

LIFEGROUPS

LEADER HANDBOOK

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What is a Life Group?

A life group is a small gathering of people where you grow in your relationship with God and others so you can better impact your world.

What makes up a Life Group?

3 Parts:

1. **Relational** – a group of at least 3 people (2 people plus a leader) sharing life together
2. **Focus** – a Christ centered focus for existence; a focus or mission that results in discipleship
3. **Leader** – a person tasked with leading those in the group to grow in their relationship with God and impact the world around them.



Groups Do 6 Things:

1. Care and pray for each other daily
2. Meet together weekly
3. Serve together at least one time per session
4. Invest in developing an apprentice
5. Have fun together
6. Open to receiving new group members

Why does Salem have Life Groups?

Life Groups are the best environment for sustained life change.

It's where people get to know you and your story AND you get to know them and their story. It's where everyone is reminded that no one is perfect!!! It's where relationships are built. The Bible is not just talked about in a Life Group but it's lived out. Together you discover what it means to follow and honor Jesus as you face real world problems. When you surround yourself with the right people, they help you grow into the person God wants you to be so you can do what God wants you to do.

Why are Life Groups so important?

1. Life Groups help people grow spiritually as they become connected with others.
2. Life Groups create an environment where people can offer care and prayer for one another.
3. Life Groups help people become engaged in serving which helps them grow in their faith.
4. Life Groups allow people to focus on their passion.
5. Life Groups help people move from attendees of a church to owners of their church.

How are Life Groups organized?

Leadership structure:

- **Leader** - helps each group member take the next step in their spiritual growth journey
- **Coach** - champions the group leader and does what is in their power to make them successful
- **Director/Pastor** - lead coaches by coordinating and providing vision for specific groups
- **Apprentice** - strategically identified and being developed to take a new role (leader, coach, director, champion)

What does a Life Group Leader do?

Leader's job description:

- Recruit members for their group
- Pray for group members once per day
- Lead group once a week
- Meet with their coach once a month
- Develop an apprentice regularly

What does a Life Group Coach do?

Coach's job description:

- Pray for leaders once a day
- Communicate with leaders once a week
- Meet with leaders once every other month
- Participate in team leader meetings
- Invest in a new apprentice at least one time per session

Where and when do Life Groups happen?

Meeting location options:

- On-Site: At the church during regular building hours
- Off-Site: In your home, a restaurant, a coffee shop...it's entirely up to you

Frequency:

- Life Groups begin three times per year

Session Overview:

- **Fall** – October and November
- **Spring** – February through April
- **Summer** – June and August

Why three times per year?

- **Flow of life** – it allows us to harness the natural rhythm of life in our community
- **Entry/Exit** – it gives people clear and easy entry/exit points
- **Targeted Discipleship** – it allows people and groups to adjust the focus more easily to specific needs or opportunities as they arise
- **Rest** – it gives leaders a much needed rest
- **Momentum** – it allows three, strategic opportunities to promote and launch new groups

Does my Life Group have to take a break each session?

No. Once your group is up and running, you may decide to keep it going. While the three sessions per year approach sets a good pace for all groups, it is especially helpful for groups that are beginning.

What resources are available for Life Groups?

Salem Resource Library (located in the NEXT Center)

Right Now Media

Right Now media is essentially the “Netflix of Video Bible Studies,” because you have instant access to thousands of great videos for children, youth, parents, married couples and more! You can view these videos from your phone, tablet or computer. Also, you can view them in a group setting using a TV or projector ... perfect for your small group! Once you sign up you will have FREE access to this library. Preview what's available at rightnowmedia.org.

Ready to sign up for Right Now Media?

Send an email to rightnow@saalemchurch.org with “YES” in the subject line. That will tell us we have your permission to pass your email address along to Right Now Media. You will receive an email from Right Now Media with instructions on how to set up your own account in a matter of minutes.

How will childcare needs be handled?

