

Leaders,

In the "Fellowship of the Rings" there is a moment where Frodo decides it would be better for him to go it alone and so he jumps into a canoe to head off towards Mordor alone. His good friend, Sam, comes after him so Frodo wouldn't face the journey by himself. Because Sam can't swim, Frodo ends up turning around to save him before they get too far. Later, Sam would save Frodo several times before ultimately accomplishing the mission. In truth, without each other neither would have made it.

Life Groups are "Fellowships" and while there are times it seems easier to go it alone, in reality we were created for relationship and we are most fulfilled in relationships. Our journeys in faith will require an ongoing relationship with God and those around us.

As a Life Group Leader you are taking on a sacred trust to lead, exhort, shepherd and mold a fellowship that collectively moves an individual to fulfilling their spiritual destiny. I can think of no greater calling, no nobler task. My hope and my prayer is that you will settle for nothing less than a fellowship of the heart.

One Life, One Lifetime,



Jeff Harris, Senior Pastor

Mighty Servant-Leader,

Embarking on a journey of leader within Life Groups is a significant endeavor. The relational and spiritual dimensions of "group life" can translate into some of the most stretching and growing experiences you will ever have. As a torch-bearer for Biblical community, you are charging into the heart of the trenches of Christian growth. Jesus conducted His ministry in the context of community and diverse relationships. The very Trinity is a divine community, full of mystery and majesty. God created community for mankind, testifying "it is not good for man to be alone." My college ministry professors always ranted, "ministry occurs in the context of relationships."

Praise God that we are called to participate in His work together! No single person is expected to be everything to everybody, as God intentionally designed His Body (the Church) to be inter-dependent. We need each other and are called to serve together in the Kingdom of God. As a Life Group Leader, you are a champion for the very heart of ministry: missionally advancing relationships.

You're not adequate to be a leader because you've attained some 7th degree of black belt sainthood. You're not qualified because you've read the equivalent of a small library of Christian material. Your eligibility for leadership is not based upon the array of charismatic attributes you possess. Adequacy, qualification and eligibility to lead others in a spiritual setting derives solely from your growing life in Christ. It is the life and power of Christ flowing through you as you seek to live "on the Vine" that equips you with transformational effectiveness to minister with and to people around you.

The journey of leading a Life Group has a lot of twists, turns, discoveries, challenges, surprises, valleys, mountain top vistas and Kingdom rewards. Your journey will be unique just as the people in your group are unique. This guidebook is intended to serve as a resource for the journey. Consider it a tool kit of instruction, guiding principles, ideas and directives to further resources. Use this book as an aid, but remember to keep finding your primary source of direction from God through prayer, His Word, and an intense seeking after the fullness of His life-giving love in your own life.

Thank you for your servant-leadership in this area... I'm proud to serve alongside you!

Pax in X,



Michael Sharrow, Pastor of Community



*I've often found myself preferring the company of people outside my congregation, men and women who did not follow Jesus. Or worse, preferring the company of my sovereign self. But soon I found that my preferences were honored by neither Scripture nor Jesus. I didn't come to the conviction easily, but finally there was no getting around it: there can be no maturity in the spiritual life, no obedience in following Jesus, no wholeness in the Christian life apart from immersion and embrace of **community**. I am not myself by myself. Community, not the highly vaunted individualism of our culture, is the setting in which Christ is at play.*

- Eugene Peterson

*People go to a group for the content, but stay for the **relationship**...Spiritual growth is about being incarnational: seeking Christ and His power in us. Not just imitation, but **inhabitation**, letting Jesus live in and through us.*

- Rick Warren

*Effective **leadership** is not about making speeches or being liked; leadership is defined by results not attributes*

- Peter Drucker

*Spiritual transformation is a process of human community formed and reformed through the presence of **divine community**...As Jesus has ongoing intimacy with the Father, so the Spirit enables the disciples of Jesus in the [church] to share in His divine relationship and community. The participation with Jesus in the communal life with the Father enables the Christian small group to be a **transforming** family system for the forgiveness, healing and maturity of group members.*

- Gareth Weldon Icenogle



Life Group Purpose

The purpose statement for Grace Point Church is “**to lead unsaved people to a life of full devotion to Jesus Christ.**” Everything we do as a community should be intentionally contributing towards the mission of that statement (hence, “missional”). An underlying principle of our mission as a church is **growth**, or movement from where people are towards “full devotion” as a way of life. This emphasis is expressed through cultural terms such as “your next summit” or “next steps” in reference to individual spiritual journeys. Fully devoted living does not spontaneously combust, but is a journey for each individual as they seek after Christ and experience His fullness transforming every aspect of life.

Our greatest wish and prayer is that you will become mature Christians.

- St. Paul to Church in Corinth

Day after day, in the temple courts [weekend worship service] and from house to house [life groups] they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

- Luke's Acts of the Apostles

Life Groups function as a means of fostering ongoing spiritual **growth** at an individual level. Growing in a life of full devotion is more than just gaining information – it’s about seeking the life in Christ as a community, within the context of relationship (to God and people).

