

# Helpful Guidelines for Life Group Leaders

By Paul DenHerder

We all encounter various challenges and issues that tend to derail developing community and spiritual growth in our Life Groups. Some of those areas are:

- Lack of commitment from members**
- Dealing with and resolving conflict in a Life Group**
- Helping individuals who dominate the discussion or seldom speak**
- Keeping the group fresh and combating stagnation**
- Developing meaningful relationships w/in the life group**
- Handling child-care during life group meetings**
- Preparing for a life group discussion**

As we seek to help our life groups grow together relationally and spiritually, we often encounter common challenges in accomplishing these objectives.

## ***Q: What are the most important aspects of a healthy and growing Life Group?***

### ***1. Connecting relationally with each other and “doing life” together in a meaningful way.***

We understand the importance of having relationships where we can be real, see ourselves and others for who they really are, and experience genuine acceptance. The reality is that we cannot do that with a large group of people. Having a smaller context where lives can be shared and we can “do life” with a few others is vital to our spiritual growth. We thrive in meaningful relationships, and actually have been created by God to function in community with others. We need a place where we can be honest and real and transparent, and yet be accepted in spite of our personal quirks! We desperately need more than casual friendships or acquaintances that we might develop either in the community or at Riverview. None of us were created to be able to grow and develop and have an impact in our world apart from being connected in vital community with others. This is why a Life Group can be such a critical part of the process of spiritual growth and emotional health. We all need friends and those we can depend on through good and bad times, and relationships where we can reciprocate this support, love, and care.

You as a Life Group leader have an incredible opportunity to help create and model this relational connecting with others. All through the New Testament we see examples and directives for growing, serving, and sharing of our lives in the context of doing so with

others. Thanks for your willingness to help your life group connect with each other. This purpose of a Life Group is vital in the spiritual growth process for each of us.

## ***2. Studying and applying the Scriptures to our lives***

Not only do Life Groups provide an environment to connect with others in meaningful relationships, but they also are a great way to study and apply Scripture to our daily lives. As we hear (listen) to God's Word it is essential that we grow in our understanding of Scripture and seek to obey it. Doing so in a smaller setting with others that are committed to each other and seeking to grow spiritually will help to foster real life change. Hearing the weekend's message is a good start, but we need to take it beyond just hearing it and seek to apply Biblical truth. Doing so with the help and encouragement of others is an awesome way to experience real community with others.

Each individual in a Life Group is at different stage in their spiritual walk. And, when we focus on what the Bible teaches us, we allow God to speak to our hearts in a unique and personal way. Real life change takes place most effectively within the context of caring and supportive relationships, and as we allow the timeless and powerful truths of Scripture to be applied consistently in our lives.

As you seek to help the life group grow in relationship to the Bible and applying and obeying its truths to their lives, remember what we are told in Hebrews 4:12-13:

***“For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any double- edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.”***

## ***3. Praying for each other's spiritual growth***

Praying for one another's spiritual growth and relationship with God is an integral part of a healthy and growing community. So often with Life Groups, the focus of our prayers can be on praying for non-personal (yet important) situations such as illnesses, difficulties of relatives, etc. Please understand those are important things to pray for and should be addressed. However, praying together for specific areas of growth and being open and transparent about what is happening in our lives spiritually will help the group to grow in supporting each other toward becoming committed Christ followers. As we grow together relationally and seek to study the Scriptures together, praying for our spiritual challenges will help the life group grow closer to each other and to God.

## ***4. Serving and doing mission-based activities together***

All Life Groups should have some “missional” outlet. Some Life Groups choose to do a couple projects or activities together to serve others and also provide an avenue for them to get to know each other. Other Life Groups will always remain “open” to new members, and see their “mission” as being a welcoming space to folks who need some place to connect. It’s important to ask, “are we, in some way, sacrificially serving others?” If not, how can we begin to do so?

