



# **LIFE GROUPS**

*Living in the Kingdom from House to House*

For leaders

by

**Cornerstone Church Johannesburg**

**LIFE GROUPS: Living in the Kingdom from House to House**

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# LIFE GROUPS

## *Living in the Kingdom from House to House*

### *For leaders*

Why Life Groups? Why meet in homes? These are the overarching questions that this manual attempts to answer. The manual has been built off of a course conducted at Cornerstone Church Johannesburg in August and September, 2012.

The course is available in two parts – one part designed for those either currently involved in leadership in the Church or looking to be (*Life Groups for Leaders*) and the other for those who are not in leadership (*Life Groups for the Priesthood*).

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## **Part 1**

### **Living in the Kingdom from House to House**

An audio version of this teaching can be downloaded from <http://cornerstonechurch.co.za/living-in-the-kingdom-from-house-to-house/>

#### **Why We Meet the Way We Do**

It's always been God's desire that we co-labour with Him. We see this when we look at Jesus' ministry. For three and a half years as he goes around from village to village, city to city, he calls a group of twelve to Himself, trains them and sends them out to continue His work.

But how should they continue His work? After he has faced the cross and overcomes and is resurrected, He tells them to wait. Simply to wait. He promises that they are going to receive something that will let them be His witnesses even to the ends of the earth (Matt 28: 19, 20).

The first two chapters of Acts show us how Jesus built the Church and how he builds it today. It's important to remember that it has practical applications – it's not just giving us a history of what happened.

The Church is built on the revelation of Jesus Himself (Matthew 16: 13 – 18). That's where we first start seeing something about the 'Church' in the Scriptures. After that, God pours out His Spirit, which we see in Acts. The result of that outpouring is powerful preaching that cuts people to the heart and causes at first a desperate cry for salvation and then a response of an awe of God. That all leads to a devoted lifestyle, in particular devotion to the Word, prayer, the breaking of bread and fellowship (Acts 2:42). And if you look carefully you'll notice that they met in homes a great deal. So did Jesus in His ministry.

We're not called to make converts but disciples, which requires more than just preaching or wonderful corporate meetings but rather an interconnected and devoted lifestyle where there is a great deal of hospitality involved. It's in homes where relationship actually happens.

It's far better to let the Scriptures impose on us than we haul out some new manual of our own. When we look at Acts, it's easy to see that meeting in homes was a core culture that Jesus built into the life of His church right from the beginning. Let's go into detail here and break this all down.

## The promise of the Holy Spirit

### Acts 1 (ESV):

1 In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began **to do and teach...**

Immediately we are confronted here with something that challenges our version of Christianity – Jesus both did and taught, which had an impact. His teaching was followed by doing and visa versa. He is the same today. We need both the demonstration of His power and the Gospel.

A dead Christianity is all bout reams and reams of teaching. But teaching ought to produce Kingdom results with lives transformed, healings happening, cities being impacted and situations turned upside down – just like we see in the book of Acts. The Holy Spirit is poured out for the sake of the Gospel, for the sake of establishing the Kingdom. You always need both doing and teaching, you can't lean on just one or the other.

2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3 He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

Note that Jesus didn't speak about the Church but about the Kingdom. We'll pick this up a little later.

4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to **wait** for the promise of the Father,

We need to wait for God at times. So often we rush ahead and do our thing and implore God to join us in what we're doing. But rather we ought to be joining Him in what He is doing.

which, he said, “you heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

God's intention is that the whole Church is baptised in and with the Spirit. He never divided the church up into Baptists, Methodists or Wild Pentecostals, etc. We need to get out of the hyper-conservative or hyper-charismatic camps and focus on what we see in the Scriptures. The Spirit is for everyone.

## The ascension

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 But **you** will receive power when the Holy Spirit has

come upon **you**, and **you** will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Here is the key issue of everything. Jesus' desire is to fill His Church with His Spirit. He puts us in community and impacts us in our togetherness so that we can be witnesses. There's a partnership with Him that takes place. We witness wherever we are. The Gospel must go out in power – His Spirit.

### Outpouring of the Spirit

#### Acts 2: 2 - 5

2 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested[a] on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.

We start seeing the fulfillment of what Jesus said in Acts 1 – that the disciples would be His witnesses to all nations. God puts the early church straight away in an opportunity to do just that – *after* He has filled them with the Spirit, not before.

Right on our doorstep is the nations – in our city. Now when this happened see how the crowds responded:

6 And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were **bewildered**, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. 7 And they were **amazed** and **astonished**, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, 11 both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”

When the Spirit comes on a church it impacts everyone. And what's the first thing we see coming out of the hearts of these Christians from the upper room? Praise. This praise left people amazed and perplexed.

12 And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 13 But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

You will always have these two responses – those who realise that something's happening here, and they are amazed and perplexed; and, of course, the hacklers. Don't be surprised when some mock you and even accuse you of being drunk when you speak the Gospel!

### **Anointed preaching**

After Jesus pours out His Spirit we see Peter preach, quoting from the book of Joel around God's promise that He would pour out His Spirit. After His sermon (Acts 2: 14 – 36) see the response:

37 Now when they heard this they were *cut to the heart*, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

38 And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Peter doesn't make distinctions. He mentions all these things together – repent, be baptised, receive the Spirit. This is for all believers.

41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Think about what this must have been like for this church. You go to bed with 120 people in your local church and you know you need to pray and wait. You wake up the next morning, go to a prayer meeting, and by the end of the day you are now 3120 people! If we want to reach our city and do what God has called us to do, it's not going to be through clever planning and strategising, decked-out buildings and the like. Rather, we need the anointed power of God which will result in men and women alive with the Gospel.

### **A Devoted Way of Life**

So, how does this pertain to meeting in homes? Well, see how this worked. After the initial three thousand, the Scriptures say that numbers were added to them daily. Then later on two thousand were added until twenty-five percent of the city were born again! Then they were dispersed and they went out preaching, with the Antioch church being planted. Here Paul and Barnabas were sent and Galatia opened to them and eventually there are churches all around Asia Minor. Then they go to Europe (Ephesus) and it was all impacted.

It started with 120 waiting on God. Do you think God's ideal is to get a small bunch of people together and make sure they're secure and happy? No, he has a great purpose in mind. He looks at 120 people and he can see Asia Minor impacted; Europe impacted; the world. We're the seed He wants to



use. From your small group of people that gather at a house God sees nations changed.

The question is, how best can we shepherd? We're not about converts but disciples, so how do we disciple? God has a way that He builds the Church that we need to grab hold of. But we can't do that unless we are convicted about it. And Acts 2:42 addresses that:

42 And they *devoted* themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Devotion has to be the way we're characterised as believers. In this scripture we see that devotion was the norm. We only have one shot at this thing called life: why not rather be devoted to God and His mission than be all over the place and all about our mission? What will count in the end? Our agenda or God's agenda?

So how did they live out God's agenda? Through devotion – devotion to the Word of God (the apostles' teaching; devotion to prayer; devotion to the breaking of bread and devotion to fellowship).

43 And awe came upon every soul...

See this – awe came on the whole church without a permanent building, a sound system, lighting or smoke machines etc. I have a pastor in Durban to thank for that insight. We can't rely on these kinds of set-ups to get people in. They ought to come in for the Gospel – not because we have a great anything but because we have a great God.

43b ...and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

And with this the miracles flowed. Not everyone was healed, but people were getting healed, delivered, saved. God is wanting to restore that to us.

44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

These were a hospitable people. Homes were open. Because they built this way God added. This isn't what you find at most 'Church growth seminars'. At those generally the 'Three B's' are preached – Bucks; Bums in Seats; and Buildings. Whatever it takes to bring the money in and to get guys to stay is the core focus. But God's way is different.

You see throughout Scripture that when you build things His way then He fills it with His Spirit, His Power, and then the people come. In the Old Testament the Ark had to get built His Way; the Temple had to be built according to His pattern. Then He came. Like in the book of Ezekiel, once it's built according to God's way then He fills it with His Spirit. And if He's there then it grows.

### **So how do we meet?**

Let's address the heart of why we're meeting first before getting into the practical applications.

