

Life Group Leader Training



FIRST PRES
COLORADO SPRINGS

Life Group Leader Training

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THIS WORKBOOK BELONGS TO:



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LIFE GROUPS AT FIRST PRES ARE FOR FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST TO CONTINUE TO BE TRANSFORMED INTO THE LIKENESS OF CHRIST WHILE HELPING OTHER FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST DO THE SAME, ALL TO THE END OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD BECOMING A CLEARER WITNESS TO THE IN-BREAKING OF THE SALVATION OF GOD THAT EVEN MORE WHO ARE LOST MIGHT BE FOUND IN THIS CITY.

Introduction

Together with the accompanying video sessions, this workbook is designed to equip you to lead a Life Group by understanding the Life Group platform conceptually, thereby seeing how the Life Group platform excels in offering an atmosphere that is highly conducive to growth in Christ, the process of transformation whereby we say “yes” more and more to God and His Kingdom.

To access the accompanying video sessions, visit firstprescos.org/lgtraining.

This is the first edition of this training material, but of course it stands on the backs of many. I am especially thankful for how I have been shaped, and thereby how this material has been shaped, by the professional resources of Garrett Higbee and Greg Ogden around small group discipleship. Further, watching how my former pastors, Wayne Darbonne and Jim Stuart, pursued discipleship also has a tremendous bearing on this material, second only to my admiration for the ferocity with which my wife, Cassie, strives to daily run after Jesus.

Katie Fowler was at the discipleship helm when we first launched Life Groups here at First Pres and her commitment to seeing this congregation grow in Christ continues to pulse through this platform. At the time of publication, First Pres is quickly approaching its 150th year. Discipleship is nothing new for this congregation. This platform, Life Groups, is how we are today articulating the ancient practice of God bringing His people together to grow in Him. In our time and in our place,



the bones of the Life Group platform are the strategic “how” God’s people grow together in Christ.

The Life Group platform requires a high level of buy-in. At minimum, to flourish within the context of Life Groups, you need to be absolutely convinced that God is worth living for above all else. Having said, I am not intimidated by the high ask of the Life Group platform as I know, even in my short time here, that God has turned thousands of hearts to Himself through this congregation. Here is a congregation prime for this level of commitment. We stand in the heart of downtown with the unified desire expressed in Isaiah 26:8, “Yes, Lord, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you; your name and renown are the desire of our hearts.”

Especially with the acknowledgement that this is the first edition of this material, I will be honored if you send me your feedback. From basic hiccups to unintended confusion on terms and processes, you can play a part in shaping the refinement of this material by emailing me what you find and sense.

I thank God for each and every person He is calling to lead a Life Group. I see God’s Light and Life breaking out into hearts within this city more and more because of the transformation that is and will take place in homes around the city through this material. When a Life Group forms, hearts are given the opportunity to be transformed even more unto Christ. And when hearts are transformed even more unto Christ, the lost are that much closer to seeing God’s grace and responding to it in the affirmative.

May the lost be found as a result of God’s people “living a life worthy of the gospel.”

Yours and His,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Michael Thornton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel.

— Philippians 1:27

SESSION 1

Foundations

What are Life Groups and Why Do We Prioritize Them?

Key Verse:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

— Matthew 28:18-20

Life Groups is a platform designed to help you open up your heart to the Lord in order that you be ever more transformed into the likeness of Jesus.

The larger header for Life Groups is _____.

The Great Commission is what we have come to call the final words of Christ during His earthly ministry as recorded in Matthew 28 where Jesus gives clear instruction to the disciples and for every disciple to follow:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make _____ of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to _____ everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
— Matthew 28:18-20

Answer Key
available on
page 45.

Three Treasures within the Great Commission:

Treasure 1: *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...*

All of God's people are called into a life of discipleship. To be a disciple is to _____ a teacher.

To be a disciple of Jesus is to not turn to Him once in a moment and then go along your own path, but to turn to Him and continue turning to Him every moment of your life as you walk with Him.

There's a great image for discipleship in first century Palestinian culture, the culture in which Jesus lived, where disciples would travel with their Rabbi from town to town and upon arriving in a new town they would be covered with the dust of their teacher. Likewise, modern day disciples of Jesus ought to metaphorically be covered each and every day and in each and every place with the dust of Jesus.