As important as it is for each of us to understand and pursue God’s mission in our own lives, it is equally important for us to do so with those who we are doing life with in our Life Groups. Without a mission outside of ourselves and our Life Group and pursuing that mission with others we potentially miss out on the benefits of working together to expand our lives into the lives of others. It will help your Life Group to be intentional about taking on a project or activity where the group can serve and focus on the needs of the community around them. Doing so will not only build and promote mission, but it also provides an avenue to work and serve together for the good of others. Here are a few ideas:

- Take on a project for a needy family you know
- Get involved with a work project or “serve” day
- Hosting some MSU international students
- Serve Riverview in an area of need such as RivKids
- Be creative in giving time and resources somewhere in the Lansing area.

There are a myriad of areas in which to serve together, and helping your Life Group seek out those areas of interest will help them in mission that extends beyond themselves. You will also discover that, as you serve together, your relationships will be deepened and your lives will become more intertwined with each other and with those you are seeking to serve.

***Q: How do we help build commitment to the group and to each other that is healthy and growing?***

Often, people have fears that are rooted in past experiences they may have had in other Life Groups. Other common fears or reservations they have are time, getting along with people that they might not like, getting stuck in a group and not being able to leave if it isn’t a good fit, and unclear expectations. Conflict with other members, stagnation, difficult people, and life stage can also be problematic.

Here are some suggestions that will help your group develop commitment:

1. Help them connect relationally. Provide avenues to get to know each other in a safe and accepting environment. That can be accomplished during the group meetings, but also outside in other activities and times of just hanging out and

doing fun stuff together. Initiate with them and encourage the other life group members to do the same.

2. Clearly communicate the parameters of the Life Group and discuss expectations that all can agree to. I would encourage your life group to discuss the following Life Group Guidelines and talk about them regularly.

***Life Group Guidelines*** (go over and discuss)

<b>Participation</b>	Providing opportunity for each member to talk when they chose to. We will talk about our own lives, avoiding conversation about other people. We will listen attentively and pray for each other.
<b>Confidentiality</b>	Keeping anything that is shared in the group strictly confidential.
<b>Accessibility</b>	Giving one another permission to call upon each other in time of need –even when it is not convenient.
<b>Growth</b>	Being intentional about our spiritual growth and encouraging each other to do the same
<b>Attendance</b>	Giving priority to the group meetings

Life Groups need to have a framework in order to be cohesive and successful. We want to keep it simple with clarity of objectives for interaction as a group.

A healthy group needs to be rooted in **trust**. Discussing the Life Group Guidelines regularly and ‘enforcing’ them will help you to grow commitment.

Make sure the expectations are clear and understood.

- When starting a group make the commitment clear
- Provide easy exits from your group. Why? Don’t burn the bridge for future involvement. Often people will just stop coming (not a good way to exit....) Be aware of that method of saying “this is NOT a good fit for me....” and allow people to leave on good terms.
- For a group that’s been together for some time, be aware of changing dynamics (time/schedule/life stage.....) and take time to evaluate the group regularly. Ask for feedback.

Commitment to the Life Group can have something to do with ‘fit’ of the members w/ each other. “Fit” is important. Commonality can be a great aspect of commitment. However, it is a good issue to raise at the start of a Life Group that the group will have differences & that over time those differences can be huge plusses.

***Q: How do I help my Life Group deal with conflict and work toward resolution?***

Whenever people are growing and developing meaningful relationships, it is completely normal to experience some conflict. Sooner or later, every Life Group will experience conflict of some sort. We often take great pains to avoid it or maneuver around it. However, the reality is that it will take place as we grow in our relationships. Ignoring it, pretending that it isn’t happening, or allowing it to hinder our relationships is not healthy or practical. As we learn to handle conflict Biblically and effectively, our Life Groups will not only grow closer, but we will also learn better ways of dealing with the uncomfortable issues that people face every day.

