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BRIDGE GROUP
LAUNCH
LEADER GUIDE

DYNAMIC LIFE

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INTRODUCTION

We want to thank you for committing to lead this Bridge Group over the next two years. We're very excited about what God will do in the lives of you and your group members.

As you get started with your new group, we've developed a discussion guide to help your group members get to know each other, understand Bridge Groups, and be on the same page. Feel free to choose what option is best for your group. There are two options:

1-Week

The 1-week guide is the fast track option that may be beneficial for bi-weekly meeting groups, groups that want to bypass the get-to-know you opportunities, or if you and the participants have all been in groups before. [Access the 1-week guide and other resources.](#)

3-Week

The 3-week guide would be ideal for groups that meet weekly, want to use the guide as a way for group members to get to know each other more, if you are new to leading, or the participants are new to groups.

As you proceed through this guide, we've included **leader meeting outlines** to give you ideas and suggestions to help you lead. For additional tips on relationship-building ideas refer to the Appendix. We pray this study will get your Bridge Group launched well. If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to your campus staff contact.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

WELCOME

Welcome to your new Bridge Group! At the center of this guide is the desire that you will get to know each other and understand the Christian community that we call Bridge Groups. Whether this is your first time in a group at Forest Hill or you've been in groups before, this study is helpful to launch this new group dynamic together well.

In week 1, you'll understand what the elements are that make up a Bridge Group. In week 2, you'll see why Bridge Groups are so important as part of the mission of Forest Hill and the gospel. In week 3, you'll learn how Bridge Groups function well.

As we begin, let's take a look at how the study is put together so you know what to do before your next group meeting.

WEEKLY READING

For each session, you'll be asked to read a section of this book. Please read this section **BEFORE** the group gathers. Each reading is about 2-3 pages.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

After each reading, there are a few questions to help you consider what you've read. Please write out your answers and be prepared to discuss them with your group. Like the weekly reading, these questions should be answered **BEFORE** the group gathers.

We're excited to hear how God will help you grow together to become more like Jesus for your good and for His glory. Get ready! He will do a mighty work.

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MEETING OUTLINE WEEK 1 WHAT ARE BRIDGE GROUPS?

- » Choose 2-3 of the Icebreaker questions to begin your time together:
 - What is your favorite movie?
 - If you could vacation anywhere, where would you go?
 - What famous person would you most like to meet?
 - What was your first job?
 - When traveling, what snack food do you most crave?
 - If you could go to any sporting event, which one would you choose?
 - What is the best meal you've ever eaten?
 - What is your favorite song?
 - If you could watch only one TV show for the rest of your life, what would it be?
 - If you had to give up one of your senses, which one would it be?
- » Consider using the [Shallow Small Groups](#) video to set up discussion. Does being in a Bridge Group truly change anything or is it just something to do?
- » Brief Weekly Reading Recap
- » Discussion Questions

WHAT ARE BRIDGE GROUPS?



WEEKLY READING

When was the last time you went on a trip where you took a flight? Was it work related, a vacation, or to see family or friends?

The common stages of a plane ride are: take off, the flight, and the landing. These stages offer a great analogy that will help as you think about the different stages your group will travel over the next two years together.

» Take Off: 1st 90 Days

Chart your course / Align expectations / Prioritize relationships

» Flight: Middle Months

Stay on course / Avoid routine / Plan the landing

» Landing: Last 90 Days

Talk about the group ending / Talk about what's next / Celebrate successes

This initial study will serve as the runway for your group's takeoff. Although the study includes a few scripture references, you can think of it as more of an opportunity to get to know one another and be introduced together to Bridge Groups. This won't feel like a typical Bible Study, but we hope it helps everyone get on the same page as your group launches. Rest assured, your group will dive into scripture in the studies that follow.

Introduction to Bridge Groups

Most likely, there are a number of you who are new to church, new to Forest Hill or new to groups. Some of you are returning from time away, and others are actively involved now. Wherever you find yourself, you may be wondering “What is a Bridge Group?” Great question!

Bridge Groups are small groups where people meet regularly to grow in Dynamic Life in Christ. In Bridge Groups, everyone will have the opportunity to: **Experience** the gospel, **Engage** in community and **Equip** one another as bridge builders.

Over the next few years, each group will navigate through a curriculum pathway, exploring various studies that fall under these three categories.