Discipleship is fundamentally following Jesus _____
_____, becoming more and more like Him in every way.

The First Pres Way, Value 3: "Keep Growing - _____, and when your life changes give God the credit," one of our seven values (see Appendix B, page 40).

At First Pres, we describe Sunday morning worship as our "1st Hour" that we give to the Lord. Within the Reformed Tradition, a worship service primarily includes adoration, recognition of God's holiness (confession of sin/assurance of pardon), receiving the Word (biblically-anchored preaching), and the receiving of the sacraments, communion and baptism.

Life Groups can rightly be seen as our "2nd Hour" where we come together in micro-communities especially for heart work unto the Lord (more on this in Session 3).

Did you know the Life Group platform is intentionally designed to pick up where our 1st Hour worship concludes?

Treasure 2: *Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded...*

Life Groups is specifically curated to help you
_____, learning to walk in obedience to the instruction of the Lord.

Discipline is the next closest synonym to discipleship.

Life Group Leader Tip: Shepherd your people to willingly and joyfully discipline themselves under the loving hand of God, then they will be _____ of Jesus Christ."

Discipleship is making a moment by moment joyful decision to say, "Jesus, I'm with You, where You go I go. How You act I act. How You love I love. How You think I think."

Treasure 3: *And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*

Disciples of Jesus Christ are not _____. We are given the very presence of God for each and every step of the journey and we are further given _____ to serve and support one another.

Applying the Three Treasures from the Great Commission:

1. Keep Growing
2. Walk in obedience to the commands of God
3. Take heart in the glorious knowledge that God is with His people

Life Groups at First Pres are for followers of Christ to continue to be transformed into the likeness of Christ while helping other followers of Christ do the same.

Under the Great Commission, Romans 12:1-2 then dials in on the discipleship process:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

— Romans 12:1-2

“The patterns of the world” can be summed up with this list: coveting, greed and selfishness.

Instead of living into vice, God calls His people to

_____ and to run toward Christ.

Verses to memorize:

Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

— 1 John 2:6

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

— 1 Peter 2:21

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

— Ephesians 5:1-2

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

— Galatians 2:20

So we are called away from coveting, greed and selfishness and into a life marked by the very qualities of God, **the fruit of the spirit**—love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, _____, gentleness and _____.

Life Groups are a primary place where you intentionally lay your _____ out before God and your micro-community and say, “Lord, _____ more and more according to Your will.”

Life Groups at First Pres are for followers of Christ to continue to be transformed into the likeness of Christ while helping other followers of Christ do the same.

How? By coming together, by lives committing to one another to live in

_____ with one another and to always be

_____ the Scriptures to our lives in the accountability of Christian community, and by practicing the “one anothers” of Scripture.

The One Others of Scripture

There are _____ specific “one another” commands in Scripture. These are direct imperatives instructing us how to relate with one another. Here are some of my favorites:

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

— James 5:16

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, _____ one another humbly in love.

— Galatians 5:13

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

– 1 Peter 4:9

Therefore _____ one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

– 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Bear with each other and _____ one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

– Colossians 3:13

Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.

– Romans 12:10

Therefore let us stop _____ on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.

– Romans 14:13

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

– Hebrews 10:24

So, practice the “one anothers” and commit to be vulnerable with one another and apply God’s Word to our lives in the accountability of Christian community.

Consider this acronym as a way to help you remember the 1st and 2nd hour priorities of discipleship:

1st: (Sunday Morning Worship)

P: Pray (prayer is the believer’s lifeline to God)

R: Relate (relationships are where we become truly known, vulnerable confession)

E: Equip (equip one another to be Jesus to the lost)

S: Stand (stand on the Word of God through the application of Scripture)

Why Do We Prioritize Life Groups?

Life Groups are a proven and effective platform for discipleship where we “Learn to Grow” into the likeness of Christ, becoming like Him in every way,

which is the goal of _____ .

**Alaska Hot House Effect Illustration:
What stands out to you?**

“Learn to Grow” is part of the First Pres Way. See Appendix B for all seven of our values.