So, the bad news is.....conflict is an inevitable part of any successful Life Group. The good news is.....conflict in a Life Group can be managed and addressed effectively by us as leaders, and can strengthen relationships within the group.

Proverbs 27:17 states:

***As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.***

Disagreements, different views, various personalities, and a plethora of other issues can often cause relational sparks to fly, but the end result, if dealt with properly, is growth in our walk with God. We need others to sharpen us, and they need us to sharpen them. It is not always fun nor is it easy, but if we can learn to deal with the interpersonal conflict we experience with each other we all we grow in our love for one another and for God.

Ephesians 4:1-6 tells us:

***I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love (making allowance for each other’s faults-NLT), being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all through all and in all.***

As Christ followers, we already are united with each other, and we are told to work hard at maintaining this unity. We do so by ‘making allowance for each other’s faults’. It is no surprise at all, that each of us has a boatload of faults, weaknesses, and areas in our lives that we need others to accept, be patient with and also seek to help us grow in. We owe it to God and to each other to preserve this unity we have through the Holy Spirit. It takes work, commitment, and love to do so, and also requires lovingly forbearing and honestly addressing issues that need Biblical change in our lives. Here are some suggestions to help your Life Group deal with conflict and successfully resolve it:

1. Don’t avoid it. Address it sooner rather than later. Don’t allow the issue to brood and fester.
2. Don’t make big deals about little issues. Help individuals extend the same forbearance and acceptance to others that they would choose to have extended to them.
3. Address the conflict privately and personally, and not via email!
4. Affirm the relationships and value love and acceptance of each other.
5. Make observations and avoid accusations. Be direct and firm, but kind.

Help model to the Life Group healthy ways of acceptance when forbearance is called for, and being directive and assertive when an issue needs to be addressed. As always, thanks for helping your life group grow relationally with each other and focus on growing Biblically.

If help or advice is needed in addressing conflict and resolution, seek out the help of your Life Group Team Lead. The spiritual health of the Life Group and the relationships in the group are valuable, and the work God has given us in accomplishing His mission to the world demands it.

***Q: How do I help deal with the individual who talks too much and often tends to dominate or control the discussion?***

One of the issues we must learn to deal with are those individuals in our life group that tend to influence or affect relationship building and the process of learning and growing together in a way that is not positive or nor healthy. Sooner or later, as the group members start to peel off the layers of their lives, aspects of their personalities or social communication skills will come to light. How we help these individuals grow in these

areas personally, and collectively, will influence not only the community of your group but the learning process.

We need to take seriously the importance of a safe environment where the group members can freely and appropriately speak, share, and engage. As Life Group leaders, we don't want to become the "behavior police" in our life groups, but we do want to be the guardians of the environment and community of the group.

We need to make allowance for people for the occasional "flap," misspoken word, talking too much, or interruption of others as they speak. We all occasionally step over the line in these areas, and need understand that we all are weak and blemished people and do or say stupid things. However, when a person's communication verbal or nonverbal begins to take place often, we need to deal with that appropriately and effectively.

So, what can you do to help deal with the individual who tends to "**talk too much.**" This person is often too talkative and makes it difficult for others to engage in communication, either by not allowing others a chance to share their ideas or thoughts and engage in the discussion. To be honest, this is probably the most common and also has the greatest potential to subvert the dynamics of relationships and the spiritual growth of the Life Group. People like this can monopolize an entire meeting and hinder the participation of everyone else in the group. What can we do in this situation?

1. If necessary, interrupt them and ask if anyone else has a thought or comment they want to contribute. Simply thank the individual for their thoughts and ask, "does anyone have an idea or thought they would like to share?", or just move on with another question.
2. Be assertive after the meeting and speak privately with them about what you see happening. Be clear and state that you appreciate their willingness to contribute to the discussion, but be honest with them about how the frequency and length of their comments can make it difficult for others to participate. Seek to enlist their help in drawing out the other group members of the Life Group. Sometimes, they may not be aware of what they are doing, and there may be underlying issues that you can address with them as your relationship develops over time.
3. Sometimes, this person may take silence as their cue to jump in and start talking. A lot of people don't like silence, and they may feel uncomfortable when there is a lull in the conversation. Help them understand that silence can be ok. Sometimes, people just need some time to process a question before responding.
4. Avoid eye contact with them during the discussion time. Some people associate eye contact from the group leader as a 'green light' to talk. They might take it as a request from you to speak. Therefore, try minimizing eye contact with them.

