



## MERIDIAN CHURCH

### Life Group 2.0

by Josh King

We believe that by God's grace the operating software of our body is in good order, regularly being updated by the Word and Spirit. Still, the elders sense that the life group application has begun to slog and it's time to reboot.

The elders strive to be intentional about what we do as a body. We don't run programs just to run programs. We also make effort to communicate why we do what we do. We're sorry that we have not done this well concerning life groups. We explain why we do them to new members, encourage them to visit many groups, and ask them commit to one for a significant portion of time so that they are known, but after this, we assume everyone knows why we do them.

So why do we do life groups? Is it our version of Sunday School? Are they primarily for discipleship or are they an evangelistic tool meant to reach our friends and neighbors? Is fellowship the focus? If so, what is "fellowship?" Pie and ice cream? While life groups can do all of the above, none of them alone captures what we believe is their primary purpose. Life groups are to be the *optimal* place where we fulfill the "one-anothers" of our church covenant. While we have covenanted together as a church body to love the whole body, we recognize that there are natural concentric circles of deeper relationships and that there is a max capacity to these circles. You cannot love every member of the body to the same degree and in the same way. Even Jesus had the inner circle of three, then the twelve, then the greater group of disciples.

Here then is the purpose of our life groups: *Our life groups exist to be the optimal, though not exclusive place, for us to fulfill the "one-anothers" of Scripture as we've committed to them in our church covenant.* Discipleship and evangelism will assuredly play a significant part in our life groups, but that is not their primary purpose. Indeed the best evangelistic and discipleship aspects of our life groups will come out as we commit to the *one-anothers* of our church covenant. Here is a defining paragraph from our covenant. We covenant before God to:

Help one another grow toward Christian maturity by bearing one another's burdens, encouraging one another, exhorting one another, praying for one another, confessing our sins to one another, speaking the truth in love to one another, admonishing one another, building up one another, teaching one another, comforting one another, submitting to one another, serving one another, patiently bearing with one another, being hospitable to one another, greeting one another, living in peace with one another, regarding one another as more



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important than ourselves, caring for one another, exercising our spiritual gifts to serve one another, being kind and tenderhearted to one another, being devoted to one another, accepting one another, forgiving one another, loving one another.

If this is the light we want to shine bright throughout our fellowship, then our life groups should bring that light into laser-sharp focus. This might look like your group loaning you a car when yours is broke down and then using their meeting time to fix it. It might look like your group preparing a meal prior to a funeral. Or, when you need help with a house project, you might invite your group over to help. Life groups do *life* together—Christian life. They are the primary place where we fulfill our covenant duties to one another.

We understand that with this there is a danger. The danger comes when we distinguish the borders of these groups with high walls and razor wire rather than with chalk. Life groups should be a means of expressing love, not favoritism.

We want you to know that our intent is to draw the borders of life groups with chalk. Commit to a group for a significant period of time so that you are known and can know others and fulfill the one another commands of Scripture in a significant way, but feel free to visit other groups if they meet on other days. If another group is doing a study on parenting, and you would like to join it, let your group know that you'll be visiting them for a bit. If your schedule changes and a different group would better fit your routine, feel free to leave without judgment. Also, make an effort to extend hospitality to those outside your group and avail yourself of opportunities to know as many people in the fellowship as you can.

This said, here is our plan to reboot life groups with sharper focus and chalk borders. First, we want to temporarily suspend life groups and mix things up over the summer. Second, we want to distinguish between life group leaders and host homes. Third, we want to clarify how life group care and deaconal care relate. Finally, we want to reboot with all “new” groups in the fall.

### **Shut Down**

We're asking all life groups to pause at some point in May. With this, an anti-covenant strike in favor of individualism for the summer isn't our aim. Use the summer months to have people outside of your current life group in your home.

Additionally, during the summer months, we will be gathering as a body to watch and discuss a number of films. On June 10th, at 6 pm we will watch *Free Speech Apocalypse*. This film ties well into the themes we have seen recently in the Psalms and 1 Peter. Please know that this film does contain mature content as it is a documentary



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showing footage of Douglas Wilson presenting a speech on Biblical sexuality at a liberal university. Let's just say that their sin is liberally on display in their vitriol against Wilson. We would not recommend parents allow any children to view the film under 16 years of age, and then only after having first viewed it themselves so as to make a wise decision. On July 1st, following our fellowship meal, we will watch the documentary *Calvinist*. On August 5th, following our fellowship meal, we will watch *Luther*. Each viewing will be followed by a time of discussion.

### **Life Groups and Host Homes**

Much of the time our life group leaders have been the primary hosts for their groups. We want to share the carpet more evenly. In each group we would prefer one family to serve as leaders and multiple families to host. We understand that not everyone can host and that each group will have different dynamics that can make this easier or harder. Still, we think there is plenty of bread to spread this glob of butter on. Perhaps groups will rotate who hosts each week or they might commit to host for half a year. Also, responsibility for any meals should be shared as much as possible. Simplicity here is a virtue. Remember, it's the family, not the feast that makes our fellowship most rich. Some groups may gather for a simple dessert. Others for hot dogs or peanut butter and jelly. Regardless, our focus should be on the gathered, not whatever food we might gather around, save the Bread of Life.

### **Who Cares?**

Many of our life groups do a great job of caring for one another's needs, but when should they contact a deacon? Should they inform an elder? When should things be shared with the entire body? How are they to be shared?

When we reboot, we want to establish marked highways for such information to travel. When the need is physical and the life group needs to call in reinforcements, they may contact a deacon. The deacons will determine how to best address the need and inform the elders if necessary. If spiritual matters are involved, an elder should be notified. Elders and deacons may then share these needs with the body if appropriate and necessary.

For example, if a life group comes to know about serious sin within the group, say spousal abuse, someone in the group might offer their home as a temporary living solution while the deacons look into longer term options and financial support. At the same time the elders will counsel the abused and begin disciplinary action with the abuser.



If a group can take care of a need easily and there is no significant spiritual issue, they should feel free to do so. If a life group begins to feel any burden, they should not hesitate to contact a deacon or an elder. Matters such as the death of a loved one, serious illness, long-term needs, or unrepentant sin necessitate the group going outside itself.

### **Installing 2.0**

Come August we will post a list in the foyer of all life group leaders. If you are interested in one, contact the leader concerning when and where they will meet next. Once we reboot, when the groups begin to settle, we're asking each group to spend time reviewing our church covenant and discuss how they can be faithful to it both within their group and as a group to the rest of the body. Once you have settled into a group, you should let the leader know if you are willing to host. Finally, the elders want each group to begin a study of R.C. Sproul's *The Holiness of God* this fall. Books will be provided for all participants.

Please let us know of any insight you might have in making our life groups work better. In all of this, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all (2 Corinthians 13:14).