

Life Groups – For the Priesthood

Part 7: Being Part of a Life Group

An audio version of this teaching can be downloaded from <http://cornerstonechurch.co.za/life-groups-being-part-of-a-life-group/>

In this final part of this series we will talk about what being part of a Life Group is all about and re-iterate its importance in the life of the priesthood.

Visitors' process

It's good to know the process we follow to welcome new people into Cornerstone or give them an idea of who we are and what we're about. This helps you see the importance of a Life Group and why it's a fundamental part of church life.

Note, we will never over-administrate anyone. We don't want people to feel as if they're just part of a process. Rather, we want to connect with them personally and help them personally.

We've dubbed our visitors lounge the “valley of decision” because people make life-changing decisions there and we see that every Sunday. People come to visit for all sorts of reasons. Some are here on business. Some are genuinely seeking a relationship with Jesus and so they thought that coming to a church would be a good way of doing that. Some have walked away from Jesus and are being honest about that and on Sunday mornings they're making decisions to take this road up again. Others are just looking for a group of friends.

Some are looking for a new church and still some are disgruntled with their current church.

This last group are usually encouraged to please sort things out with their current church before coming to Cornerstone. We believe that if you come in through the front door of a church you leave through the front door! If people sort out their problems with their current church then they can dispose of their baggage and not keep taking the same baggage with them wherever they go. After a little while of being here they'll be disgruntled again because those hurts haven't been dealt with.

We encourage guys to honour their leaders. If you've been in any kind of leadership role – whether is church, business or something else – you know how you pour your life into those you're working with. We believe it's good to honour that. We can't hold their hand to do this but we encourage them to do it.

Some people like to go around from church to church and are in a perpetual state of shopping. But they're missing out on integrating into a body and functioning in a body; they're missing out on a vital piece of their Christianity. We try and encourage people to integrate, if not here then somewhere, and part of our process with newcomers is to help them do that.

God has not made junk and has put a skill inside each of us that someone else may not have. And even if you feel like a cookie-cut of someone else (and you feel they may be better at what you do) there's something in you that is of worth, because God has called you. He called you to be his child - not me, not us – He has done it.

So let's follow the process of a Sunday morning when we welcome visitors:

- Generally, we find most visitors to Cornerstone come on a Sunday morning
- In the Sunday morning meeting, we ask for people who are new to put their hands up, and we hand them our Visitors Card.
- Just putting up the hand is a big deal for many people as not all people are that outgoing.
- We invite people to fill out that card and bring it with them to the Visitors Lounge (at the back of the auditorium in Cornestone Bedfordview) to meet us. This is a huge step for many people and we need to honour their guts in coming. Our culture doesn't encourage this sort of thing.
- At the Lounge we talk to them over a cup of coffee / tea and a treat about Cornerstone and tell them about two things – DNA and Life Groups.
 - **DNA** – this is our four week course where we tell people exactly who we are, what they can expect from us and what we expect from them. We're very upfront in this course. Why? Because many times you could be part of a church for years and only discover later that they believe something you can't get on board with. In this course we want to be open, honest and to the point, and after those four weeks you should have enough ammo to hold us accountable to how we live our lives as a corporate body.
 - **Life Groups** – Why do we tell them about this? Because it's another thing to do in the week? No, it's because no man or woman is an island.

In Gauteng we like this 'appointment' lifestyle. We like to keep ourselves at arms' length, but we have to get past that attitude. Many people turn away from a big church like this because they say they're a small church kind of person. But many people who have pushed through that notion can't believe that this is a big church, because it's friendly and it feels like a small church even though it's in such a big setting.

That's a huge testimony to the saints, not to the elders. Because the saints are in the Life Groups and that's the life of the church. You're the ones welcoming the newcomer, being hospitable, helping people move, etc.

- Then we offer them a follow-up. If they would like to do that, a team goes to visit them in their home. Then it's outside of the context of a lights and a fancy coffee. It's quiet and in their home where they're comfortable. But by inviting us in that shows guts and commitment and can be the seed for a great relationship.
- These moments in the Visitors Lounge will be fundamental for the visitors in understanding if they want to be part of this spiritual group of believers in Jesus.
- The person who speaks to them at the Visitors Lounge writes down additional details at the back of the card and gives that to us as the elders.