#### **1. Acts 1:3 – Kingdom first**

From Acts 1:3 you can see that it's all about the Kingdom first. We're not about church growth but about the Kingdom impacting this world. We're not saying Life Groups are important because they've proven to be a great formula for making a big church. No, the Church serves God's Kingdom agenda. Jesus is establishing the Kingdom of God through the Church. Life Group is a key way in which we serve this agenda because it's where real discipling takes place. You can't disciple closely in large, corporate settings.

#### **2. 1:8 – Our Apostolic purpose**

We only ever do what we do with the infilling of the Spirit. We are called to be witnesses by His infilling. The Church is supposed to impact "Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria and the ends of the Earth (Acts 1:8)".

And who is Samaria to us? The demographic that doesn't look like you. (The Jews hated the Samaritans.) It's the cultures we're not used to and they're here in our borders and outside our borders as we go to the ends of the earth.

#### **3. 2:37-41 – The heart of the matter**

We must be convicted in our hearts. We need to be crying out to God, "What must I do?" just like the crowds did in Acts. And the answer to their question? Be filled with the Spirit and be baptised (Acts 2:38). Identify with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. We live on way too much human sweat and not enough on His power.

#### **4. 2:42 – The importance of personal devotion**

We can preach as much as we like but how is your personal devotion? This is the way in which we "work out our salvation" (Philippians 2: 12, 13) – we are devoted to the Word; to prayer; to the fellowship; and to the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42). We need to make a personal decision to change

our patterns and live devoted. It must come from the inside out or else it will never produce the Kingdom.

If you don't have a personal devotion to Christ and His ways then you won't really understand why meeting in homes is so important, why discipling is so paramount. Too much of our Christianity these days is about getting the congregation together and teaching them some Christian 'tricks' – formulas for this and that. When you meet in homes the point is to disciple, not to teach some new gimmick.

We need to come back to the drawing board – find the best time of your day and give God that time. When was the last time you got excited about planning some time off to wait on God? Devotion starts with us as individuals and that life will then boil over to us in our togetherness. We are dead without our personal devotion to God.

#### **5. 2:43-47 – Why we meet the way we do?**

We get the value of meeting in homes from the Scriptures. Jesus is building His Church. What He did back then by the Holy Spirit He will do and wants to do today.

Jesus looked over the 120 in that upper room and saw how they would impact a city, a region and beyond. He's committed to doing the same thing today as he looks over your Life Group.

He is ushering us towards Acts 1:8 – a Christianity that is both done and spoken. We are devoted to the Word of God (the Apostles' teaching in Acts 2:42) and we see in the Word that the early church met both in large corporate meetings – they met in the temple – and in homes (Acts 2: 46), so that's why we do it the same way.

The congregational dynamic has wonderful benefits but as they in Acts worked out their Christianity in a discipleship way it was fleshed out in a smaller context. It's impossible to disciple effectively in a large, congregational setting. If all the leaders of our church were taken out and the building was closed down, our church should still continue, because the church is wherever we get together – it's not a building.

Fellowship is a very misunderstood word and the English language doesn't convey the richness of what the word means in the Scriptures. Here we see that relationships move into friendships into covenant and then into partnership. We see how Jesus partnered with his disciples when He sent them out.

God is wanting to put partnerships together. Dynamics that happen in little groups, something of the Kingdom that transacts there, just doesn't happen in a larger setting. And so meeting in homes continue to be a big part of how Jesus builds his church.

***Questions to ask***

1. What is the relationship between the God's Kingdom and the church? (Acts 1:3)
2. What is our purpose as believers? (Acts 1:8)
3. What is the heart of the matter? (Acts 2:37-41)
4. What's all the fuss about personal devotion? (Acts 2:42)
5. Why do we meet the way we do? (Acts 2:43-47)

## Part 2

### Homes, house-to-house and households

An audio version of this teaching can be downloaded at <http://cornerstonechurch.co.za/homes-house-to-house-and-households/>

In Part 1 of this series on Life Groups, we looked at Acts 1 & 2 and examined how the early church started and how they met. Acts 2:42 and vs 43 shows us that they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching (the Word), the breaking of bread, the fellowship and prayers. Verse 43 shows us that they met both in large corporate meetings (at the Jewish Temple) and in their homes. It even says they did this day by day!

Now we'll look at the emphasis the Scriptures place on 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.

#### In Jesus' day, a lot of ministry took place in homes

In Acts 1:8 Jesus tells his disciples that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon them, and they will be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. He lived this out in his own ministry. The Gospel always goes out in ever-increasing circles. You see this from the scriptures.

Let's examine how much of Jesus' ministry occurred in homes and came out of homes. Unlike what we might expect today, or what they might have expected then, Jesus didn't occupy some chief place in society. He didn't minister out of some school of philosophy or anything like that. No, instead he ministered and taught in normal, ordinary, every-day homes.

The Gospel must invade our homes and then must flow out of our homes. Our homes ought to be a place where the healing of God flows.

#### Matthew 8: 14 – 17

14 And when Jesus entered **Peter's house**, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. 15 He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him. 16 That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. 17 This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."

**Luke 5: 31 – 32** (also see Matthew 9: 10 – 13)

“31 And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

This profound declaration of the Gospel comes out of a home (Levi's home). Right here, in a home, all sorts of things are happening – Jesus is talking about the Gospel; He is being criticised; He rebukes the Pharisees. These very important moments didn't occur at some important place somewhere.

Jesus' declaration of the sick needing salvation is what our homes should stand for – a place where the lost are welcome, where people can get saved. We can invite any of our friends to our home as, after all, the Gospel is not for the righteous but the unrighteous. Effectively, our homes are a venue for the Gospel.

### **Mark 2:1**

And when [Jesus] returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was **at home**.

The rest of this passage tells the story of the paralytic who was healed after being lowered down from the roof by his friends because there wasn't even space by the door. That all happened in Jesus' own home, who was preaching the word. Note that he didn't complain that they had opened up his roof to lower down their friend!

### **Mark 3:20 – 21**

**Then he went home**, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. 21 And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “He is out of his mind.”

Talk about how the Gospel invades! They couldn't even eat because the crowd! His family even said He was out of his mind.

Jesus' ministry was from the inside out. If the Gospel isn't working at home, will it work outside the home? Jesus took the Gospel home – he allowed it to mess up his own home, to turn it upside down.

- A lot of Jesus' discipling happened in homes. **Mark 9: 33-37** offers us an example (this is possibly Jesus' own home being referred to):

33 And they came to Capernaum. And **when he was in the house** he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” 34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one

another about who was the greatest. 35 And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." 36 And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

- **Luke 10:38-42** – He taught in Mary and Martha's house.

- **Luke 19:1-10**

1 He entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3 And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature. 4 So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. 5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for **I must stay at your house today.**" 6 So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. 7 And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." 8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." 9 And Jesus said to him, "**Today salvation has come to this house**, since he also is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Salvation came to a house, and that mattered to Jesus, and he declared this salvation out of a house. That declaration can be made in our homes too. Our home is a rescue station where people can get healed. Yes, it is a sanctuary as well for us and there are times when it's good to just unwind. But the fact is that it must be an outlet for the Gospel.

- **Matt 26:18**

He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover **at your house** with my disciples. '"

The Passover was a profound moment in time that we still celebrate today. And it all happened in a home.

- **Luke 7:36**

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's **house** and reclined at the table. 37 And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment,

38 and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

Our homes ought to be filled with an aroma of worship. This is a beautiful picture of what a home can be.

### **The first church met in the temple and in homes**

- **Acts 2:1-3 1**

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled **the entire house** where they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

The Lord determined that the Church would be born with the power of the Spirit in a home. This meeting in homes continued as a component of the early church's life, as the scriptures below show. You didn't have to tell them to meet in homes, they knew that that's where Christianity is lived out.

- **Acts 2:46-47 46**

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread **in their homes**, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

- **Acts 5:42**

And every day, in the temple and from **house to house**, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

- **Acts 8:1b-3**

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. 3 But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering **house after house**, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

- **Acts 12:12-17**



When Peter was set free by the angels, he went to Mary's house, the mother of John-Mark, where there was a prayer meeting being held for his release from prison! Our homes can be used for prayer.