Try sitting next to that individual so it is more natural to not make eye contact as much with them, and allow you to do so with other members of the group.

If you have difficulty dealing with that individual who talks too much and makes it difficult for other group members to contribute seek the help of a Life Group coach or other Life Group leader. This situation can be challenging, but in most cases, enlisting the 'over-talkative' individual's help in engaging the other members will normally help them learn to speak appropriately and in balance.

***Q: How do I help the person who is quiet, shy or reserved and how can I help them engage in the life and discussion of a Life Group?***

Most Life Groups will have an individual or two who, although they seem to enjoy the group, seldom contribute to the discussion and often won't say much or express their views. Some member's personality may be reserved and less talkative, but we want to encourage and help them to feel comfortable to speak up and also help them to engage in the dynamics of the Life Group. What can we do to help them?

First of all, we want to be careful to not press or force them to engage in the discussion, but to find ways that make it as easy as possible for them to speak up and share their thoughts. Here are a few suggestions:

1. When possible, make eye contact with them when asking a question. Some people interpret eye contact as encouragement or an invitation to speak up. By looking directly at them when asking a question it may make it easier for them to talk. It may reassure them that you are interested in what they have to say.
2. With an individual who has a history of not participating in the discussion, use the seating arrangement to encourage them. By sitting directly across from a quiet individual, you can maximize the amount of eye contact they receive from you.
3. Although we want to be careful to not put them on the spot, at times it is good simply ask them 'did you have anything to add to this....?' By doing so, you are not demanding an answer, but just providing them the avenues or opening to contribute. Some want and need that invitation. Be careful in the frequency that you do this, especially if you can ascertain that they feel extremely uncomfortable. If their response is 'I don't know,' consider that to be an appropriate response, and don't keep probing for more. Our role is not to drag information from them, but rather to affirm that their opinions and thoughts are valued and welcomed. When they do contribute, affirm their thoughts, and by doing so will encourage them to speak up again.
4. If necessary, speak to them privately, and ask them if there is anything you or the group can do to help them participate more regularly. Affirm them in that the

group eagerly desires to hear from them when they are able to contribute. Be sure to be understanding of their personality and any issues that might make it difficult for them to participate regularly.

Often times, as the relationship grow and develop with the Life Group, they will feel more comfortable to speak up during the discussion time. Initiating with them and getting to know them during the life group and outside of the meetings will go a long way in helping to create an environment for them to feel safe and increase their participation.

***Q: What can I do to help prevent my Life Group from becoming 'stagnant,' and what can I do when my group gets to that point?***

In our desire to help connect people relationally, study the Word, pray for each other and do mission together often our Life Groups can become stagnant or not have the enthusiasm and excitement we desire. Here are some suggestions to help you keep the life group fresh and free from getting bogged down.

1. Invite other members in the Life Group to host the weekly meetings. This might include having them host the meeting at their home and provide refreshments, or being responsible to help organize providing the snacks by fellow members. Helping the other members sense ownership to the Life Group and taking responsibility for various aspects will help them feel needed and engage.
2. Invite other Life Group members to help lead the discussions. This also helps create ownership and will provide an avenue for growth and training of others. It will also help train someone to lead the discussion in your absence.
3. Be enthusiastic and adequately prepare for the meetings.
4. Help the group develop a mission to serve others outside of the group meetings.
5. Be aware and balance the frequency of your meetings. For most groups, meeting every week or every other week is about right.
6. Keep the length of your meetings about 1½ hours, or agree to a length and then stick to it. Be mindful of people's time. Groups that typically run 3 hours or more will experience a greater rate of stagnation. The idea is to keep help them want to come back for more. It is much better to have consistently exciting and good meetings week in and week out than to burn out.

