

Life Groups

Part 3: Life Groups in Cornerstone

The audio version of this teaching can be downloaded at <http://cornerstonechurch.co.za/lifegroups-in-cornerstone/>

In Part 2 we looked at the emphasis the Scriptures place on meeting in homes, starting from the ministry of Jesus to the life of the early church, including the letters, which give us more clues to God's heart for church life.

Now we'll look more closely at why Life Groups are important for us today and how Life Groups are practically worked out in the life of a church, using Cornerstone Bedfordview as an example.

A clash of cultures

Constantly we're addressing the fact that the Kingdoms of this world are diametrically opposed to the Kingdom of God. As much as we've been called to turn the world upside down with the Gospel, many times the world has turned the church upside down. We're very tempted to take the ways that the world uses to capture people's attention and "run" churches that way.

Church life, which includes life groups, clashes against the prevailing culture of our time. As the Church we could just go with the whole current post-modern flow and give into the systems of this world, or we could challenge the culture with the Kingdom culture we find in the Scriptures.

What are some of the pushes from our culture?

1. A consumer Christianity

This is where it's really "all about me" and questions of how beneficial it is for me personally are made all-important. Basically, if it's not going to be easy then what is the reason to be involved? So if church demands too much then it loses its benefit and is a waste of time.

2. A spectator Christianity

This is when I basically come to church to watch a show. We live busy lives in the city and so there's a push to just get all the "church stuff" done on a Sunday morning so we can get on with our lives. But the Sunday morning time is the least important in our Christian lives. The most important time is our day-to-day living out of our faith; a commitment to a lifestyle of Biblical values.

The Sunday meetings enable us to be encouraged so we can fulfill what we're called to do together while Life Groups help us flesh that out in a personal way. But not many sermons are about the in-between, most important bits of our life.

3. "I reserve my rights" Christianity

Here I just choose what I like from a menu and dispose of those aspects that make me feel uncomfortable, don't fit in with what I'd like, or challenge me in ways I'd prefer not to be challenged in. Self-sacrifice and obedience to Christ go out the window.

But we've been called to live in a different culture altogether.

The biblical value of Life Groups as seen in Scripture

In the church we need to see disciples made, not converts. Life Groups is not a programme or something to fill another night – something to justify the elders' salaries – but it's rather about a lifestyle where we practice Christianity in a community.

We've already seen in Part 2 that it's the way the early church met and God calls us to have a heart of hospitality. This is part of working out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12,13).

Who is responsible for our growth as a Christian? Ultimately, we are personally responsible. It's good that we prayerfully consider a church that will help grow us, but it's also up to us to work out our salvation and as we take responsibility we also share that responsibility together.

The important purpose of Life Groups

- Life Groups enable the elders of a church to care for the flock

We don't set up shallow Life Groups. Rather, this is the place where there is a more hands-on approach to shepherding the flock.

When we have a visitor to our church we try to engage them personally rather than have a system that follows them up with general letters of welcome and so forth. This is because God deals with each of us personally and we feel that it's good for us to represent that heart of God as a church. That's why people need to be encouraged to join a Life Group as soon as possible so that they can be personally shepherded.

Life Groups revolve around three hallmarks of shepherding: loving, leading and feeding. This is where discipling takes place. We want to see each person changed from glory to glory and becoming like Christ. Life Group leaders enable the elders to care for the flock.

- **Life Groups provide a place where the flock can be envisioned.**

Alone we can lose vision but together we can get on board with something and so be envisioned. We may develop relationships around many interests or issues but the real objective is about being disciplined in Christ.

- **In Life Groups, people have space to grow relationally**

You can't really grow relationally on a Sunday morning meeting where things are often rushed or there are a lot of people around. You can't grow relationally in the supermarket either when you bump into someone buying the groceries. No, in a Life Group, in someone's home, is where we work out our relationships and where we truly learn to love, forgive, honour each other and so on. Here is where Christianity becomes personal.