- **Acts 20:17-21**

17 Now from Miletus [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.  
18 And when they came to him, he said to them:

“You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and **teaching you in public and from house to house**, 21 testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

As you can see, Paul' ministry – despite being a prominent leader – included preaching from house to house. Discipling happens in homes. If you read through the book of Acts with this in mind you'll start to pick up the heart of it.

### **Households were impacted with the Gospel**

(Some went on to become churches)

- **Acts 10:17-48**

Cornelius' household in Caesarea

- **Acts 16:11-15**

Lydia's household in Philippi

- **Acts 16:25-34**

The Philippian jailer

This last scripture is a good one to read. God is very interested in saving households, not just individuals. After you're saved the next thing on God's agenda is to see your household saved. This is how we should be praying. And not just for our parents or our kids but for our aunts and uncles and all the rest.

- **Acts 18:1-11**

After Paul is kicked out of the synagogue in Corinth, he moves to Titius Justus' house next door and ministers from his house. There the ruler of the synagogue, Crispus, and his household are saved! So he was kicked out of the synagogue only to have the ruler of the synagogue saved in a house next door.

These scriptures challenge the way some of us think of Life Groups. This isn't a time to play Scrabble

or Chess! God is interested in this.

### Churches in homes

At the end of many of Paul's letters, you'll see he greets churches that meet in homes. For example:

- **Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19**

Priscilla and Aquila's home

- **Col 4:15**

Nympha of Laodicea's home

- **Philemon 2**

Philemon from Lycos Valley's home

It seems churches may have been planted in houses and moved elsewhere as they got bigger. Some of them had big mansions so they could accommodate that. The point is that there's a strong theme surrounding the involvement of homes with the Gospel.

### The Principles

Taking all the above into account, let's apply this to today. So, why do we meet the way we do (in homes and in big corporate gatherings)?

#### 1. We emulate Jesus

- We see how Jesus ministered above. But Jesus also calls his house a “house of prayer for all nations” (Mark 11:17).

Life Groups aren't a program that we add on to our Christianity but are rather the way in which we live it out. We don't need amazing facilities – although we do thank God for our facility. Our primary way of meeting is in homes.

- Jesus also spoke about how Zeal for His Father's house consumed Him (John 2:17). A home is not just a place but it's a family. When we meet in a home that family is making a statement about who they serve, who their God is, the Gospel they believe and the Jesus they trust.
- Jesus also practises hospitality. See **John 14: 1 – 4:**

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take

you to myself, that where I am you may be also. 4 And you know the way to where I am going.”

Jesus is preparing a place for us in His home, not at a hotel or some or other place. That's hospitality. Hospitality says that everything you have belongs to the Kingdom of God. There is none that are unwelcome, no sinner that will be turned away. That's Kingdom.

## 2. Our home/family is our most practical tool to use for the Gospel

- When we talk of homes we don't just mean a place but also a family. God wants our treasures and talents. He wants an amazing river of Gospel life to flow out of our homes.
- Hospitality is love in action. You want to tell me you love me? Well, is your door open? Hospitality is not about having the best house, a full fridge and the best crockery. Hospitality is about the home being open.
- The New Testament often challenges us to practice hospitality:

### i. **Matt 10:12-14 12**

As you enter the house, greet it. 13 And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. 14 And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town.

- If that home is not hospitable, Jesus says let your peace return to you.

### ii. **Rom 12:9-13 9**

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and **seek to show hospitality.**

### iii. **Heb 13:1-2 1**

Let brotherly love continue. 2 **Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers**, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

### iv. **1 Pet 4:8-10 8**

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. 9 **Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.** 10 As each has received a gift,

use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

**v. 3 Jn 5-12 (To Gaius)**

5 Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, 6 who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. 7 For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. 8 Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

9 I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. 10 So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

11 Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. 12 Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

Here's a whole letter in the Bible that's all about hospitality. Gaius was commended for his hospitality. He was obviously well known for it. And now, for all of eternity, he has been commended for it!

But can you see how wicked Diotrephes' heart had become? For all of eternity he is known as the guy who wanted to be first, so he stopped his own people from showing hospitality to others (vs 10b) and even put them out of the church if they did.

**We live our lives from the inside out**

Having our own devotion times must grip our hearts. Our home should be a place where we practice the Gospel. It starts with our devotions and then boils over to leading our families and then practicing the Gospel in hospitality.

1 Tim 3:1-8 and Titus 1:7-8 list hospitality as part of the qualifications of being a leader. It's not just about leading the home / family, but opening the home up for the Gospel.

**Out of this culture of using our homes as a tool for the Gospel, we organise Life Groups in homes and offices and wherever else necessary.**

The first church saw that it was necessary to meet in small groups. It's in the Scriptures as a model for us to follow. It's a Kingdom culture and therefore we want to practice it in our Christianity.

It ought to happen naturally (and many times it does) but we also formalise Life Group meetings for the sake of discipleship and shepherding. This isn't something we want to add on to our church life, it's something we want to make a part of our life and celebrate. The real nitty gritty of Christianity happens in homes (we love our wives from Monday to Sunday).

It's great to invite someone to a large corporate gathering but it's even better when we can invite them into our home and share the Gospel with them there. Are we known in our neighbourhoods as homes of healing? Or are we just known as the irritating Christians who play loud music?

We choose leaders from those who we see are getting it right at home, along with the other qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3. It doesn't mean they're perfect. It means that they know how to sort things out with God. We will address leadership more strongly in the next part.

**We believe, unflinchingly, that this is the way we build the church Jesus is building**

This isn't something we've decided on beforehand and then have tried to find scriptures to support it. When we look at the New Testament we see this is how discipleship happens. It makes sense – it's much more sustainable that way. Everything God has called us to can happen in a home context and we want to make space for that to happen.

***Questions to ask***

1. What was so special about homes to Jesus?
2. Why was the book of Acts church focused on homes?
3. Is my home a fortress or a tool for the Gospel?
4. Do I understand the heart of hospitality?

## **Part 3**

### **Life Groups in Cornerstone**

An 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**

##### **1. 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.

## **2. 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.

## **3. 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.

## **4. Life Groups provide accountability**

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

## **5. 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.

## **6. 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.

## **7. 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.

## **8. 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 to ask***

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?

## Part 4

### Qualifications and Functions of a Deacon

Download the audio version of this teaching at <http://cornerstonechurch.co.za/life-groups-qualifications-and-functions-of-a-deacon/>

In Part 3 we discussed why Life Groups are important for us today and how they are practically worked out in the life of a church, using Cornerstone as an example.

Now the course splits into two – for those who are involved in leadership or would like to be and for those who aren't. We've called these two parts "Leadership" and "Priesthood" for ease-of-use, knowing that, of course, all of us are the priesthood.

You are currently reading the first part for leaders and potential leaders, which is the fourth part of the course overall. In this part we will talk about the qualifications and functions of a deacon.

#### The leadership offices in a local church

##### Phil 1:1

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the *saints* in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers [*elders*] and *deacons*:

This is how the local church is made up. The highest order of life in a local church is *saints*. Within that, the offices of overseers and deacons are appointed by God.

Leadership is one of the many functions in the body of Christ. God has anointed elders and deacons to lead and it's important that we understand that this call is from God. Likewise, elders (overseers – the original Greek word means the same thing) have been appointed by God and are the one governmental leadership office for the local church.

It's rather strange how we, in our so-called wisdom, tend to add all sorts of other titles to 'elder' – bishops, founding pastors, senior pastors, arch-bishops, even CEO's. We create all kinds of hierarchy but leadership in the body of Christ has nothing to do with that. God has appointed only the elders and only the deacons and only the saints.

### **Relationships outside the local church**

Every church also works in partnership and submission to servants. Paul and Timothy introduce themselves as servants in Phil 1:1 above. That's why we believe that every local church should work with a trans-local team made up of Eph 4:11 gifts (apostle, prophet, teacher, evangelist and pastor). These people with these gifts encourage and help churches and make sure they're healthy and help open the vision of that church. We see Paul and Timothy took this role and so we believe in following the same pattern for church today.