Commit to **intense vulnerability** with one another and **resolve to**

_____ **the Scriptures** to one another each and every week as you rejoice in all the ways God will transform your heart to beat ever truer for His name and your joy.

A Final Word On Vulnerability:

Intense vulnerability will require utmost

_____. To this end, every group is highly encouraged to have a matter-of-fact conversation around confidentiality as well as physically sign a Life Group Covenant that includes a full range of important expectations for real and full Christian community to flourish (see Appendix A for a template).

Time of Reflection

Take five minutes to journal your thoughts and respond to the articulation of Life Groups that you just heard. What surprised you? What excites you the most? What feels most challenging?

SESSION 2

Qualifications and Role

What Kind of Person are We Passionately Praying for to Become a Life Group Leader?

Key Verse:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

— Mark 12:30–31

We carry out the Great _____ in the spirit of the

Great _____, making disciples by loving the Lord and loving our neighbor.

We lay down our lives for one another. We serve one another as if the salvation of the other depended on it.

And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

— Romans 5:5

When we are _____ in the love of God that is being poured into our hearts—the limitless, perfect, eternal love of God—we are empowered in the very strength of the Lord to extend His love to everyone we meet.

What kind of person are we passionately praying for to become a Life Group leader? What are the qualifications and role of a Life Group leader at First Pres?

A Life Group leader:

- Is not perfect
- Knows her/his limitations
- Seeks to operate in the strength of the Lord alone

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

— Ephesians 6:10–12

Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty.
— Zechariah 4:6

Core Areas of Growth in a Life Group Leader:

A Life Group leader demonstrates _____ and
_____ in these core areas:

(these qualities are already publicly working themselves out in your life)

First, you are marked by _____ and
_____.

This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

— 1 Corinthians 4:1-2

Faithfulness and integrity expand to every dimension of your life.

Second, you are living in _____ with Christ and
_____ to the grace and love of God.

Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

— John 15:4

In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

— Matthew 5:16

They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.

— Isaiah 61:3

Third, you are in high _____ with our core theology:

- **Evangelical**

- Authority of Scripture — We believe God's Word provides perfectly sufficient wisdom unto salvation.
- Personal Repentance and Faith — We believe salvation is realized when a person repents of sin and believes in one's heart while confessing with one's mouth that Jesus is Lord.
- Good News — We believe we have a responsibility from God to share the good news that God offers forgiveness of sin and salvation to all who believe.

- Jesus — We believe that Jesus is the second person of the Trinity, the Son, fully God and fully man. Jesus is the only name by which we may be saved.
- Heaven Starts Now — We believe that the eternal Kingdom of God has been inaugurated on earth. This inauguration compels us to apply the gospel to all areas of life in the here and now.

(Note: this brief list is not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, this list is designed to outline the core starting framework for our beliefs. Also reference the Apostles' Creed, Appendix D.)

- **Reformed**

- We are a member of A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO).
- Visit Eco-pres.org to explore the essential tenets and confessions of ECO.

- **Egalitarian**

- God calls both male and female to lead God's people.
- All are called to mutual submission in Christ.

- **The First Pres Way: 7 Values in Our Pursuit of Jesus** (Appendix B).

A Life Group leader is further _____ with a strong desire to help others grow in Christ and walks in _____ before others and before God.

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.
— Colossians 3:12

Leader, Teacher, Shepherd

As a Life Group leader you will be leading, teaching and shepherding souls toward Christ.

As a leader you cast wise, godly _____, not your own vision, but the vision of God that is in alignment with the rest of the body of First Pres. As a worshiping community, we are pursuing and resting in the love of God together.

As a teacher you facilitate the learning and _____ of the Scriptures.

As a shepherd you know your people and care deeply for your people. You are not able to ignore the _____ of your people or the _____ of your people, because you love them too much.

Time of Reflection

All of us are in process. Though we started off “dead” in the trespasses of our sins, we have been made alive in Christ! Take several minutes to consider your salvation story and how God is growing you in Christ. What areas of growth most excite you? In what areas are you praying most for God to continue His work of sanctification in your life?

SESSION 3

Heart Surgery

What Does a Life Group Accomplish?