Transformational learning is difficult in large group settings, where it is easy to lose the relational aspect of being truly known, encouraged, loved, held accountable and bearing each others’ burdens. Smaller relational settings, like Life Groups, are highly conducive and Biblically modeled for facilitating spiritual **growth**.

One of the most energy-releasing, efficacy-increasing and progress-enabling properties of an enterprise is clarity. Without a clear understanding of identity (what is this about?), where we are headed (define success) and the expectations surrounding those pillars, confusion and frustration begin to handicap. By defining the purpose (identity) of Life Groups as being to facilitate spiritual **growth**, it clears the stage for defining leader expectations, group models, strategies for healthy execution and more.

Knowing what Life Groups *are* also allows us to distinguish those things from what they are *not*. For instance, if Life Groups are about

G5, full devotion type **growth** – then simply having an assembly of people participate in a study does not necessarily equate to a successful life group. Similarly, the singular capacity to teach a lesson does not necessarily translate into effective leadership within the Life Group context. These are powerful and liberating distinctions which allow us to invest time and energy into the pursuit of truly missional ministry endeavors.

*Life Groups are about facilitating the spiritual **growth** of the individual members. Everything else is just gravy!*

Life Groups Leader Expectations

Life Groups are not “Sunday School in your living room,” so the chief qualifications of a life group leader are different than a class instructor. In many classroom ministry roles the emphasis calls for a gift of teaching, and the ability to deliver instruction well. While those are advantageous gifting and skill sets as a life group leader, they are not primary.

Prerequisites to becoming a Life Group Leader are:

1. Exchanged Life
2. Demonstrated spiritual maturity/growth
3. Member of Grace Point Church
4. Completed a Life Group Leader Application and met with Community Pastor
5. Ability to navigate the spiritual growth needs of a group

As a Life Group Leader, expectations include:

1. Focus on guiding the group towards spiritual growth
2. Identify the spiritual growth needs of the group and coordinate next steps
3. Maintain communication with Community Pastor and/or Life Group Navigator(s) regarding health and happenings of the group
4. Participate in leadership development events, including quarterly Life Group Forums and the Leadership Summit
5. Maintain personal spiritual health by pursuing Christ and spiritual next steps

*It takes a changing life to change a life.
-Joe Stowell*

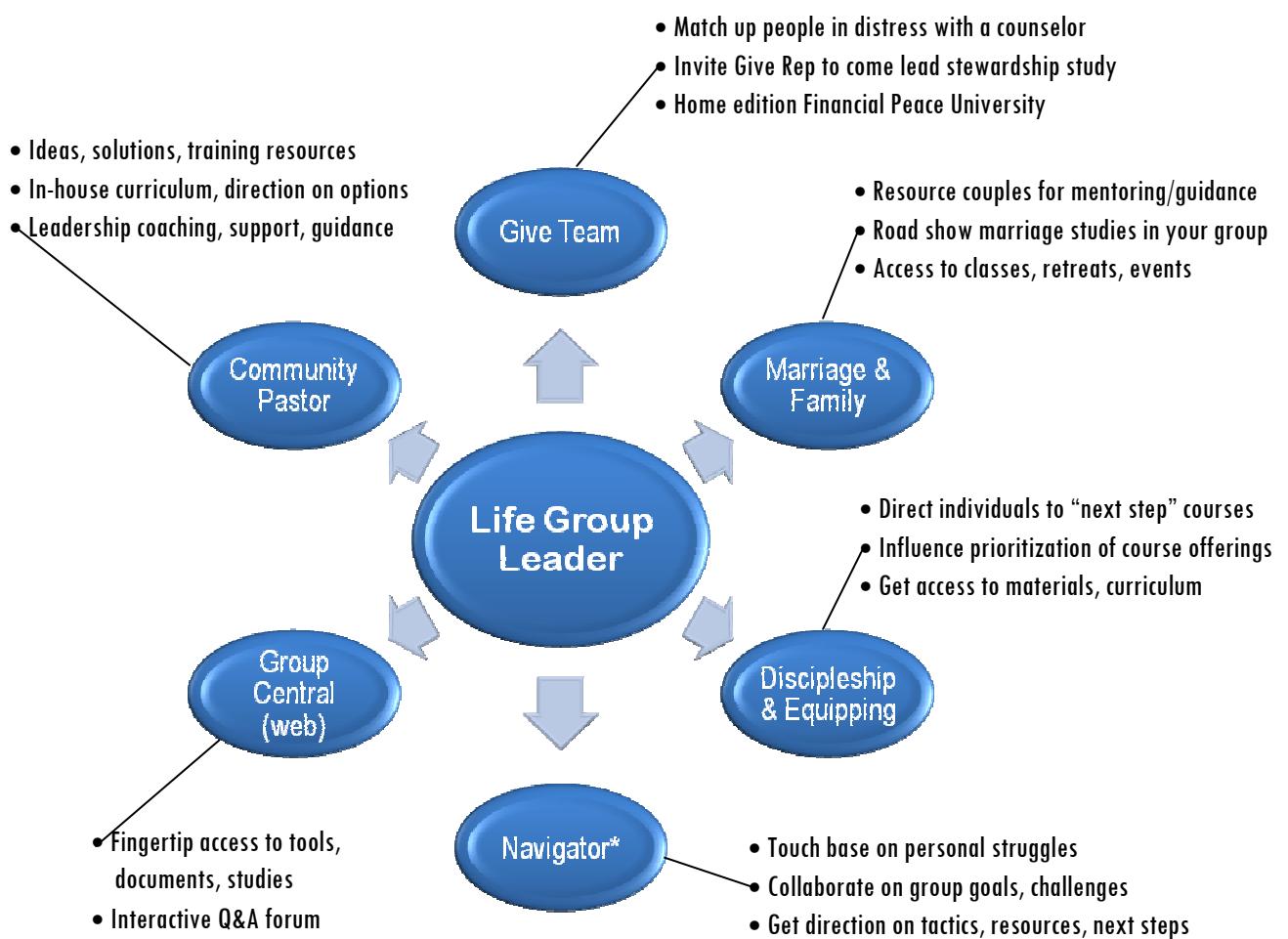
The process of becoming a Life Group Leader:

