



BIBLICAL COMMUNITY
GROUPS

Life Group Training Manual



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Our Foundation

The concept of Biblical Community stems from the basic understanding that we have our unity as a people in Christ. This unity is real, and it transcends our ethnic and cultural differences. The New Testament teaches that in spite of our ethnic differences, by virtue of our faith in Christ, we now enjoy a common identity, being together coheirs in Him. We are one body – His body.

Paul, speaking of the unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ, puts it in these words:

... Keep in mind that once you—Gentiles in the flesh—were called “uncircumcision” by those called “the circumcision” . . . At that time, you were separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He is our *peace*, the One who made the two into one and broke down the middle wall of separation. . . He did this in order to create within Himself one new man from the two groups, making *Peace*, and to reconcile both to God in one body through the cross (Eph 2:11-16).

The oneness we experience in Christ is not limited to a concept understood at a large scale for all Christ-followers around the world; it is also expressed, in a more tangible and personal way, in our local churches and in the inner groups that serve as components of our churches. Our oneness, as a local body, should permeate every aspect, every coordinated effort, and every function of our local body. Steve Gladen puts it this way:

Each local church is meant to be a unified body, working together in a coordinated way toward a common purpose . . . The coordinated functioning of your local body requires understanding clearly what success means for your church. What is God’s end for your church that you must keep in view? This is defined in your church’s and your small group ministry’s vision and mission statements.¹

To achieve success together, therefore, we must operate in unity; this is a unity that should be evident through all areas of ministry. In this way, the local church maintains a “churchwide system that moves people along a comprehensive pathway toward the end destination of mature disciples. . .” In line with the system of the local church, “each ministry—including your small group ministry—must develop a comprehensive plan that fits within the system and helps achieve your church’s vision and mission. This is your ministry’s pathway to help achieve God’s end purpose for your church.”²

¹Gladen, Steve. *Planning Small Groups with a Purpose*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018.

²Ibid.



Our Mission

Cherrydale Baptist Church's mission is *to make disciples who love God and people above all else.*

To inspire missional discipleship at Cherrydale, we pursue strategic venues to engage communally through the following pathway: **Belong, Grow, Serve.** We believe that spiritual growth and maturity in Christ-likeness is accomplished through this pathway.



Belong



Grow



Serve

Christ
Church
Biblical Community Groups:
Focused Study Groups
Fellowships
Life Groups

Intentional
transformation

God
The world
Our local church
Our neighborhoods

Biblical Community Groups

Biblical Community Groups gather around specific goals; they are intentionally formed to carry out those goals, and they have defining characteristics. Our vision includes three types of Biblical Community Groups: **Focused Study Groups, Fellowships, and Life Groups.**

Although all of these groups may share common characteristics, each of them stands out for their distinctive goals and emphasis. **Fellowships** are either gender oriented, or their initial link may be a common first language or a common cultural identity. **Focused Study Groups**, on the other hand, are centered around the systematic study of Scripture or a particular Christian book the group chooses to study.

Life Groups are where people connect to each other relationally at a more intimate level, and where prolonged prayer and gospel conversations take place. Their gathering point is also the place or location where its members reside. And because of their common location, Life Groups are where the Holy Spirit may lead to accomplish the mission of making disciples while reaching the lost in our communities —*loving God and loving people above all else.*

We believe that life transformation and empowered missional engagement happens best in community, and our Life Groups are the geographical extension of our church body carrying out mission locally in community.



The Life Group Vision

Cherrydale's vision for Biblical Community Groups is to encourage our church family along our spiritual pathway to pursue community connections which will help us carry out key aspects of our church's mission.



Connecting to a Life Group

Connecting through Life Groups is a step toward achieving spiritual growth and missional living.

Life Groups are extensions of our church family in mission. This mission is both inwardly and outwardly focused: we seek to grow together in the LORD, loving Him; but we also seek to be outwardly focused as we shine the light of the gospel in our neighborhoods via our service.

Trajectory

First, we connect with other believers in biblical community at a large scale. This takes place when we come to corporate worship and seek intentional educational discipleship within our local church body.

Later, we pursue community at a small-scale level through Life Groups; our aim, through this second step, is to make this connection based on the geographical location of the residence of those seeking to be plugged in.

End Goals

Essential end goals of Life Groups are summarized as follows:

- Communal bonds
- Spiritual growth
- Unity in transparency
- Service to one another
- Missional living





Our Core Values

Life Groups are channels through which our church's Core Values are expressed.

Trinitarian Worship – The sole object of our worship is the Triune God revealed through creation and more specifically in the Bible as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14).