Childcare can be a challenge for Life Groups. To help remove that obstacle, here are two resources that can help:

- 1. Wednesday nights:** If your group meets on Wednesday night (at home or on campus) Salem Kids and Salem Youth are a great connecting point for your kids. However, please be sure to confirm that their meeting schedule aligns with your Life Group schedule before finalizing your plans.
- 2. Childcare Reimbursement Program** - Forms are available online, in the church office or will be e-mailed upon request and must be submitted within 30 days of the event in order for you to be reimbursed.



Life Groups Childcare Reimbursement Form

Reimbursement payable to:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Reimbursement is available for church designated events.
Please fill out ONE form per event.
Form must be submitted within 30 days of event.

Ministry Area Event	Date	# of Children	# of Hours	Amount
Life Groups				

Please use the chart below.

Reimbursement Chart:				
Number of Children	1 Hour	2 Hours	3 Hours	4 Hours (maximum)
1	\$7.00	\$14.00	\$21.00	\$28.00
2	\$7.50	\$15.00	\$22.50	\$30.00
3	\$8.00	\$16.00	\$24.00	\$32.00
4	\$8.50	\$17.00	\$25.50	\$34.00
5 or more	\$9.00	\$18.00	\$27.00	\$45.00 maximum

Childcare Reimbursement
<i>Office Use Only</i>
Today's date: _____
Requested by: _____
Account #: _____

Return this form to the office of Salem Church of God.

Revised 11/03/16

How do Life Groups grow at Salem?

1) Personal invitation - Since the beginning of time, it has been God's desire to create a people who would have fellowship with Him for all eternity. Some groups will grow by the power of a personal invitation as some may be more likely to come to a friend's house before they would a church service.

2) Leader Multiplication – Leaders are responsible to help those in their group grow spiritually. Along the way, it may become obvious that the next step for someone in the group is to become the leader of another group. At that point, the group's role is to commission that person and celebrate with them as they lead out of their God ordained passion.

3) Focused Promotion Periods – The session-based focus provides the perfect opportunity for a focused promotion blitz three times a year (January, May and August). This creates a lot of energy and encouragement for people to get into a Life Group.

How do I sign-up to lead a Life Group?

Life Group Leader Participation Form:

Complete the Life Group Leader Participation Form. Forms are available online, in the church office or will be e-mailed upon request.

LIFEGROUPS Life Group Leader Participation Form

Instructions: Turn-in completed form to Betty Scheibly.
937-836-6500 ext. 104 or b.scheibly@salemchurch.org

Life Group Name: _____

Life Group Leader(s): _____

Phone number: _____ E-mail: _____

Address: _____

My group is... new existing

I am open to receiving new members... yes no

My group is... Short Term: start date: __/__/__ stop date: __/__/__
 Ongoing

My group meets... Off-Campus—Location/address: _____
 On-Campus *Note: Campus availability must be scheduled and confirmed.*

My group meets... Weekly
 Other—please specify: _____

My group meets on... Sun. Mon. Tues. Wed. Thurs. Fri. Sat.

My group meets from ____:____ a.m./p.m. to ____:____ a.m./p.m.

My group provides childcare... yes no *Note: On-campus childcare must meet our safety and security requirements and is subject to approval by the Children's Ministry department.*

Please indicate which category best describes your group. You may check more than one option, if needed.

Geographical Group Location: _____

Outreach Group Focus: _____

Affinity Group Category:

Singles Married Young Adults Men Women Older Adults

Other _____

Activity Group Focus:

Bible study Sports/Recreation Exercise Arts/Crafts

Other _____

Additional details about your group not noted above...

My group will be focusing on: _____

Educational resources required for this Life Group... none as noted below

Name of book: _____

Author: _____ Publisher: _____

ISBN: _____ *Note: Educational resources are the responsibility of the individual.*

How do I facilitate a Life Group?

Element #1: The Icebreaker- An icebreaker can be a fun or thought-provoking question. Its purpose is simply to create conversation and enjoy one another so genuine sharing can take place.

Just for fun...listed below are 5 really bad group icebreakers!

