

GATEWAY CHURCH

Life Group Manual

By: Pastor Ed Rocha
December 2021

Table of Contents

- Before we start 4
- Lesson 1 5
 - Biblical Basis for gathering in Life Groups 5
 - Conclusion..... 6
- Lesson 2 7
 - Birds and Life Groups..... 7
 - Conclusion..... 8
- Lesson 3 9
 - Vision..... 9
 - 1. Unite..... 9
 - 2. Thrive 9
 - 3. Engage..... 9
 - Conclusion..... 9
- Lesson 4 10
 - 5 Reasons 10
 - 1. Safety..... 10
 - 2. Evangelism..... 10
 - 3. Friendship..... 10
 - 4. Free..... 10
 - 5. Together 11
 - Conclusion..... 11
- Lesson 5 12
 - Temple and Homes 12
 - Conclusion..... 12
- Lesson 6 13
 - 5 More Reasons..... 13
 - 1. Empower 13
 - 2. Connect 13
 - 3. Multiply..... 13
 - 4. Grow..... 13

5. Assemble.....	14
Conclusion.....	14
Lesson 7	15
How Do I Start?	15
1. Choose the Location.....	15
2. Choose the People	15
3. Choose the Day [as long as it's Thursday :-)].....	15
Conclusion.....	16
Lesson 8	17
5 Life Group Tips.....	17
1. Size.....	17
2. Focus	17
3. Fun.....	18
4. Time	18
5. Worship.....	18
Conclusion.....	18
Lesson 9	19
5 Biblical Reasons to be in a Life Group	19
1. Church.....	19
2. Inclusion	19
3. Agreement.....	19
4. Support	20
5. Selflessness	20
Conclusion.....	20
Lesson 10	21
1. Smile	21
2. Help.....	21
3. Delegate.....	21
4. Pray	22
5. Serve.....	22
Conclusion.....	22

Before we start

Thank you for your interest in Life Groups. I believe that God wants us to focus on two main points for this next season of Gateway Church: His Presence and Life Groups. In this manual you are going to perceive a few things: First, this is a beta version of this manual, I'm writing it from scratch so, it's going to go through a few adjustments from time to time. Second, you will notice that we repeated many times the phrase: "Getting together with people we like to talk about the God we love." I love that phrase. It says it all. So, you will see it a lot. Next time you see it, you know, it's there on purpose to help you remember the main reason why we do Life Groups. So, the next time someone asks you why it's important to be in a Life Group, you will know what to say. Our prayer is that every Gateway member will be in a Life Group by the end of 2022. Why is that important? Because Life Groups are the way God intended for us to do Church. In the next pages, we will see many Biblical and Natural reasons for that. So, welcome to our Life Group Journey, and remember: **Life is better together.**

Lesson 1

Biblical Basis for gathering in Life Groups

Small groups are becoming increasingly popular in churches. There are a lot of benefits of having small groups. But is it Biblical? The answer is yes. Here are some Biblical texts that show the importance of and give us a Biblical basis for gathering in small groups:

- “Let us make man in our image.” - Gen 1:26.

Our God is a God of Relationships. The first relationship since before the beginning of time is the Trinity. Think about it, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together is a small group right there. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have always experienced relationships. But God wanted to have children, so God said, “Let us make man in our image.” - Gen 1:26.

- “(...) Appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.”
Exodus 18:13-26

In this text, we see that Moses was getting overwhelmed by the mission of ruling above over the people and the people were also exhausted from standing all day in this all-day long assembly. Imagine having a 9 AM to 5 PM administrative church meeting. That doesn't sound like a lot of fun. God then uses Moses's father-in-law, Jethro to give Moses the idea of releasing God's people to gather into small groups. Moses listened to Jethro, and this proved to be very wise advice indeed. From the very beginning, God had a plan to keep His leaders from burning out and to provide a way for everyone to be heard and taken care of.

- “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him. - Matthew 4:19-20

Jesus himself had his own small group and we need to follow this example. One of the biggest principles to be learned here is that Jesus called His twelve disciples to spend time with Him. Acts 1:12-14 talks about how the twelve then became a “group” for one another. The early Church followed Jesus' pattern of discipleship and spiritual family life. They broke bread from house to house and had larger corporate meetings (Acts 2:46; Acts 5:42).

