Jesus' style of teaching was *prophetic*. It is in contrast to another valid style called *systematic* (going through all points of Bible doctrine one point at a time). There is a place for both. But in Life Groups (as the name would suggest) we want you keying in on important life issues and being *prophetic*, "*Thus says the Lord*," about the life issues and choices that pertain to your Group right now. Jesus said, "The shepherd knows

his sheep.” He knows what they need *now*. If they need water, he takes them to the stream. If they just drank and now need grass, he takes them to the green hillside.

Prophetic doesn’t mean “preach.” But it does mean you are dealing with heart issues during Group time, and you have a high expectation in your mind that they will be changed as a result of your time together discussing and applying God’s word. They will actually *do* Christianity.

What quadrant below is your facilitation in?



The more your topic really “hits home” with a current heart issue or need of your Life Group, the more powerful it potentially is. Narrow your target! Aim for the heart each week.

How do you know what’s “on target” with the heart? First, check your own heart. What are *you* really dealing with? Assuming your home Life Group is similar in life stage to you, they may be facing some of the same issues. Of course if you are a mature believer and you have a group of new or untaught believers then you need to take them through foundational studies—even if you’ve personally been through them before. Follow the Core Curriculum chart in that case.

Step Six: Praise & Worship

This will round out an evening by including all five Purposes (CREST) in your Life Group. The first time I heard of worship in a small group I thought they were crazy. But it works because it can be non-musical, or more “listening” than singing. Everyone seems to get it whether younger or older.

And even when you put a worship DVD on just crank it up loud so that no one feels like they’re humming or singing a solo. I sound pretty good when you can’t hear me (and I can’t hear myself) over the DVD.

This step can come before or after the Bible study. I often say, “We’ve spent a lot of talk talking to each other—the horizontal relationship—now lets take 2-3 minutes to connect with God in praise and worship. Just let this song be a prayer from your heart to Him.”

- Someone can bring a CD or mp3 of one of their favorite worship songs and even print out words for the group to sing along, or just read along as a personal prayer directed toward God.
- Worship DVD’s such as iWorship@home is a great option! **Just crank it up enough where people feel like they can hum or sing without being heard too clearly.** LifeTogether.com also has great DVD’s for worship.
- Someone can bring in a favorite song with words typed and share why it is meaningful to them. Then just read through and let everyone turn it into their own prayer to God silently.
- ABC Praise through the Alphabet, thanking God for his attributes while playing instrumental music in the background. For example, Thank you Lord that you are Almighty...that you are Beautiful...that you are my Creator...that you are Discerning...
- Have each person read from the Psalms out loud as they feel led. They are encouraged to read as many times as they want, and the verses should reflect God’s beauty and goodness. Note Psalms 145 through 150 are best to read praises from.

Be creative! People love to express and share with the Group a song or something that's been meaningful to them that is praise or worship oriented.

Step Seven: Evangelism (Empty Chair)

Life Groups are “open” groups, meaning you continue to reach out to new people each week.

- Empty Chair -focus every week. (Everyone inviting a friend, co-worker, neighbor or relative to fill that chair every week.) If everyone is doing this weekly, the group will grow!
One of the things you delegate each week is the “Empty Chair” prayer. This brief prayer usually at the start of the group prayer time. It can be along the lines of: “Lord, we pray that during this week you’ll give us opportunities to invite people to our Group and by your grace fill this empty chair with someone new.” Model this a couple weeks before you delegate it.
- Encourage your group to invite people weekly before and after worship services.
- Intentionally Evangelistic Events. You might have a Group BBQ at someone’s house and invite a couple neighbors also, or to come along to an outing at a Rays game. It’s that simple to start reaching out! What do you like doing? Just invite others along with the group.
- Participate in Churchwide outreach events by inviting people. The Church schedules a number of intentionally evangelistic events each year that have a community appeal and make it easy to invite friends. People who won’t come to church on Sunday morning are often open to going with you to a Tail Gate party, concert, or health fair.

Open Groups and Group Size. Open groups are not a new idea. Sunday School is an open group that expects new people. But size is an issue. In fact small group expert, Bill Hull says that once a group attendance exceeds 17 people it changes from “small” to mid-sized in feel. Group dynamics change. Sharing becomes more difficult and it may take on a “class” feel where some talk and others just sit in silence and listen all night.

So while your home Life Group is *open*, there are limits. And you need to be apprenticing a future Group leader so that every 18 months or by the time you consistently average 12-14 attendance you already have an experienced person ready to launch a new group.

Step Eight: Prayer/Testimony

Prayer

Be very conscious of time during this step (ten to fifteen minutes maximum).

- The person who volunteered to lead Group Prayer goes around the circle and asks each one in turn, “**How can we pray for you this week?**” Give everyone a chance to share a request each week.
- Always give opportunity for someone needing extended prayer to see you afterward.
- Prayer saves time and gives needed insight into people’s lives. God often gives insight as you pray for others.
- Prayer is our greatest spiritual weapon
- Pray for your apprentice & for multiplication

Testimony

- Positive praise reports of answered prayer, or something special the Lord is doing in your life.

Prayer Traps to Avoid

There are a few “traps” to avoid to keep group prayer dynamic.

