

DISCIPLES AND DISCIPLE MAKING CULTURE: LIFE GROUPS – Summary 3 May 2022

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Conversations have been anonymised and categorised for conciseness.

Summary of key points:

- Key words - fellowship, safe, personal, sharing flaws, encouraging (personal support), relationships
- Faith building as we see God at work in our lives
- Without spiritual growth, it's just a social club.
- Diverse nature of groups mean that results vary
- Experiences show that while the expectation is that groups will multiply, the experiences of most of those present don't reflect that.

ROLE OF LIFE GROUPS IN DISCIPLE MAKING

We have lots of groups so what makes a Life Group unique in the church context? Other groups are focused on particular roles rather than on each other but can become a Life Group. Fellowship is a key component – don't get that element of fellowship elsewhere. A Life Group is primarily relational, within the group, but for it to have 'life' it needs to be intentional about connecting with others outside the group (either in a serving context or evangelical).

From the discussion, the **common themes** were:

- a group that does life together, know each other intimately, support each other in practical ways, pray for each other;
- smaller version of church but more personal;
- safe place, be themselves, ask the dumb questions, be accepted for who they are;
- opportunity to work together, get to know them better;
- disciplined by each other, be prepared to go outside the group.

Life Groups must never become solely insular, an exclusive group, closed group; rather they need to be outward looking, even if it is just the willingness to bring new people into the group. Some groups have an outward focus and members keep each other accountable in trying to reach others. One Life Group has chosen to support a local school chaplain and as a result they have been able to connect with the school community.

FRUITS/RESULTS WE WANT TO SEE FROM LIFE GROUPS

See people get better at praying and want to pray (some people are not comfortable praying out loud); studying the Word – knowing the word better, seeing it worked out, walked out; building into person's life, evidence in spiritual growth, maturity, walk it out on a daily basis; faith building,

encouraging to see what God's doing in other's lives; growth, individually, personal + numerical growth; lasting friendships that outlast the life of the group; creation of a safe place to bring people that you connect with outside the group.

Individual experiences:

- Friends brought non-Christians to Group – did what we always did – eventually became Christians; haven't experienced that elsewhere
- Kept a record of answered prayer – makes you want to pray more – encouraging. They can see changes happening – encouraging seeing God at work

HEALTH OF LIFE GROUPS AT NHBC

People are connected primarily through relationship with an existing Life Group member. We need to know what Life Groups exist as that would help in connecting those who are looking to join a group. Connecting people into Life Groups must be intentional.

Consensus that no one knows how many Life Groups there are at NHBC Rochedale, who leads them, when they meet, if they follow the format suggested, and whether they have an outward focus. It's different at Balmoral because it's small.

While the last point of Pastor Paul's presentation referred to groups multiplying, the experiences of the vast majority of those present don't reflect that - the theory of multiplication is what we aim for, but the sentiment from all is that it's seen as splitting the group and no one wants to split. Dividing/splitting must be done voluntarily and willingly as it causes angst, mourning and resistance. Splitting is a real difficulty – but for all the right reasons: Genuine deep relationships; support; investment into each other's lives; experiencing spiritual growth.

Perhaps a culture/expectation that splitting is a 'thing' will help overcome this.

Life Groups all have a season. This is a normal life cycle. Disbanding members should then form or join new Life Groups – this is an organic way of splitting/multiplying Life Groups.

Individual Experiences:

- When the group became too large, no one wanted to split ... people like to be with the people they've come to know. Forced division doesn't work – relationships need to be kept intact.
- When in group that grew large, the group disintegrated when we tried to split.
- Changed dynamic, was never the same – died a natural death as family circumstances changed.
- Selected someone to be 2IC and leaders left – took the new group but it didn't work whereas the other group continued. Had intentionally said they'd be setting up another group, trained someone to lead; they went off to start a new group.

Question: Is splitting Biblical? Splitting in the early church was only due to persecution.

PROCESSES AND NON-NEGOTIABLES

Regular meetings that focus on Jesus and what God is doing in our lives; prayer; reading scripture; building relationships so that people are able to share deeply; and food! Being able to share and be

prayed for is very important. It's important to develop a mindset of what God's doing in my life so able to share; balance between what's God doing and how can we pray for you...

Groups with families with children/teenagers will work if everyone's involved, not just a group for adults with the children dragged along! It's important to build relationships between adults and children, so that people feel comfortable to share and pray for each other. Do everything together, rather than having children in another room – keep it short.

LIFE GROUP LEADERSHIP: IDENTIFICATION, TRAINING & EQUIPPING

Leadership is not necessarily for everyone. Some people have the gift of leadership, others don't. Watch people in action. We need to be aware of the health and welfare of the leaders as well as the group. We need to pray for more leaders.

Training is not as intentional as could be. Leadership can be shared, be a facilitator. People can be mentored, nurtured. Group dynamic skills can be taught and learned. It's important to have a flexible type of leadership.

A Life Group can split into small groups when they meet to help develop future leaders. This helps train its members to run discussions, preparing them to start their own Life Group one day. Usually there's a core group and others that come and go - perhaps the comers and goers are the ones that begin new Life Groups?

Do we need announcements from the pulpit that leaders are needed?

LIFE GROUPS AND LOCAL AND GLOBAL MISSIONS

We have the example of supporting a school Chaplain. Acts of service for others outside the group changes perspective, can grow leaders. The service must be beneficial to the receiving party.

Groups could adopt a missionary or one of the local missions we support. While a group may decide to support a ministry from outside of NHBC, it would be more enhanced if it was within NHBC. A suggestion was made that the bare minimum should be praying for the nations – choose a country ...

Can a Life Group be used to plant churches? Is that a good way to plant churches? New Farm is more like a Life Group.

Some churches have satellite groups that meet occasionally as a larger group. Although we have multiple campuses, we don't do that.

RESPONDING TO SPECIAL NEEDS, MARGINALISED, VARIOUS AGED, SAME SEX COUPLES.

- Love and accept but not affirm/enable (their sin)
- Exercise mercy and grace
- Conviction is the job of the Holy Spirit. Our job is to show God's love.
- 1 Cor 6:18, Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. [NIV]