Biblical Authority - We believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and has the right to command our belief in action (2 Tim 3:16-17).

Multiplication Mindset - We multiply by developing leaders, launching Biblical Community Groups (Focused Study Groups, Fellowships, and Life Groups), and planting churches (2 Tim 2:2; Rom 15:20).

Kingdom Partnerships – Life Groups occasionally seek to serve gospel-centered organizations in their efforts to advance the good news of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:6-8).

Gospel Centrality – The highest aim Life Groups can achieve is to serve our LORD outwardly by proclaiming, through their witness, the gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom 1:16-17).

Gospel Advancement - We share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel (Rom 10:14-15).

Biblical Community – We fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in our lives, in others' lives, and in the world (Acts 2: 44-47).

An essential part of our vision as a church is to encourage spiritual growth in the life of our church family. Life Groups are ideal environments for discipleship via the exposure to the Word of God, prayer, and practice. Transformation through discipleship within these groups is incidental as believers connect with other like-minded followers of Christ, seeking to build community, pursue fellowship, and base the core foundation of the group in the person of Christ.





Biblical Community Groups: Structure & Distinctions

There are three different types of Biblical Community Groups available: Focused Study Groups, Fellowships, and Life Groups.



1. Focused Study Groups

a. Book Study Groups

These groups pursue the study of books written on a variety of biblically grounded topics (e.g., Christian living, theology books, Christian novels/fiction, etc).

b. Bible Study Groups

These groups pursue a systematic and disciplined study of the different books of the bible (e.g., a group studying the book of Romans).

2. Fellowships

These groups may be distinguished by:

- A common first language
- Common cultural background
- They may be gender-based groups
- A few examples:
 - Mongolian Bible Fellowship
 - Chinese Fellowship
 - Cherrydale International/Cross Cultural Fellowship



3. Life Groups

There are several key distinctions of Life Groups:

- People connect to each other relationally at a deeper level
- They are ideal to engage in spontaneous spiritual conversations with non-believing guests
- They are where life transformation and mission happen best in community



Life Group Time Structure



Connection/interaction through the Word

*Confession
Adoration
Thanksgiving
Intercession*

*Breaking bread
Conversations
Activities*

Length/Format Options

Even though the length and format settings will vary depending on the size and the demographics of the group, starting and finishing on time is important. Below are two generic examples of how you might consider arranging your Life Group:



90-Minute Meeting

- 6:30 – 7:00 PM: Fellowship (Eat/Socialize)
- 7:00 – 7:10 PM: Announcements
- 7:10 – 7:45 PM: Devotional time
- 7:45 – 8:00 PM: Prayer/Clean-up

2-Hour Meeting

- 6:30 – 7:15 PM: Fellowship (Eat/socialize)
- 7:15 – 7:30 PM: Announcements
- 7:30 – 8:15 PM: Devotional time
- 8:15 – 8:30 PM: Prayer/Clean-up



Life Group Leadership Structure & Roles

The Life Groups are led by a Shepherd Leader who is supported by the Service Leader and the Prayer Leader.

Shepherd Leader

- Overseer and shepherd of the group, who maintains CBC's vision for Life Groups
- Ensures that the 3 goal-structure is maintained and carried out
- Should be prepared to share if the designated couple or person is unable to do it
- Is ready to stimulate conversation through their own personal study of correlating passages to the weekly sermon
- Identifies and refers those in need of counseling
- Identifies, motivates, and coaches future Life Group Leaders within the group
- Coordinates rotations of couple or individual sharing of the Word



Service Leader

Outward service (service oriented outside of the Life Group):

- Facilitates community service activities for the group. For example,
 - Aiding the efforts of church ministry partners
 - Aiding the efforts of ministry within the church (e.g., children's ministry)
 - Collecting baby items for young/single moms in the area





- Coordinates care for the adopted missionary and the adopted local CBC senior

Inward service (service oriented inside of the Life Group)

- Facilitates the group to serve those in the group (or their families) who have physical needs.
For example:
 - Meals when a member/family is sick
 - Meals when family has a new baby
 - Gathering an offering when someone is in need
 - Helping a member/family move
 - Helping an elderly member or injured person with their lawn or repairs
- Facilitates the group to share of their physical resources and their time. For example:
 - Members can offer things they would be happy to let others borrow if needed
 - Couples exchange date-nights; one couple goes out on a date while the other watches the kids.
- Coordinates, confirms, and notifies group of house rotations.
- Contacts members when they are unable to attend
- Coordinates fellowship and fun activities
- Leads group to make decision on how to handle babysitting

