

“DNA: The molecule that encodes genetic information in the nucleus of cells. It determines the *structure, function, and behavior* of the cell.”

-Webster’s Dictionary

One of the characteristics of each LifeGroup is its own distinct look & feel. But in this critical formation stage of our group, there are a number of characteristics that we want to see woven into the fabric of each LifeGroup @ Bethany. Before signing your LifeGroup Covenant, it is important to read these over as a group and make sure everyone is on the same page regarding these foundational building blocks for group life. The document that follows corresponds with the ABCD components on the Group Covenant. It’s important that the Covenant is re-visited every 6-8 weeks to make sure you’re following through with your commitments and goals. If any of these areas needs further explanation, don’t hesitate to contact the LifeGroup Leadership Team for further clarification. Please note: these are not in order of importance...merely alphabetical!

ACCOUNTABILITY:

It’s critical to your growth and to the health of your LifeGroup that group members hold one another accountable regarding specific areas of spiritual growth, along with group & individual goals. Many groups that become stagnant or fall apart miss this crucial component. We must give each other “accountability permission,” and be willing to be on both ends of the equation: we’re willing to be accountable, and we’re willing to hold others in our group accountable in return. This may very well be the most difficult part of the entire LifeGroup experience, but the personal spiritual growth and transformation that can result can also be the most rewarding part of the whole endeavor! Remember, your LifeGroup family is not content to let you live life at a low level, but to help one another live and experience life as it was meant to be lived! Giving permission to other group members to hold us accountable for the goals we set for ourselves is vital to our spiritual growth & development, as well as the health of our group.

Also, it’s important that each group understand that what is said in confidence within the “friendly confines” of the group needs to stay in the group. Trusting one another is an important building block in a healthy group experience. When a LifeGroup becomes a safe place for group members, personal struggles or areas of concern might be shared. This is part of the growth process. Outside of a group structure, we’re often left to carry these burdens alone...and we all know how difficult that can be. In a LifeGroup, as we feel comfortable doing so, we can allow others to help, advise, and pray for us. The burden may not go away, but perhaps will feel lighter. Any of those issues shared within a group should be handled with the utmost confidentiality. It’s very important to keep whatever is shared within your group within your group. Nothing will wreck your group faster than a shared confidence being broken.

LifeGroups should be a place where everyone can feel a high level of acceptance. Every effort should be made to not inadvertently embarrass or hurt another member of the group. For instance, it’s possible that a wife might share an area of personal struggle, but that same struggle may involve her husband, who was unprepared for that to be shared. Or someone else in the group might share something involving another group member that would be better in a one-on-one setting. Bottom line -

work toward never saying anything that might embarrass a spouse or another group member. Your group health is important - not just for the group, but for every person that makes up that LifeGroup!

To quote one prominent somewhat greyish-haired preacher who will remain nameless, “LifeGroups are not groups of people whose primary purpose is to make us feel good about ourselves, but people who love us enough to say the hard things.”

BELONGING:

In order for each of us to be a healthy, growing, functioning part of our LifeGroup, we have to be a part of it! Of course, that’s a no-brainer. But a key part of our involvement is our attendance at group functions. Not only is it impossible to belong to something I don’t make a priority in my schedule, but others who need to find a place of belonging aren’t going to find it from us if we’re chronically absent. As with anything we do, there may be times when we just don’t feel motivated to go. That’s natural. But two things to consider. First, maybe that’s all the more reason you *should* go. God may have something in store for you that’s exactly what you need to get you over the slump you’re feeling. Our LifeGroup can be a place that energizes us and breathes life into our hectic, draining schedules. Second, others in your group are counting on you. Your presence, the smile on your face, your encouraging words, those are all attributes that you bring to your group that make it special (not to mention that fabulous cheesecake recipe you’re famous for...). Your fellow group members are looking forward to seeing you, and some may in fact need exactly what you have to offer.

Being a part of a healthy LifeGroup is more than just attendance. Just like in a family, there are responsibilities to share and goals to accomplish. Every group member can and should play a role in the life of the group. Sure, we’re all good at different things. What can we each bring to the table to make our group function? Will we commit to keeping our group accountable to our goals and what we’re trying to be about?