Let’s unpack a bit of what each of these three categories will be.

Experience the Gospel

If you’ve heard or seen the term “gospel” before, what was the context for how it was used? How would you define “gospel”? Each of you would likely answer these questions in a variety of ways.

Watch [The Bible Project - The gospel of the Kingdom video](#). How was the “gospel” explained?

Let’s look at how Zacchaeus experiences the gospel. Read Luke 19: 1-9. How did Zacchaeus encounter Jesus? How was Zacchaeus’ life changed as a result? In what ways can you relate to Zacchaeus? This is one of many illustrations of how someone has experienced the gospel. Just as Jesus took the initiative with Zacchaeus, God takes the initiative towards people because of His great love for them.

The gospel, translated “good news” in Greek, can be thought of in a few ways:

- » The gospel is God’s plan of salvation for us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; it is essential to Christian Belief (1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Romans 10:8-10). When a person acknowledges his or her sinfulness and trusts in Jesus as Savior, he or she will come to “experience the gospel” as God’s rescue from sin and the beginning of a new identity and purpose. (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- » The gospel is the means by which Christians understand and experience the grace, unearned favor, and love, of God; it is essential to Christian Growth (Colossians 1:3-6; 2 Peter 3:18) This is a lifelong process of knowing God and becoming more like Jesus in every area of their lives by God’s grace.

Experience the Gospel (cont.)

Which of the following descriptions most closely expresses where you are in your spiritual journey?

- “ Not really sure.
- “ Consider myself a Christian but still have significant questions about Christianity.
- “ Curious about Jesus but not yet at a place I consider myself a Christian.
- “ Consider myself a Christian and have pursued opportunities personally and with others to continue to grow in my experience and understanding of the Christian faith.
- “ Consider myself a Christian but I haven't been actively pursuing growth in my journey.
- “ Consider myself a Christian and have pursued opportunities personally and with others to continue to grow in my experience and understanding of the Christian faith.

In your Bridge Group, a few of you will experience the gospel for the first time as you truly come to understand the good news, while others will experience the gospel as your understanding of God's grace and its influence in your life increases in your journey as a Christian.

You'll grow by doing some Bible studies, learning scripture and praying together, as well as engaging in discussion with one another through sharing your thoughts and hearing from others. These are just some of the places where the gospel will become more real in your life through your Bridge Group.

If you're curious about how you can know God

READ THIS

Engage in Community

What types of communities have been part of your life? What does community look like for you?

If your group was sitting together having a conversation around these questions, a few common themes might surface. One person might talk about the idea that a community shares something in common, like interests, ideas or beliefs. Another would share the tension of building community in the midst of so many life demands. Someone else could add the hope for the group to be “their people.”

There is one thing most everyone would agree on: Community doesn't just “happen.” It requires a degree of relational effort and intentionality. Hopefully, you'll experience that the investment of building community is well worth the cost.

Bridge Groups are a gospel-centered community, where the primary goal is to fulfill the great commandment to love the Lord and one another as God loves us. This posture creates a group environment for people to feel free to be themselves, authentically engage with and care for others, discover their God-given purpose, and use their gifts within the group and beyond.

Some practical ways you'll engage in your Bridge Group community may include vulnerability during group discussion, enjoying a meal together, celebrating fun occasions like birthdays, helping someone going through a challenging time, or hosting some group meetings and cookouts for your neighbors.

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Equip One Another as Bridge Builders

A bridge simply connects two previously disconnected places.

Your Bridge Group will be a place to learn how to engage with people who are not connected to Christ and wouldn't consider themselves Christians. This may provide an opportunity to interact with people who are different than you. Take a moment and think about the names and faces of people in your life—neighbors, co-workers, or the person who consistently crosses your path in places like the grocery store or gym.

Everyone likely has had experiences that shaped their beliefs about God, Jesus and the Christian faith. Becoming a Bridge Builder is simply thinking well about your own spiritual journey which will allow you to take a risk and engage with someone else about their spiritual journey.

In your Bridge Group, you'll learn how to authentically build relationships with people in your personal circle, share your story of how God changed your life, and ultimately, point them to Jesus. As you come together for your meetings, you will encourage each other and share your experiences of building bridges. You may even decide as a group to invite one or two people into your group!