Key Verse:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

— Romans 12:1-2

Life Groups foster an environment that is most conducive to “heart surgery.” Heart surgery is all about transformation in Christ, becoming increasingly passionate about dying to sin and living for Christ.

The Process of Salvation

Justification ► Sanctification ► Glorification

Justification is the moment God claims us as His own. We realize that this has happened when we turn to Him in repentance and faith.

Glorification is the real and soon hope of every believer—that God will make all things new. We will live with God forever in His very near and joyful presence and sin will be completely removed from our hearts.

Life Groups are for the middle stage, _____ .

We know sanctification is happening when a child of God is noticeably bearing _____ of the Fruit of the Spirit.

It is precisely because the Life Group platform is designed to grow you ever more into the likeness of Christ that we place such a high capital on _____ during our Life Group times together.

We are praying for people to be loving each other as Christ has _____ us, committing to be vulnerable with one another as you apply Scripture to your lives alongside one another.

Life Groups at First Pres are for followers of Christ to continue to be transformed into the likeness of Christ while helping other followers of Christ do the same.

Life Groups is an ideal platform for us to come together as the people of God, lay our hearts bare before one another and the Lord, and invite the Lord to _____.

**Illustration of C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*:
What stands out to you?**

Heart Surgery is about creating an atmosphere week after week where your Life Group commits to the intimidating yet freeing work of offering your whole heart to the Lord and asking Him to _____.

Behold the immeasurable joy of seeing your heavenly Father set captives free!

How Do You Stand with The Spirit During Heart Surgery?

- Know your Life Group / Listen well to your Life Group
- Care for your people enough to take time to let sin come out and righteousness come in
- Ask heart-opening questions that move from fruit to root
- Lead times of prayer marked by confession and steeped in Scripture
- Verbalize next steps and consider homework that aids in moving from fruit to root
- Foster intense vulnerability and commitment to the application of Scripture

When we talk about heart transformation, we need to distinguish between someone's actions (the fruit) and the person's heart motivations (the root). Let's walk together through a few examples:

- Controlling Charlie is always interrupting the conversation and dominating the group time. The fruit is disruption and insensitivity, but the root is needing self-earned _____.
- Sad Sally confesses that she is bulimic. Bulimia is the fruit, but the root is a need for _____.
- Frustrated Fred confesses that he's addicted to pornography. Pornography is the fruit, but the root is a _____ issue.
- Finally, Anxious Ann always seems to be putting on a smile, working harder than everyone else to do the right thing, and seldom does Ann appear to be at rest. The fruit is over-busyness and anxiety, but the root is a need for _____.

As a Life Group leader you want to nourish your Life Group with Scripture that affirms Christ-centered _____.

Avoiding Andrew:

- They _____ enough to press in with Andrew on how the Holy Spirit was working in His heart.
- They interceded together and _____ Andrew.
- They _____ Scripture in the Spirit.
- They _____ and implemented a way forward.

And Andrew retained _____ for his personal growth in Christ while not doing it alone.

As a result:

- Friendships are deepened.
- Hearts are further directed to the Lord (through intense vulnerability and commitment to the application of Scripture).
- The Great Physician has done His good and pleasing work of heart surgery.

Life Group is Happening!

Time of Reflection

It can be easier to keep our dragon scales on, but it is to freedom in Christ that we have been called. What is a story from your own life of dragon scales falling off by the grace and power of Christ? How does it feel to dream about curating this kind of opportunity for other sisters and brothers?

SESSION 4

Sailing at Full Tilt

What are Spiritual Gifts and Why Do They Matter for My Life Group?

Key Verse:

I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

— Romans 1:11-12

We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because He cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

— C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

What are spiritual gifts for?

What Paul is saying is not that he alone is holding the keys to some secret gifts, but rather that he longs to be with his brothers and sisters so that the special graces God has given to him may be used by God to bless the body of Christ.

Spiritual gifts are special graces given by God to His children for the primary purpose that the people of God be fully equipped to join the Spirit in building one another up in Christ and thereby the love of Christ throughout the earth.

God is sprinkling His graces out over His children. Not everyone has the same spiritual gifts, but all of God's children are given some special grace that God desires for His children to use to bless the larger body and out into the ends of the earth.