Prayer Leader

- Trains alongside the Cherrydale Prayer Ministry
- Maintains an ongoing prayer list for his/her group
- Facilitates prayer at the Life Group meetings:
 - Prayer through worship
 - Intercessory prayer
 - Prayer for healing
- Meets quarterly with Prayer Ministry and shares prayer report of his/her Life Group
- Becomes the Prayer Ministry's link to knowing how to pray for the individuals in his/her Life Group
- Coordinates regular prayer for adopted missionary and adopted CBC seniors



Life Group Devotional Models

Devotional Leadership

Life Group devotional times may be led either by:

- Different Life Group members each week. The goal is that each couple or individual has the opportunity to lead on occasion (see rotation example on Circle).
- By the structural leadership of the group (by the Shepherd Leader, or by the Service or Prayer Leader).

Devotional Leading Models

Biblically-Based Experiential Sharing

Sharing of what has impacted the designated couple or person that week (from their devotional time or through recent events)

Sermon-Related Sharing

Follows the passage of the recent Sunday's sermon text





Life Group Reports

Shepherd Leaders will share a Life Group Report with the Biblical Community Pastor bi-annually. The report is divided in three sections covering the three areas of focus for the structural leadership: Shepherding, prayer, and service.

Shepherding

1. As a Shepherd Leader, how are you, by faith, pursuing your own personal spiritual growth? What challenges are you facing? What is God teaching you?
2. How are you addressing the heart and encouraging your group to live by faith? How is your Life Group integrating faith in their communal interaction? Is the group achieving unity in the bond of faith prompting its members towards transparency while sharing time together?
3. How are you, the Prayer Leader, and the Service Leader modeling and encountering personal spiritual disciplines for your group?
4. Who are you intentionally pouring into as a potential future Life Group Shepherd? Have you been able to cast a vision for planting a new life group on a regular basis?
5. How can we equip and support you in your personal life and/or your group?

Prayer

6. Please describe the group's prayer time during your meetings. Are you interceding for one another? Are you interceding for the church ministries, for your adopted missionary, your senior Cherrydale member, and for our nation?
7. Has your group dedicated intentional times to pray through adoration, intercession, and thanksgiving?
8. Does your group intentionally elevate thanksgiving, worship, and adoration to each member of the Trinity?
9. Do you earnestly, through prayer, pursue spiritual gifts? (1 Cor 14:1).



10. Is your group actively praying for the lost (perhaps known persons)?

Service

11. Is your group actively seeking to share the gospel with unbelievers? Are you motivating and encouraging the members to engage in evangelism both as a group through outings and/or individually? If you or your group have faced difficulty in this area, please describe what has been the challenge. How can we help you?

12. What was the last service (evangelistic) activity your group had? What is your group planning to accomplish this next quarter/semester?

13. What does your group do to maintain support of your adopted missionary?

14. What does your group do to support and encourage the adopted Cherrydale senior?

15. Has the implementation of the Life Group vision been accomplished? What challenges have you faced these past months? What has worked best?





Shepherd Leadership Essentials

A Shepherd Leader must be intentional about creating an environment where spiritual formation/discipleship can happen. To achieve growth, Life Groups should strive to be in the process of multiplying leaders (Shepherd Leaders) who will seek to create or experientially engage with others to pursue spiritual growth as well.

I. As Shepherd Leader, be devoted to seeking intimacy with the LORD.

Effective shepherding is dependent upon the power of God's Spirit and not on one's own effort alone. *Are you pursuing the practices that develop your affections towards the LORD?*

Faith – Shepherd Leaders of Life Groups ought to maintain intimacy with God through the Word and prayer. They are to faithfully and courageously devote themselves to Jesus' Great Commission to make disciples of all nations, beginning locally and with their Life Group.

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Matt 6:33).

Humility – Shepherd Leaders have a teachable spirit and seek to grow in their skills, gifting, and their knowledge of God. They have a flexible attitude and seek collaboration with other leaders and with those they lead. Servant Leadership is characterized by humility.

Humble yourselves in the sight of the LORD, and He shall lift you up. (James 4:10).

Compassion – Shepherd Leaders have an intentional love for all people, especially for *the least of these*. They seek healthy relationship with others, caring for them in times of need. They have good people skills and high emotional sensitivity that invoke a positive response in others.

Finally, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, compassionate, and humble-minded. (1 Peter 3:8).

Vision – Shepherd Leaders envision a fully engaged church, pursuing God's mission to make disciples of all nations. They take personal responsibility of their ministry and desire to inspire others to take ownership of the church's mission to *make disciples who love God and people above all else*.

"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good deeds" (Heb 10:24).