Our relationship in this context is with New Covenant Ministries International (NCMI). It's been like that since the beginning and we thank God for it. It's through this relationship that so much of the nations has opened up to us; and often truth has been revealed that we thank God for. With this relationship we can build our church on the foundation of apostles and prophets (Eph 2:19) with Jesus as the chief cornerstone.

Undoubtedly we build on Jesus Christ first and then apostolic-prophetic ministry. What does apostolic-prophetic mean? It means we're a going church (apostolic) and we're a listening church (prophetic). We're going – we're not here for and about ourselves – we are gathering together for the sake of equipping the saints so that together we can do the ministry and reach out through doors God opens.

We don't shepherd for shepherding's sake with the objective of having a whole lot of healthy sheep. No, we shepherd to enlist people into God's army so that it can rise up and do His calling in this world.

### **Elders, deacons and accountability**

The leadership of elders and deacons comes with great responsibility and accountability.

**Heb 13:7** Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith

So, are you imitate-able?

God literally wants to put you in the front and say, "That's what I mean." We need to be comfortable with that. He wants to set us up as examples. In 1 Cor 11:1 Paul says "follow me as I follow Christ." So, you – as a leader – are the model of what we are showing the church, a model that showcases what God intends – that showcases passion, purity of heart, steadfastness, consistency, and so on.

It's important that God is raising us up – he is saying go and stand before the sheep and show them. This isn't a position of prominence where we strut around hoping people will notice us so that we can autograph Bibles and that! No, it's about a function in the body of Christ.

### **Heb 13:17**

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Once the foundation of a real, authentic example has been set then we can say, as above, obey your leaders and submit to them. Not before.

We're going to give an account for our leadership. Sadly, there are many books and courses you can go on to recover from leadership abuse. Each of us may have our own story. But we must keep our hearts pure.

The obedience we as leaders command is in Christ because we're setting an example. We never impose – it's not because we say so and it's not because we can act like we're an expert. No, we're looking to find where God's going and follow that and do this well as a team and keep our hearts pure. As a leader, this is not your church, this is His church.

God looks for men and women of purity to stand in this incredibly important function. We need to let them do this with joy.

### **What a deacon is and what a deacon does**

1. A deacon is not a position of status or achievement.
2. Deacons are not just the servants and gophers who must 'make it happen'.

While some of that takes place, it's deeper than that. The heart of service was first expressed by Jesus who regularly referred to himself as a servant. The word he uses to describe himself as a 'servant' in the original Greek is the same word that means 'deacon'.

3. The heart of leadership in Phil 1:1 is service. We, the leaders, come to serve.
4. A deacon is not some kind of promotion because you've been a good saint. It's there as a call of God on your life.
5. "Deacon" is also not a noun

While the word may be a noun in English the actual reference and the way it's used in Scripture (as well as elder / overseer) is a verb – a doing word. It's something God has called

us to do, not be.

### **Functioning correctly**

The perennial problem in the church today is that elders function as deacons; deacons are doing the work of the priests; and the priests spectate. In a post-modern world, spectating is the default. There's an expectation of 'show us' and 'we want to be entertained'.

In the first century church in Acts (at the end of chapter 5) there were about 15,000 people in the church with only 12 elders and seven deacons! How did they manage that? It's because the believers were operating as an active priesthood and not spectators. They weren't being told what to do – they wanted to be involved because of their inner conviction and lifestyle.

We're almost regulating their kind of lifestyle when it should be the normal, natural flow of things. Here is a Biblical model and value that's been lost and needs to be gained.

How else did they manage this? Acts 6 says the elders were giving themselves to prayer and the Word. Deacons should be holding the elders accountable for the ministry of the Word and prayer. When was the last time you asked an elder if they were giving themselves enough to loads of prayer and the Word?

The deacons were empowered to operate in much more higher levels than we see today. Yet the qualifications are simple and have never changed.

### **Qualifications of deacons**

#### **1 Timothy 3:8-13 (NLT)**

8 In the same way, deacons must be people who are respected and have integrity. They must not be heavy drinkers and must not be greedy for money. 9 They must be committed to the revealed truths of the Christian faith and must live with a clear conscience. 10 Before they are appointed as deacons, they should be given other responsibilities in the church as a test of their character and ability. If they do well, then they may serve as deacons. 11 In the same way, their wives must be respected and must not speak evil of others. They must exercise self-control and be faithful in everything they do. 12 A deacon must be faithful to his wife, and he must manage his children and household well. 13 Those who do well as deacons will be rewarded with respect from others and will have increased confidence in their faith in Christ Jesus.

Basically, a deacon will have respect and authority because of a heart toward God. In essence, this

passage above isn't just for the deacons but for the whole church. But out of the whole church, those who are doing it as a good example and taking kingdom culture seriously and have a call on their lives are to be appointed as deacons.

### **Acts 6: 1 – 7 (NLT)**

1 But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. Those who spoke Greek complained against those who spoke Hebrew, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food. 2 So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. "We apostles should spend our time preaching and teaching the word of God, not administering a food program," they said. 3 "Now look around among yourselves, brothers, and select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. We will put them in charge of this business. 4 Then we can spend our time in prayer and preaching and teaching the word." 5 This idea pleased the whole group, and they chose the following: Stephen (a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit), Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch (a Gentile convert to the Jewish faith, who had now become a Christian). 6 These seven were presented to the apostles, who prayed for them as they laid their hands on them. 7 God's message was preached in ever-widening circles. The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem, and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too.

Now, it's true that the word deacon is not mentioned in this passage but when you tie this up to the rest of the teachings on this subject you can see it was most definitely inferred.

Note this, they chose people who were "full of the holy spirit and wisdom" to serve at tables. So, it's not just hands that are needed! There's something more happening here.

Also note that as a result of building in God's way, God's message was preached in ever-widening circles and the number of believers increased.

What can we see from this? A deacon must have a good reputation and testimony in the home, marketplace and the church. It's about living your entire life like this, not just living like this on a Sunday.

## **Let's expound**

### **1. Moral qualifications**

Deacons must have integrity and not be double-tongued. If you say "I'll pray for you" it means you'll pray! You need to have heart, not charisma. You can't lead people on clichés and what you download on the Internet. You also can't show any partiality to rich or poor – serve them all equally.

What does it mean about not being a heavy drinker? It means you're not in bondage to anything, you don't need something external to pick yourself up; rather, your joy comes from the Lord.

## **2. Spiritual qualifications**

A deacon must be committed to the revealed truths of the Christian faith. They must be devoted to the Word of God so much that they don't just read it, they take it to heart and live it out. The Word of God influences everything.

A deacon must be full of the Holy Spirit – committed to the Word and a relationship with the Holy Spirit. You need to be filled and know how to stay filled. It's about knowing how to go through storms and struggles but yet remaining in the Spirit, staying joyful, hopeful etc. We need to be able to persist through every season, producing fruit.

Once again, we need wisdom – not wisdom from below but wisdom from above (James 3:17). There are many people with a thousand opinions on absolutely everything. God's leaders, however, point people to Christ.

Deacons must be full of faith. We're a community of faith, we believe in God and that He will come through. Persist in prayer, there is no plan B. It's God; His word; His Kingdom. Plod faithfully and in due season you will reap.

## **3. Home life**

A deacons must be faithful to his wife. You need to have this marriage covenant sorted out – one wife! Your marriage is going to tell others how you lead. Your ability to apply the Christian message is evident in how you shepherd at home.

The scripture in 1 Timothy above says a deacon must manage his household and children well. That word 'manage' becomes the word for leadership in the New Testament. It's the one who stands on the bow of the boat, who knows how to get the boat through the rocks and reef and guide it safely into the harbour.

### **Functions of a deacon**

As per Acts 6 above, deacons release the elders to focus on prayer and ministry of the Word. Praying over others is a privilege of shepherding and should never be hindered by the repetitive processes that steal time.



Ministry of the Word isn't a Sunday morning download from sermons.com. Rather, ministry of the Word is birthed in a place of intercession and prayer and downloaded from heaven.

Elders are governmental but there are often blurred edges around that. Deacons serve the elders in a coming-alongside kind of way, even if some have more government on their lives which we see in action in business etc.