- "The apostles did not stop teaching the people. They continued to tell the Good News—that Jesus is the Messiah. They did this every day in the Temple area and in people's homes." - Acts 5:42

You find many examples of the church meeting in small groups at individuals' homes. One example was at Mary's house (John Mark's mother), where Christians got together to pray for one another. You can see other examples in Acts 12:12; Acts 28:30-31; Acts 1:13; Romans 16:3-15; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:1-2.

Many Bible texts make reference to small groups. For the purpose, we want to achieve with this manual the verses shared above will suffice. We do not intend for the lessons of this manual to be exhaustive, instead, we want them to be more like a guideline.

Now, if you would like to dig deeper into the subject of Biblical base for Life Groups, we have an entire Bible study based on Acts chapter two called 12 Biblical Reasons for Life Groups. That study is available for those who like to go deeper into the Word of God. If you are interested in having a look at that you can ask our leadership team for it and they will gladly provide that for you.

Conclusion

Are Life Groups Biblical? The answer is, Yes! God uses small groups from the times of Moses, passing by Jesus and the 12 disciples into the early days of the Christian church and there are plenty of Biblical bases for it.

Lesson 2

Birds and Life Groups

What do birds have to do with Life Groups? Well, have you ever heard the old saying, “Birds of the same feathers flock together”? Well, it’s true. The meaning of this saying is that people with similar interests tend to form groups. I’ve heard some pastors speak against that, telling their church not to form those groups because we should love everyone the same. While it is true that Jesus said we should love one another, He never said we must like everyone. There is a big difference between loving and liking. The word love that Jesus used in that verse was agape which literally means, sacrificial love. Agape is the love you have for everyone, including the postman and strangers you meet on the street. But there is another word in the New Testament for love, which is Phileo, and that is the love you have for a friend. Naturally, you will treat different people with different sets of boundaries and different levels of affection. For example, you probably don’t go around telling everyone you meet how much money you make. That’s a boundary right there. That information is a privilege of those who are more intimate to you. And how does someone become intimate with you? Well, intimacy is a journey that starts on the road of affinity.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines affinity as "a feeling of closeness and understanding that someone has for another person because of their similar qualities, ideas, or interests". Our experience with Life Groups is that when people get together because they like each other doing Life Groups is something natural and easy that just makes sense. And that’s what we want Life Groups to be. Not a chore or responsibility, not a burden you have to carry. Life is in itself a big enough challenge for us in so many aspects. Doing church should be easy as pie. It should be a walk in the park. Doing church for us at Gateway is doing life together. “Life is better together” is not just a catchphrase, it’s a deep and hard truth. And life is better together with people we like.

That’s why at Gateway we encourage people to get together based on affinity instead of a theme, a genre, or a common interest. Those groups are good and do have their value. There are some really important interest-based groups. But affinity-based groups are far more natural than interest-based groups. They also tend to last longer. That is because people in interest-based groups go through different stages in life and end up having different interests. For example, someone who goes to moms with small children group will not have small children forever. At some point, people will lose the interest that first brought them to that group, and they stop attending. But in an affinity-based group, people tend to find people they like, and that affection with time will either grow or diminish. Those whose affinity for each other grow will stay in the group and become lifelong friends. Those whose affinity diminishes will move on to another affinity-based

group until they find birds with the same feathers as theirs. When they do they will also become lifelong friends. And that's our final goal, to find people we like, people we want to do life together.

Conclusion

Life is better together, especially together with people we like. We want to encourage you to invite people you like to come to your Life Group. Word of mouth is still the best way of getting people to get together so, what are you waiting for? All you have to do, is to call two or three people and let the Life Group be an excuse to get together with people you like to talk about the God you love.

Lesson 3

Vision

Dr. Ian Dunn brought a powerful vision for Gateway church, UNITE, THRIVE, and ENGAGE. We believe that it's important to continue to build upon what God has already established through this vision. So here is how the vision for a church in Life Groups fits in within these three God-given mandates:

1. Unite

Life Groups provide a place for the church to UNITE, to connect with each other.

- "Yes, whatever a person is like, I try to find common ground with him so he will let me tell him about Christ and let Christ save him." —1 Corinthians 9:22

2. Thrive

Life Groups provide a place to THRIVE together.

- "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." —Proverbs 27:17

3. Engage

We believe every person is created with God-given potential to make a difference in the world. Life Groups are a place you can ENGAGE with others, to become more like Jesus, and reach the potential God has put inside of each one of us. Life Groups are the perfect place to reach out to others to share our faith and Christian values with them.