1. If not currently an apprentice in a Life Group,
 - a. Contact the Community Ministry Assistant (CMA) and request a Life Group Leader Application
 - b. Submit the completed Life Group Leader Application to the CMA and an appointment will be setup to meet with the Community Pastor. The purpose of the meeting will be to review your application, share the strategy around Life Groups, discuss expectations and explore the spiritual readiness of any prospective leaders
 - c. (optional) Join an existing group as a co-leader for a season of intentional apprenticeship
 - d. Work with Community Pastor to determine launch date and open house for new life group
2. If already in a life group and identified as a future leader or serving as an apprentice,
 - a. Inform current Life Group Leader of interest/desire to eventually lead a life group
 - b. Complete a Life Group Leader Application to the CMA and setup an appointment to meet with the Community Pastor
 - c. Map out a plan for contributing as a co-leader to the current life group if not already being practiced while targeting a date to launch a new group



- d. Share the plans and movements towards leadership with the existing Life Group – make it a point of celebration!
- e. At the appropriate time, launch with new group

Leaders are expected to navigate, detect and discern growth needs of their group – not necessarily be the solution to everything. Knowing when to respond, when to solicit input/counsel and when to out-source situations to supporting ministries is key to the effectiveness of a group leader.



Life Groups Leadership Principles

You Can't Lead Where You're Not Going

Pursue personal spiritual health as a prerequisite for group leadership. Leaders cannot proclaim a battle cry for spiritual growth if they are not in the forefront of pursuing an ever-increasing life on the Vine themselves. Leaders should be reflectively asking, "How am I intentionally seeking God in new and deeper ways? How is God challenging me to grow in this season?"

Interdependence is Critical

Maverick or solo leadership will limit the long-term health of groups and overly tax a leader. The sooner a leader divests the facets of missional leadership among the group members, the sooner that group can be transformed into an assembly of listening heads into a breathing manifestation of the Body of Christ! Discover strengths, capitalize on them, challenge them to grow. *Don't give people a title – ask them to do things.

Leaders Learn

Be intentionally active in pursuing growth by learning. Read, ask questions, attend leadership development events offered, reflect. Proverbs 4:5, 13:20 and Romans 12:8.

Impression without expression results in depression. Spiritual inputs without healthy outputs creates spiritual obesity – with all of its hazards.

- Rick Warren

Keep the Process Slave to the Purpose

Remember to be vision-driven and goal-oriented; it's about the mission of leading people towards a life of full devotion. The check-boxes are aids as *means* not the *end* itself. Goals and strategic planning are good stewardship expressions, but can easily become life-killing substitutes for the mission at hand. Leaders should be open-minded about re-evaluated practices and processes – what worked yesterday may not work today.

Spiritual Growth is Dynamic

There are some key axioms to reflect upon when considering the mission of nurturing, cultivating and establishing a culture of spiritual growth. Spiritual growth is:

- INTENTIONAL – growth happens by making commitments and choosing to pursue what only God can accomplish. Be strategic in challenging people in this area
- INCREMENTAL – process, step-by-step it happens; everybody needs a track, trail or pathway to grow; start where people are at (recognize that first!) but don't leave them there
- PERSONAL – people grow uniquely according to their SHAPE, learning styles and output context (experience applying the truths they've consumed)
- HABITUAL – growth happens via habits intentionally developed to reinforce Godly pursuit(s)
- RELATIONAL – faith is personal but not private, it's intended to be developed and expressed in community; spiritual maturity is always benchmarked Biblically by character (love) not doctrinal knowledge
- MULTI-DIMENSIONAL – requires a variety of inputs (discussed later), and is not achieved merely by doing a deep dive in any one aspect of spiritual life
- SEASONAL – growth happens in spurts, and never at a sustained or constant rate/trajectory; in nature the only time expansion happens at a constant rate is in the case of swelling – healthy growth happens quite often in variable bursts, alternating between intake, meditation, application, and output.