Deacons' responsibilities range from menial tasks to helping the elders sort out relationships in the church. Let's expound:

### **1. Deacons shepherd the flock with the elders**

The Kingdom is about about discipling the nations. That requires work, focus, effort, hospitality, inconvenience and a whole lot more besides. There are too few leaders in the church with too large a job to do. Deacons and elders get involved in lives together. We're discipling people and working towards the same goal – God's Kingdom on earth

### **2. Deacons operate and grow in the expression of their giftedness and level of faith**

God's got a call on your life. The man who waited on tables (Stephen from Acts 6) preached one of the most significant sermons in the history of the church later in the chapter in front of a hostile audience that stone him to death. Yet he becomes a seed for Paul and the event is a catalyst that helps to bring Paul in.

Philip is another great example of a deacon. We see him operate as an evangelist in Acts 21:18. He had one mandate from God, was called to be a deacon, and had a different mantle within all that. He started a fire in Ethiopia that still burns today.

Deacons need to operate at the level of their anointing and call. Some are captains of ten, some of thousands. Some deacons are going to do things that elders are never going to get to do, like open up cities.

### **3. Deacons work with the elders in bringing through the next generation of leaders**

It's so important for deacons to work together and identify the next generation of leaders. Leadership helps all the other gifts in the church to be released, that's what it's there for. Part of the elders' responsibility is to pray and see who they can delegate to. As a deacon, look to delegate and raise up and keep asking the Lord who the next leaders are.

### **Some final pointers**

- Deacons are leaders of a Life Group. Big things happen in small groups.
- Deacons help administrate the routine of the church
- Deacons should be gatherers at all times (be relational and work on your communication!)
- Deacons reach out to the lost
- Deacons should study and prepare themselves for where God is taking them
- Deacons must make sure they remain in a place of accountability
- Deacons are encouraged to work on the excesses of human nature
- Deacons should develop the scope of their ministry and influence. Our gift will make room for us.
- Deacons are not just involved in Life Group leadership but there are other practical areas where they serve (marriage counseling, etc.).
- Good deacons don't become elders. We don't have some hierarchy / corporate ladder going! If you're called to be an elder you'll know it and the elders will see the evidence.

### **What God won't do**

When it comes to leadership there are three things God can't do for you. There are certain things God can't do, such as repent for you.

- God won't work out your call – he'll give you a call but you need to work it out.
- God won't put the gifts into practice – Timothy was encouraged to stir up his gifts (2 Tim 1:6). God pours out the gift and anoints with ministry but we have to work it out.
- God won't be obedient for you – you must choose to be in obedience. That's what keeps us in this race, your choice to keep running.

### **Questions to ask**

1. What are the two leadership offices in a local church?
2. What characteristics do you look for in a deacon?
3. What does a deacon do?

## **Part 5**

### **Our discipleship, shepherding wineskin**

An audio version of this teaching can be downloaded at <http://cornerstonechurch.co.za/life-groups-our-discipleship-shepherding-wineskin/>

In Part 4 we showed the qualifications and functions of a deacon. In this part we will look at shepherding in more detail.

#### **The motivation for shepherding**

##### **Matt 9:35—38**

35 And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them.” That’s our saviour. But it’s amazing how differently it’s been with leaders throughout the ages, where rather than being moved by compassion they’ve seen the crowds and sought to take advantage of them.

When Jesus feeds the five thousand and the four thousand (Matt 14: 13 – 21; 15:32) the Scriptures reiterate how he was moved by compassion.

Remember the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15? Aren’t you glad that that’s God’s response to a person who was incredibly lost and practically a basket-case. What would our response be to a son who took his inheritance like that? But God is always motivated by love – it doesn’t matter what our needs are, He is always motivated by love. Ahead of time He is already loving us.

#### **We are motivated by love**

If love isn’t the chief motivating force in your life, you need to go back to your Father and let it happen there. *As leaders we can’t afford to basically be “let loose” on people and not be motivated by love.*

There are scriptures that warn us strongly against not loving and shepherding (see Ezekiel 34 and

Jeremiah 23:1—8). God gives a very strong warning against false shepherds who fleece the flock and are not concerned about the sheep but only about their own thing and themselves.

Jesus makes His statement on the shortage of labourers in Matthew 9 above in the context of where He was teaching and making disciples. This wasn't said in a classroom somewhere. So we see that shepherding is not for maintaining a flock but for the sake of taking the nations. God is saying, in our discipling, forward moving, apostolic nature, that we're called to really care, to be moved by compassion, to teach and proclaim and heal for the objective of truly loving people because they are harassed and helpless.

There are many that see opportunity in the church but when difficulty arrives they bail. But God is looking for those who stick it out.

### **Additional motivations for shepherding**

#### **Matt 28: 18—20**

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

- God is interested in making disciples, not converts. We're motivated with the same objective.
- We're to be motivated by relational maturity

We want people to move on from being babies in Christ to relational maturity. Life Groups give new disciples some kind of connection, the kind a Sunday morning can't give.

People fight with each other. They don't know how to forgive and honour each other. We see it even in Acts 6 where the deacons are tasked to help a relational problem (read the scripture for more context). So we get in amongst them and bring about relational maturity.

### **Relational maturity has three stages**

#### **1. *Friendship only***

We're always the perfect friend when we first meet. We're all comfortable to stay on this level as we don't want anyone to know what's hidden away (and it's also uncomfortable knowing everyone else's weaknesses too). A lot of people will come week on week to church and they don't want to experience

a Christianity with relationships that go deeper. But it's our job to help people mature to relationship.

## 2. *Relationship*

Here it's about covenant, where we find the warts we all have. Through covenant we commit ourselves to each other despite our warts.

We have a relationship with each other not because of each other but because of Christ. That's maturity. Being miff, reserving our rights and easily criticising are things we have to work on. We're all only one sentence away from criticism; we're all quick to give opinions and quick to want forgiveness. But we're slow in asking for forgiveness or even giving it.

But we lean on the love of Christ and our Father. Then we move onto partnership.

## 3. *Partnership*

Once we move from friendship into relationship we move into partnership where we go and do ventures together for God. We see in the book of Acts where Paul and Barnabas were separated in the Antioch church for a partnership in ministry.

Our biggest job as leaders is going to be relationships – so you yourself have to learn how to forgive in advance. Some of us go into our 'miff tree' on occasions and we feel sorry for ourselves and believe that everyone else is wrong. But some of us camp there and run electricity and everything. We live there and it's going to take a revival to shake us out of there.

We have to win in this area as leaders. Christ forgave us ahead of time, not just on the day we asked for forgiveness. That's how we should forgive, ahead of time. It doesn't matter what group you decide to belong to, you're going to be let down. So we must forgive ahead of time so we don't get hurt when people offend us. Sure, we handle hurting issues (and we do it Biblically) but we have to learn to be forgivers. We can't afford for leaders to be the ones always sitting in their miff trees. We don't withhold forgiveness, we live in it constantly.

People often come to a church and initially love it. But give it time. In the quest to find the perfect group of people, people cause themselves a lot of unhappiness. Just settle this in your heart. When you're at your local church and have decided on it you must stay long enough to produce fruit. Jesus' team must have had incredible fighting – Jesus didn't choose run-of-the-mil guys, they were opposites! Simon the zealot belonged to a group that used to kill tax collectors, yet Jesus calls him and Matthew.

Build everyone into Christ and His apostolic purpose. Even though there's a nice social element to Life

Groups it's not about fun and games but the serious business of discipling and shepherding. We build them not into ourselves or our church's cause, but the body of Christ.

### **Big things happen in small groups**

- Every Life Group meeting is an opportunity for an outpouring of the Spirit, for something to happen that's not the mundane. We've got to stick with it, even through evenings where it's boring. Some of the biggest changes in peoples' lives are going to be in small groups.
- We can only properly care for the flock in and through small groups where discipling takes place. This is where we get into each others' lives and where there's vulnerability and where we trust God together.
- We don't build a professional 'counseling' culture. People must learn to go to the Father (in discipling this is what we teach them). Otherwise we start requiring specialist counselors and professionals and the counselor becomes the life group. Rather, we want to build them into the life of a church with a Life Group.
- In a small group you learn where your strengths are.
- The best way we can shepherd responsibly is in a Life Group where people bear fruit. You can't declare you're a part of the church if you're not – what are you a part of if you attend Sundays only? That's attending a meeting, but we connect to our church through and in a Life Group.