- First, encourage your Group to pray mainly for people and concerns close at hand, as opposed to a lot of “third person” requests such as for “all the missionaries in the world.” This keeps it personal, reveals their heart, and we can see when the prayer is answered.

- Second, don't allow the prayer request time to become the "advice giving" or fixing time. Keep moving. If someone has advice, they can share it after Group time with that person. Coach the group on this if it becomes a problem: *"Before we take prayer requests tonight let me remind you that if you have advice or insight on a problem share that after Group with that person, not during prayer requests so we can move along and get to our actual prayer time."*
- Third, don't "pray around the circle." While you will take requests this way, some people are still very uncomfortable praying out loud. Allow several to pray as they feel led after you have taken requests. It's often a good idea to ask for a volunteer to close prayer time when they sense things are winding down and everyone has prayed.

"Don't allow the prayer request time to become the "advice giving" or fixing time."

Things to Encourage or Model in Your Prayer Time

- Encourage people to bring a little pocket type notebook and jot down the requests of others.
- Encourage people to be transparent in sharing requests. Model it as the leader. You set the tone of transparency.
- Encourage people to follow up during the week by meeting practical needs expressed during the request time. Even simple unexpected caring touches during the week, such as an email that asks, "How did that test go that we prayed about at Group?" will go a long way toward building a caring culture in your Group. Model this yourself and enlist others to do the same.

Step Nine: Leadership & Delegation

Leadership Moment

- Weekly, announce Life Group and church items from the Life Group Update, including Leadership events.
- Identify an apprentice within your own group. Have group leadership ready to multiply as group grows to 12-14 regulars.
- Review the Group Covenant with each Small Group Campaign
- Assure the weekly attendance is posted using our Web site (woodlandgroups.com under the “Group Management” tab). Make sure you have registered any new visitors, and added any new members. You get a log in ID and password from the Life Group office.

Delegation

- Weekly, delegate all ministry elements (Delegation Sheet p. 30).
- Give away ministry elements to members attending so everyone has a ministry purpose every week.
- This will greatly help your weekly attendance and leadership development.
- When someone knows they are being counted on, in a specific area, it helps them attend more faithfully.
- Encourage members to take various tasks as they feel comfortable.
- Always ask for volunteers versus asking someone openly to do a certain element. (We don't want to embarrass or shame anyone into leading an element.).

- Make sure you delegate the Reminder Caller weekly to take the list and call the night before and remind each person of their delegated responsibility for that week.

Delegation Is Critical. The last thing you will do each Group session before you break for fellowship is the weekly delegation of all the Group tasks. It is the use of the Weekly Delegation Sheet that makes all the difference in your Life Group. It only takes about three minutes, but it is the most important three minutes in the entire Group time.

Delegation allows you to do all Ten Steps with ease and keep it fresh. It also begins to give ministry responsibility away to others. This is vital for their spiritual growth and ministry development. And it is the path toward creating new Group leaders using OJT, on the job training.

The “Reminder Caller” is the key to the Delegation system working. That person will take the sheet home with the names and phone numbers and call everyone the night before to remind them what they volunteered for. It’s amazing how we forget! It’s OK to leave a voice message.

How to Delegate using the Delegation Sheet. Simply go down the list. For each task, ask, “Who would like to do _____ next week?” Then wait. The old saying is that if you can count silently to seven you can delegate. It’s amazing who volunteers between “five” and “seven.”

In the first six weeks or so you may have to read the short “description” of each task on the back of the Delegation Sheet so everyone is clear what’s involved. And model it yourself as a leader when you do a task. At first you may do most items.

If no one volunteers for an item, then graciously take that task yourself. Keep it light hearted and no pressure! We joke about counting to seven some times. If you didn’t read the description, refresh to them what’s involved, and encourage someone to be ready *next week* to volunteer for it. Start using the Delegation sheet right away. The simple things like snacks they will probably do right away. Other things like ice breaker, worship, or even the Delegation Sheet (yes, we delegate the delegation!) you may have to model a few times.

It’s amazing just who will volunteer for what. Don’t underestimate your Group. And count silently to seven. Don’t chicken out!

The Home Life Group Weekly Delegation Sheet

Date: _____

Name and Phone

Greeter _____

Name Tags _____

Drinks _____

Chips/salty snack _____

Sweet Snack _____

Ice Breaker _____

Bible Study _____

Worship _____

Empty Chair Prayer _____

Group Prayer _____

Attendance Posting _____

(woodlandgroups.com > Group Management tab)

Reminder Caller _____

(You will get this sheet and call everyone 24 hours before Group time)

About the Delegation Sheet

Greeter - Greet people at the door, make sure everyone gets a name tag.

Name Tags-- You may need someone to stop by the Life Group office during the week and get a couple 100-packs of name tags.

Ice Breaker – Choose an ice breaker (or create one) and lead that opening time around the circle. Everyone answers.

Bible Study – The facilitator of the study/discussion. Take the DVD and leader book, if there is one, preview and do any preparation. Then moderate and facilitate the discussion. (The Group Leader is still the Leader, just not facilitating that night.)