Life Groups Values & Principles

Declared values are what breathe life and direction into culture and practices. From the value system established, we then derive principles for operating, protocols or “policy” in the form of expectations. The drivers of our Life Group strategies are reflections of the CORE values of Grace Point Church (Commitment, Ownership, Relationships, Encouragement):

Growth Values – intentional and meaningful movement towards full devotion living; confessional communities that seek Christ and His fullness not merely self-awareness; living out truths in discipleship-centric obedience not simply accumulating Godly data; setting the stage to saturate the souls of people in the things of God through diverse activities

Relationships Values – being fully known, modeling and experiencing active grace, trust and confidentiality, love that is powerful enough to confront in a redeeming way and celebrate constantly; personal consideration over programmatic agendas

The missional values behind Life Groups translate into tactical strategies. These strategies are meant to be tactical principles rather than over-defined rules, allowing leaders to focus on the missional heart behind everything we do: growing the full devotion factor in the lives of everyone participating in a life group.

Fundamental tactics to the way we approach Life Group ministry and the implied expectations for every group include:

Meeting Frequency

There is a direct correlation between the group size, family unit size, stage of life and the need for frequent connection to sustain an effective relational context for growth. Groups that meet less than weekly will constantly struggle to sustain relational depth. The expectation for Life Groups is that they will be connected at least weekly. How weekly contact is achieved can take on a spectrum of expressions or models.



Life Cycle/Duration of Groups

Short-timers syndrome (STS) is a universal phenomenon within workplaces, schools and communities. When the expectation is that any initiative is disposable or short-term, people will not fully engage. A key to setting the stage for meaningful relationships and engagement in a Life Group is the expectation that investments made are relatively long term.

Group Size

The number of people in a group greatly influences the dynamics that will be experienced. Jesus often had more than 100 people regularly following Him in ministry, but just 12 selected disciples and 3 whom He knew more intimately. Studies and historical church experiences have validated that the ideal relational context for small groups involve 8-14 adults, depending upon the format of each gathering. Having too few people can lack sufficient diversity to avoid stagnation or cliquish isolation,

while too many can dilute and frustrate the times you get together. Some groups will slowly build to the target range, some will keep increasing until they surpass the “target range” and some will blow past the 14 mark and have 20-30.

The key to remember is that the driver for group size is relational depth. If a group has more than 12-14 people, then the expectation is that there would be *sub-grouping* within the life group. This means at some point during most weekly gatherings the main group would breakout into mini-groups of no more than 8-10 for further discussion, prayer, and relationship. In large group cases, the sub-grouping process will plant the seeds for eventual launching of new groups. For traditional groups, sub-grouping along gender lines can open the door for new levels of intimacy and accountability, even when size is not a pressing factor.

Multiplication of Groups

A natural and healthy by-product of something as life changing as a relationship with God through Jesus is numeric growth. In Matthew 13 we read that Jesus went to the lake and was praying while people gathered around and huge ministry broke out. In Acts we read that Peter shared the Gospel message and thousands joined – with “more joining them daily.” It is logical that a by-product of healthy groups would be the replication of communities. The how, when and why of replication are critical to the healthy outcome of the process.

- **Establish Group DNA** – it typically takes 12-18 months for a group to arrive at a rhythm and depth that is truly reproducible; this intangible ethos is referred to as your Group DNA (gDNA) and is key to the successful multiplication of group life
- **Identify Leaders** – sometimes a spiritually appropriate or responsibly available individual isn’t obvious to identify; it’s important to be sharing the leadership roles to keep the group from being singularly dependent upon just one person as the “super leader;” sharing roles and responsibilities will keep the group healthier and allow for future leaders to be developed
- **Plan to Launch** – when a leader comes forward, be intentional about preparing them to launch out as a new group leader by allowing them to share in key responsibilities for a season; make the prospect of launching a new group well known within the group so there are no scandals or conspiracy theories
- **Coordinate with Community Pastor on Launch** – prior to launching leader, prospective leaders must interview with Community Pastor to prepare, equip and review expectations with them; the Community Pastor will also facilitate getting a target start date for the new life group
- **Send out New Leader & Group as a Church Plant** – splitting or dividing an existing group is a messy and rarely recommended approach to replication, as it tends to create emotional rifts that harm the healthy movement built up over the previous year; when a leader is ready to start a group, launch them from the existing group just as you would send a missionary pastor to go plant a church in a new area; people seeking to join a group will then be matched up with the new group leader and the empty chair created in the original group can then be filled as a celebration of fruit-bearing

Consistent Attendance Expectations

The community experience of groups is not about fulfilling a check-box of expectation; it’s about experiencing the fullness of relationships in the context God-pursuit. Meaningful experience requires consistent involvement and participation. If someone drops by a local church worship experience only



periodically they will not truly experience community. Grace Point defines group attendance or membership as someone who shows up at least 50% of the time.