Consider all the various aspects to a successful Life Group:

- Hosting an atmosphere of Christ-centered _____ (time of fellowship)
- Seeking the transformative _____ of the Father by submitting to Scripture (time in Word)
- Cultivating _____, vulnerability and Spirit-empowered support (time of prayer)
- Discerning together how the Lord is calling each individual to _____ His love and salvation to the world.

God never intends for us to live isolated from one another. Instead, God fully intends for us to walk together.

The Four Primary Spiritual Gifts for Life Groups:

The Gift of Faith: The one gifted in faith is responsible for growing the faith of the whole group through cultivating lives of unceasing _____.

The Gift of Hospitality: The one gifted in hospitality is responsible for creating and maintaining an atmosphere of Christ-welcoming and joy-filled _____.

The Gift of Mercy: The one gifted in mercy is responsible for identifying and responding to the needs of the Life Group by coordinating efforts to serve one another and the surrounding community as Christ has taught us as we _____ to the love and salvation of God.

The Gift of Teaching: The one gifted in teaching is responsible for further unpacking _____ for the purposes outlined in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* Teaching must include the applying of Scripture over each person present.

Our goal is that every Life Group will be able to identify at least one person in their group for each of these four gifts. Ideally, every Life Group ought to have a minimum of four individuals who together are gifted with the four primary gifts.

A Note on Structuring Your Life Group:

Fellowship, Word, Prayer (30-minute blocks each)

The fellowship block is led by an individual with a gifting in hospitality.

The Word block is led by an individual with a gifting in teaching.

The prayer block is led by an individual with a gifting in faith.

Further, an individual equipped by God in the spiritual gifting of mercy leads the Life Group in continuing to serve one another and the surrounding community throughout the year. This leader also and equally has a deep passion and gifting for leading the Life Group in incarnational ministry to reach our soon-to-be brothers and sisters in Christ (witnessing the love of God, (“Share Good News” see Appendix B).

The Spiritual Gifts Assessment Tool (Appendix C) will help you lead your Life Group in discerning which spiritual gifts God has given to each of you with which to bless one another and the world.

A Study on 1 Corinthians 12 and 13

Concerning Spiritual Gifts

Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All of these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He distributes them to each one, just as He determines.

Unity and Diversity in the Body

Just as a body has many parts, though all its parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so, the body is not made up of one part but of many.

Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were

an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body...

Love Is Indispensable

And yet I will show you the most excellent way.

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Biblical Application:

_____ is the great virtue that stands the test of time. These other gifts are given us in the here and now to help us and the mission of God. Love is the eternal ethic that God is calling us to and your Life Group must be marked by love.

Spiritual gifts are special graces given by God to His children for the primary purpose that the people of God be fully _____ to join the Spirit in building one another up in Christ and thereby _____ the love of Christ throughout the earth.

Time of Reflection

Take 10 minutes to complete the Spiritual Gifts Assessment Tool (Appendix C) and then continue to the time of reflection.

Having heard about ways in which God gifts His children to build one another up in Christ for the purpose of further witnessing the love of God to the ends of the earth, and having taken the Spiritual Gifts Assessment Tool, reflect on how God has gifted you in relationship to your brothers and sisters within the framework of a Life Group. Which of the four primary spiritual gift groupings are you most excited about?

SESSION 5

Tools and Geography

How Do You Speak Truth in Love? How are Life Group Leaders Supported and Resourced? Where Do Life Groups Fit in With the Rest of the Church and the Mission of God? How Does the Kingdom Expand Through Life Groups?

Key Verse:

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ.

— Ephesians 4:15

Question #1: How Do You Speak Truth in Love?

- Before seeking to partner with your sister or brother in confronting sin, always check your own heart first:

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

— Matthew 7:1-5

- Cultivate an atmosphere in your Life Group where “playing judge” has no place.
- Seek to hold _____ and _____ together.

John opens his gospel with these words: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

— John 1:14

Together as a Life Group, set a firm _____ to _____ to one another.

...to grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.
 – Ephesians 4:15

Question #2: How are Life Group Leaders Supported and Resourced?