2. Spend time with group members outside of the group gatherings.

Love is demonstrated to others through time spent together, and it's a lot easier to trust someone when we know they love us. Only when those foundations of love and trust are in place will we really take down our defenses and masks, and then real change, real belonging, and growth can happen together.

As you (and your spouse as a partner-helper, if married) in co-leading and shepherding the group, initiate get togethers with individuals over breakfast, or coffee, or invite a family over for dinner, you'll see breakthroughs. These opportunities will pave the way for community discipleship.

- What would be a realistic goal for you to schedule a one-on-one time with a Life Group member? Once a week? Every other week?
- How comfortable are you in these very small personal settings?

As your relationships deepen with group members, more of the deeper things of life will bubble to the surface. This is it exactly as it should be, but you'll likely find yourself in need to advice and help. You are not alone as a spiritual helper and leader. You have a wonderful council of elders (some of whom are pastors), deacons, and counselors ready to assist you when you're not sure what to do.

Encourage regular attendance and participation.

Having a structured Life Group setting with a consistent schedule is important.

WHEN: *Life Groups* meet in the evenings during the week or during the afternoon on Sundays.

WHERE: Although the *Life Group* Shepherd Leader's house often serves as the home base, we encourage the group to seek a hosting rotation among different members of the group when possible.

HOW OFTEN: We encourage Life Groups to meet every week. We place great value in sharing life weekly in order to accomplish strong communal ties among the members. Families hold weekly





activities, and placing a consistent scheduled meeting with their *Life Group* allows families to incorporate their attendance and participation in their weekly schedule.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS: How the Shepherd Leader of the group communicates with group members will vary depending on the preferences in light of the different personalities found in each group. Some will respond best to email, while others will respond best to a text message or to a phone call. A group text or a “WhatsApp” message are often preferred options.

3. Cultivate an environment characterized by consistent growth in trust and transparency.

Establishing trust and transparency in your Life Group will help increase the likelihood that you will retain attendees. People act with transparency when they are able to share both their setbacks *and* their victories. The best way to do this as the Shepherd Leader is by modelling transparency yourself. Here are some basic recommendations:

Modeling Transparency

- When the Shepherd Leaders of the group tell testimonies of their true impact on their life, that truth is more likely to penetrate the heart of the members and not just their minds.
- When you are willing to disclose your experiences with the group, the group members are more likely to recognize their need not to push behaviors that demonstrate self-sufficiency and that they need to lean on Christ.
- A Shepherd Leader should not publicize any deep-seated secrets or failings; he or she should not feel the need to bring up any private sin into the open before the group unless the Spirit of God leads the person in that direction. Some questions you might ask yourself when considering sharing with others:
 - Will my anecdotal sharing help people’s Bible learning by clarifying a truth from the text of Scripture?
 - Will my sharing portray an illustration that shows the benefits of obeying the truth found in the Bible?
 - Will my self-disclosure meet genuine needs for emotional support and prayer?



- Will my illustration portray family members or friends in a negative manner? Do I have the person's permission to tell the story, even if this were to represent an embarrassment to him or her?

The Apostle Paul modelled transparency:

"We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, regarding the affliction that happened to us in the province of Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of living. Indeed, we felt as if the sentence of death had been passed against us, so that we would not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead" (2 Cor 1:8-9).

The Benefits of Transparency

To seek transparency is to avoid masking what one is experiencing at the heart level. A Life Group's Shepherd will see the following fruits as a result of his or her openness:

- 1. Your transparency will enhance your relationship with the Life Group members, facilitating more one-on-one ministry.**

Members of the Life Group will see you as approachable and will feel safer talking to you about the personal needs that they may not want to reveal to the entire group.

- 2. Your transparency will give birth to a deeper level of sharing among Life Group members.**

Interactions will be less superficial because you have set the pace. Life Group members will not feel alone or like they're not "good enough" Christians because their Shepherd Leader has already demonstrated the beauty of authenticity. In turn, with discretion and discernment, members of the group will freely express their need for support and counsel, opening the opportunity for group prayers on their behalf.

- 3. Your self-disclosure will foster deeper fellowship within the group.**

Without a willingness to be transparent, we cannot bear each other's burdens (Gal 6:2), comfort one another (2 Cor 1:4-7), encourage each other (1 Thess 5:11), forgive one another (Eph 4:32), care for one another (1 Cor 12:25), or weep or rejoice with each other. When honesty and openness is already established, members will be more willing to share experiences of their Christian journey when new members or visitors attend a group meeting.