Assimilation for Relational Depth as a Priority

With a driving value to achieve and operate within the context of relational depth, group leaders must be intentional in assimilating people. Sharing of testimonies, personal prayer time, individual investments and promoting a culture of “known-ness” is imperative. Scheduling periodic open house events for prospective to join or hosting potluck/BBQs for extended time to assimilate people is a missionally valuable activity for groups to implement.

Prayer as Divine Communication vs. Answering Machine Needs Ticker

Prayer is a fundamental of group life. Group prayer, individual prayer, preparatory prayer, intercessional prayer – drawing the group into encounters of varying expressions of the prayer life is extremely healthy. Leaders must be intentional to guard the health of prayer time to avoid it getting mired in discussion versus practice. When prayer requests take longer to notate than the actual prayer time engaged, there is an imbalance. Leaders should remain alert to the trends of prayer and let diversity of approaches and forms of prayer be introduced to keep it fresh and purposeful.



Life Groups Strategies 4 Health

PUTS Principle: Manage the Ins, Measure the Outs

The missional purpose of Life Groups is to facilitate the transformational growth of all members towards “full devotion.” Something so spiritual, radical and elusive as individual transformation in a group setting does not happen spontaneously – it must be intentionally sought after and cultivated. How do you do that? It’s easy to fall into a false dichotomy of either focusing on the *output* of missional growth (full devotion) or being purpose-less under the guise of opting for an organic “hopefully it will happen” approaches. Neither yield transformational results.

That’s where the *PUTS Principle* (not to be confused with a *putz* principle, altogether different topic!) comes in. At Grace Point Church we have established a “missional measure” of “full devotion” by what is called the **5 Gs** (Grace, Growth, Gifts, Give and Go). Those are categorical facets or attributes of a fully devoted Christ follower. However, simply focusing on the *outputs* of full devotion does not tend to result in full devotion. There are related, yet distinct *inputs* that are associated with the desired *outputs*. Hence, the principle that to get the desire OUT-put measures, you must be intentional with how you manage the IN-puts.

Church ministry and small group thought leaders have often coined catchy phrases to capture what church life is all about. As is often the case, there's nothing truly “new under the sun,” so these proverbs and maxims serve as contemporary re-packaging of concepts already found in Scripture. Jesus masterfully reduced the entire Old Testament covenant law into the *2 Great Commandments* of “love God fully, and love people.” Jesus also wrapped up His earthly ministry with a final charge to the first “church” in a message called the Great Commission. From those two pinnacle imperatives, we derive five chief “inputs” of a Biblically healthy Christ-seeking community:

Worship – the adoration of God; including such practices or expressions as prayer, praises, music, poetry, dance, and meditation

Discipleship – the teaching of the Ways of Jesus/God; including Bible study, memorization, discussion and application

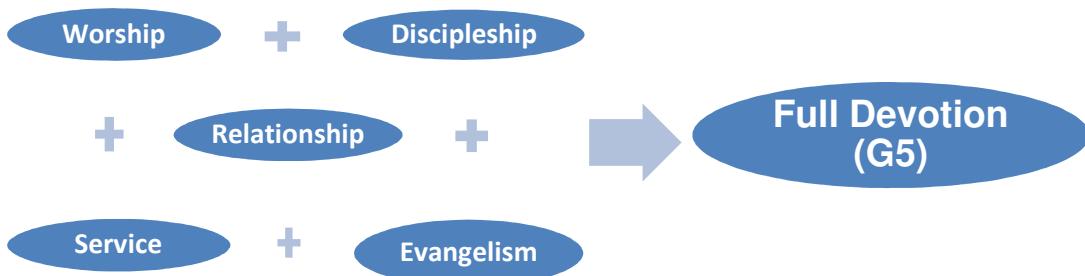
Relationship – fellowship of the saints; including acts of friendship, confession, encouragement and accountability

Ministry – serving the local Body of Christ; includes actively helping each other, stewarding the gifts and abilities entrusted to fill divine functions within the Church

Evangelism – taking the Great News of Jesus to the lost; including inviting people to group or weekend services, sharing testimonies with lost people, local outreach initiatives and various mission trips

These five distinct categories or Biblical purposes make up the primary “inputs” necessary for any full expression of a Christ-seeking community. This is true at the macro level of a local church just as much as it is in the micro sense of a group-church meeting in your living room. The chief responsibility of a Life Group Leader is to navigate the spiritual growth of the group

by effectively managing the “inputs” to achieve the “output” of advancing “full devotion to Jesus Christ.”