- 1. Share the worst sin you've ever committed.*
- 2. If you were God, who would you punish first?*
- 3. Which person in this group do you think needs to find Jesus the most?*
- 4. Share the juiciest piece of gossip you know so that we can pray about it.*
- 5. If you could change anything about your spouse, what would it be?*

These questions are a surefire way to destroy the environment you want to create in your community group. Here are some examples of good icebreaker questions:

5 really good icebreakers!

- 1. What happened this week that you are celebrating?*
- 2. If you could travel anywhere in the world where would you go?*
- 3. If you knew you could try anything and not fail, what dream would you attempt?*
- 4. If you had 5 million dollars to spend in 5 days, but couldn't spend any of it on yourself or your family, what would you do with it?*
- 5. "2 Truths and a Lie" – Share 3 unique things about yourself and your life. Two of them true and one of them false. Then the group will guess which one isn't true.*

How do I facilitate a Life Group?

Element #2: The Prayer Time - Prayer is an important element in a Life Group but it doesn't always have to look the same.

Often a new group will go through their group time and at the end the group leader will take prayer requests and lead a closing prayer. As the group builds trust, the leader may ask the apprentice leader or random members to lead prayer. *(Caution should be used when asking people to pray. Some people have never prayed out loud and surprising them by asking them to pray will strike the fear of God in some.)*

As the group develops you may have some meetings where the men pray in one room while the women meet to pray in another. There could be times when you break into groups of 2 or 3. You may also introduce different prayer techniques. (Please refer to page 22 in the handbook for more ideas.)

Have someone (perhaps the apprentice leader) record the prayer requests. This accomplishes at least two things.

1. They can email the prayer requests during the week so group members can be praying for each request.
2. They can also record answered prayers. It is incredibly encouraging to see and share answered prayers with all group members.

Element #3: The Social Element - To create an environment where spiritual and relational growth will naturally occur, there must be a level of comfort and enjoyment. If group loses this element it can quickly become a CLASS people attend rather than a COMMUNITY they enjoy.

One of the best ways to encourage this is to schedule time into the Life Group that allows for people to connect and relax. Often time, doing this over a meal, works great! Many groups allow 15 to 30 minutes at the beginning of each gathering for people to enjoy snacks and hang out before any official activities begin. Then the icebreaker transitions the meeting into the next phase. Find what works best for your group and go with it.

Another important way to allow for social time in a small group setting is to plan social gatherings with no agenda other than to simply enjoy each other. You can also use these events to invite others into the Life Group dynamic. Here are some good examples:

- Serve together
- Plan a Christmas party or a Super-bowl party
- Enjoy a summer cookout
- Go out to dinner or dessert together
- Play a round of mini-golf, ride go carts, see a movie together, etc.
- Go see a Dayton Dragons game
- Women do one thing while men do something else together

How do I facilitate a Life Group?

Element #4) –The Discussion - The actual discussion usually takes up the bulk of the group time together. Here are some tips to keep in mind to make the discussion time flow naturally and help people get the most of the time together.

1. **Remember**, you don't need to have all the right answers. Your job is to ask good questions that create conversation. Conversation will lead to authentic sharing, discovery and real learning.
2. **Remember**, the goal isn't simply to get through the material, but to facilitate growth and relationships. Remain flexible as you move through material. You may find that the conversation moves in a different direction, but that direction is important enough to stay with. You have permission to let the conversation move in whatever way you think is most helpful. That being said...don't let it get off on bunny trails that are unproductive.
3. **Remember**, to pray for the group meeting before it begins. As a leader you need the Holy Spirit to give you insight into the lives of your group. The Spirit can even help you sense what someone's body language is saying, but you have to ask God to help you see with His eyes and hear with His ears. And, as He guides you, there will most certainly be times when you are working on God's agenda and you will know it. Those times will prove to be the best and most memorable times for your group.

Resource: "Turbo Group Training" from Community Christian Church

Life Group ground rules...

Every small group needs guidelines to function effectively. Your small group should agree on some basic parameters so that your group doesn't spin out of control, fall apart or lose its way.

Be great listeners.