7. Change up the meeting periodically. Go out for dinner or cook a meal together, or maybe alternate the men and women meeting separately. Take a short break from the curriculum and do something different. Be creative and work hard at keeping it fresh BEFORE it begins to stagnate. It is more difficult to revive than it is to keep it fresh.
8. Maintain a good balance of relationships, studying the Word and praying together.
9. Get their feedback regularly about how the group is doing. Solicit their honest thoughts and perspectives and then incorporate their ideas as much as possible.

***Q: I don't seem to be adequately prepared for the weekly discussion. How can I be better prepared each week?***

An important aspect of leading the discussions is **being adequately prepared to do so**. With this in mind, we have chosen to provide weekend series **Study Guides** and accompanying **Email** with suggested questions as the preferred curriculum for our Life Groups. We see the benefit of expanding and digging into the weekend message as a way to capitalize on the message and its application to our lives. By focusing our discussions on that weekend's message, it allows us to build and dig more deeply into the Scriptures without adding another curriculum that demands our time and attention. We believe we can maximize our leader's time spent thinking and preparing since the message and application is still fresh on people's hearts and minds. It also helps us a church to move forward together as a church family on relevant and needed discussions that apply to our daily lives. As we 'velcro' together in meaningful relationships and the truths of Scripture we are able to direct our lives toward a path of loving God and others.

It is still important to do some preparation for the discussions. Being acquainted with the discussion questions for each week's topic and having an idea of where the discussion can go is vital. You as leaders are probably busier than those in your life groups. We want to help you as much as we can in being prepared to lead those discussions.

Here are some suggestions to adequately prepare for each week's discussion:

1. If you were not able to attend that week, either listen to the message via the Riv website or Life Group Leader email that is sent out every Sunday afternoon by Noon.
2. Read the questions ahead of time and answer the questions as they apply to your life.

3. Think of how you can relate those questions to those in your Life Group, and if particular questions would help begin a good discussion or address issues that you see to be particularly relevant to your members.
4. We provide more questions than the typical group can discuss, so don't feel obligated to discuss each and every question. The goal would be to help the group discuss at least a couple questions in depth, rather than just getting through the questions without any meaningful discussion and application to their lives.

***Q: How can I help my life group grow in relational connectedness?***

Most will readily acknowledge that it is quite difficult (if not impossible!) to have more than a certain amount of quality relationships in our lives. Those in the Life Group need to be connected into relationships that will foster growth and provide quality care for their lives. This can be a challenge. Our desire is to help provide the avenue and environment for real relationships, where every person can say "these are the people that I 'do life' with." Our desire is that the quality and authenticity of these relationships will not only take place during a Life Group meeting, but also thrive and grow outside of the scheduled Life Group times.

You can help encourage and foster this connecting that people need and want by initiating activities and opportunities aside from the regular meetings. Encouraging and initiating with the whole group or with one or two others will help to build the relational foundation for lasting and meaningful friendships. Simple things can make a big difference, things like remembering birthdays, anniversaries, helping each other with home projects, or just relaxing together on the back deck with no real agenda.

Hebrews 10:24-25 tells us this:

***Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.  
And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another.....***

We do best when we are in community with other people – and experience healthy relationships that live in acceptance, honesty, support, genuine care and love. Each person in the life group needs this.