As a leader, it is important to realize that everyone tends to have a dominant preference for just one of the missional inputs. A person with a default dominant preference for discipleship (common among life group leaders) – unchecked through intentionally divesting ministry functions within the group – will drive a group to become anemic in many aspects of community not found in discipleship. This requires a leader to be intentional about sharing responsibilities within the group based upon giftedness and needs.

Examples of intentionally divesting leadership around the missional inputs are:

- **Appoint a Ministry & Evangelism Ambassador** – commonly referred to as “Go Reps” for the association with the Go ministries at Grace Point. Have someone carry the torch for identifying and coordinating opportunities for the group to engage actively in the Great Commission locally. It’s valuable for a group to be purposeful in choosing a local opportunity to regularly serve with so that it becomes a part of the *gDNA* and allows for greater transformation through relationships. Groups are free to identify service opportunities on their own, but one of the most efficient means of gaining access to ministry needs is by sending group ambassadors to the Go Rep meetings held monthly. It is not a requirement that each group have a representative present at every meeting, but until a regular service rhythm has been established participating in these meetings is a great way to connect the Go world.
- **Rotate Worship Leading** – worship is more than just music, but if there are musical talents within the group it is effective to have those members take responsibility for bringing elements of worship to gatherings or planning special worship-themed meetings.
- **Fellowship & Activities** – it’s usually obvious which group members are gifted in the ability to connect and create engaging socially, so it’s a great idea to capitalize on natural strengths and empower such members to coordinate periodic relationship-building elements of group life.
- **Teaching** – effective studies, whether topical or straight from God’s Word, is a powerfully important component of a life group. The leader does not necessarily need to be the primary teacher nor does every gathering have to demonstrate full studies. The emphasis and content of discipleship should be selected with care, targeting group growth spiritually. Rotating who leads studies and discussion times can be very healthy. Use of DVD-curriculum or guest teachers is also a way to mix things up.

It’s encouraged for leaders to experiment with the inputs as pertaining to the structuring of group time. Attempting to fulfill every component of the missional inputs within a single group gathering is unrealistic. It is better to allow for rotating or variable gatherings that are focused on particular inputs – having a “worship night,” “service project night,” or “relationship-building event” in the place of regularly planned group time.

Group Needs-Based Models

Groups have diverse factors and variables just as the people in groups have an array of personalities. A key to establishing and maintaining a healthy group is to choose a model that matches the life stages and shape of the people in it. Do not let a cookie-cutter model dictate or drain the life from your group! Grace Point has established principles and values that must be maintained, but the group-specific expression of those ideals can take on a great deal of texture. Key factors that can shape the group model requirements include:

- **Kids** – none, a ton, young, old?
 - ✓ When there are children, be up front and intentional about how the group is structured to best accommodate them. For younger children, childcare can be a necessity in most cases. Groups meeting at or near the Grace Point campus can take advantage of free childcare on Sundays, Mondays and Wednesdays from 5-7pm. An ongoing list of prospective youth baby-sitters is also maintained by the Community Ministry team in collaboration with the Point Student Ministry – contact the main office for a list of candidates and affordable options.
- **Schedules** – fixed date, fluctuating each week?
 - ✓ Sometimes the life rhythms of a group make having a static day of the week targeted for a life group unrealistic. Groups with a high degree of schedule “flux” have found using alternating days of the week throughout the month creates the elasticity needed without compromising the value of meeting together weekly.
- **Location, Location, Location** – small houses, big houses, construction or distance?
 - ✓ A life group does not have to meet in the home of the leader. Some life groups will find rotating locations helps spread the burden and blessing of hosting. If group members come from too many different directions, try to find the home most centrally located to minimize travel barriers. Rooms can also be reserved on the Grace Point campus.

There are as many models as there are personality-context variables, so leaders are encouraged to experiment until the optimal structure is arrived at for their situation. Some examples of formats currently used with success include:

- **Couples Group w/Gender Breakout Times**
 - 2 hour meeting time on a weeknight (static), meeting in home of leader
 - 0:00 – 0:15 snacks, 0:15-0:30 fellowship, 0:30-1:00 large group lesson/discussion, 1:00-2:00 breakout of men/women into separate rooms
 - Male/Female breakout used as setting for continuation of main study with deeper application, accountability, prayer and encouragement, or separate discussion/study
 - Every few weeks a meeting time is spent just sharing a meal and/or playing board games
 - Youth baby-sitter hired to watch children in room separate from adults
- **Couples Group w/Lots of Young Children**
 - 1.5 -2 hour varying model on 4 week rotations (different nights depending upon week)
 - Week One – meet in home with onsite babysitter for fellowship and study, Friday evenings
 - Week Two – meet at another home without any babysitter and share a meal together (no official study time), Sunday afternoon
 - Week Three – meet at Grace Point campus in a classroom while childcare is offered, time spent mostly in more intensive study/discussion, Sunday afternoons
 - Week Four – optional “buy” week where group might engage in fun/social activity, service project or mix things up
 - Use of 3 childcare tactics (onsite babysitter, GPC childcare, and none)
- **Women’s Group**
 - 1.5 hour group meeting on a weeknight (static)
 - Week One: in-depth Bible Study
 - Week Two: review assignments, homework, share experience of study