- We take these details and capture them on a spreadsheet that the elders share. This is so we can follow up on them.
- If people want to be called in a month, we record it, and then do it. We don't want to promise something and not do it. We want to be god stewards of our administration but we want to make sure people don't feel part of a process.
- An elder will phone them in the week to give them a quick thank-you and maybe speak to them about DNA and Life Group in more detail if that's what they indicated they would like.

We value these moments of decision in the Visitors' Lounge. We want to honour God with the work He's called us to and we want to help people integrate and function in a local body so they can enjoy all God has for them and get on with the call on their lives and the call God has placed on the Church. We want them to find their part to play in this exciting mission God has given us.

A culture of being served

in 1840, over 90 percent of the American population was involved in agriculture. Then the industrial revolution happened and the Second World War and the U.S. became the biggest economy in the world. Now, 23 percent of its working population are involved in making something. Everyone else is involved in services where you're not actually producing anything. Less than three percent of its population is involved in agriculture.

If you track the history of involvement in the churches in the U.S. alongside the development trend mentioned above, you come to some interesting conclusions. The U.S. used to have some of the highest involvement in churches compared to anywhere else in the world as there used to be a culture of work, producing and getting involved. But now, as most of the population is involved in services, people come to church to be served.

We are very much a part of this Western culture where we arrive and want to be served. When you go further north into Africa you find some churches have meetings three times a day, every day. Even guys who work will come to these meetings. And everyone's involved – they all sing, they all contribute in some way. Why? Because there isn't a culture of service, most people are involved in other kinds of work and work that requires contribution is a part of their life.

This culture of expecting to be served has unfortunately worked its way into the Church in a big way. We need to break this mindset because we are not here to be served but are here to serve.

We do need to follow up on people and that's a process that we've just gone through. But if that doesn't happen, will they stay? How much of a revelation have we had of Jesus that even if no one calls us again we will still keep coming to church? That's the difference between coming to be served or coming to serve.

Before we can function as the priesthood of all believers we need to have a revelation of Jesus. If you want friends, be a friend. If you want someone to follow up on you, you follow up on them. If you want someone to pray for you, you pray for them. If you want someone to give to you, you give to them. That's how life works in the Kingdom. We don't see that in the world, but let's not live like the world does.

Engage, be involved, know what's going on, interact, ask questions - that's how you're going to get involved in this church. The only way you're going to get to meet people and make friends is to get on board with what we're doing. Because if you haven't noticed it yet, we're a very busy church. There is so much going on. And the best way to make friends is to do something with them, to walk alongside them.

What is a Life Group?

- **A place to serve one another**

How else can you serve except to be around people to serve? Making yourself dinner is not service. You need to be integrated into somewhere before you can serve.

- **A place to build relationships**

The Scriptures teach us how to love and relate to others. You can't live the Scriptures unless you have a relationship with other people. It's not possible.

- **A place to exercise your gift**

The smaller context of a Life Group makes this possible and more practical. But you can't practice if you're not in a Life Group and in a community. If you're sharing prophetic words on your own, in your bedroom, you've got a problem.

- **A place where you grow and mature**
- **A place of encouragement**
- **A place where we can be vulnerable and transparent**

We're all very proud and like for everyone to think we've got it all together. We want this unreal, idyllic world that doesn't exist.

- **A place where you can be accountable**

This means you are transparent and people know what's going on in your life. Why on earth would you want someone else to help you with your decision making? Because we all fall short and we're a family. If I stand here and share my weakness, it's going to make you feel more comfortable to share yours. If I get a little bit of perspective, maybe someone can give me insight just by talking about it. Encourage means to give someone courage. And we all need that!

What is a Life Group not?

- **A place to gossip**
- **A social club**

While it is a social gathering that's not its only purpose. There are plenty of great social clubs available.