Our strong desire is that every Life Group leader will have a Life Group coach. Your Life Group coach is your first contact point in processing whatever circumstance you're dealing with that you need extra support with. The leader-coach relationship has both mentoring and resourcing built heavily into its DNA.

How do you know when it's time to reach out to your coach? I want to pass on a great acronym I heard from Garrett Higbee (Soul Care Consulting) directly related to knowing when it's time to pull in support.

The SOS Tool

(knowing when to reach out for additional support)

KNOWING THEIR S.O.S.			
SEVERITY	1 Wisdom Issue Mild Stress Everyday Problems	5 Moderate Conflict Distressed but Functioning More Complex Issues	10 Crisis Stronghold Sin Significant Suffering
OWNERSHIP	1 Repentant Open Highly Teachable	5 Sees Sin Makes Excuses Moderately Teachable	10 Blame-Shifts Defensive Denial: Not Teachable
SUPPORT	1 Close to Family Intimate and Accountable Vulnerable in Small Group	5 Some Family Support Few Friends Somewhat Open in Small Group	10 Estranged from Family No Friends Isolated: Not in a Small group



Let's be completely honest, knowing that heart work, transformation in Christ, can get messy fast. The SOS tool is designed to help you, as the Life Group leader, understand the severity of a given situation and then make a wise decision to best care for the individual(s).

Illustration: Ben

S 2
O 2
S 2

Total Score: 6 (With a score of 6, this heart work can be stewarded well within the context of the local Life Group.)

Illustration: Judas and Jezebel

S 8
O 8
S 5

Total Score: 21 (With a score of 21, it is time to reach out to your coach for additional support. In this case, the coach will reach out to a pastor for even greater support so that your Life Group has excellent support while walking through this crisis.)

How to Shepherd a Church of 2-3,000 People into Transformative Christian Community (Life Groups):



Do you sense God calling you to become a Life Group coach? Please reach out to Michael, the Pastor of Discipleship: mthornton@firstprescos.org.

A Note on Size:

By and large, your ability to do serious heart surgery

_____ as the group size increases. Many groups will grow in Christ more by multiplying into smaller groups. (Take time roughly every six months to discern this with your coach.)

A Note on Frequency:

3 times/month

9 months/year

(recommendation to take December, June and July off)

A Note on Structure:

(this is a brief recap from our previous session on spiritual gifts)

Fellowship, Word, Prayer (30-60 minute blocks each)

The fellowship block is led by an individual with a gifting in hospitality.

The Word block is led by an individual with a gifting in teaching.

The prayer block is led by an individual with a gifting in faith.

Further, an individual equipped by God in the spiritual gifting of mercy leads the Life Group in continuing to serve one another and the surrounding community throughout the year. This leader also and equally has a deep passion and gifting for leading the Life Group in incarnational ministry to reach our soon-to-be brothers and sisters in Christ.

Material for Time in the Word:

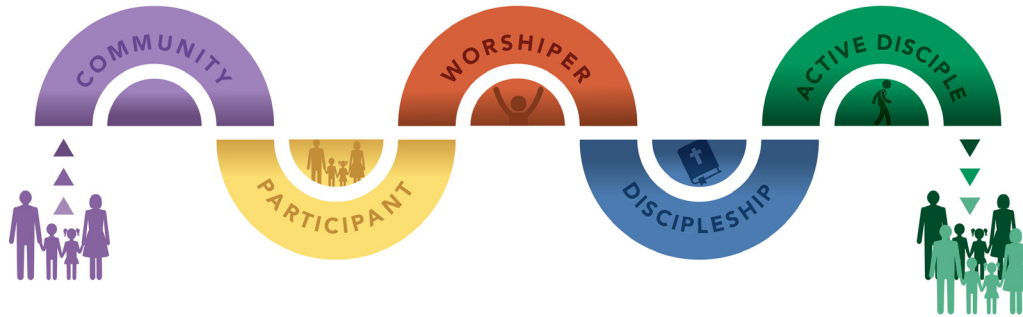
Each Life Group meeting dedicates approximately 30-60 minutes to studying and submitting to Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Each Life Group leader is equipped with a custom, guided discussion handout based on the sermon from the previous Sunday (with plenty of flexibility as clear needs arise). For instance, during your first few months together you may want to do a study on the “one anothers” of Scripture. We live in the information age and there is no shortage of excellent resources, so please do not hesitate to reach out if you are not finding what you are sensing the Spirit leading you toward. This is also a great opportunity to connect with your coach. If you decide that, for a season, you’re not going to be further unpacking and applying the Scripture from the previous or upcoming Sunday, host a conversation with your Life Group coach, get into the “why” and discern together how the Spirit is leading your group.