### **Deacons' main responsibilities in shepherding**

Deacons work with the elders and under their oversight as they care and shepherd in a small group. Here are some of the deacons' main responsibilities:

#### **1. Love the sheep**

However we handle the sheep it must be in love. Even when we correct, because that's always done with the hope of redemption and repentance.

- We support the sheep
- We pray for them
- We council them
- We teach them

- We encourage them. This is sorely missing in the body of Christ. With our culture, we live under criticism and cynicism most of the time. We're always told where we lack and how we aren't performing well enough.
- We respect them

## **2. Lead the sheep**

- We lead by example (Hebrews 13:7).
- We make sure we're prepared
- We have a servant heart
- We are willing to yield to others
- We must be patient
- We look to empower the sheep
- We create opportunities for them
- We take them where they may not necessarily want to go (but must go)
- We show them the vision (of the church) and help them understand how it applies to them.
- We show them how to integrate into the church
- We help them to discover their giftings and their function
- We pray with and for them
- We help them with the Word of God
- We serve them

## **3. Feed the sheep**

- Teach them how to read the Word and live it; how to practice it. We ought to be doing this in our own lives so that we can teach properly!
- Celebrate the discipline of reading the Word and knowing it. We don't download thoughts from the Internet and get on board with the latest fad. We need our own revelation. Every one of us should know our Scriptures.

### **Additional shepherding responsibilities:**

- Look to integrate the fringe, frail and fragile. Go and look at those at the back of the church on Sundays and take care of them.
- Gather wherever and whenever you can. Shepherd's gather. Part of God's rebuke in Ezekiel 34 to the bad shepherds is that they don't gather the flock anymore. It doesn't matter what gift you have, if you don't gather you're going to scatter the sheep. Ask God to show you how to gather.
- Draw in new people. Look for them before and after meetings. Some of them stand around,

waiting. We must discipline ourselves in this.

- Help the elders in praying and ministering to people in meetings and other relevant times.
- Facilitate people becoming friends. Introduce people to each other.
- Shepherds sort out relational issues
- Be a source of information. Know what's going on in the life of your church. Not just the information but where the church is going.
- Be a source of hope. When they come to you, there is always hope.
- Be pro-active. Don't wait for people to get sick or backslide. A good shepherd prays ahead of time and asks God who needs the phone call.
- Be all of this with your away-game as well, outside of meetings. You're a deacon everywhere. God will lead you to people that need to be shepherded.

The next two parts will focus more on the practicalities of leading a Life Group, starting with the practical expectations of deacons.

### ***Questions to ask***

1. Why is shepherding so important?
2. As a deacon, what is my role in shepherding?
3. What is the goal of shepherding?



## **Part 6**

### **Practically Leading a Life Group, Part 1**

An audio version of this teaching can be downloaded at <http://cornerstonechurch.co.za/life-groups-practical-expectations-for-deacons/>

In part 5 of this part of the series for leaders and potential leaders we looked at shepherding in more detail. Now we will focus on practically leading a life-group, highlighting how we integrate people into the life of Cornerstone Church Johannesburg as a practical example.

#### **Following up newcomers**

Who is the church?

We are the church. So when we say we are Cornerstone church, we are a body of believers who call ourselves Cornerstone Church. We aren't some organisation, we're a people.

At some point in our personal histories we decided that this was going to be our spiritual home. But what was it that made us decide that? Was it the coffee? The music? The boys and girls? Location? There are many reasons why people come to a church. But what keeps us here is important and it's important how we welcome anyone new in and let them know who it is we are.

On Sunday mornings, usually our time to corporately worship the King, we have a lot of visitors. There's a lot that happens on those mornings that we do to help people that are either new to Cornerstone or new to Jesus altogether. The Word gets preached of course, which is important, but we also want to connect with people personally which is why we have a Visitors Lounge at the back of our auditorium in Bedfordview.

On a Sunday morning we usually ask who is new and people put up their hand and we get a 'visitors card' to them. Why do we do that and what do we do with it? Here's what we do when this card lands on someone's hand.

#### **We will not over-administrate them**

Systems don't shepherd us. Pastors and deacons shepherd us.

From the outset it's important to remember that no one should be part of a process and the heart of doing all this is not to put anyone through a process. It's not good knowing you're part of a process.

We don't have some ladder people need to climb. We want to honour people and we've put together administration to do that, but we won't over-administrate or pester people.

We are not in the business of selling Cornerstone but simply want to help people integrate into a healthy body of believers – whether it's us or someone else.

- The visitors card asks for some details – name, address, phone numbers, email, a short reason why they are here, what age group they fill in, and some other details.
- We invite them to join us for a cup of coffee at the Visitors' Lounge at the back of the auditorium. Here we have coffee, tea and other drinks as well as some treats. We have helpers that serve in a number of ways to make it easier for us to connect with people personally.

We must honour what people are going through in this process. If you're new, it takes some guts to put up your hand in the first place, as not everyone is very outgoing. Filling in the card takes another decision. Coming to the Visitors Lounge is even more gutsy. People do these things, despite their reserved personalities or our culture, because they are genuinely looking to connect; are genuinely looking for help; or are genuinely in a place of decision in a number of areas in their lives. That's why we've dubbed that lounge the “valley of decision”.

All kinds of people come to the Lounge. Some were invited by a friend. Others have wondered away from Christ and are just being honest about it. On that Sunday, in that lounge, they often embark on a new journey. Some are looking for another church. Some are not happy with the church they're at. And some are disgruntled with their church.

The last category mentioned need to be handled with care and responsibility. We have a saying here that if you come through the front door you leave through the front door. If someone is disgruntled or hurt with their old church, they must sort it out there first before coming here. We try and encourage people to do that. We can't hold their hand but we encourage them to do that. They might come here but if they haven't dealt with that baggage they will bring it here too. Sooner or later it will come out when they begin to find that this church also has people in it, and people hurt people – it's inevitable.

Then some are church hopping and say that they just “go where the Spirit leads them”. They love God but they're not seeing that they must be integrated and functioning in a body. We want to help them get there, even if it's not this body.

- In the lounge we get to know them a little better, ask them questions, understand their needs and where they're at, and look to be friendly and personal. This is not just about 'getting it done' but about really helping people through the decisions they have to make.

- We also tell them a little bit about who we are as a church and what we're about. We then introduce them to:
  1. **DNA.** Why? Because this is our course that will tell them exactly who we are, what the leaders expect from them and what they can expect from the leaders.

At DNA we look to have an open slate and tell people exactly who we are, our values and so on. People must know what we value if they want to be a part of us. People should be able to hold us accountable to what is taught there. Very often what happens is people go to a church but only discover years down the line what that church teaches on certain issues, and then they realise they don't want to be a part of it. At DNA we look to be up front to avoid this issue.

2. **Life Groups.** Why? Because we want people to be able to connect into the life of this church as soon as possible.
  3. **We ask them about a follow-up visit.** On Wednesdays people go out to the homes of people that have asked for a follow-up visit, where we can talk about where they're at, their needs etc. in an environment that's much more comfortable for them and where they can meet more people from Cornerstone.
- Notes are made at the back of the visitors lounge of the discussion. These notes are important to the elder who will be calling them the next day.
  - The call is just to thank them for coming. We don't want to over-administrate, we just want to thank them. We might re-iterate DNA, the Life Groups or a follow-up visit.
  - Details are captured on a spreadsheet which the elders share over the Internet. We want to make sure we follow guys up well, so these details might include a more appropriate time to call and so on.
  - If they would like to integrate we'll allocate them to an area which will get picked up by a specific elder and then things carry on from there. We believe that people need to make the decision to integrate and make themselves accountable. They need to decide to connect as much as the leaders look to help them do that.
  - Once people are integrated we want to start having them function in the life of the church – discover their gifts and so on. This is where leaders and Life Groups come in again.
  - That functioning is not a list of things to fill the week with but can take all kinds of forms, like

hospitality when people from the country come to visit or minister, etc.

