

Life Groups at Fairview Baptist Church

Philosophy, Purpose, Place, and Leader Expectations

Philosophy of Life Groups

In their impactful book, *The Trellis and the Vine*, Colin Marshall and Tony Payne address crucial questions on the life of the local church. Through the metaphor of a trellis and a vine, one of the primary ways we fulfill our mission to make disciples at Fairview is through the trellis of Life Groups. Here, we seek to cultivate an environment where Christians grow in relation to God and to one another. Life Groups function as one of the primary vehicles for Fairview to prayerfully proclaim God's Word to one another. While we don't require members to be a part of one, we have consistently found godly fruit as a result because Life Groups are a ministry to individuals who, in the context of community, grow as faithful Christians. In other words, life groups provide the trellis where what the church is learning as a body can be applied more individually and deliberately through these biblical rationales:

- Community is an instrument of worship, a weapon against sin, and a tool for evangelism (Acts 2:42-47; Col. 3:1-17).
- Deep life-giving relationships and discipling relationships happen in community (Acts 2:42; Eph. 3:17-19; Heb. 10:25; 1 Jn. 1:2, 7)
- Life groups are a living illustration of the gospel and its power to save us from sin and reconcile us to God and to each other (Rom. 15:5-6; 1 Pet. 1:22-25).

Nature and Purpose of Life Groups

The nature of life groups is fourfold: Relational & Conversational, Honest & Authentic, Word Formed and Applied, and Deliberate & Intentional.

- *Relational and Conversational*
 - The group isn't seen as a meeting time or place, but a family. Community isn't an event, but a lifestyle lived out over the week doing ordinary things with intentionality.
 - Encourages one another to do things they already do, but to do them with others in community. The group invites others into the normal everyday rhythms of their lives.
 - Life groups are less of a Sunday school and more of relational community fellowshiping around the word and prayer.
- *Honest and Authentic*
 - Gospel transformation and loving community only happen when we are honest with ourselves, others, and God. Life groups foster this by providing a safe space where people can be honest and transparent.
 - Life groups model Colossians 3:12-17 where we share our burdens and concerns to allow others to bear our burdens and love us.
- *Word Formed and Applied*

- As the word creates the people of God, so it matures the people of God together. Healthy bible discussion does just answer the question “What does the Bible say?” but also answers “How should I respond to what the Bible says?”
- Through meeting consistently, life groups practice the rhythms of: proclamation of the Word, prayer, fellowship, and hospitality.
- *Deliberate and Intentional*
 - Have naturally occurring, spiritual conversations about the Sunday sermon, Equip Classes, personal Bible reading and devotional time, etc.
 - Pray with/for and encourage one another in the Lord (What are they struggling with or is there something to be thankful/grateful for that we can praise God together about?).
 - Foster an atmosphere of confession of sin, repentance, restoration, and reconciliation
 - Encourage one another to live for Jesus in the everyday rhythms of life.
 - Catch up on what's going on in their lives (sharing joys and burdens)
 - Invite neighbors and unbelievers into the group to make initial contact, build relationships, and evangelize, in hopeful expectation that the Lord will use their efforts to add new believers to the group and ultimately his kingdom.
 - Share a meal and have fun together! (Play games and enjoy casual conversations too!)

The purpose of Life Groups is quite plain and ordinary: to help members build relationships, based on our shared unity in Christ, that result in richer integration into the larger community of the church. These groups facilitate relationships for mutual encouragement and edification. Additionally, these groups are not purely study nor are they purely social times. Rather, in an ordinary and informal way, these groups are informed by Scripture for member's building up one another in love and good works. This may find itself working out in one-on-one discipling relationships. Our fundamental desire is for group members to encourage each other in the various discipling relationships for accountability, edification, and prayer.

In sum, we desire regular biblical content in these groups because reminding one another of God's truth reminds us why we get together with each other on a regular basis: building community around a shared love for God and his truth. The overarching purpose of groups is to aid in the building up and maintaining unity of the members of Fairview. For more, see the [DNA of Life Groups](#).