There will be a time at the outset of our group when we’re still forming and getting aligned with new group members. This is a natural part of the beginning of any group. But once the group is in place, it’s important that new members are added to the group only after the other group members have prayerfully considered adding additional people. There are a couple of things to consider. First, group size needs to be manageable. If a group gets too large, people may tend to shut down in the group and feel more inhibited to be an active part. But secondly, we’re hoping to create caring environments within LifeGroups that develop a certain amount of trust with one another that allows them to truly live life together. Often, introducing someone new to a group can come as a surprise to other group members, and it may take a long time before that level of trust is developed with the newer members. So it can be almost like starting over. The relationships we’re building are more important than adding new people to the group. In fact, new groups will be launching at least twice a year, so new people will have opportunity to be involved in a LifeGroup. There may very well be circumstances where all the members of your group agree that extending an invitation to a person or couple is wise, and if the group has consensus, not to mention room for another person, go for it!

CARE:

LifeGroups are more than just another weekly gathering. The desired outcome is that people will strive to “live life together.” That will look different for every group, but the common denominator for all is an environment of care. Being a part of a LifeGroup gives permission for others in your group to have access to you. When you need them, you can call. And vice versa.

When you live life together in a family, you do whatever you can to care for your family members. Scripture uses the analogy “one-anothering.” The primary people that can and should care for you, outside of your own flesh & blood family, is your LifeGroup. Of course, this develops over time as you continue to grow together as a group. But time and time again at Bethany, small pockets of close friends (who, incidentally, live life together) have gone the extra mile for others in their small spheres of influence. It’s a wonderful thing to watch, and an even better thing to experience. How incredible to know that all over Bethany, there can be small pockets of people who go the extra mile for and care for one another?

The span of care that emerges within your group will differ from other groups. We’re all different, and our unique life situations often present unique needs for care. In large church settings, those needs can sometimes go unnoticed. But the beauty of the LifeGroup community is the safety net of others who know and value each other helping to share whatever load life brings our way.

DISCIPLESHIP

A disciple is a learner. Discipleship is the process of learning, specifically to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Becoming a disciple is a marathon, not a sprint. It’s a life-long journey that has a degree of movement. Sometimes baby steps, sometimes big leaps. Sure, there are times when we all “sit still” in our journey and don’t experience much movement. This is most alarming when we’re taking the Lone Ranger approach to our discipleship.

LifeGroups have a distinct advantage over Lone Ranger approaches to spiritual growth. Regular times of study, reflection, and allowing Scripture to be a spring board for discussion are at the core of the LifeGroup environment. It pulls the learning environment out of the “I’ll talk, you listen” format that we’re so accustomed to and allows an entirely different approach to interaction and discussion. Your LifeGroup will commit to studying Scripture, a topic, a book, etc. an important part of your group life.

Another key component to discipleship is looking beyond ourselves to those who have yet to experience the authentic Christian community that we will experience within our LifeGroups. Jesus gives us our marching orders in Matthew 28. We’re to “make disciples” and “teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Nowhere are we commanded to find authentic Christian community and hoard it all to ourselves. So from day one, we’re asking every group to prepare for LifeGroup multiplication.

Simply put, after 18-24 months, we want to help your group of roughly 12 people multiply and become 2 groups of 6, and each group of 6 would then add new people to their group to create a new LifeGroup. So a group of 12 becomes 2 groups of 24 total.

On the surface, that’s just math. Though the math is easy, group multiplication is not. That’s why it’s important to set that as an expectation from the beginning. Deep friendships will develop over time, and it’s difficult to go through the process of no longer being that tight group of 12 you’ve been for the past year and a half. It’s often called “birthing a new group.” From what many have said, that’s a painful process no matter how it’s done!

But below the surface, there are new people who have yet to experience Christian community who will sign up or be invited to join groups. The unique experience you have shared with your group can be now experienced by even more people. More importantly, the life transformation that can and will occur in LifeGroup relationships can take place in the lives of even more people.

“Jesus said, ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.’”

-Matthew 18-20, NRSV