Conclusion

Our Life Groups are the perfect place to put this vision into action.

Lesson 4

5 Reasons

Here are 5 simple reasons why we should be a part of a Life Group:

1. Safety

Life Groups provide us with a safe place where we can connect outside a church setting. We want to encourage you to limit the newcomers, as much as possible, to people who are your friends or friends of friends. That way we keep our Life Groups safe. We live in crazy times and we don't want strangers in our house or around our children. So, it's very important to keep that in mind when inviting new people to your Life Group.

2. Evangelism

When was the last time you shared the Gospel with someone? A recent study done in the U.S. and Canada shows that 98% of Christians only share their faith in Christ with people they already know. Life Groups are a great place to meet new people and to share our faith.

3. Friendship

Life Groups promote friendship. Life Groups are simple, they are a weekly opportunity to sit around some people you like to talk about a God you love. It is also a great place to meet new people and make new friends.

4. Free

Life Groups are free. There is no membership fee. You don't have to pay for the snacks. It doesn't cost much to run a Life Group. You don't need a church building to have a Life Group. You can have them in somebody's home, in a basement, or at a coffee shop.

5. Together

We were not meant to do life alone. Neither are we meant to be alone in spiritual life, in our journey with God. Divided we fall, united we stand. Life Groups unite us and strengthen us as a church. It may seem that Life Groups are a division, but they are not, on the contrary, they are the building blocks of a healthy church. That is why so many churches call them cell groups. If the Church is the body of Christ, Life Groups are the cells of this body. Our body is made of many cells and healthy cells mean a healthy body.

Conclusion

Our Life Groups are a safe place to share our faith, to make new friends, it doesn't cost you anything, and above all, it's a great excuse to get together with people you like to talk about the God you love.

Lesson 5

Temple and Homes

Some churches only emphasize the importance of small groups. Other churches only emphasize the importance of corporate gatherings. The Bible shows us that the Apostles and the early Church did both. They gathered in the Temple and house to house. Throughout the book of Acts, you find a pattern of the first Christians meeting in the temple and from house to house. One mention of this is found in Acts 20:20. Sometimes we call this type of church structure “20/20 Vision”. We need to see the importance of both “temple ministry” and “house to house” ministry.

"Large Group=Worship, Small Groups=Fellowship" Rick Warren

Worship and fellowship. Those were the two main focuses of the early Church. They would go to the temple to worship God together in large numbers but would get together in small groups, house to house, to break, to partake of the Lord's supper, and to have fellowship.

Small groups, or Life Groups, as we call them at Gateway, are the life of the church. We know that the Romans were persecuting and even killing the first Christians. But that did not stop them from getting together to break bread in remembrance of Jesus from house to house. That's how Jesus did it with his disciples, yes, Jesus had a small group of 12 disciples and that's how Christianity started.

Conclusion

Both the corporate worship at the temple and the fellowship we can only have at a Life Group are essential for the health and growth of any church.

Lesson 6

5 More Reasons

Here are 5 more reasons why you should be a part of Life Groups:

1. Empower

Life Groups are empowering in the sense that everyone gets to play. The idea is to allow everyone to be heard, to be relevant. It also gives us a chance to pray for one another and to exercise our God-given gifts. That is very empowering.

2. Connect

Real church happens in circles, not in rolls. In Life Groups we look at each person in the eye and connect to them on a deep level. Life Groups allow you to really engage in church life, to really live the commandment of Jesus to love one another.

3. Multiply

Life Groups multiply the amount of time we spend together as a church. If we only go to church on Sunday to worship together for one hour we are only together as a church an average of 48 hours a year. That's the same number of hours a regular worker devotes to his job in any given week. We say God comes first but are we really putting Him first in our lives? By participating in Life Groups, we immediately triple our yearly hours of gathering as a church and that promotes fellowship and bonding with one another as a family, the family of Christ.

4. Grow

Life Groups promote church not only church growth but also promotes our personal spiritual growth. It's easy to navigate through life and see a few decades go by without really growing spiritually in Christ. Life Groups give you a highway to spiritual growth as they allow you to weekly exercise your faith and exercise your love.