Question #3: Where Do Life Groups Fit in with the Rest of the Church and the Mission of God?

Life Group Vision:

The Life Groups ministry is one piece of a grander vision of making disciples. With the pathway being mapped as: Community ► Participant ► Worshiper ► Discipleship ► Active Disciple.

Life Groups is a central strategy in moving a person from a worshiper all the way through to an active disciple.



An "Active Disciple" is one who walks in the transformed understanding

that the child of God is _____ as the very hands and feet of Jesus to further the mission of God, the building of His Kingdom where His righteousness permeates the whole earth, beginning for the believer in his or her own heart. Here, devotion to Christ and His Kingdom is nurtured to moment-by-moment, purpose-driven action unto God.

Question #4: How Does the Kingdom Expand Through Life Groups?

"Go and make disciples" inherently involves growth, but there can be a tension between individual heart growth (depth) and Kingdom growth where people are being saved (width).

If all we do is multiply our Life Groups, are we really doing the hard work of heart transformation?

On the other side, if we never multiply, have we really caught the vision of Christ's body as continuously growing to reach and save the lost?

What might be at stake? A saved person's further sanctification versus a neighbor's justification.

Maintain a willingness to, at minimum, take on an individual or couple who are hungry to be trained to be a Life Group leader. There is no better way to pass on the DNA of our Life Groups! Strive to be a Life Group that plants Life Groups, for the sake of the outpouring of the salvation of the Lord!

Keys to Discernment:

- Foster a commitment to keep in step with the Spirit.
- Foster a high level of willingness to be flexible.

This is one way we “Deploy Generosity” — one of our 7 values under our mission of being Light and Life for the City (Appendix B).

You, not your wallet, are the most valuable Kingdom resource, and you must discern how to steward the time you have.

God’s people are marked by their overwhelming generosity. Cultivate hearts that are marked by the generosity of Christ.

Closing Charge:

I cannot thank God enough for each of you, for the way in which you join Him in His good harvest. The Kingdom of God is breaking into the city more and more every day and when God saves us, bringing us from darkness to

light, He invites us to nothing short of _____ with Himself in Christ.

Verses that Fearless Disciples Live By:

For you died, and your life is now _____ with Christ in God.
— Colossians 3:3

For I am already being _____ like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near.
— 2 Timothy 4:6

I have been _____ with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
— Galatians 2:20

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward _____, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
— Hebrews 10:24-25

Time of Reflection

Session 5 contains a lot of “nuts and bolts” to Life Group ministry. What stood out to you? What questions do you have? How can you be most supported as a Life Group leader? Do you feel called to inquire about becoming a Life Group coach?

SESSION 6 (BONUS)

Steadfast

How Do I Lead Well Through Crisis and What Resources are Available to Help Grow My Crisis Leadership?

Key Verse:

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

— 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Establishing a Biblical Theology on Crisis

What is the difference between corporate crisis and individual crisis?

Crisis knocks one off balance.

According to Webster:

- Crisis is a time of intense difficulty, trouble or danger.
- Crisis is a time when a difficult or important decision must be made.
- Crisis is the turning point of a disease when an important change takes place, indicating either recovery or death.

The tones and textures of a crisis moment or season are, by definition, not pleasant to our current wiring. Note several of the words in the definitions above: intense, difficult, trouble, danger, disease, change, possibility of death.

It is wise to grow in our crisis leadership. After all, when COVID-19 is a distant memory, crisis will remain. Until Christ returns and establishes the New Heavens and the New Earth, crisis remains. Until “every tear is wiped away,”

The first record of crisis in human history was globally corporate in nature—the “fall,” the ultimate crisis—causing our separation from God. The roots of crisis are a mistrust of the goodness and trustworthiness of God. And

while COVID-19 will fade into history, the fall remains the _____

_____ of the human race until the full redemption of God’s people.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden... So the Lord God banished (them) from the Garden of Eden...