Worship – Bring in a favorite worship song on CD, or worship DVD. It does not have to be musical. Can bring in the words to a favorite praise song and sharing why it's one of their favorites. Be creative!

Empty Chair Prayer – A short prayer usually leading off the group prayer time. Pray that God will give the group members divine appointments to invite people and fill the empty chair next week.

Group Prayer – Ask each member in turn, “How can we pray for you this week?” Ask the Empty Chair Prayer to pray first. Ask for a volunteer to close when he/she senses that all who want to have prayed.

Delegation/ Leadership Moment – Take the Delegation Sheet and ask, “Who will do ___ next week?” Jot down name and phone. Give sheet to the Reminder Caller.

Attendance Posting – Usually the Host since they have password.

Reminder Caller – Volunteer get the sheet and phones everyone 1 days before the next group meeting to remind them of what they volunteered for. Can leave a voice message.

Step Ten: Fellowship

- Have soft drinks and refreshments available at the end.
- Turn the background music back on.
- It's always good to save time at the end for fellowship. Some might have arrived late and this will allow them the opportunity for needed fellowship.

Bookend Your Group with Fellowship

The first few minutes of a small group, before the ice breaker, should always allow for open fellowship. In our Group we encourage people to arrive a few minutes early so they can grab something to drink, or a snack and fellowship a bit. But at 7:00pm sharp, our agreed upon start time, we start with the ice breaker. After a few weeks everyone knows to get there a few minutes early, instead of running late.

If you end your formal group time "on time" people are more likely to hang around and fellowship. That after-group hang time is crucial for developing relationships. If you run late, people tend to just rush out the door. Your group becomes more like a "class." We try to break by 8:30pm and encourage people to hang out and fellowship. Sometimes they hang out for a long time!

Creativity and Variety

Anything you do the same for 12 weeks is going to get stale. Mix it up! Take a night between each six-week or eight-week study to do a fellowship night. Have a game night, a cookout at someone's home (invite new people and neighbors!), or go on a simple outing (road trip to Starbucks etc.), or a mystery destination and bring \$5. We went to a really cool ice cream shop in downtown Sarasota one time. No one knew before hand where we were going. They had fun texting and guessing as we went.

Change the order you do some of the elements. Change host home locations from time to time. Just make sure everyone knows.

After Small Group Is Over

The most important part of leading a small group happens when it's over. It's the other six days in between group meetings. The six checkpoints are the best way to monitor how well a person is caring for their group.

Care Checkpoints

- Calls Regularly (Care Log)
- Emails Weekly
- Encouraging Notes & Cards
- Time – one on one meetings
- Being Available
- Prayer

Bible Study Preparation

- Read over your study notes (or preview DVD)
- Look over the study questions
- Spend some time in prayer

Starting Right: A Checklist for a New Group's First Two Weeks

Week One

- **Call** everyone you have invited the evening before, reminding them of your Group, about bringing their favorite appetizer or desert and how excited you are to get together. This is a crucial step. People just forget.
- Have your home set up and ready early. At least 15 minutes before everyone is supposed to arrive. This includes: Chairs set up, lights on everywhere, music, drinks, etc...
- Warmly greet at the door. Have name tags ready.
- Have casual fellowship and mingling for a while and then get everyone to get a seat.
- The best way for those attending to get to know one another is to open up this time with sharing brief life bio's. Do this voluntarily only. Start with your own bio. Example: I grew up here, went to college here, this many children and names/ages, favorite hobby is, been coming to the church since, etc... "Anyone else want to share?" This will go on for a while, everyone can continue to eat. When the sharing is done maybe take a break, get coffee & desert, and then invite everyone back for an informational and prayer time.
- Share about next week. **Delegate** the snack/drink items. Give resource details, or pass out participant guides and collect money in an envelop on the snack table. **During a church-wide campaign you will start the study the first night** and make the bio's shorter (Just name, home town, favorite hobby).
- Encourage people to bring friends. Leader Pray for the open chair.
- **Group Prayer:** (follow the procedure under Step Eight, p. 26)

- Finish on time. Adjourn, but encourage people to hang around.

Week 2

- Again, call everyone you have invited the evening before your Life Group, reminding them of the Group and about bringing their specific item they volunteered to bring, if any.
- **Follow the *Ten Basic Steps for group time* (p. 13)**
- **At the end of group time, delegate various Life Group roles** using the *Weekly Delegation Sheet*. You want to start delegation as a part of your Group's culture from the very start.
- You will do several of the items on the Delegate Sheet yourself in this second session in order to model what to do:
 - Ice breaker
 - Bible Study facilitation
 - Worship
 - Empty chair prayer
 - Group prayer
 - Delegating using the *Delegation Sheet* (p. 30)

But include all the elements of Group life in this second week. Enlist your spouse or good friend beforehand to do some of these tasks above the second week and help model what you want.

- In the first few weeks, as you Delegate, you will need to take a second to briefly describe each task before you ask for volunteers. A brief description is listed on the page following of the Delegate Sheet in this book (p. 31), and on the back of the Delegation Sheets we supply to Group leaders.