When someone is talking, make eye contact. Pay attention to what the person is saying instead of thinking about what you'll say next.

End on time.

If you have kids, this may really be important. It also helps group members know what to expect and that you value everyone's time. Once the group gets going, this may not matter as much, but it is really important for a group that is just starting out.

Give examples, not advice.

Instead of feeling like you need to give advice if someone's struggling, try giving an example from your own life that relates.

Keep it confidential.

What's said in the group, stays in the group.

Show up.

Commit to worshiping and attending your small group meeting weekly.

Be real.

Bring your authentic self to this journey. Genuinely engage in your Life Group. Let yourself be vulnerable. It's better this way.

Unplug.

Consider a "hands off technology" approach where everyone puts their phones away during each meeting. This ensures that everyone is all-in without distraction...after you check in on Facebook, of course.

If these ground rules work for your group, great! If not, then work together to find what works best for your group. As you move forward, hold each other accountable.

Life Group ground rules...

God used covenants with his people and considers this form of agreement important. At Salem we encourage you to set-up healthy guidelines for your Life Group as soon as your group begins. In fact, you may even want to ask your group members to create their own agreement.

Pictured below is an example of a Life Group Agreement. If something like this would be helpful for your group, you can create your own or use the one we've created. Copies of the Life Group Agreement are available online, in the church office or will be e-mailed upon request. Contact groups@salemchurch.org for more information.

LIFEGROUPS Group Agreement

Purpose

To provide a predictable environment where group members grow in their relationship with God and others so that they can better impact their world.

Values and Goals

Relationships

While prayer and discussion of curriculum are key elements, the driving force behind the group is the building of relationships.

Authenticity

The atmosphere should encourage openness and transparency among members. This is an environment where people should feel free to be themselves.

Confidentiality

For authenticity to occur, members must be able to trust that issues discussed within the group will not be shared outside the group.

Respect

Group member should never say anything that will embarrass their spouses or other members of the group.

Availability

A primary responsibility of the group is to prioritize for specific relationships. This requires a willingness to be available to meet one another's needs.

Multiplication

Group members recognize that one of the goals of their group is to start a new group within the life cycle of the group. This allows others to experience the Life Group relationship.

Serving

Group members recognize the importance of living out their faith by intentionally looking for opportunities to serve others at least one time per session.

Group Guidelines

1. The group will meet from ___/___/___ through ___/___/___.
2. The group will meet weekly on _____ (day of the week)
3. The group sessions will begin at ___:___ a.m./p.m. and end at ___:___ a.m./p.m.
4. The group time will typically consist of ___ minutes of sharing, ___ minutes of study/discussion and ___ minutes of prayer.
5. Group members will attend and participate on a regular basis.
6. Members agree to pray and care for other group members on a weekly basis.
7. The group is intentional about planning a time to serve together at least one time per session.

I commit together with the other members of this group to honor this agreement.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Seven ways to deal with problems in your group...

Life Groups are made up of human being. From time-to-time, you may experience a few problems. While a Life Group Agreement will cover all the general guidelines your group will need to get along as a community, chances are good that it won't cover everything

Listed below is an overview of the basic ways to deal with problems in your group:

- **Pray** – Seek God in prayer by praying for the situation and for guidance regarding the problem.
- **Look to Scripture** – Search the Scriptures to find out what God's word says about the problem.
- **Develop a Core** – Be wise in developing core group members who will help you pray for the group, provide feedback and deal with some of the administrative issues of leading a small group.
- **Identify an Apprentice or Intern** – Intentionally raise up and mentor a future leader who can take on the additional responsibility of helping lead and care for the group.
- **Take Charge** –Failing to do what you need to do (perhaps because you fear offending the source of the problem) is one of the worst things you can do. When you attain a clear sense of God's direction, you should do one thing...obey.
- **Talk with your Life Group Coach or Pastor/Director** – Some problems you encounter will be beyond your ability or experience to address. It's a sign of maturity when you realize that you don't know what to do. Talk with the person who oversees you and your group.
- **Refer** – If someone shares a chronic or potentially harmful problem – such as a troubled marriage, chronic depression, suicidal thoughts, sexual sins or abuse – refer that group member to a pastor.