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What excites you most about being a part of a Bridge Group?
2. What questions or concerns do you have about being a part of a Bridge Group?
3. Which one of the 3 “E” statements about groups is most appealing to you in this season of your life? Why?
4. Which of the 3 areas would you like to grow in over the next 2 years?
5. How was the weekly reading or video helpful in your understanding of the term “gospel?”
6. What are you looking forward to most in building community with people in the group?
7. How do you hope you can use and develop your gifts in and outside of this group?
8. What are some challenges in relating to people who are different than you?
9. What is a simple way to connect with anyone?
10. Who are 1 or 2 people that you can build a bridge to in your neighborhood, workplace, or community?

MEETING OUTLINE WEEK 2: WHY BRIDGE GROUPS?

» Choose 2-3 of the Icebreaker questions to begin your time together

- As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?
- What does a perfect weekend look like for you?
- What books have influenced you the most?
- What does adventure look like for you?
- What drives you crazy?
- Which of your accomplishments are you most proud of?
- Would you describe yourself as more laid-back or more intense? Why?
- What subject or topic are you currently interested in?
- What is one invention you don't want to live without?
- What is your favorite month of the year?

» Show the FHC Mission, Vision, Values video.

- Ask “What stood out to you in the video?”

» Brief Weekly Reading Recap:

- Consider having different people read the FHC Mission, Vision, and Values

» Discussion Questions

WHY BRIDGE GROUPS?



WEEKLY READING

Think about a few memorable experiences you have had in community. What made them special or unique?

The relationships you made and the shared sense of purpose were probably most memorable. God hardwired the human heart with a desire to belong to something that is bigger than itself.

This design is a reflection of the relational triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and His creation of man for relationship with Him. Likewise, from the beginning with Adam and Eve, mankind was made for community with Him and with others.

Over 2,000 years ago, this was also true of Jesus. He often went out into large crowds to teach, eat, and heal, but His close

relationships were with His small group of 12 disciples. That's who Jesus “did life with”. After Jesus' resurrection, a small community began which the Bible calls an “Ecclesia” or assembly (Acts 9:2, 19:9). Together this small group of Jesus followers audaciously cherished, celebrated, and shared the good news of the gospel with others.

Take a moment now to read Acts 2:42-47 to get a glimpse of the early church.

What did this community share together? What do you imagine it was like to be a part of this group of people? If the Christians in Acts had a mission, vision and values, what do you think they'd be?

Today, Jesus continues to capture the hearts and minds of many people through the community we call “the church”. Bridge Groups exist to provide a smaller environment within the church where people can grow relationally and do life together. But God’s mission for Christians is more than just being in community with one another. He also calls His followers to tell others about Him so they can know Him as well. Forest Hill’s mission, vision and values are rooted in the Bible and over 2,000 years of this Christian movement that centers on Jesus Christ. We created Bridge Groups as a place to live out the greater mission of God to be in community and invite others into the goodness of the gospel.

[Watch Forest Hill’s mission & vision video](#)

LET’S TAKE A LOOK AT FOREST HILL’S VISION, MISSION & VALUES:

MISSION (Why we exist)

Building Bridges that connect Everyone to Dynamic Life in Christ.

VISION (Where we are going)

Bringing Heaven to Greater Charlotte One Person at a Time.

VALUES (What we believe)

» **Stand on the Essentials**

We keep Jesus first, prioritize the gospel, and are rooted in the authority of Scripture and led by the Holy Spirit. We believe the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testament are a complete and unified witness to God’s character and redemptive acts culminating in the incarnation of the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. Being Truth, we submit all areas of our life to it. (Colossians 1:15-20; Ephesians 2:4-5; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

» **Engage Who’s Next**

We believe the rising generation is the future of the church, requiring us to reach and develop them as disciples and leaders. Discipling, mentoring and developing all young people—from babies through young adults-- is a top priority in our church. (Psalm 78: 5-9; Matthew 19:13-15; Luke 15:11-32; Psalm 71: 15-18; Deuteronomy 6:7)

» **Cultivate Kingdom Diversity**

We believe God’s love for the whole world compels us to break down barriers and be a church where all people belong. We will strive for a multiplicity in ethnicity, gender, age, culture and socio-economic status to be reflected across our staff, elders, deacons and congregation. (John 3:16; Matthew 28:18-20; Revelation 7:9-11; Romans 12: 4-5; 1 Corinthians 12: 12-14, 18)

» **Live on Mission**

We believe each person is called to live out the Great Commission to make disciples in all the places they live, work and play. With our words and our actions, we want to share the good news of the Gospel and invite others to know and follow Jesus. (Matthew 5:13-16 and 28:18-20, Acts 1:8.)