Example: "You saw how I greeted people at the door. We delegate little tasks one week at a time in this Group. Who would like to be our door greeter next week? Just be here 15 minutes early, greet people as they arrive, help them get a name tag?" Ask then wait. The saying is, "**If you can count to seven silently you**

can delegate.” Graciously take an item yourself if no one volunteers after 7 seconds. Set a positive, lighthearted tone: “Ok, I’ll do it this week, but be ready next week to volunteer after you see how we do it.”

- Finish on time.

Resources

woodlandgroups.com/resources

On the next pages are some of the basic tools and resources for home Life Groups.

Where do I find good small group study material?

An Approved List of Group Studies

All studies for Life Groups need to come from the approved list of over 250 group studies found on our Core Curriculum list and on groupcurriculum.org.

Core Curriculum (woodlandgroups.com/resources)

We have a recommended Core Curriculum as a starting place. These are sorted by “group phase.” They are also some of the studies that have proven most helpful and popular. You can browse copies of each item in the Core Curriculum studies in the Life Group Office. You can download a pdf version of the Core Curriculum chart at woodlandgroups.com/resources.

Groupcurriculum.org

Anything on groupcurriculum.org is already on the approved list. Groupcurriculum.org is a truly amazing Web site maintained by North Point Community Church in Alpharetta, Georgia. It has over 250 current small group studies from a variety of evangelical publishers, complete with summaries, reviews, order links, and the ability to search for a study by topic, key word, whether it has a DVD or not, or the type of group (women’s, men, etc.). Each resource includes links for ordering online. We try to keep a copy of every Andy Stanley group DVD study on hand so you can borrow them free of charge.

What If a Study Is Not on the List?

If a study you want to do is not on the list call us with the info and we’ll check it out. In many cases it’s fine, but occasionally there is a good reason it’s not there. It may have doctrinal issues, or simply not be a real small group study with a life-application discussion guide included.

Can I Write My Own Study? No, because we want to model a simple, reproducible approach that many can do, not just highly gifted saints. And we want the group Leader to invest time in people, not crafting custom studies. God has gifted men and women across the country to produce excellent small group studies and we leverage their spiritual gifts by using them.

Open Group Versus “Closed Group” Studies. A lot of great studies would not be suitable for a Life Group because they are designed for closed groups. A closed group is one that, once it has formed, new people cannot come in to. *Experiencing God* is an example of a closed group study. You really need to be there from the start. But all Life Groups are “open” to new people.

Avoid Lame Small Group Studies. Sorry, but there’s just no kind word for some of what passes as a “small group study.” Avoid them! If you accidentally get in one, punt! Lameness can be from several sources:

1. “Test questions” instead of good discussion questions. Nothing is more boring than a study guide that asks you to read a passage then simply regurgitate the obvious: “How many disciples did Jesus call from the verses we just read?” You can almost hear the yawns. What’s the point of that kind of question?
2. It’s all academic. Or the issues are not that relevant.
3. A study that may make interesting points, but makes no impact on how I live or my values. Those are “Discovery Channel” studies, not prophetic.
4. Boring would-be DVD teachers. Just because it’s on a DVD doesn’t mean it’s any good. If you find yourself drifting off after three minutes your Group certainly will!

Why A Core Curriculum For Life Groups?

It's important that all Life Group studies support the Church's purpose of "making disciples" through the Group. Therefore we ask all groups to follow the **Core Curriculum** on page 42.

A "curriculum" simply means a *course* or plan of learning. It doesn't refer to particular books. That's why there are many options under each phase of the Core Curriculum.

Jesus had a curriculum. Jesus didn't randomly instruct His disciples. Let's look at the Master's curriculum for his twelve disciples:

1. He first met them in the context of big group teaching to the multitudes.
2. He called them to be *with* Him (relationship). First he just said "Come and see," just check it out and let's talk.
3. But later he said "Follow Me" (become a disciple). They did everything together. Being with them was his method.
4. He modeled ministry.
5. Then he equipped them as "fishers of men" and delegated small tasks to them like passing out fish and loaves to everyone.
6. Then sent them out on short term assignments.
7. Then he debriefed them.
8. Finally, near the end, he revealed difficult truths, and called for ultimate commitment (take up your cross).
9. Then he sent them out to the ends of the earth.

At one point Jesus told them, “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear” (John 16:12). He took them step by step along the path to becoming “fishers of men” who would lead his church.

Leaders lead. The point is that as a Group *Leader* you want to intentionality “lead” your Group to a destination, to greater spiritual growth, life change, commitment, and readiness for ministry. You are not content to just impart knowledge. You are also enlisting them to be part of Woodland’s strategy of evangelism and discipleship.

Core Curriculum Organized by Group Phases

The Core Curriculum is organized by Group Phase. Groups have natural phases of development, just like people. We started in childhood, then adolescence, then young adulthood, then not-so-young adulthood. When it comes to making disciples, the small Group life phases are:

- Gathering (months 1-3)
- Growth (months 4-6)
- Equipping (months 7-9)
- Deepening (months 10-12)

The “months” are approximate. You must assess where your Life Group is *now* and help it grow to the next phase in development. Choosing studies that fit your group’s current life phase really helps the process of making disciples.

Why not just pick any study?