Resource: *Small Group Ministry in the 21st Century*. (2005). Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, Inc.

How do I deal with different personalities in my group?

The Over-Talker: This person tends to dominate the discussion no matter what the topic. Nearly every group has one.

- Tip #1: Remind the group that you want everyone to participate in the dialogue.
- Tip #2: Yell at the person and tell them to pipe down! (Just playing)
- Tip #3: If the person is dominating the dialogue simply cut in and say, "Let's see what someone else has to say." (Many people know they talk too much, a gentle reminder to let others talk is usually enough.)
- Tip #4: Pull the person aside privately and affirm them and their input but tell them you need to make sure everyone else is participating. You can even work out a private signal that you can give them if they are talking too much.

The Non-Talker: This is the quiet person who probably doesn't feel comfortable to share even in a small group.

- Tip #1: Call on them occasionally. Sometimes just saying their name and asking, "What do you think about that?" helps them feel more comfortable. Chances are they will be happy to share when called upon.
- Tip #2: Talk to them outside of the group setting and affirm that you value their contribution in the group setting.

The Tangent-Starter: This is the person who loves to get the group way off track by tossing in random thoughts.

- Tip #1: Don't let occasional tangents upset you, just steer the group back on-track after a moment or two.
- Tip #2: If the tangents become too much of a distraction, pull the person aside outside of the group and honestly explain how difficult it can be to facilitate the group when the group gets distracted. Ask the person for their help in solving the situation.

The Insensitive-Beast (person): This is the person who always gives advice, makes fun of others, cuts people off, etc.

- Tip #1: This person is dangerous to the health of the group! They destroy real sharing because people are afraid of what he/she will do with the info. Remind the group that the group environment must be a safe environment and that kind of talk won't happen.
- Tip #2: Talk to this person one-on-one and discuss your concerns. Ask for their commitment to creating a safe atmosphere for the entire group.

Specific group concerns and ways to deal with them...

1. The rabbit-chasing group

- Interrupt someone who seems to be changing the subject from the main point of the lesson by reminding the whole group of the goal. Then redirect the question to someone else.
- Depend on your apprentice leader. This person can support you during the meeting by bringing the group back to the main point.
- State the goal of the discussion upfront. If your group has problems with staying on track, this may be a crucial strategy.
- Pray. If someone shares a personal need during the discussion and you feel that it's inappropriate at that point in the lesson, say something like, "Thank you for sharing. May I pray for you right now?" Pray briefly and then get back on track.

2. A person with chronic needs

- Pray for the person after the meeting is over. This is especially important if this person shares his or her need every week.
- Spend time together outside of the group meeting.
- Ask another group member to spend some time with that person.
- Ask for help from your Life Group Coach and/or Pastor/Director.

3. A disruptive or argumentative visitor

- Explain the purpose of your group. He or she may want to force a different agenda on the group and you must make it clear that you won't let this happen.
- Direct questions to specific people so that the disruptive visitor doesn't have permission to take over.
- Keep the conversation going. Silence gives the person an open door to make his or her point.
- Interrupt. This is crucial when someone is giving harmful advice to other group members or saying something that is biblically unsound.

Specific group concerns and ways to deal with them...

4. Group member conflict

- Help people understand that conflict is a natural part of relating to others. Groups that never experience conflict are failing to honestly relate to one another. If group members are growing in relationships, they're bound to have misunderstandings and hurt feelings.
- Mediate. Help people talk through their differences and misunderstandings.
- Practice forgiveness. You'll experience conflict yourself. You must model a healthy conflict by forgiving anyone who hurts you.

5. A stagnant group

- Invite new people. Challenge members to invite new people.
- Meet at a different time or place.
- Go on a daylong retreat and ask God for a vision for your group. If you don't have a vision, it will be almost impossible for the group to change.
- Take a break from the "usual" and do something different and fun.