**Q.: How can we provide for the needs of caring for children during a Life Group meeting?**

For those of us who have families in our groups, one of the issues we need to understand and address is the children and how we can help the parents experience a dynamic and

helpful discussion as adults and still provide for the care of their children. Some groups choose to allow their kids to be present in the discussion aspect. Other groups choose to provide the parents a time when the adults can freely dig into the Scriptures and discuss its application to their lives by making separate provision for the care of their children. Here are some suggestions on how to have a “kid free” Life Group discussion:

- Every family finds their own babysitter. Each parent becomes responsible to do so on their own and allow the kids to be at home, so that the parents are free to attend their Life Group.
- Hire a sitter to come to the meeting place and provide care for the kids in another room or section of the home. The home must be large enough and separated enough to allow the parents to study and connect free from distractions.
- Hire a sitter(s) at some other location, possibly another member’s home. Both of these options would involve minimal cost if the parents all chipped in on the cost of the child-care.
- Trade off child-care with another Life Group that meets at another time, or with another family.
- Have the men and women meet separately on alternating weeks so one parent can be home w/the kids. Perhaps alternating everyone meeting together one week, men another week and the women the next. This will also provide the avenue for the men and women to discuss specific issues that might not be able to be addressed in a mixed group environment.

Whatever option your group chooses, being intentional to provide a time when the parents can meet free of distractions will pay dividends in their lives.

### **Q.: Can our Life Group share communion together?**

Absolutely! We encourage our Life Groups to do so on a regular basis. Here are some common asked questions regarding communion or the Lord’s Supper.

#### **What are the Biblical foundations for the practice of the Lord’s Supper?**

From the exodus from Egypt going forward God instituted the Passover (Exodus 12) as a memorial meal to remember God’s salvation of His people from slavery. Years later Matthew, Mark and Luke then record the final Passover meal Jesus shared with His disciples that has become known as “Last Supper.” During this celebration Jesus diverged from the typical Passover liturgy. This signaled a New Covenant that would be fulfilled by His sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection. The eating of bread and drinking of wine in “remembrance of Jesus” (Luke 22:19) became a regular practice in the 1<sup>st</sup> century church. We see in Acts 2:42 – 46 that the “breaking of bread” was a

regular part of the early church, and Paul gives lengthy instructions to the church in Corinth (I Cor 11:17 – 34) about the appropriate practice of the Lord's Supper.

### **What elements are permissible for use in the Lord's Supper?**

Because the initial Lord's Supper was a modified Passover meal, unleavened bread was used to represent the body of Jesus. However, neither Jesus nor Paul advocates the exclusive use of unleavened bread for this ritual. As such, we see freedom to use bread of any kind, but feel that switching to an entirely different food would compromise the symbolism of the bread. Jesus used the phrase "fruit of the vine" to describe what filled the cup and represented His blood. For this reason, wine or grape juice are appropriate, with grape juice being preferred in order to honor those who may have a weaker conscience. It may be useful to note that we do not believe these elements actually "become" Jesus' body and blood, or that Jesus is present in a different way during the Lord's Supper than at other times. Rather, the elements are simply symbols which help us remember the sacrificial work of Jesus on the cross.

### **Don't we need a pastor or something to practice the Lord's Supper?**

There is no evidence in the Bible that suggests church leaders must be present to administer the Lord's Supper. As such, at Riverview we feel the freedom to practice the Lord's Supper in a variety of settings. Because Life Groups are often significant communities of Christ followers, we believe they can be an appropriate venue for the practice of the Lord's Supper.

### **Who should participate in the Lord's Supper?**

In the Gospel accounts the participants in the Lord's Supper were disciples of Jesus, and it appears that the Acts 2 folks who "broke bread" together were also followers of Jesus. While the I Corinthians passage does not make this distinction as clearly, participants there are exhorted to "examine" themselves before participating in the Lord's Supper. For this reason at Riverview we (along with most churches and denominations) believe the Lord's Supper should be practiced only by those who profess to follow Jesus.

### **How do we handle instances where unbelievers are present during the practice of the Lord's Supper?**

Leaders should not feel responsible to "screen" other group members to determine if they are truly followers of Jesus. Instead, our intent should be to share the Biblical principles about the Lord's Supper, and allow individuals in the group to determine whether or not they'd like to participate. Life Groups leaders with questions or concerns about this should consult their Life Group coach for direction.

