

LIFE GROUP

## LAUNCH LEADER GUIDE



### INTRODUCTION

We want to thank you for committing to lead this Life 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 Life 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 guides** to give you ideas and suggestions to help you lead. For additional tips on leading this study well, relationship-building ideas, and how to use Story Cards, refer to the Appendixes. We pray this study will get your Life 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 Life 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 Life 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 Life Group. In week 2, you'll see why Life Groups are so important as part of the mission of Forest Hill and the gospel. In week 3, you'll learn how Life 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.

### MEETING OUTLINE WEEK 1 WHAT ARE LIFE 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 <u>Shallow Small Groups</u> video to set up discussion. Does being in a Life Group truly change anything or is it just something to do?
- » Brief Weekly Reading Recap
- >> Discussion Questions

## WHAT ARE LIFE 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 and 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 Life 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.

## LIFE GROUP **FLIGHT PLAN**

### **TAKEOFF**







### RELATIONSHIPS

Groups that enjoy one another tend to grow.



### **FLIGHT** MIDDLE MONTHS







### AVOID ROUTINE

A predictable environment helps everyone feel safe. Plan interruptions to the normal rhythm of meetings by organizing socials, retreats, and bridge building opportunities.



### PLAN THE LANDING

If you launched your group without an apprentice, consider who could serve in this role and make a plan to involve them.



### **LANDING**



Not talking about multiplication sets you up for a bad experience. Be intentional about celebrating, encouraging, and having fun.



Encourage and challenge one another to take next steps. Connect your apprentice and other potential leaders to a campus discipleship staff.



### CELEBRATE SUCCESSES

Point out growth when you see it and then celebrate it. Take time to remember everything you've shared.



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### Introduction to Life 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 Life Group?" Great question!

Life Groups are small groups where people meet regularly to help the next person take their next step in relationship with Jesus Christ. In Life Groups, everyone will have the opportunity: **Experience** the gospel, **Engage** in community and **Equip** one another to live as ambassadors.

Over the next few years, each group will explore various studies that fall under these three categories.

WEEK 1

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 was it 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.
- Curious about Jesus but not yet at a place I consider myself a Christian.
- Consider myself a Christian but I haven't been actively pursuing growth in my journey.
- Consider myself a Christian but still have significant questions about Christianity.
- 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 Life 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.

If you're curious about how you can know God

**READ THIS** 

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

### **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.

Life 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 Life 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.



your Life Group.



### **Equip One Another as Ambassador**

The United States has ambassadors in countries all around the world. What are their jobs? How are they the same as the people in the culture around them? How are they different?

Ambassadors are people who live in one place but who represent the culture and values of another place.

As Christians, we are called to live as ambassadors in the places where we live, work, and play (2 Cor 5:20).

You represent the kingdom and show others what Jesus values and how he calls us to live. In your Life Group you will spend some time talking about how to live in the culture of the world while representing the Kingdom of God. You could talk about how to share your faith in Christ or pray for your friends and neighbors who don't know Jesus. You may discuss how to navigate tough cultural situations with Biblical truth and Christ-like humility and grace. All of these are ways you will equip one another to live as ambassadors in the places where you live, work and play. Then togehter you all can bring Heaven to the greater Charlotte area!

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- **1.** What excites you most about being a part of a Life Group?
- **2.** What questions or concerns do you have about being a part of a Life 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 is a simple way to connect with anyone?
- **9.** Who are 1 or 2 people to in your neighborhood, workplace, or community who don't know Christ? How can you start to pray for them?

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### MEETING OUTLINE WEEK 2: WHY LIFE 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?

### » Brief Weekly Reading Recap:

- Consider having different people read the FHC Mission, Vision, and the Five Marks of a Disciple.
- » Discussion Questions

## WHY LIFE 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?

















### many people through the community we call "the church". Life 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 and vision are rooted in the Bible and over 2,000 years of this Christian movement that centers on Jesus Christ. We created Life 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.

Today, Jesus continues to capture the hearts and minds of

### LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT FOREST HILL'S **VISION, MISSION & VALUES:**

### MISSION (Why we exist)

Helping the Next Person take the Next Step in their relationship with Jesus

### **VISION** (Where we are going)

Bring Heaven to Greater Charlotte One Person at a time.

### **FIVE MARKS OF A DISCIPLE**

### » Believe in Jesus

How does a disciple internally change when they believe in Jesus? By cultivating a personal relationship with Christ through faith, worship, and trust and professing Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Savior: We come to Jesus in faith, recognizing Him as the One who has saved us from sin and death through His sacrifice.

Lord: We continually submit to Jesus as Lord, aligning our lives under His authority and sovereign will.

How does a disciple live out that they believe in Jesus? By publicly confessing Jesus as Lord and demonstrating faith in their actions.

### **Choose Community**

How does a disciple internally change when they choose community?

By developing Christcentered relationships and experiencing spiritual growth through fellowship.

How does a disciple live when they choose community?

By actively participating in and contributing to the church community through participating in worship service, being a part of a group and caring for others.

### » Serve the Cause

How does a disciple internally change when they serve the cause?

By having their hearts transformed by Christ and becoming more loving and humble as they participate in serving.



How does a disciple live when they serve the cause?

By actively serving in the church and broader community, following the example of Christ's service through ministry teams, outreach programs, and caring for the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of others.

### » Invest in the Kingdom

How does a disciple internally change when they invest in the Kingdom?

By living with an eternal perspective and prioritizing God's kingdom over earthly desires.

How does a disciple live when they invest in the kingdom?

By generously giving their time, talents, and finances for the advancement of God's kingdom through tithing and giving offerings regularly, supporting missionaries and ministries, volunteering time and skills for kingdom work.

### » Live as an Ambassador

How does a disciple internally change when they live as an ambassador?

By embodying Christ-like character and values in everyday life through being rooted in the Gospel.

How does a disciple live when they live as an ambassador?

By boldly sharing the Gospel with others and representing Christ in all areas of life.

What did you find compelling? How do you think our Mission, Vision, and Five Marks of a Disciple 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 Life Group be like the community in Acts 2?
- **4.** How is the smaller environment of your Life Group more conducive to engaging in community?
- **5.** How does Forest Hill's Mission, Vision, and Five Marks of a Disciple relate to God's mission for the world?
- **6.** What resonates with you about Forest Hill's Mission, Vision, and Five Marks of a Disciple?
- **7.** What ways can your group practically live out the Mission, Vision, and Five Marks of a Disciple?

### MEETING OUTLINE WEEK 3: HOW DO LIFE 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 LIFE 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 Life 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 Life 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 Life Group recognizes the value of its members and works together to show up, join in, and be yourself.

### Is this group for you?

Hopefully, you enjoyed getting to know the people in your group and learning about Life 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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### **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?

### **LEADER**

### 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**

- » Life 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 Life Groups, but that doesn't mean they aren't important. Authentic relationships are the fertile ground which help us grow. In LifeGroups 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 LifeGroup, 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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