- Problem of randomness – not leading anywhere
- Problem of doctrinal issues
- Problem of not being a discussion/life oriented
- Problem of poor quality (“Why did we ever pick this study?”)

CORE CURRICULUM STUDIES

By Group Phase

Gathering Phase (Months 1-3)

- Take It to the Limit (A. Stanley DVD 6 weeks)
- Imagine (Tim Passmore, DVD+ book, 9 weeks)
- LifeTogether “Connecting with God’s Family” (Brett Eastman, guide + DVD, 6 weeks)
- Break Away (Andy Stanley DVD 6 weeks)

Growth Phase (Months 4-6)

- **James** book study using Bible in Community Source pdf (6 weeks) - do this first in this phase!
- God is Closer Than You Think (DVD, 6 weeks)
- LifeTogether “Growing Together in Christ” (DVD, 6 wks.)
- Permission to Speak Freely (3 weeks -prayer)
- The Best Question Ever (6 weeks - wisdom)
- The Life You’ve Always Wanted (6 weeks)
- If You Want to Walk on Water You Have to Get Out of the Boat (6 weeks)

Equipping Phase (Months 7-9)

- **Acts** book study Bible in Community Source pdf (6 weeks) - do this first in this phase!
- Wide Angle: Framing Your World View (6 weeks) - do next
- Just Walk Across the Room (4 weeks)
- LifeTogether “Using Your Shape to Serve Others” (6 weeks)
- On Location – ministry at work/marketplace (5 weeks)

Deepening Phase (Months 10-12)

- **Genesis: Abraham** using the Bible in Community Source pdf (6 weeks) – do this first in this phase!
- LifeTogether “Surrendering Your Life for God’s Pleasure” (6 wks)
- Starting Point (10 weeks)
- Becoming a Contagious Christian (8 weeks)
- Roaring Lambs

Various Seasons of Life Studies (as needed)

- Lost – Christian financial principles (Stanley, 6 weeks)
- iMarriage (Stanley, 6 weeks)
- Homebuilders series on marriage and parenting by Dennis Rainey
- The DNA of Relationships for Couples (Smalley)
- Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage/flag page

James, Acts (the Ministry of Paul), and Genesis (the Life of Abraham) are free download resource pdf documents at groupcurriculum.org. They lead off the Growth, Equipping, and Deepening phases. We ask you to do these studies first in those phases to get people into the Bible directly.

Using the Core Curriculum Plan

The timeline is approximate. Assess where you believe your Group to be now (see the next chapter). Move them along. If you are a new Group, or need to “re-gather” people start with a couple of the Gathering Phase studies. Then choose a couple studies from the next phase, and so on.

Fill in as needed with specific “season of life” studies above or on groupcurriculum.org

Group Phases Explained

Assessing Your Group.

Groups go through the phases at different rates. So the timeline is only an approximation. A lot of factors can affect where your Life Group is. In fact, if your established Group needs a “re-start” it is back in the Gathering phase again. On the other hand, if you lead an existing Group and it’s healthy you probably want to begin at the Growth Phase and go from there.

Gathering Phase (Months 1-3)

Gathering doesn’t mean shallow. It means *a significant topic of high interest to nearly everyone*—whether new believers or seasoned saints. A *gathering* topic also has the potential for generating a lot of good discussion very easily. Think Sermon on the Mount. That was a gathering topic message: 8 Ways to Be Happy (beatitudes), relationships, money, revenge, lust, worry, how “good” do you have to be? And interestingly, after Jesus taught on all these “high interest” topics the conclusion was,

“... the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because *he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.*”
(Matthew 7:28-29)

These topical teachings were seen as “authoritative!” The people considered them “deeper” than what the Scribes has been putting out. Why? Because they hit home on heart issues we all struggle with.

If you’re starting a new Group you need to focus on “gathering” people and helping them connect in genuine community. “Gathering” isn’t a function of spiritual maturity. You have to “gather” mature believers just like you do young believers. The focus in on connecting people relationally as a Group. After all, if they aren’t in your Group you can’t do *anything* with them. So start like Jesus did, by “gathering.”

The “Gathering” phase lasts as long as it takes for the Group to “gel.” After three months or so of *gathering* type studies, you may sense the Group has undergone a good change. They’re connected to each other. Now they are coming not just for a topic, but because they have really

come to enjoy being with the *people* in the Group. They have gelled. It's like a mental switch flipped and now they've decided *this is what I do*. You may start to see people getting together outside of group who didn't know each other before, or calling each other. That's a good sign!

How to Start. When you're starting a new Group the big concern is simply getting folks to come and connect into a cohesive Group. So you need to choose a *gathering* type of study to help in the process. More importantly, you need to understand the Gathering Process:

1. Invite, invite, invite (twice as many as you plan on having). Keep inviting each week. Get them inviting people each week. Use the "Empty Chair."
2. Help them get to know each other. People come once for instruction, but come back for relationship. Schedule a party/social night between each six-eight week study. Maybe meet at someone else's house that night. BBQ or pot luck and games is a good start. Make it fun!
3. Choose a study that is of immediate interest to everyone and generates lots of discussion from their own life experiences related to it ("how I'm dealing with this truth/principle in my life").
4. Realize that sharing parts of their life story with the Group precedes caring, life change, and commitment.