### **How often should we participate in the Lord's Supper?**

There are no prescriptive guidelines given in the Scripture in terms of the frequency of this practice. It is our intent to observe the Lord's Supper on a bi-monthly basis during the weekend services. Life Groups may vary in the frequency of their practice of the

Lord's Supper, but a general guideline would be to implement the practice on an every other month basis.

Your Life Group Team Lead is available to help you with any questions that you may have in regard to helping you communicate and incorporate this into your life group. Many groups do this naturally and simply by doing so when they share a meal together. Our desire is to help our Life Groups practice the sharing of the Lord's Supper as a regular and meaningful aspect of doing life together.

### **Q.: What can I do to encourage the Life Group members to pray in the Life Group?**

As a Life Group leader, you have the opportunity to create an environment for real life-change that requires transparency and openness about your life. As you lead in praying for your life and the spiritual growth of yourself and those in your life group, you will be modeling sincere and genuine prayer that focuses on real life change that is personal and real. Don't be afraid to be specific and honest in your prayers. Discuss with the group the need to be real before God and each other and to ask God to grow you up in those areas that you all fall short of what God desires for you.

Here are a couple suggestions that will help your group learn to pray in earnest for their own lives and the lives of others:

- Read Ephesians 1:15-18 and Ephesians 3:14-19 and pray those prayers for your life and the lives of others. As God answers those prayers you will be experiencing and seeing life change take place through your prayers.
- Be careful to not pressure others to pray out loud when they are not yet ready to do so. Although it is great to be able to do so, we want to foster communication in our prayers and allow others to do so as they feel comfortable doing so. In time they will grow in being honest and real before God and others.
- Read through Mark 14:32-38 and look for principles of prayer that Jesus demonstrated with His disciples. These include: a) His openness and honesty with them about what He was going through (33-34) b) His transparency with the Father (34-35) c) the work of prayer (37-38), etc.
- Share personal requests for your spiritual life with the group. Allow them to do the same. If needed, re-ask for specific requests that will encourage them to think about their own lives that relate to their spiritual relationship with God.

Helping create an environment where members are being real and feel safe in sharing their struggles will take time. It is something to be cultivated over time, but sought after on a continual basis. As we understand the privilege and acceptance we have before God

to go to Him with our requests it will be truly life-changing for your Life Group. In closing, this passage in Hebrews 4:14-16 lays a foundation for our communication with God:

*So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. The High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for He faced all of the same testings we do, yet He did not sin. So, let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive His mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.*

**Q.: What curriculum should we use for our discussion & study?**

We produce a weekly **Study Guide** that goes along with the weekend messages - as the basis of discussion and spiritual growth in our life groups. The **Study Guide** contains background information and questions that will help the life group download the weekend's message and dig deeper with personal application to our lives.

The following is taken from a book entitled "Sticky Church" by Larry Osborne, and he communicates this perspective very well.

#### ***"Growth Points"***

*Most spiritual growth doesn't come as a result of a training program or a set curriculum. It comes as a result of life putting us in what is often referred to as 'a need-to-know or need-to-grow' situations.*

*Though the lessons we must all learn are pretty universal, the order in which we learn them and the classroom God uses to teach them are seldom the same for any two people.*

*'Need-to-know' moments happen when we find ourselves in a predicament where we need to know God's viewpoint on an issue we've never dealt with before.*

*For instance, imagine a dicey ethical issue at work. Perhaps you've discovered that everyone else in your office or industry winks at something you see as unethical. At that point, you need to know, "Does the Bible speak to this issue? And if so, what does it say?"*

*Or maybe your next-door neighbor has started to meet with some Mormon missionaries and wants you to join in. Suddenly the deity of Christ, the Trinity, the atonement of Christ, and a host of other theological issues no longer seem so dry and academic.*