5. Assemble

I love it when Captain American said: “Avengers, assemble!”. To assemble is to get together. But how can we get together as a church with all these lockdowns? In the classic movie Braveheart, William Wallace, the character played by Mel Gibson says: “They may take our lives, but they will never take our freedom.”. The future of the world is uncertain right now, but we can be certain of one thing: The future of the church is in small groups. We have witnessed a lot of government control these days. They can lock down our buildings, but they can’t lock down our freedom. We have the freedom to worship our God from house to house. If the life of our church really happens through small groups, the government can shut down all the temples they want, it won’t affect us if we are a church IN Life Groups, much, on the contrary, it will only make us even stronger as we get together to resist any oppression and ungodly impositions. The church is not made of bricks, it’s made of people.

Conclusion

Life Groups empower us, connect us, multiply our time with God and with one another, they help us grow and are a great solution for lockdowns in such a time as this.

Lesson 7

How Do I Start?

Here are 3 simple steps for you to start your Life Group:

1. Choose the Location

It's that simple. Choose where you're going to do it. It can be your house, a friend's house or at a restaurant. The place doesn't really matter, what matters is to get together with people we like to talk about the God we love.

2. Choose the People

That's right. Choosing the right people is key to healthy living groups. Mark 3:13 says that Jesus chose who to be his disciples those that he wanted. Therefore we encourage the groups to gather around affinity. Remember: Birds of the same feathers flock together so, find some people you like and invite them over to have tea, coffee, or whatever it is that you guys like to drink and get together to learn more about the amazing God we love.

3. Choose the Day [as long as it's Thursday :-)]

We encourage new groups to start Thursday night so most groups can be on the same day. Why? Because that way we limit the number of days we allocate for church purposes. Besides, when the church grows in number, and it will grow because any healthy organism grows, then we will have trouble finding other days for our meetings with several areas of the church such as leadership, volunteers, worship team, etc. If our Life Groups are scattered around every day of the week then later when the church grows and everyone is in a different Life Group on a different day of the week it becomes very hard to find a day and a time to do anything else.

What if I can't do it on Thursday nights? If you can't do it on Thursday nights, then you are excused to do it on any other day/time that is more convenient for you. Remember, what really matters is that you are getting together with people you like to talk about a God you love.

Conclusion

Life Groups are simple, it takes three simple steps to either start one or to be a part of one. You don't need a college degree or intense training; all you need is a couple of people you like and a place to meet. We will provide you with the guidelines for your Life Group dynamics, so you don't have to worry about what you're going to say. Want more incentive? Jesus loves Life Groups, he was born in one, he led one and he promised to be in one every time we get together in his name.

Lesson 8

5 Life Group Tips

Here are some very useful tips for your Life Group:

1. Size

You can start your Life Group with your spouse, with a friend, with anyone, really. Jesus said that he will be present wherever two or three gather in his name (Matthew 18:20). That should be a good enough reason to start a Life Group. Once you get started and if you are consistent chances are that the group will grow. When it does, bear in mind that you should not let it exceed 12 members. If you are consistently having more than 12 people in your Life Group, congratulations, that is a sign that you have a healthy group that has borne fruit. Now it's time to send them out. Get a group member to volunteer to host the new sprouting group then bless them and send them off to reach out to other people. This is how we reach our community to Christ.

Question: Can I leave my original group to start a new one and still stay connected to my original group?

Answer: Of course, you can, if that is what you want to do that is a great sign that your original group is very healthy and it's natural that you want to stay connected with those people with whom you have been doing life together. So, now you have two groups to participate in, your original one where it all started, and now the second one that grew out of it. When that happens, we have achieved God's commission and it is a sign that we are reaching our community for Christ. That also means you are going to have to meet on a different night for you to continue to be able to attend your original group on Thursdays. And that is okay, that is a very good reason for you to do your group on another night instead of Thursdays.

2. Focus

Be careful and diligent to be a good facilitator and don't let the focus of the meeting drift to something else. We are here to follow the 3 Life Group goals listed above. So, make sure you follow the Life Group's Weekly Guidelines which will be provided to you by our leadership. Our Life Group's Weekly Guidelines will normally be based on Sunday's message (with a few exceptions) to keep everyone on the same page with what God is saying to the church.

3. Fun

Life groups flow better when they are fun. This is not supposed to be a heavy atmosphere but a light one, where there is a place for joy and laughter. Studies show that people learn more and learn faster when they are in a relaxed and fun environment, so, again, have fun.