- Week Three: prayer, confession, accountability, encouragement
- Week Four: fellowship
- Week Five: service project locally
- Meeting on campus at Grace Point utilizing free childcare as needed
- **Couples Group w/Children**
 - 2 hour group meeting on weekends
 - Alternating schedule with 1 week at Grace Point for free childcare and classroom for more intense study/discussion time, other week in homes without childcare and more fellowship time
- **Mixed Group w/No Kids**
 - 1.5-2 hour group meeting on weeknight (static)
 - Periodically will all enroll in a Grace Point sponsored education program (i.e. Search for Significance, Love & Respect, Truth Project, etc.) as a group with that filling the “teaching” component
 - Group meets afterwards for prayer and discussion about the learning process, and periodically throughout week to share a meal

These are just a sample of group models currently being used at Grace Point. They're not meant to limit any new groups to select from a menu, but to stimulate creative thinking by offering glimpses of how leaders have accommodated the structuring of their group time to best meet the situation of the members. Explore, experiment, evaluate and enjoy the journey as a group!

Choose Curriculum on Purpose

Studies are just *part* of group life, but a key component nonetheless. Be careful not to let the group be defined and driven by the study. Choosing studies is a very important task for any group. As the leader, be sure to play an active part in navigating which curriculum is best suited for the growth stage, needs and dynamics of the group. When evaluating study options, consider the following principles:

1. **Subject** – is this a subject that will foster spiritual growth? Does it lend itself to building community and relational depth, or is it too academic and prone to draining energy? Is it tied to known spiritual growth needs or just “interesting” to some people? Is it relevant? Is it something you can drill down to application in life?
2. **Format** – the newer the group or leader, the easier the format should be. Video based studies can be ideal, as they allow a leader to focus on the discussion facilitation and bigger picture of group life. If doing a book study, evaluate the homework load associated and be sure it is realistic for the group to keep up with – a study that stops being fully participated in after a few weeks can create poor culture for future seasons of group life. Is the study format intended to allow others in the group to take turns leading? Is that a goal? Workbooks can be good to ensure each person owns part of the study. Leaders with advanced training/experience can take the liberty to create lessons from self-led Bible Studies, but should consult with Community Pastor before making this a primary strategy.
3. **Prep Time** – leaders must be realistic about time commitments for self and others. It's easy for a leader to employ such rigorous studies that demand extensive preparation to the point that the leader does nothing other than prepare for the lesson...inclining the group to gradually grow imbalanced in the spiritual growth journey.
4. **Set goals** – what will the characteristics of a successfully completed study be? Define these goals at the onset of a study and then conduct periodic check-ins to gauge if the group is tracking towards the goals. Everything in the life of a group is about facilitating spiritual growth, so be clear in connecting how a study is intended to serve that greater purpose – then measure or evaluate it as a group.



5. **Involve the Group** -- don't make selecting curriculum an arbitrary thing, but don't give it fully away to democratic election either – keep the focus on the group purpose of spiritual growth and help avoid options that would not serve the purpose. Ensure there is group ownership of the destiny before it, intentionally drawing people into the selection process.
6. **Mix Things Up** – don't let the group get into a rut, different learning styles/modes and study formats are a healthy thing. Consider rotating who leads the study, who leads/prepares discussion questions, the length/setting of study time, DVD versus person delivered and any other way to introduce variety in the learning process.
7. **Right Stuff for Right Time** – there are seemingly endless possibilities for study topics/materials, and a leader must be diligent to make sure the right study is picked for the right time in the growth process of the group. Heavier matters of doctrine, history or theology are rich in content and can be like a juicy steak for mature Christians...or it can bog down a group, overwhelm young Christ-followers and tilt a group towards overly-cerebral discussions. Evaluate the spiritual condition and "age" of the people in the group and plan accordingly. Never assume every smiling face is at the same place spiritually!
8. **Grace Point Alignment Campaigns** – periodically Grace Point will conduct community-wide initiatives where all life groups will engage in simultaneous studies that coincide with a sermon series. These will be communicated in advance and will come with clear guidance on expectations, materials and rationale. Such campaigns will typically span 4-8 weeks at a time. If a leader believes their group will not be able to fully participate, they must contact the Community Pastor right away to discuss further. Community Campaigns can be an incredibly enriching experience for a church body and will be a significant factor in the growing movements amount Grace Point life groups.

Growth requires activity, application. The difference between the Sea of Galilee – the great center of fishing and livelihood – and the Dead Sea was a small thing called the Jordan River. Inputs with no outputs is a hazard. It is the flow-through cycles that stimulate growth versus stagnation.