Growth Phase (Months 4-6)

Again, the time line is approximate. But once your Life Group has gelled, now you can take them into some studies that go deeper into their character, understanding, values and disciple habits such as prayer and a daily quiet time.

Why don't we start with Growth/discipleship topics? You have to build some trust before most people are willing to go deeper. And what about the disciple habits of prayer and Bible study? If you were starting a brand new Group and advertised the topic: "How to Have a Daily Quiet Time" you probably wouldn't get too many takers. It sounds very "task"

oriented. They don't know the value. First change their values. And that happens best in a setting where you already have built trust and relationship. You might be tempted to say, "Well, I guess everyone here is just too shallow." But that's not at all the case. What happened is that you left out vital steps. It's like putting a 12 foot ladder in front of someone with the first three rungs missing.

At the Growth phase you're expecting some significant life change. But people aren't going to do that unless they know your heart and come to trust the others in the Group first. Groups that start out too intense tend to scare people away. You wouldn't ask someone to marry you on the first date, would you? In human relationships we just don't do that. We get to know each other first.

James is the best study to start this phase with because it gets people directly into God's word with a short, easy to find the application study. It builds confidence that, yes, they can read and understand the Bible.

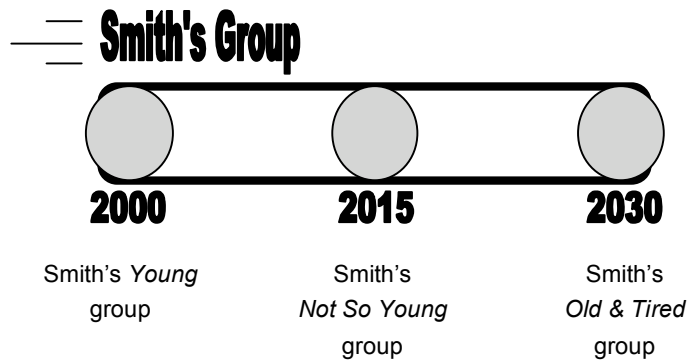
Equipping Phase (Months 7-9)

For the first six months or so the focus has been one building their relationship with God and with each other.

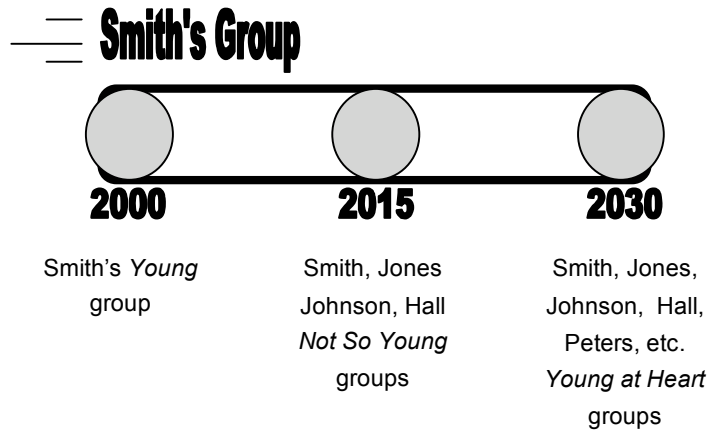
If things have gone normally (i.e., no major breaks or glitches) you should begin to discern as a leader that you need to turn their focus outward, to minister, to use their gifts to serve others, and be an influence on the world around them for Christ.

Caution: Use sound judgment and wisdom. Some leaders want to try to get their group "out there" way too soon and ignore real character and spiritual needs or the importance of the group forming strong connections first. We want people to first gain spiritual strength and make strong connections as a group. Take at least six months first.

But, don't let your Group get "comfortable" as a holy huddle either! A group that stays inward focused will become unhealthy, ingrown and fall apart. And even if everyone's having a great time, God's plan is not that your Group just get on the *Conveyor Belt of Time* and grow old together.



Multiply leaders for new groups!



During the Equipping Phase you will do one or two studies that focus on things like doing ministry (the *Acts* study download), your spiritual gifts, or understanding how to share your faith, etc. You'll encourage them to find a place of service, and to find ways to share their faith.

Groups vary a lot on how much "equipping" you can do at once. Don't overdo it. One study might be plenty, then mix in a Growth study or Season of Life type of study, and then come back to some more equipping.

"Can't we stay together *forever*?" When your Group says that, get them into the *Acts (Paul's Ministry)* study fast!

Deepening Phase (Months 10-12)

This is the most exciting phase of all! You've gathered your group, they've grown spiritually, begun to use their gifts and to reach out. But God wants their whole heart.

We may come to Christ initially for what He can do for us. That's what Abraham did. When God called Abraham He promised him a huge chunk of real estate and a long awaited child if he would just relocate to Canaan. Abraham said, "Sure!" But many years later that same God tested him by asking him to sacrifice what was most dear to him, his son Isaac. It's doubtful that Abraham would have passed that test at the beginning. He had *deepened* in his faith to where God himself was central, not what God could provide.

God will test you! He will test each of your Group members at some point. Taking up our cross, denying self, to follow Jesus is an eventual part of the Christian life. Your role as leader is to help prepare them.