*Need-to-know moments are similar, but they're usually accompanied by a tough trial or a stretching experience. It might be a new job with a jerk boss, the rough sledding of a financial mess, or the pain of a broken heart. Each in its own way calls for a deeper and more obedient walk with God.*

*Most of us learn and make changes in our lives – when we understand why a topic is important, and we change best - well, when we have to.*

### ***Velcroed for Growth***

*Message-based life groups take this haphazard learning-and-growing process in account. They're perfectly fitted to the way spiritual growth actually takes place.*

*The focus of a message-based small group is not so much on the curriculum as it is on the process. There is no set body of information that must be covered in a particular order.*

*The topic in any week simply flows out of whatever was taught in the previous weekend's message.*

*The ultimate goal of a message-based small group is simply to 'velcro' people to the two things they will need most when faced with a need-to-know or need-to-grow situation: the Bible and other Christians.*

*On the one hand, the 'message-based' aspect of these groups guarantees that the Bible remains close at hand. It really doesn't matter if some messages are home runs and some are duds. The simple process of handling the Scriptures on a regular basis and looking into them to see what they say sets the stage for future need-to-know or need-to-grow moments.*

*In fact, the seemingly arbitrary nature of the topics covered in weekend messages drives home the point that the Bible speaks to an incredible array of subjects. This apparent randomness sends a message that God has an answer somewhere in His Word, no matter what situation we face.*

*On the other hand, the 'small group' aspect of a message-based group guarantees that we'll be close enough to other Christians to benefit from their knowledge and support. The Bible is a big and complex book. Even Bible scholars occasionally need the help of other Christians and scholars to grasp all that it says and implies.*

*While it's true that a 'Lone Ranger' can learn a lot through self-study, 'Lone Rangers' (and even Brains on a Stick who know the Bible inside out) aren't exempt from need-to-know and need-to-grow moments. Yet when they are faced with one, their isolation guarantees that the only thing they'll know is what they already know.*

*Wise counsel, a warm hug, or a swift kick in the rear, those are rather hard to self-administer. If we don't already have those kinds of relationships in place, it's usually too late to pull them together once a need-to-know or need-to-grow crisis hits with full force.*

*At Riverview, we see the benefit of approaching our life groups in a similar way. We want to capitalize on the weekly messages and their application to our lives. We also*

understand that time and the hectic pace of life work against the intentionality that is needed to pursue our relationship with God and other Christ followers. Focusing our weekly discussions on that weekend's message allows us to build and dig more deeply into the Bible without adding another curriculum that demands our time and attention. It also helps us to move forward together as a church family on relevant and needed discussions that apply to our daily lives. As we 'velcro' together with meaningful relationships and the truths of Scripture – we are able to direct our lives toward a path of loving God and others the way He desires us to do so.

Thanks for your commitment to helping those in your life group grow together relationally and Biblically.

### **Q.: Do Life Groups meet during the summer months?**

We encourage our Life Groups to meet as often as possible throughout the summer months and use this time to have a more relaxed schedule of meetings. With family vacations and various summer activities that kick into full gear during this time, we suggest being intentional about meeting and keeping in touch with each other even if it is socially on a regular basis.

We encourage you to work hard at keeping in touch with the members of your life group and also encourage the members to call, email, Facebook, etc. throughout this month. Many groups make it a point to meet up at a service and catch up with each other either before or after a service. Some groups schedule a cookout or get together either at a member's home or at a park. Whatever you choose to do, you as a leader can help to keep the group relationally connected by initiating with each member personally through the various means available. Keeping the relationships connecting in an informal fashion will only help to stimulate your group members to look forward to when the group formally resumes meeting in the Fall.

The importance of individuals sensing that they belong and are connected to a few others in community – is critical for ongoing spiritual growth and serving God in their lives. No matter how busy or hectic our lives might be throughout the summer months, the fact that each member is important and valued relationally continues to be a vital ingredient to spiritual growth.