6. An enormous group

- Identify a future leader and mentor that person. Without another leader, your group will be stuck. It will never multiply no matter how big it gets.
- Prepare the group for leader multiplication.
- Break the group into smaller groups to discuss the lesson.

Resource: *Small Group Ministry in the 21st Century*. (2005). Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, Inc.

Seven roles to get group members more involved...

One way to solve problems and increase how connected people in your group feel toward each other is by giving members an area of ministry that they can own. Not everyone in your group will want to take on a responsibility, but others will welcome the opportunity. As you think of ways to encourage positive involvement in the life of the group, keep these ministry positions in mind.

1. Prayer Ministry Coordinator
2. Meeting Host
3. Food Coordinator
4. Childcare Coordinator
5. Member Care Coordinator
6. Outreach Coordinator
7. Sub-Group Leader (this is the person who leads a smaller group when your group breaks into smaller groups during the meeting)

Group Leader prayer ideas...

Prayer, at its most basic, initial level, is simply talking with God.

Group Prayer Ideas: Try one or all. Spread them out over the course of the session. Create your own ideas.

1. Find a Psalm (8, 24, 57, 70, 100, 113, 116, 121, 150) and read it as the prayer.
2. Ask someone to read Psalm 136 and the group read the responsive part..."His love endures forever."
3. Direct people to choose their favorite Scripture or one that is meaningful to them and have each person read the Scripture as their prayer.
4. Ask each person to write a one sentence prayer on paper. Then ask someone in the group to read the sentences as the prayer.
 - a. To involve the whole group, ask each person to draw a paper and read what's on it.
 - b. Encourage each person to take a slip home and pray for the request every day. During prayer time the next week, talk about what it meant to pray for someone every day. Ask the group to share any answers to prayer.
5. Each person says a one sentence thanks prayer. (Example: "Dear God, thanks for good friends for my kids. Amen.")
6. Popcorn Prayer: This is still the idea of 1-2 sentence prayer, however, you don't necessarily direct people to go around the circle or pray a particular type of prayer (i.e. thanks prayer); they just pray as they have something to say. Designate someone to begin and someone to end.
7. Ask people to gather in groups of 2 or 3, share a request and then pray for each other.
8. Neighborhood Prayer Walk: Group members walk in groups of 2 or 3 around the neighborhood praying aloud.
9. Just pray. Again, it's helpful to designate someone to begin and end.

Developing apprentice leaders...

“...prepare God's
people for works of
service, so that the body
of Christ may be built
up.”
Ephesians 4:12

How do I spot an Apprentice Leader?

- Look for the person who take the group seriously (spiritual velocity)
- Look for the person others like to be around (relationally intelligent)
- Look for the person who embraces the Life Group vision (teachable)
- Pray regularly for new apprentices

How can I be sure that I have found the right person?

- Confirm that they have a teachable spirit, spiritual velocity and are relationally intelligent
- Speak with your Life Group Coach
- Ask them to meet with your Life Group Coach and/or Pastor/Director

How do I prepare them to take on their own group?

- I do and you watch.
- I do and you help.
- You do and I help.
- You do and I applaud AND begin helping someone else.

Soul Care

How To Take Care Of My Own Soul As A Leader

1. Remain connected to God through prayer, Bible study and worship.
2. Find a prayer warrior whose role is to pray specifically for you, your family and your ministry.
3. Share the load with others. Finding people in your group to host, facilitate or be the prayer coordinator not only makes your job easier but it allows them to serve as well.
4. Rest. Taking a Sabbath is not just a good idea, it's a Biblical command!

Ways to provide soul care to others...

- Be a prayer warrior!
- Be an encourager!
 - There are times where we need to add "fuel to the flame" with our words.
- Be present and available!
 - People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Remember, it's hard for you to really have a "voice" in someone's life until they trust you. Trust takes time, but it grows as you make yourself available.
- Be a vision clarifier!
 - Satan doesn't have to defeat us, he just has to distract us. (Remember...without vision, leaders perish.)
- Be a good listener!