- 4. Your self-disclosure will instill hope within others who may be discouraged due to their struggles.**



Others will see that you're pressing on in your faith despite problems, and that the LORD is using you. Life Group members will discover that following Jesus is not pain-free and that it involves trusting God in the midst of difficulty.

5. Your own need for prayer and support will be met.

Ministry within the group will be mutual, rather than flowing in only one direction—from you to the other members of the group. You won't suffer alone when facing a job loss, dealing with a rebellious teen, or wrestling with an important decision.

6. Your openness will enhance God's glory among group members.

God receives glory when the group gives Him the opportunity to do what only He can do: God alone answers prayer, He sustains and stabilizes during adversity, and He transforms irritating circumstances. The recipient of His grace praises Him and tells others what he did.

"Call upon Me in the day of trouble. When I rescue you, you will honor Me" (Psalm 50:15).



How to Connect to a Life Group

How and Why We Connect

We envision CBC's Biblical Community Groups as a venue to seek connections between our members and with those on the path towards membership; however, it is our desire also to see Life Groups pursuing missional living together. Hence, we believe Life Groups ought to also connect outwardly when possible. The occasional participation of unbelievers in group meetings (this may be planned time together on occasion) will give the group the opportunity to engage informal gospel conversations.

Life Groups are also encouraged to participate in service activities or events (see the service role for *Life Groups*) outwardly where these gospel conversations may be initiated (e.g., with unbelieving neighbors). This will give the Holy Spirit the opportunity to use the Life Group members for God's glory through their witness while presenting the gospel. In this way, the vision of our Biblical Community Groups goes hand-in-hand with our church's mission *to make disciples who love God and people above all else*.

Pathway Into a Group Connection

Traditional Route

1. The person interested in joining fills out the small group interest form via Circle.
2. The Biblical Community Pastor makes a group recommendation based on availability and the person indicates which option suits them best.
3. The Biblical Community Pastor contacts the Shepherd of the Life Group and later seeks connection to the person with the group.

Through an Existing Life Group

1. A member or a person in transition to membership is invited to the group by members of the group.
2. The Shepherd contacts the Biblical Community Pastor and informs of the connection, providing necessary information for small group data upkeep.



Multiplication

New Life Group Development

A new Life Group may develop through the growth of an existing home group. When Life Groups become large, a new birth will be encouraged. This possibility makes the presence and development of co-leaders or leaders in training so critical. The co-leader (e.g., this person may be someone the Shepherd Leader defaults to for leadership needs), who is highly functional in the group, along with the Shepherd Leader, will make this “birthing” of a new group a very seamless and smooth process when the time is right.



Helpful Suggestions & Tools

What to Do When Someone Monopolizes Discussion Time

Occasionally there is one guy or gal in the group who is extra extroverted (i.e., excessively talkative)! While they often have good comments to express, the frequency and extent of these comments crowd out meaningful sharing by the others in attendance. Some do this simply as an overflow of their personality. For others, it can be a cry out to be affirmed by those around them.

The following suggestions can help address either cause:

1. At the beginning of each discussion make a comment saying that **you would like everyone to share during the discussion time**. If you have a “discussion dominator,” then you might even put a time limit on their time to share (e.g., one minute? two minutes?)
2. **Be ready to make an appropriate transition**. Bat the conversation around to other group members managing your eye contact. Look at the one talking and move off of them when it is time to transition. Make transition statements like, “That is a good point, what do you think, Tom?”
3. **Select the appropriate time and place to talk about their habit**. Obviously, calling them out with other group members present can only be humiliating for them and uncomfortable for everyone else. Consider meeting up for coffee or asking if they would stay a bit longer after Life Group has ended.
4. **Affirm and encourage**. People bring with them a variety of experiences, perspectives, and values in their present day lives. Therefore, we want to correct with great sensitivity. Their monopolizing of the discussion time can be an indicator of past pain in their life or of present struggles at home. For example, start by saying that you appreciate them and their contribution the Life Group. You might even share an example of something they said.
5. **Focus on the solution not on the problem**. After affirming them, you might say, “I’ve noticed that you have a lot of good things to share each week. Because of that, and the fact that you, like me, are so quick to jump into discussion, I think several in the group are hesitant to open up. I was thinking it might be beneficial if we work together to ensure you and I are allowing everyone plenty of opportunity to share their comments as well.” Ask the individual to help you get everyone in the group talking and sharing. You can ask them to let two other individuals in the group answer or talk before they do as a way to encourage others to share.



Life Group Ministry Ideas

1. When dividing between men and women

2. Teens in Life Groups



3. Children

4. Worship (Music)



Notes



Notes

Questions on Biblical Community Groups?

Contact Juan David Prettel, Associate Pastor
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