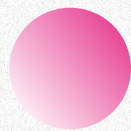


BUILDING BRIDGES

that connect Everyone to
Dynamic Life in Christ.

So what does all this mean? What will happen if Forest Hill is living on mission and sees our vision come to life?

We envision every part of our city impacted by the message and power of the Gospel through our words, our actions and our resources. However, we know that this message cannot go out from us until it grows deeply in us, through the power of the Spirit, as we pray, spend time in God's Word and love others. Then all of our lives will reflect all of who God is, so that we can help bring the Kingdom of Heaven to everyone, one person at a time.



What did you find compelling? How do you think our Mission, Vision, and Values relate to what you read about the early church in Acts 2?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did God create community?
2. What did you find most attractive about the community in Acts 2?
3. How can your Bridge Group be like the community in Acts 2?
4. How is the smaller environment of your Bridge Group more conducive to engaging in community?
5. How does Forest Hill's Mission, Vision and Values relate to God's mission for the world?
6. What resonates with you about Forest Hill's Mission, Vision and Values?
7. What ways can your group practically live out the Mission, Vision and Values?

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MEETING OUTLINE WEEK 3: HOW DO BRIDGE GROUPS WORK?

» Choose 2-3 of the Icebreaker questions to begin your time.

- What stresses you out?
- What is the best advice you've ever received?
- Do you care more about pleasing people or speaking the truth?
- What lasting lesson did your family teach you?
- What is the favorite organization or cause to contribute to?
- Who do you look up to?
- What is one of your strengths?
- What is one of your strongest childhood memories?
- What is one of your goals for the future?
- If you could relive any moment of your past, which one would you choose?

» Brief Weekly Reading Recap:

- Show Up
- Join In
- Be Yourself

» Discussion Questions

» Is this group for you?

» Leader stories set up

HOW DO BRIDGE GROUPS WORK?



WEEKLY READING

Have you ever experienced a group that you would say was “healthy”? What about one that was “unhealthy”? How would you describe the differences between the two?

Healthy groups can be a great source of learning and growth, while unhealthy groups can lead to frustration and even stagnation.

What do you think would make a healthy group experience for participants of Bridge Groups?

Everyone brings expectations into new group settings—expectations of yourself, others, and even how the group should operate. A great place to start laying a foundation for a “healthy” group dynamic is by considering the expectations people are bringing in to the group. For instance, some topics that may cross your mind are attendance, engagement with each other outside of group, and how the group meeting time is spent.

What specific expectations have you noticed that you are bringing to group?

It would also be helpful to think about how you typically respond to unmet expectations. Do you become critical, go quiet, or simply withdraw from conversation? In group settings, unmet expectations can materialize in a variety of ways that impact the overall health of the group.

Setting healthy group expectations upfront creates a safe space where members can grow both relationally and spiritually. Here are a few areas to consider as you work together towards creating a healthy group:

Show up (be present)

- **Attendance:** Make group a priority. You will get out of group what you put in, and if you're not there, everyone is affected.

Join in (be prepared)

- **Communication:** Notify the leader if you need to miss a group meeting. Your input is valuable—prepare for and participate in the group discussion and keep in touch outside of group.
- **Confidentiality:** It's important to create a safe place, establishing trust, so that everyone can connect and grow. What's said in group, stays in group—no gossiping.
- **Show kindness:** Encourage one another, care and celebrate one another, support each other in difficult times, and be respectful.
- **Listen well:** This is the best posture to care and learn. Seek to understand, rather than judging or trying to fix.
- **God's Lens:** Use Scripture as the basis of Authority and truth. Everyone is created in God's image; we can learn to see and love others as God does.

Be yourself (be real)

- **Authenticity:** Be transparent, honest, and real.
- **Believe:** You have a unique perspective and set of experiences to contribute. Use your gifts within the group.
- **Freedom:** You and your group members are likely in different places when it comes to your life circumstances, spiritual journeys, and relational experiences. Experience the freedom to be where you are in those areas.