Paul said, "To me, to live is Christ; to die is gain." We want to lead people to make that transition to fully devoted follower of Christ.

The *Genesis* download study of Abraham's life is excellent for calling for total commitment. Most groups that have been intentional are ready to enter the Deepening Phase around 10-12 months of meeting together.

New Life Group Leader Application

Leader Name(s): _____

Phone(s): _____

email: _____

Have you completed the "First Steps" membership class? Y / N

Are you a Woodland church member? Y / N

Have you met with the Life Group pastor? Y / N

Group Location or Host Home Address:

Host Home Phone (if different from yours): _____

Start Date: _____ Is this group ongoing? Y / N

If not, how many weeks will you meet? _____

Curriculum of Study: _____

Have you read the church's doctrinal statement? Y / N

Are you in agreement? Y / N

Do you agree with the Church's Core Values Statement? Y / N

Pastor's Approval _____ Date: _____

Group Leader signature: _____



Life Group Leader Commitment

Realizing the growing need for loving care and community at Woodland Church, I commit to fulfill the following expectations as a Life Group Leader:

1. Having the assurance of my personal salvation through faith in Christ, and having been baptized by immersion, I purpose to be consistent and committed in living the Christian life.
2. To be filled, controlled, and led by the Holy Spirit.
3. To maintain a healthy family life.
4. To fully embrace the statement of beliefs, values, vision and strategy of Woodland Church and be loyal and accountable to its leadership.
5. To be faithful in my support of Woodland Church with my finances, time, and talents.
6. To attend Life Group leadership meetings.
7. To go over the Life Group Covenant with my group twice a year or as needed.
8. To personally train up assistant group leaders to shepherd and lead a future Life Group
9. To have consistent/regular communication with the Life Group office.
10. To be diligent in my preparation for Group time.
11. To provide a high level of shepherding care, intentional spiritual growth and impact opportunities for my Life Group.

Leader's Signature _____

Life Group Covenant

Woodland –The Community Church

We commit to...

- A. **Priority:** While you are in the group, you give priority to the meeting and making it a priority to attend
- B. **Participation:** Everyone is encouraged to participate and no one dominates
- C. **Respect:** Everyone is given the right to his or her own opinion, and all questions are encouraged and respected.
- D. **Confidentiality:** Anything that is said in the meeting is never repeated outside the meeting.
- E. **Life Change:** We will regularly assess our own life-change goals and encourage one another in our pursuit of Christ likeness.
- F. **Empty Chair:** The group stays open to reaching new people at every meeting.
- G. **Care and Support:** Permission is given to call upon each other at any time, especially in times of crisis. The group will provide care for every member.
- H. **Accountability:** We agree to let the members of the group hold us accountable to the commitments we make in whatever loving ways we decide upon.
- I. **Mission:** We will do everything in our power to start a new group.
- J. **Ministry:** The group will encourage one another to volunteer and serve in a ministry and support missions by giving financially and/or personally serving.

Beliefs & Values

Woodland's Ten Core Beliefs

We Believe...

1. There is only one true God (1 Timothy 2:5).
2. God desires to have a personal relationship with us and that this only occurs through His Son, Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:5-6).
3. We are to obey God and live by His commands (Deuteronomy 13:4).
4. Our salvation is to be followed by baptism (Mark 1:1-13; Matthew 28:19).
5. The Bible is God's Word given to us for daily instruction and is without error (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
6. God sent to us a comforter called the Holy Spirit to guide us in our daily walk with Him (John 14:16-17).
7. In worshipping God freely, but with decency and order (1 Corinthians 14:40).
8. Our bodies are the temple of God and should be treated as such (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).
9. We should not engage in activities which would cause others to stumble (Romans 14:19-23).
10. In becoming disciples of Jesus Christ (John 8:31-32).

Woodland's Ten Core Values

1. We are to grow spiritually (2 Peter 3:18).
2. We are to share our faith with a lost world (Acts 1:8).
3. We are to communicate with God through prayer (Ephesians 6:18).
4. We are to use our spiritual gifts as we minister to those who are in need (Acts 26:16).
5. We are to be faithful in meeting together as believers (Heb. 10:25).
6. We are to give our resources obediently (Malachi 3:10; 2 Cor. 9:7).
7. We are to encourage one another (Isaiah 1:17).
8. We are to forgive one another (Colossians 3:13).
9. We are to follow God's leadership (Matthew 16:24).
10. We are to show the love of Christ (1 John 3:11).

For a more detailed doctrinal statement, go to sbc.net/bfm

Doctrinal Implication for Life Groups Leaders

Because we believe the above, we reject certain movements and doctrinal trends. We believe that the Holy Spirit's baptism occurs in full measure to all believers at the moment of salvation and that there is not a visible sign necessary to confirm it. We reject the so-called prosperity Gospel, that teaches that if one has enough "faith" he/she will be prosperous and healthy on earth. Biblical accounts flatly contradict this: Paul was a man of faith, yet had little in the way of material possessions, and suffered physical sicknesses despite earnest, believing prayer. He was rich toward God and awaited his true reward in heaven. Jesus Himself had little in earthly goods and is the ultimate example of suffering innocently and despite faith in God. God does miracles. But for His own reasons He sometimes delivers us "through" a trial instead of "from" a trial.