- This is a big church and this process is to help each and every person be connected with personally. There are at least 50 to 60 people that serve here at Bedfordview on a Sunday morning and there's a lot going on. That kind of serving in a life group is imperative as well.
- The Life Groups help a large church like Cornerstone to function as a family not an organisation or business. This is because relationships happen in Life Groups. We're not trying to run a process but help people integrate and then function, to bring life into their lives and have an appropriate setting where Jesus can work in them.

It's good to understand the process so that, as leaders, we know where we can help and also how to get people integrated and functioning. The heart of not over-administrating needs to be clear as it also affects the way we should lead our Life Groups.

### **Preparing the heart for a life group meeting**

#### **1 Corinthians 3**

3 But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, 3 for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? 4 For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?

5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 8 He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. 11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw — 13 each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

This is a terrifying scripture and when we read it it becomes evident that when it comes to leadership and life and being a Christian these days, one of the last things most people like to talk about is facing Jesus one day. Not everyone feels confident about how they will be received. For some of us we think of how the groom will be waiting for us but when he sees us he'll give us that 'look' – that look of, "I know where you were last night".

While people don't like to talk about this, this does serve as a motivation. The reason why this is important for the practical is because our practices take form when the heart is right. Without the heart practice becomes formal (and others feel it) and practice feels like everyone's telling you what to do (it becomes law). But when the heart's right there is a flow that comes and you have energy to do this thing called 'leading'.

Every time we get together the idea is that in some way we're building other people's lives. Sure, this text shows that we are building ours too. But the point is that we should be looking carefully at our own lives and the lives of others in building them. We're really thinking about this. We're being intentional, not all about hype or beating our chests in a frenzy but actually not doing anything.

We need to be aware of with whom we're working with (Jesus) and how and why. When we prepare for a Life Group meeting, we do it with all this in mind – we want to see people mature and grow. We want to help them build with gold so that on that day they meet Christ it will be a joyous occasion where Jesus really does run towards them smiling and they receive a grand reward.

We want to teach them about godliness, about the Christian life, about Christian practice; about giving themselves to the church and reaching the community; about deep prayer; about fellowship; about faithfulness; about serving each other; about patience and humility; about loving each other and not comparing; about not making ourselves seem better than we are; about not wearing masks.

That's what we're all wanting and that's where we're taking people. We want to see all flourish. We want to be like Jesus where He says He will not break a bruised reed (Isaiah 42:3). He isn't going to destroy or hurt someone who is battling. We want to think about others and where they are carefully, we want to pray with them, we want to ask God to help them.

This is not easy work.

### **Expectations believers have on leaders**

So, with all this in mind, here are the expectations believers have on leaders in the church:

- Because there is an expectation on believers to become involved and grow, there is (rightly) an

expectation on leaders to do whatever possible to help them do that

- There is an expectation (rightly so) that leaders will really care and not just be concerned with their own family and home. We can spend our whole lives doing that and in all honesty God has called us to do more than just that.
- There is an expectation that leaders won't just go through the motions. That they won't just administrate and facilitate.
- There's an expectation that leaders would be masterful builders (as 1 Cor 3 above stipulates). We will hold people up and not let them fall. We're not putting behaviour on people but encouraging them into the life of the local church.
- We create the space to be with each other. We don't all come to a prayer meeting, for example, but instead we come to learn to pray and mine the depths of prayer. Same with worship or any meeting context.
- There's an expectation that leaders will lay aside things. Some aspects of your life are not more important than what's going on at a local church and being involved in it.
- There's an expectation that leaders would work into nations and so on as they bring others to Jesus and encourage them also to work into nations, to contribute, to find what it is they need to do.
- We build towards others, not ourselves. In 2 Timothy 4:6, Paul says He is being poured out like a drink offering. The context is that the drink offering in the Old Testament – which was wine mixed with spices – would be poured over an animal sacrifice to improve the smell. So the scripture is saying that leaders pour themselves over the works of what their people are doing so that those peoples' works can be seen, not the leaders' works. We display our group to the world, pouring ourselves over them and what they're doing so that all of that becomes a pleasant incense to the Lord.

### **Practically leading a life group**

#### **Life Groups are not:**

1. A Sunday meeting. There's a Sunday meeting for a Sunday meeting purpose. There's no pressure or expectation to perform things in the same way. There's no ritual, routine or liturgy.

2. A lecture or study. It's not a great time of preparation and preaching that should be recorded and put on the Internet! If your teaching is that good, God will bring you there, you don't need to use this platform to do it.
3. Haphazard. They are relaxed (compared to our corporate meetings especially) and at a home, but the leaders plan intentionally for the night.
4. Purely a social gathering. There are times for that but not every time. There may be social aspects, for example a time of PlayStation or the like, but we build Life Group nights around Jesus not around 30 Seconds! Socialising is important but it's all part and parcel of what Life Groups are about, not the main focus.
5. A time to build your own following around your own pet doctrines or your own vision for where the church should go.

You must talk to your leaders about any problems you might have with where things are going, not to your group. If you do the latter what you don't want to happen will happen – the church will get hurt, people in your group will get disgruntled and offended with leaders, and there is division. You end up raising people who are critical and don't love Jesus and His church and hold on to hurts. You might not want to see that happen, but it will.

**Life Groups are:**

1. A place of encouragement. Here everyone is building and growing and learning about their relationship with God and one another.
2. A time of worship.
3. A time of contribution. Try and get people to speak. Try keep the conversation on track or come up with an answer at the end. It's not easy but it's part of what the time is about. You want to look at Sunday's message and together work out how it can be applied. You're making Christianity practical for the guys.
4. A time of prayer. Pray for each other. Encourage each other.
5. A time of bringing your life. You bring everything of who you are to the time with your Life Group – your heart, prayer, devotion time, family, home, marriage and so on. This is what leadership is about.

### **Speak to the elders**

It's important that deacons and leaders build a relationship with the elders and do their best to avoid misunderstandings. Experience shows that most of the time that people get offended, upset or confused is simply because they're not talking to the other party.

If you feel that something's not happening at church that should be happening, it's not going to change unless you say something about it. The enemy uses these sorts of things to cause division. If an elder is doing something that bothers you, then you need to speak to him about it, otherwise he's just going to keep doing it and you're going to continue to be bothered by it.

### **A note on performance and offending others**

Leading a Life Group is not about performing, although in our culture it can very often feel that way. Many people will come to your group looking for a performance, which is an unfortunate reality. Just do your best, trusting God for these people, and carry on. You best realise that you will no doubt offend someone at some stage, so prepare your heart for that.

### **Last thoughts**

This is slow, steady, deep and hard work. But it's easy to build with straw and wood. Anyone can put together a Christian life that looks good to their friends but one day the one thing that we don't like to think about will happen – Jesus will weigh our work. Jesus is using us to help build others' lives and our own in His masterful way. So let's build it!

So, you still want to be a leader? God has called you so go and do it. If this scares you, ask him to encourage you.

We'll be expounding on leading a life group practically in the final part of this series.

### ***Questions to ask***

1. How do we follow up those who are new to our local church?
2. What kind of preparation should go into a life group meeting?
3. What expectations do believers of this local church have of life groups?



## Part 7

### Practically Leading a Life Group, Part 2

An audio version of this teaching can be downloaded at <http://cornerstonechurch.co.za/life-groups-leading-a-life-group-meeting/>

In Part 6 we covered the way in which newcomers are brought into the life of Cornerstone and what believers in the church expect from the leaders. We also covered some practicalities in leading a Life Group and these will be expounded on in greater detail for this final part of this series.

#### What Life Groups leaders do at Life Group

##### 1. Facilitate worship and prayer

We do this in whichever way we know how. While we might not have a musician in our Life Group but we can still sing songs and engage in prayer. Some churches in Africa only sing with one drum! Most of us do have CD players and so on. Even just bowing our heads and singing songs is good.

Of course, worship is not just singing - it's also praying and there are many kinds of prayers. See this scripture below.

##### **1 Tim 2: 1 – 8**

2 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. 7 For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

8 I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;

Paul is teaching Timothy on how to lead his local church and how to teach this to pastors. We pray by lifting holy hands without anger or quarrelling.

We also pray for the nations. In Mark 1:17 Jesus says that His house is a house of prayer for all nations. So all nations can pray and we pray for the nations.