Life Groups Tasks & Exercises

The intent of the Community Ministry team at Grace Point is to minimize the administrative burden on Life Group Leaders while ensuring the maximum experience for all life groups spiritually. With leadership does come responsibility, and in a Romans 12:8 sense the expectations at Grace Point is that leaders will be diligent in how they steward the opportunities and resources entrusted to them. Here are some key administrative tasks, expectations and group exercises that exist presently for all Life Groups/Leaders:

Administrative

- Attendance – report monthly
 - Purpose: not to rank groups or track empty numbers, but to know who is truly engaged, identify those who are still needing to be matched with a group, anticipate future group and leader needs, etc..
- Share/Report Major Events
 - Exchanged lives, baptisms, ministry/service projects, spiritual growth breakthroughs

Assimilation

- Start with Relationships – assimilate intentionally
 - Have a plan in place for how new group members will be assimilated and how relational intimacy and spiritual focuses will be established as core values.
 - Suggestions: launch and re-launch every group with the sharing of testimonies by every group member (even skip lessons for this!); write out a value statement, mission statement and/or group covenant document; review goals and purposes of group with new members

Leadership Development

Note: Leaders are learners, and Grace Point ministry staff will be intentional about offering key opportunities by which to grow leadership capacity, efficacy and health. Stewarding influence and opportunities by being responsible in self-growth is an expectation for all leaders.

- Participate in Life Group developmental/training events (mandatory)
 - The Community Ministry team will offer large scale training and strategy forums approximately once per quarter
 - Optional and leader-specific training will be offered through various channels including Discipleship courses and/or guided studies with Life Group Navigators
- Leadership Summit
 - Unquestionably the most concentrated and potent source of high caliber leadership lessons made accessible for affordable rates and local...take advantage of it!
- Participate in Grace Point leadership initiatives (i.e. Advance) as communicated
 - The larger the Grace Point community becomes the more imperative leadership communication, readiness, vision clarity and integrity becomes. When the Grace Point pastoral team promotes a strategic leadership event, Life Group Leaders should make it a priority to be engaged so that communication within the groups can be as clear as possible about the movements within Grace Point.

Gauging & Promoting Spiritual Health

- G5 Assessments
 - Utilize the G5 Assessment Tool periodically within a group to get an aggregate look at where missional outputs are registering; relay results (names not needed) to the Community Pastor for tracking group growth
- Request Discovery/Membership status



- A significant next step for many people can be going through the Discovery Class process at Grace Point; be intentional about determining the status of group members and encourage engagement in the Discovery/Membership process as appropriate
- Baptism
 - In a group culture of spiritual growth, having meaningful spiritual conversations about next steps should always involve touching base on fundamentals like baptism
- Spiritual Discipline projects
 - A healthy practice for any life group to engage in is a study and or exercise of exploring and implementing spiritual disciplines. Sharing in the experience and journey that comes from it can be an incredibly enriching process for a life group
- Ministry Projects
 - Encourage group members to participate in the work of God locally, both by employing their SHAPE in regular service with Grace Point campus ministries as well as local outreach venues – all of which serve to be catalysts for spiritual growth as people move out in faith and obedience to participate in God's Kingdom work

GP Community Initiatives

- Rally behind key community-wide events (VBS, Leadership Summit, Impact Events) as much as possible, including changing group schedule on key weeks to allow everyone to participate



Life Groups Resources & Tools

GPC Group Central

Information and ideas exist in a constant state of flux, and keeping up can require extensive meetings, lengthy emails, re-publishing key documents, and the perpetual death of small forests. The launch of this all new website dedicated to Life Group Leaders is intended to help close the gap. GPC Group Central is an online resource center for you! At this website you'll find:

- Leader Resources - *FAQs, Troubleshooting Tips, Guides, Covenants*
- Study Materials - *free studies to use as curriculum, up-to-date lists of GP Group library studies*
- Q&A Forum - *shared learning blog-like area to exchange ideas, challenges and discoveries with other leaders and the Community Pastor*
- Links to Online Resources - *there are a lot of great small group sites out there, so rather than duplicate everything you can find some trusted links and utilize the materials/information ready and waiting out there*

Visit *GPC Group Central* today by visiting: <http://lifegroups.weebly.com>

G5 Assessment Tool

Gauging spiritual growth and conditions can be very difficult. A helpful aid in this effort is the G5 Assessment Tool, which employs 5 simple questions pertaining to each of the missional measures at Grace Point Church

Recommended Books

There are a lot of people and churches who have “been there, done that” when it comes to pursuing missionally effective group life initiatives. These are just some of the books recommended for further reading. Leaders are learners at heart, so take advantage of the insights and guidance these books have to offer!

Leading Life-Changing Small Groups, by Bill Donahue

Life Together, Dietrich Bonhoeffer

How to Lead Small Groups, Neil McBride

Community that is Christian, Julie Gorman

...and many more! (see GPC Group Central)