4. Time

Be conscious of your time. The entire experience from greeting them at the door to saying goodbye to the last person should not be a minute longer than 1 hour. If you follow the Life Group guidelines you will not have problems having enough content to last you one hour. It is very easy to go over an hour if you guys are having a good time but try not to, remember we are on this journey for the long run. Life Groups are not a sprint race, they are a marathon, so, let's keep that in mind and keep the entire experience within the 1-hour window. At the one-hour mark, let everyone know that the meeting is officially over, then close with a prayer thanking God for this time of fellowship together. At this point, if you feel like you want to go a little longer you can tell the group that if anyone wants to stay, they are welcome to. That way you don't make anyone uncomfortable, and you don't run the risk of having someone walk away from you before you close.

5. Worship

Have some worship music playing in the background. Music is a powerful tool to set up the atmosphere. But make sure everyone, or at least most people, are happy with the style and volume of the worship. Not everybody likes Caribbean Worship music and not everybody likes to shout when they talk so, be sensitive to other people's preferences. A simple way to do that is to ask.

Conclusion

These tips are very usual and we learned them through many years of trial and error. Try to apply them to your Life Group and let us know if you have any more tips from your own lessons you might learn along the way.

Lesson 9

5 Biblical Reasons to be in a Life Group

Here are 5 Biblical Reasons why you should be a part, host, or facilitate a Life Group:

1. Church

Nobody is the body of Christ alone. Alone we are members of the body but together we are the body of Christ:

- Together you are the body of Christ. Each one of you is part of his body. - 1 Corinthians 12:27

2. Inclusion

In a Life Group setting everyone gets to play, everyone has a chance to talk, to share, to add value, to contribute, to participate.

- If someone sitting there receives a message from God, the speaker must stop and let the other person speak. - 1 Corinthians 14:30

3. Agreement

There is power in agreement. Prayer becomes more meaningful and powerful. When I have a situation in my life I'd rather have a small group praying with me than praying by myself.

- "If two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven." - Matthew 18:19

4. Support

Life Groups give you the support you need to help you handle stress better. You are better off handling the challenges of life with friends than all alone.

- You are better off to have a friend than to be all alone - Galatians 6:2
- This is my commandment: Love each other just as I have loved you. - John 15:12
- Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. - James 5:16

5. Selflessness

- We should think of their good and try to help them by doing what pleases them. - Romans 15:2

Conclusion

In Life Groups we have more chances of exercising our selflessness as we sit down to hear other people's needs and are allowed to participate in their lives in practical ways, loving on purpose.

Lesson 10

5 Responsibilities of Life Group Facilitators

1. Smile

- Take care of God's needy people and welcome strangers into your home. - Romans 12:13

When someone new comes in, make sure they feel welcomed. It's tough to be the new kid on the block.

2. Help

- Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others. - Philippians 2:4

Make sure there is worship, chairs, and snacks for everyone. We recommend that you make a monthly schedule for people to bring snacks to the group or you can organize it so that everyone brings a little bite to eat so it won't be burdensome for anyone.

3. Delegate

- And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. - 2 Timothy 2:2

Nothing kills a group faster than centralized leadership. To facilitate a healthy group that will thrive, be healthy, and multiplies you must ask questions, be dynamic, stimulate people into engaging. Encourage people to participate, to read scripture, to talk, to share, and eventually to become the facilitators of their own Life Groups.

4. Pray

- Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.- Hebrews 7:25

Prayer is key to reaching others to Christ. Before you can engage someone in a conversation about giving their lives to Jesus you should engage them in prayer. When we pray the Father releases power, angels, and even the Holy Spirit to bring conviction to the hearts, scales fall from their eyes and then they can open their hearts to the truth. At that point, all we have to do is lead the person into their new walk with Christ.

5. Serve

- But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. - James 2:18

Love looks like something. The best way to show people you care is to serve them. Start with your own group, find out what are some practical ways that you could get together as a group to help someone, schedule a day, and get together as a group to meet that one person’s need. You will be surprised how that person will feel loved and connected to the group and how God will pour His life-transforming power through your simple acts of kindness and service. Also, encourage your Life Group to engage in some sort of social works for the community. If our church closed our doors today would we be missed by our community? If the answer is no then there is something very wrong with the way we are doing church. As Christians we are supposed to make a difference after all God called us to love others and love is a verb, an action, it’s something we do. Love looks like something.

Conclusion

In Life Groups we have more chances of exercising our empathy as we sit down to hear other people’s needs and are allowed to participate in their lives in practical ways, loving our community on purpose. Life Groups are also a great place for us to participate more actively as Christians. It gives us more opportunities to get together to pray for one another, to serve one another and our community as we engage in social works and acts of love for people in our city.