Place of Groups in the Life of the Congregation

When visiting a church for the first few times, it can be intimidating to make yourself known to so many people. With life groups, you're introduced to a microcosm of the congregation representative of the whole. So, when thinking about the role or place of life groups in the congregation, consider the illustration of a cul-de-sac and an on-ramp. Our desire is not for groups to function as communal cul-de-sacs of retreat to settle in the status quo. Rather, our desire for groups is to function as on-ramps into the life of the whole congregation. In other words, when someone becomes a member, we pray they get plugged into a life group and join them in deliberately doing spiritual good toward one another. But after a few years, we pray they expand that horizon of relationships to the congregation more broadly to love and serve them for Christ's sake.

Additionally, we understand that there may be situations where group leaders, or members, may feel unequipped to address—such as depression, abuse, or marriage problems. We do not expect life

groups, nor the leaders, to handle every situation present. Any time someone may feel in need of help, please, reach out to an elder. In fact, we encourage group leaders to regularly communicate with an elder on the strengths and weaknesses of the group so we can pray for them. We do not want you to feel alone, but we desire to help foster congregational care.

Leader and Member Expectations

Life group leaders are the ones out front initiating and fostering discipling relationships. With this sort of lay leadership, there are seven expectations we have for life group leaders.

- 1) A member in good standing who regularly attends corporate gatherings of Fairview Baptist Church.
- 2) Communicate regularly with an elder of Fairview about the status of your group, what content you're going through, and if you need any pastoral support.
- 3) A happy disposition to create a hospitable environment that welcomes new members (space allowing).
- 4) Facilitate and foster discipling relationships within and beyond your group.
- 5) Attend the bi-annual life group leader training events.
- 6) Identify and disciple a co-leader in consultation with the elders of Fairview.
- 7) Seek to develop a discipling and multiplying culture to serve the broader congregation.

Life group members are a microcosm of the congregation that prays together and spurs one another on towards love, discipling, and evangelism. Within this philosophy of life groups, we have four expectations of members in life groups.

- 1) A member in good standing (or in the process of joining).
- 2) Not avoiding corporate gatherings, using life group as a substitute.
- 3) Regularly attend and participate in life group.
- 4) Contribute toward spurring one another on toward love and good works.

How Does an Individual Join a Life Group?

At the end of every membership interview with an elder, we ask candidates if they would like to join a life group. We work together as elders to identify an appropriate group, reach out to the life group leader, and ask the leader to invite the new member. This same process is taken if a current member decides to join a life group.

How are Life Groups Structured?

With the exception of men and women groups, life groups are open to anyone. There are wonderful benefits to men and women groups, such as facilitating a healthy vulnerability and accountability in service toward the broader congregation. However, we are hesitant to particularize much further because the gospel implies that we love those who are not like us.

Group size is broadly determined by space constraints and ability of the leader. Generally groups have a leader and co-leader(s), where the primary leader is discipling and preparing the other for

leadership. Additionally, depending on the schedule of life group members, groups meet weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly.

Under the oversight of the elders, groups are given freedom on how to use the time. The time may be spent walking through a book of the bible, a good Christian book, reviewing Sunday's sermon, or previewing Sunday's sermon text.

How are Life Groups Different from Discipleship Groups?

	Life Group	Discipleship Group
Description	A community where you grow in relation to God through relational community.	A gender specific group that meets weekly to grow in spiritual maturity through study and accountability.
Purpose	Create and cultivate gospel transforming community.	Create and cultivate doing spiritual good to one another.
Make-Up	Open group of new and mature believers of both genders.	Closed group of believers of same gender.
Size	Usually 10-15	3-5 people
Dynamic	Fellowship (50%), sermon or study discussion (30%), and prayer (10%).	Study of material (50%) and accountability (50%).
Next Steps	Leaders disciple and raise up other leader to form new LG or start a DG.	Multiply and lead their own groups.