

INITIAL MEETINGS

Are you wondering what to do during your first meetings together? Should you just jump right into a Bible study or book discussion or do something different?

To answer that question, pause and think for a few minutes about what makes *you* comfortable in a group setting. It is likely that you are comfortable when you have: 1) relational trust with people and 2) understand the purpose of why you are together.

Here is the recommended plan for the first three weeks of meetings to establish relational trust and present clear expectations in your Life Group:

MEETING ONE

- As your new group gathers for the first time, let the natural meet-and-greet time continue naturally as long as it is not uncomfortable. Give people an opportunity to get to know each other. CAVEAT: if your group members do not know each other *at all*, consider having less unstructured time at the beginning and instead leave 20-25 minutes for this at the end. **Do not plan to split apart for gender-based accountability in this meeting.**
- When you progress to having people sit down for discussion, introduce yourself and welcome everyone to the group. Then share your testimony with the group. Take your time and do not skip important details about your story, but you don't have all night just for you either – think 8-10 minutes. Then progress to the co-leaders of your group. **The leaders set the tone for the level of vulnerability in the group.** Keep this in mind as you share and include appropriate levels of vulnerability in your story as this will set the culture for that in the group.
- **Finish the first meeting by walking through the Life Group expectations document included at the end of this manual (Appendix D).** Establishing expectations eliminates unnecessary frustration between group members and leaders and charts a clear course for the purpose of the group. This is a good time to cover the content you plan to study, meeting location and schedule, and other logistics.

MEETINGS TWO AND THREE

- **Plan to cover people's testimonies over the course of the next two meetings together and split apart for gender-based accountability and prayer.** The goal of the accountability time is vulnerability and repentance, with people looking to Christ as their hope and help, growing in their trust in Him.

- **In the third meeting, before you split apart for accountability, cast the vision of each Life Group multiplying after two to three years.** Take your time explaining this to your group and encourage questions so everyone understands the purpose of this strategy. This clearly defines expectations from the beginning that Life Groups are about growth and multiplication, not a stagnant community. If you have a co-leader or co-leading couple from the beginning of your group, explain that the co-leader(s) plan to launch out with some of the people in the group over time. If you start without a co-leader, note that there is a need for one and encourage people to pray about it.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

As people share their stories, do not passively listen to them! Remember the first step in our Path of Discipleship is Convert to Christ. We do not assume salvation at Redeemer Church! You are listening to hear any concerning statements as they share their story., i.e., "I know I am a Christian because I generally do the right thing." Or "I have always believed in Jesus." DO NOT confront these concerning statements, or others like them, in public. But if you are left wondering about anyone's salvation, please schedule a time for lunch or coffee with that person directly following the initial meeting and dig into their stories more. **Getting comfortable having uncomfortable conversations is vital for a Life Group leader. Discipling others includes confronting concerning beliefs and/or behavior lovingly.**

If you follow these steps, you will establish your group well and be ready to carry out the traditional schedule afterward!