Also in worship we stir up the gifts (see below), break bread, discuss the word and have a ministry time. While we advocate “dining room Christianity” that doesn't mean there is no agenda at all. No, we do have a spiritual agenda for the time.

## **2) Cultivate contribution**

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

It's important that we do this. It's our job as leaders. We must understand that all ministry in the local church works towards the functioning and maturing of the priesthood so that we can all come into the fullness of Christ.

People don't come to your Life Group to see the gift on your life. No, they come to express what God is doing in our togetherness. It's not possible to do this in a large congregational meeting – not everyone is able to contribute, it wouldn't be practical. But in a Life Group each person has a gift, anointing and ministry they can use. In a local church, each person is valuable.

Secondly, it's no good if you do it all (but you should be able to step into any gap). A good Life Group leader creates opportunity for involvement and contribution and builds away from themselves, looking to delegate. There are a myriad of ways in which this can be done – asking guys to host the next meeting, cater for the next term, lead the group in prayer, lead the discussions based on Sunday's preach, etc. Doing all this also helps to break spectatorship, which is a goal for us as leaders.

## **3) Teaching an application of truth**

Teaching the Word is part of our worship, it's not a separate thing. We celebrate the Word and hold it and its authority as a high value. At Life Group it's good that we read it and discuss it. Honesty and vulnerability should be cultivated.

When it comes to discussion we stay away from meaningless debates and conversation, like a six week debate on what the animals ate on the ark or other such things that sidetrack us! There are as many theories as people but the reason why we look at the Word of God is to become more like Jesus, not to discuss some new irrelevant theory.

A Life Group leader creates an atmosphere of learning, discovering and the obedient application of truth. People must leave with handles on how they can live the Word, not information on our latest opinions. We steer people towards the Scriptures and Jesus, not towards us. We want to help them to refine their ability to consult Scripture for themselves.

With this it's important to remember that Life Groups are not mini-Sunday morning meetings. So there's no pressure to preach a message or re-preach Sunday. Rather, discuss Sunday's message, ask questions based around it, and look to bring things into practical application, asking people what action they're going to take in response to the message, and so on.

As per Acts 6, the function of a deacon is to come alongside the elders, who are the governmental authority in a local church that decide on doctrine and direction. That's why at Life Group the deacons reinforce what's been taught on a Sunday. That also means we're all going in the same direction and everyone can get on board with the same vision.

Church is not Twitter where there are a million different opinions all vying for a platform to express their vision and doctrine. No, we are one church going in one direction.

That doesn't mean deacons can't run a series or do something of their own. Sometimes it may be necessary to teach people life skills – such as finances, or marriage, and so on. That's very good. We do have the material which is available for use, and we also do run courses like that on Wednesdays. In these cases, deacons should discuss it with their elder before going ahead.

The elders aren't looking to stop deacons from sharing their revelation. But the Life Groups have been designed for shepherding the folk, integrating them and letting them function in the life of this church.

Lastly, the Sunday messages at Bedfordview are recorded and made downloadable so that the deacons can get them, make notes, and so on. It's good to encourage those in the Life Group to do the same.

#### **4) Facilitating relationships**

A mature Christian can handle relationships properly, so as leaders we teach others to have relational responsibility. Most of the church's counselling takes place at the Life Group. We are peacemakers and so maintain relational openness in the group.

In Part 5 we covered the three stages of relational maturity – *friendship*, *relationship* and *partnership*. We can't get to the partnerships we're called to without friendship and relationship. In Life Groups we work out these covenants and find a way to make things work. Then we've moved into partnership.

Many of us never get to be fully functioning in our callings and ministries because we never learn how to handle our relationships. For leaders, most of the work actually takes place in teaching people how to love one another. Our King has decreed that we will be one through His blood, so it is possible.

Think about the early church, how 120 people prayed for 40 consecutive days together in the upper room (Acts 1, 2). That's unity.

God is calling us to adventures together in partnership. But we won't get there if we continue to criticise and remain unforgiving. We must take this seriously and live healed.

Doing so develops community and even greater hospitality as more people open their homes.

### **Practicalities in leading a Life Group at home and administration**

1. Start on time and finish at a reasonable time. Studies show that after one and a half hours people have dialed out. We need to honour people and stick to one and a half hours as a maximum. If people want to stay for longer then that's up to them, but close it off formally after one and a half hours.
2. Be hospitable. Create a warm atmosphere. Make sure there are refreshments. If it's not your home then try and get some community around things like catering and cleaning. If it is your home, remember that we are running a home group not a hotel group! Keep the house clean and so forth but also keep it "homey".
3. Look for ways to impact and serve the community. Go to the hospital together to pray for people; a senior citizens home; and so forth. Think of ways in which the group can get involved in social justice issues or just serve those in need in the area.
4. Keep your home open and let it be a safe environment. People should know they can come to this house and talk about anything.
5. Plan a term in advance. Don't let things happen haphazardly. Let everyone know when they're serving at a Sunday meeting and so forth.
6. Make sure the 'big rocks' (the important events) are on the calendar. These events are values to us as a church (like the EQUIP time). You should know when these are and should be encouraging guys to attend these, in addition to coming yourself.
7. Stay informed with what's going on at the church and where the church is going.

8. Put the leaders' meetings in your diary.
9. Plan for the apostolic. Think of how your group can do apostolic things together – visiting a site, spending an evening with another life group, praying for a church plant, going on trips together. Sometimes you might all want to save up to send one person on a trip. If you pray for church plants or trips and get prophetic words, let those in the leadership have these so that the necessary people can be encouraged. Remember, the apostolic belongs to every believer.
10. Find out from your elder when they are visiting this term.
11. Plan your communication with your elder.
12. Keep the church database up to date with your details and your group's details. Phone the office for this. If someone changes their address or phone number, let the office know.
13. Get onto our communication channels so you can stay informed. Our website [www.cornerstonechurch.co.za](http://www.cornerstonechurch.co.za) lists all the events. We also have a Facebook page and a Twitter feed and a mailing list, which you can sign up for on the website.

### **Multiplying and planting**

The idea is that groups will grow and then multiply, meaning another group is planted from the original group. We don't believe we will (or should) see this every time but we do know that we need double the amount of groups we have now to do all the things God has called us to do as a church.

As Life Group leaders, thinking about where a new group may be needed should be something you pray into. Amongst all the other gifts we're raising up in the church, work with the elders in helping them recognise and raise up new leaders. Even raise up those with personalities that clash with yours.

Remember, we always build away from ourselves and it's a sign of a good leader when they can bring through someone who has a bigger capacity than they do. In fact, developing stronger leaders than you are is part of the goal!

We don't multiply groups using any formula (when the group reaches 20, we multiply etc.). In some contexts across the world that's worked but it's never worked at Cornerstone. Some leaders can have 100 people coming to their home – it's happened before!

### **Working as a team with the elders**

Remember, deacons are part of the leadership team of the church. The elders deal with doctrinal and

disciplinary issues. So work with them – if someone has difficult questions, bring those to the elders.

Constantly we are endeavouring to close this gap between elders and deacons. It's one team with different functions. We function in partnership.

Have regular meetings with your elder who oversees your group. Make sure you're able to be challenged and look to receive correction so you can be a better leader and grow more into Christ.

### **Concluding thoughts**

- Deacons must be able to lead themselves. This means they should dig their own wells (places of refreshment), manage their resources, and manage their devotion times with the Lord.
- Your devotion time is your best preparation for your Life Group. If you have a strong devotional life, you can lead from the heart and from the revelation God gives you of where we're going. You don't need to spend nights in research, just spend time in devotion to the Lord.
- Manage your time and your energy levels! Let the elders know what's happening. Don't run at more than full-speed and then burn out. Too many leaders burn out and then never get back into leading again. Rather, pace yourself. If you do step off for a season, have a plan to come back, otherwise you may miss the inheritance God has for you in leadership.
- Stir up the gifts God has given you. God gives the gift but it's up to us to work the gift. Doing this is important for the life of the local church.

### ***Questions to ask***

1. How do you lead a life group gathering?
2. What should you teach?
3. What is the expected outcome of a Life Group gathering?
4. What do we do at a Life Group?