Handling “Extra Grace Required” Personalities in the Life Group

Most often, you won't have any Extra Grace Required people in your Group. But if you do, Matthew 10:16 tells us to be as wise as serpents, but as harmless as doves. This verse certainly applies to the Life Group Leader handling “extra grace required” personalities that can be in your Life Group. To avoid damaging the integrity of the meeting, individuals who tend to disrupt should be quickly identified, and ministered to wisely with love.

The goal in dealing with these EGR situations is to protect the other members of the group, maintain the control and integrity of the meeting, and to minister to the underlying needs of the individual.

Here's a number of possible “extra grace required” group members you may encounter and what to do about them...

The Expert...feels spiritually superior and dominates discussion.

The Boss...tries to take over the group because they are “more experienced” than you.

The Converter...tries to make your group like his/her group back home.

The Fixer....has quick snap advice; dismisses people's problems.

The Critic...has frequent negative opinions and “ain't-it-awful” rants.

The Boxer...is quick to argue; dead-set on just about everything.

The Story Teller...has endless stories that ramble and takes over.

The Drainer...tries to make the group about them & their problems.

The Lagger...is always late and disrupts the flow.

The Left Fielder...is way, way out there in their own world or views.

How to Handle Specific EGR Personalities

We've grouped these EGR personalities into similar categories based on their underlying issues and the solution for dealing with them.

The Expert, Boss, and Converter are all vying for control and have strong personalities. They may be used to being in charge, or retired from being the boss somewhere. It can cause disunity, confusion, and get your Group off its purpose or out of balance.

Solution: Do not encourage their sharing. If they attempt to take control of the meeting, lovingly but firmly reassume control. Meet with them privately if need be, to explain the leadership structure (you are the leader the church has appointed) and the set purpose and goals of Woodland's Life Groups.

The Fixer, Critic, and Boxer are expressive but lack empathy and are poor at reading people's feelings, and rarely back down. So people get hurt and may drop out. The Spirit is grieved and ministry stops.

Solution: Be patient but not sympathetic toward critical statements or attitudes. Gently challenge this attitude with positive statements. Or remind the group that we're not here to give "quick fixes" or put others down by a "yes, but" style of discussion, but to encourage each other. Model what you want. The person who just wants to rant will probably move on if they can't rant in your group. Remind people that we're not here to debate doctrines but discuss how we can live out biblical principles. Stand up to someone if they become critical toward another group member. Remind the group of the covenant and "respect" as a principle of group life—even if we disagree on points.

The Story Teller and the Drainer both suffer from "attention deficit" disorder—so to speak. They want to be the center of attention, and feel affirmed only when they are. But it's like a black hole. The more you feed their need the worse it gets. After a while it begins to rip your Group apart as it sucks the life and energy out. The Story Teller or Drainer may be either witty or boring, but he/she takes over discussion and others remain silent who should be sharing. The Story Teller wants your group to be their audience. The Drainer wants your group to be their personal support group.

Solution: Don't encourage the story teller to share. Direct them, and the group, with statements like, "You have a lot of experiences. But what we want to know is what is happening *now* in your life?" The Drainer you should talk to outside of group. They may need a support group if there are specific issues (co-dependency, etc.). If it is random "poor me" issues, just don't encourage dwelling on the complaints. Affirm them briefly but then *move on* to the next person or question. This will model a healthy response to the group, and be better for the Drainer too.

The Lagger and the Left Fielder are both in their own world and their own agenda. Left Fielders come in two types: spacey and hostile. A spacey Left Fielder ("the UFO's embedded secret numerical messages in the Bible," etc.) may be an occasional hitch. But a hostile Left Fielder (spouts wild, or controversial opinions that off topic) will torpedo your group if you let him/her continue. We're not talking about a seeker who might ask, "You mean you believe Jesus is *God*?" That's an honest question and you should affirm and answer it. We're talking about someone stirring up controversy.

Solution: Reaffirm the agenda of the group. For the Lagger, reaffirm the start time. Always begin promptly. Discuss with group if it's too early.

For the spacey Left Fielder re-direct: "Interesting, but let's get back on our topic." For the hostile Left Fielder reaffirm the group covenant and purpose (not controversial topics but ones that unify and focus on our living out Christianity not theory). Re-direct: "Let's get back on our topic." If a hostile Left Fielder persists you need to firmly handle them outside of Group time or you will lose your group!

As we said, you may have a group with none of these "extra grace required" people in it. That's most often the case. But when you do, don't wait to handle a disruptive group member. People are looking to you to lead and maintain the Group culture of love, unity, and spiritual growth.

Seekers and New Believers in Your Group

Our Life Groups are always "open" and we want them to be a place where a seeker or new believer are welcomed, and can be loved on by

solid believers. In fact, that's the best way for people to discover the truth and grow in grace. It's "normal" just like a family with older brothers and sisters. Occasionally someone will say, "Well, can't we have an *advanced* Life Group of just mature believers?" But anyone truly spiritually mature longs to help people discover Christ and then grow in their faith.