



gracefellowship

Series: Stand Alone
Date: August 21, 2022
18

Title: Life Groups
Passage: Acts 2 &

Pre-Message Scripture Reading: Acts 1:1-11

This is one of our most anticipated days of the semester! Today we are kicking off our Life Groups for the Fall and Spring semesters! If you have never been part of a Life Group I hope this will be the year you jump in and engage on a different level with people in our church. It really can be life-changing; in fact, we say all the time that life change happens in circles, not rows. We love our Sunday morning gatherings and believe in the power of these services to change people's lives, give hope and direction and to share truth; but we really believe true life change happens when you sit down in small groups of believers and seek Jesus together.

In Life Groups we wrestle with the things found in God's Word, pray for one another, fellowship and develop authentic relationships and help one another through times of difficulty. We also celebrate the victories we experience in life.

Life Groups are the vehicles we utilize to make disciples and introduce discipling relationships.

This isn't just something we think is a cool idea or that we model because other churches have had success with Life Groups. We are following the methods of Jesus to make disciples.

In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus said,

:: Matthew 28:18-20

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

The final instructions Jesus left with His followers- and all future generations of His followers- was to go into all the world and make disciples. Then that means we need to ask the question:

How did Jesus make disciples?

If Jesus' method to make disciples was preaching to crowds then the command to go and make disciples would only be for Pastors and Evangelists as we stand in front of an audience to preach. That would let the rest of you off the hook! But is that what Jesus did? Jesus certainly preached to crowds, but that was not his method for making disciples.

Jesus called 12 men into relationship and invested His life into them. Out of the 12 there were three Jesus spent even more personal time with to train for leadership.

What I want to do for the next few minutes is give you a behind the scenes peak at our strategy for Life Groups and let you see how we pull our methods straight from Scripture, doing what Jesus and the early church did.

First, Jesus was an intentional leader.

He sought out and called people into relationship with him and then he had a strategy he followed to disciple them.

Second, Jesus had a Biblical foundation for relationship.

The Bible is a book about relationships. First and foremost we are invited into relationship with God. Then we are created to have and enjoy relationship with people that promotes God's Kingdom.

- The covenants of the Old Testament are relational.
- The 10 commandments are relational: those are not just rules to keep people in line- they are guidelines to maintain proper relationship and to be consistent with love.
- The new covenant of grace through Jesus is relational. We enter into the family of God through a relationship with Jesus.
- The fruits of the Spirit are relational and can only truly be lived out and utilized in relationship with other people.
- The Bible itself is relational and conveys to us who God is and how we can know Him and walk in fellowship with Him.

Everything in Scripture points to relationship, but it's not just my personal relationship with God, it's also our corporate relationship with God.

Third, Jesus created relational environments to make disciples.

Where do we find Jesus in the pages of the gospel spending time with the disciples? Around campfires; in boats; at tables having meals; walking along the road; in homes- the list goes on and on.

Jesus utilized very relational environments to communicate His strategy and invest in His followers. It's really true what they say: More is caught than taught. In our daily lives as parents we are making disciples as our kids watch our lives. People at church are watching you! I had a fun moment with my youngest son last week, who serves in our kid's ministry as a helper, when I told him about a parent who contacted me and said their child wouldn't stop talking about playing with Grayson! I told him that there are always little eyes on him. And it's true of us as well. That's why it's important to create relational environments where people cannot only hear what you have to say, but watch what you do.

I know my kids are watching me at home and seeing if I'm the same person there as I am up here on this stage. I don't want to be the guy who leaves church and is a totally different person that their kids don't believe. I hope that them watching me at home gives credibility to what I say I believe in front of you all on Sunday mornings.

Fourth, Jesus had a reproducible process.

The things Jesus did helped mature people toward Christlikeness. He calls us to follow the same process. All of us can be intentional leaders, develop a biblical foundation for relationship building, create relational environments and guide people toward spiritual maturity.

Again, this isn't just something we made up because other churches were doing and it looked cool! I want us to see a couple places in the book of Acts this morning that the disciples followed the same process as they made disciples and the church grew.

:: Acts 2:42-47

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.

44 All the believers were together and had everything in common.

45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,

47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Was there an intentional leader? Yes- the apostles.

How about a biblical foundation? They listened to the apostles teaching and they spent time in prayer.

Was there a relational environment? Sure! They moved beyond the temple courts and broke bread in their homes

Is this something we can reproduce? Yes! All of this is doable. You do not have to be an apostle or a pastor to make disciples!

Let's also check out Acts 18:23-26

:: Acts 18:23-26

23 After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

24 Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures.

25 He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.

26 He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

Here we meet a guy who is already following Jesus and has started doing some ministry. When Priscilla and Aquila, two devoted Jesus followers, hear him speak they realize that he needs to be discipled to have a more fully formed understanding of the gospel.

Priscilla and Aquila become intentional leaders- they seek out Apollos.

They have a relational environment, inviting him into their home.

There is a biblical foundation as they explained the way of God more adequately.

Is that reproducible for any of us? Yes!

My kids are taking Algebra right now and I have more math going on in my home than I care to admit! So let me put this in a simple equation for us to follow today:

**Intentional Leader + Biblical Foundation + Relational Environment +
Reproducible Process = Infinite number of disciples**

Today we are going to extend an invitation to all of you to join one of our Life Groups. These groups are the life-blood of our church. We have incredible leaders who would love to engage with you and help you find your place in a group.

Let me address some common things we hear from people who are hesitant about being in a Life Group:

- I've never been in a group like that before and it's intimidating.
- I'm too busy.
- I have kids and it's inconvenient.
- I'm an introvert
- I don't think I want to be transparent with people.

Satan will give you a thousand excuses as to why you can't join a group. I just want to encourage you to give it a shot. Truthfully, you will gain so much from the relationships you form in a Life Group. Just as truthfully, other people will gain from what you bring to the group. Without you, we miss out on the amazing things God has put in your heart. Each of us brings gifts and wisdom and life experiences that are helpful to one another.

Life Groups give us a change to know people and to be known. In a growing church with multiple services you can't possibly know everyone. But that isn't really the goal.

The goal is not to know everyone; the goal is for everyone to be known.

Now, let me wrap things up today by saying this- we currently have 9 groups that are available. We know that isn't enough groups to accommodate everyone in our group. Some of you may end up in groups that are bigger than we would like or hope for. We don't want you to use that as an excuse not to join a group. What we want you to do is lean into the tension it creates! We are praying that God stirs in some of your hearts to join our team, seeing the need for more disciple-making groups, and offer to be an intentional leader yourself.

- Some of you are more than capable of leading a group- we need you!
- Some of our groups may branch rather quickly this semester as God raises up leaders. We want you to know that's good!

On Pentecost when Peter preached in the power of the Holy Spirit and 3000 people trusted in Jesus as the Messiah, I bet the disciples looked at one another and went 12 small group leaders isn't enough! We better start discipling people and raising up leaders! But they leaned into the tension and as the church was formed and people began opening their homes to small groups of believers, Acts 2 says God added to their number daily those who were being saved!

I can't wait to see what God is going to do this year in your life as you engage in a Life Group. I want to ask Andy Malcolm to come up and give us some next steps and direction about how to connect with a group this morning.