Take a moment to read through 1 Corinthians 12:12–27. How does the passage establish a healthy model for this Bridge Group?

Paul refers to a community of believers as the body of Christ. Just like a human body is made up of many parts, the church body is comprised of many believers connected by the Holy Spirit. Each person rejoices and suffers together. No one part is greater than the others and Christ is the head. A healthy Bridge Group recognizes the value of its members and works together to show up, join in, and be yourself.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you imagine this group will be similar and different to your other group experiences?
2. How does understanding your expectations and how you react to unmet expectations help as you begin this group?
3. Why do you think it is important for everyone in your group to agree to show up, join in and be yourself?
4. Which of the 3 may be difficult for you or the group?
5. How can the difficulties be overcome?
6. How will you personally take steps to show up, join in, and be yourself?
7. How does the body of Christ analogy support Show Up, Join In, Be Yourself?

Is this group for you?

Hopefully, you enjoyed getting to know the people in your group and learning about Bridge Groups. Feel free to ask your leader any questions you may have as you consider moving forward with joining this group. Take time to decide if this group will be a fit for you.

If you decide to stay in this group, that's great! We're excited for what God is going to do in you and through you in this group! If you don't think this group is a good fit, please be sure to let the group leader know and ask them to help you get in touch with their campus staff contact to learn about other options.

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LEADER STORIES SET UP

- » **End the group today by sharing your story (7-10 minutes) to model vulnerability and authenticity for the group. To help you shape what you share, feel free to use these questions:**
 - Where are you from?
 - What is your family like? What is your relationship with them?
 - What activities are you good at or enjoy most?
 - Describe a person or event who influenced who you are today?
 - If you're a Christian, share how your relationship with Christ began.
- » **Ask group members to give encouragement of where they see God in your story and/or highlight your strengths/ uniqueness.**

Your group members will begin to share their stories at the next meeting and also receive encouragement from other group members. Take as many meetings as needed until everyone is able to share. (This is an opportunity to bond and get to know each other a little more.)

APPENDIX: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

- » Bridge Groups are a place where we can grow to become more like Jesus. That growth happens best in community with others. Authentic relationships are not the purpose of Bridge Groups, but that doesn't mean they aren't important. Authentic relationships are the fertile ground which help us grow. In Bridge Groups we share our lives with each other, encourage, and even challenge each other to live like Christ. Doing this requires us to open up about who we really are and what we really think.
- » In these early stages of your Bridge Group, helping your group members get to know each other is crucial to lay the groundwork for authentic relationships. Over the course of this study, you'll have a chance to do some story-telling and work together to shape this group. But, if you as the leader feel you need to focus the first week on building relationships by playing games, please feel free to do that and then begin this study the second week. Just make sure to communicate that plan to your group.
- » There is no shortage of "getting to know you" games out there. But we've included a few of our favorites below. We pray that God will draw you and your group closer together in order to help each of you follow Him more.
 - **Two Truths and a Lie:** Have a group member come up with two things about themselves or their life that is true, and one that is not true. Then, have the group guess which one is false.
 - **Hobby Guessing Game:** Have each group member write his or her favorite hobby or thing to do on a note card. Collect the cards and, without letting the person see, tape a card to the person's

- forehead. Allow them to go around asking yes/no questions until they guess it right. Then match the person who wrote the card with the hobby.
- **Fishbowl Game:** Before the group meets, cut slips of paper (enough for 3 for each person). At the beginning of the meeting, have each person take 3 slips of paper and write down a question to help them get to know each other. The questions cannot be yes/no, and if they can be answered with a word or short phrase, they must include a follow-up (i.e. "What is your favorite food? What do you like about that food?") Each person folds their slips of paper in half and puts them in a large bowl. The leader then starts by pulling out a slip of paper and answering the question. After answering the question, the leader passes the bowl to the person on his or her left who takes a slip of paper and answers the question. If you draw your own question, put it back in the bowl and draw again.
- **Using Story Cards:** Story Cards are an excellent resource to consider using along with the initial icebreaker questions. They are extremely useful for helping your group to open up to more difficult topics. If you are interested in using the Story Cards, ask your campus staff for a set.



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