- **A religious gathering**

It's a community of friendships, not a place of laws and rules. But the fact that it's primarily a relational thing makes it so complicated! Because relationships are complicated! Yet, we can only mature and grow in relationship. It's easy to read the Bible, but you can only work it out in relationship. It doesn't happen any other way!

- **A place of judgement**

We don't come to Life Group to puff ourselves up and judge everyone else who's got it wrong and is living wrong. The church is called to love not to judge.

- **A place to push your agenda**

The Life Group is about your church not your thing. Sometimes we feel that the Life Group gives us an opportunity to push things in the direction we want and that direction is opposite to where the elders are leading us. Using a platform that was given to you for the purpose of building this church for your own agenda lacks integrity. This is not what Life Groups are about.

The elders encourage Life Groups to be a place where people can ask questions, where they can discuss things and so on. But if you're not sure about what the elders are doing and why, discuss it with the elders. Why sow discord or doubt in the minds of others? Sort this out with the elders directly.

What happens at a Life Group

It's your responsibility to ensure your Life Group is all these things above, not your Life Group leader. Sure, they do carry the responsibility, but they really can't do it without you.

Generally we try and do the following things at a Life Group:

- 1. Facilitate worship**
- 2. Cultivate contribution**
- 3. Teach and apply the truth**
- 4. Facilitate relationships**
- 5. Multiply and plant**
- 6. Impact the community**
- 7. Raise up leaders**
- 8. Lead yourself**

When it comes to facilitating relationships:

- 1. You need to give if you want to get**
- 2. You need to help people integrate**
- 3. You need to help create a culture of encouragement**
- 4. You need relational responsibility**
- 5. You need to develop community**

Cultivating a contribution in a Life Group

- 1. Every single person is valuable to God and to His people.**

You are not a number or just part of the mass. You're unique, an individual created in the image of God in such a beautiful and wonderful way.

God has gifted and anointed you. So you have a gift, anointing and ministry that God has given to you that He wants you to exercise. It's one thing having it, it's another thing using it. An anointing is a supernatural empowerment of God to fulfil a task, to accomplish something for him. So we must use what God has given to us. Get what the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25 is saying – if you don't use it, you lose it.

- 2. Come prepared when you come to Life Group**

Don't just sit and receive from the leader. If you want to receive, learn to give first. Jesus said it's far better to give than receive. Come prayed up, ready, having waited on God.

- 3. Your gift will always make room for you**

We don't have to force things and make them happen, your gift will make room for your contribution. The Life Group leader will make room for you to contribute and participate. So therefore be ready. A Life Group leader who doesn't isn't very good.

- 4. Being a contributing member of the body**

Understand this in Life Group, just like you are in church.

- a) We contribute with our time.
- b) with our talents
- c) with our treasures - finances (meals etc.), to the financial responsibility of the church.

Your prayers are powerful and effective, so pray those prayers. Life Groups are a great forum and opportunity for us to pray, together.

You have a story. Tell it. Our testimony's also grow and develop, it's not just about what God did 25 years ago but maybe what he did 25 minutes ago, hours ago. We need to have an ongoing testimony. We should all have a story to encourage, develop and help others.

- 5. Exercise your gifts**

1 Cor 14: 26

26 What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.

We can't always do this in a big forum but in a Life Group it can happen effectively. And so why is this done? For the strengthening of the church. Not the building, the people!

6. Be willing to be stretched

Because that's when you grow. When you do things that might not come easy or naturally or you think someone else could do it better. But by me doing it, I'm going to grow. If we're going to operate in spiritual gifts we must be stretched.

7. Be available or willing to lead when asked

Be faithful if you're given something to do. Even be open to leading a group if the elders ask.

8. Don't resist multiplication of the group

Sometimes it becomes a comfortable enclave, and then if anything rocks it we freak. But for the purposes of growth, sometimes God has to do that. Don't dig your heels in but be part of what God is doing.

9. Be outward in your focus.

As much as it's about relationship and building each other up, etc. It's also a great opportunity to have impact and make a difference together somewhere (a hospital etc.). If the world is not our parish, then our parish becomes our world. The life group is not our world.