- **Life Groups provide accountability**

Along with the above, Life Groups provide the space for relationships to also include accountability.

- **Life Groups provide opportunity for participation, making Christianity practical and a lifestyle**

In a Life Group everyone partakes in prayer, sharing their testimony, serving the others, worship (breaking of bread) and exercising the gifts God has given them in the Spirit (prophecy, etc.).

Not all of us can prophesy on a Sunday morning, but we can in a smaller setting at a Life Group.

Christianity is best lived out through participation. You must be connected to a church and then you must function.

- **Life Groups are about formation, not information**

This is not time for more information but a time to be challenged with the 'hows' of Christianity. i.e. formation.

Life Groups provide the space where we can, as in Acts 2, cry out, "Brothers, what shall we do?" More information won't help. We want disciples, not experts. We need encouragement and prayer, done together, to help us faithfully plod along in in God during tough times.

- **In Life Groups, we seek and save the lost**

We learn how to share our faith, how to be engaged in a lifestyle of evangelism, and we pray for the lost, our families, our city, the nations and so on.

Statistics say that, putting our relationships together and seeing it as one network, we affect about 40,000 people on a daily basis.

At Life Groups we provide opportunities for the lost where we can invite them. And we keep developing our apostolic identity – going on ministry trips together, serving together, and so on.

- **Life Groups equip for works of service**

Life Groups are to equip us for works of service. Whatever it is. Your gift makes room for you. There's nothing more healthy than a Christian whose giving out. It's when you stop giving out that problems begin.

Practically – Looking at our meetings at Bedfordview

Here's how we have worked out the value of Life Groups in Cornerstone Bedfordview, to serve as an example.

- Sunday Mornings (9am)

This is when we worship as a congregation, envision, teach / preach, hear from God, present the gospel and more.

This meeting is primarily about worship – it is, after all, the sole purpose of man to glorify God. Here we enjoy a corporate dynamic where we see the Spirit poured out and we see changes taking place.

We want there to be a friendliness, fellowship and sincerity. That's what we're showcasing – who we are as a community. But that's also all in our worship. See 1 Cor 14.

- Sunday evenings (6pm)

These meetings are more geared towards evangelism or providing more space for the spiritual gifts to operate. For evangelism we usually have courses or series' or cafe-styled evenings. We also tend to

do our celebrations or ordinations on Sunday evenings. Basically, the Sunday evening meeting purpose changes quite a lot.

- Wednesday evenings (6pm) – Wednesday Night Life
 - We usually have a prayer meeting from 6 – 6:45pm.
 - We then enjoy a meal together until 7:30pm
 - We then have a Bible study until 8:30pm

- Life Groups

Generally, Life Groups meet in homes on Tuesday and Thursday evenings at various times. We're also addressing the necessity of meeting at other times and venues. Therefore, we have lunch time Life Groups that cater for business people who can't make evenings, and Friday late afternoon youth Life Groups.

Life Groups can form around a specific demographic, function, need or purpose – there isn't a specific model in terms of how we put them together.

So, who should be in a Life Group?

Everyone. Every person who is serious about their Christianity.

How Life Groups are led

Life Groups are led by deacons who are in relationship with and have oversight from an elder. We see in Phil 1:1 that Paul begins addressing the saints first before the deacons and elders (overseers). So we understand that the highest form of life in a local church are the 'saints', not the leaders.

God holds the team of elders and deacons accountable for the wellbeing of a local church. These people don't have perfect lives but what's important is that they know how to sort it out with God.

Why homes? Because it really is the best and most practical way that the leaders of the local church can 'watch over your souls' as called to by God (Heb 13:7).

Questions

1. What is the difference between a program and a lifestyle?
2. What are the meetings of this local church, and why?
3. What is the heart behind Life Groups, and when do they meet?
4. Who are Life Groups intended for, and who leads them?