— Genesis 3:8, 3:23a

In this sense, crisis permeates _____ facet of who we are. In

our fallenness, we cease to _____ clearly, _____ clearly,

_____ clearly. We’re bent. We’re broken by the fall. Our only

hope for cure is in _____ with Christ. And this corporate crisis of our fallenness spirals into the individual crises each of us walk through.

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

— Galatians 5:19–21

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

— Galatians 5:22–23

As a Life Group leader, don’t be surprised by the “generalness” of the brokenness of humanity. Be broken-hearted, but be prepared. Throughout Scripture, God does not shy away from using the fall to further conform His people to the image of the Son.

We celebrate that God is a God who can redeem even evil into growing His people in Christ and into His Kingdom. This doesn’t dismiss the severity of suffering and pain, but it does cause our attention to be turned to Christ and how He is inviting us into union with Himself.

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of His resurrection and

_____ *in His sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*

— Philippians 3:10–11

Consider this as you develop the biblical theology of crisis and suffering: the people of God are invited into full participation with Christ in His suffering and His resurrection, even to the point, Paul writes, of becoming like Jesus in His death. How does this shape how we approach seasons of crisis?

Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery it is. In the boredom and pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it, because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace... Here is your life, beautiful and terrible things will happen, don't be afraid.

— Rev. Frederick Buechner

How Do I Lead Well Through Crisis?

First: Resolve to never compromise your commitment to _____ in the vine.

Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.
— John 15:4

Second: Steep every crisis in _____ .

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.
— Ephesians 6:12

Third: Discern appropriate _____ .

A key question to ask yourself: How severe is the crisis?

Discern how much care your brother or sister, or couple or family, needs and then lead your Life Group in supporting that person in the best ways you can according to the strength given to you by God. The ultimate illustration of this is the Incarnation.

Fourth: Know when to bring in additional support.

Reference our SOS guide in Session 5. Discern when it is appropriate to reach out to your coach or a pastor. At First Pres, you have a wealth of support. You

should _____ carry a burden solo that is not meant to be carried solo.

As you reach out for support, remember your Life Group

_____. While it may be completely appropriate to reach out to a coach or pastor, it may not be appropriate to take the burden to other members of the church as we seek to serve the body.

What Resources are Available to Help Grow My Crisis Leadership?

First: Never hesitate to ask to meet with someone on the pastoral staff. Just send an email to mthornton@firstprescos.org.

Second: Recognize, as with all kinds of specializations, that pastoral training and experience has its limits! Praise God that we also have the Counseling Coalition. You have access to an incredible team of counselors to help guide you through seasons of crisis. To learn more and see our list of counselors, go to firstprescos.org/media/articles/counseling-coalition.

Third: Our Stephen Ministry is an excellent resource to partner a brother or sister with someone who needs to go deep in processing a season of crisis. Contact us at care@firstprescos.org.

Fourth: Be sure to check out the webinar we recorded just for you that has great insights from the counseling and psychology fields. To watch the webinar, go to firstprescos.org/crisiswebinar.

We all live under the great human crisis of the fall and each of us has many individual seasons of crisis, but God is there. God can use crisis to further turn hearts to Himself.

Finally, always remember that your greatest joy as a Life Group leader is to continually point those under your care to our loving Father and Helper.

Time of Reflection

Christianity doesn't dismiss suffering. Rather, the gospel sees crisis as a result of the fall. In this sense, any and every crisis brings us to our knees in tears. But God. But God! God is present in our suffering and can even use suffering, and often does, to turn our hearts further to Himself.

Take a minute to read again the key verse found at the beginning of this session. What do we come to know of Paul's view of suffering within this passage? What challenges you most in this session? What gives you the greatest hope and comfort?



Life Group Covenant Template

Key Verse:

Such confidence we have through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

— 2 Corinthians 3:4-6

Together with my Life Group I covenant to:

- Faithfully worship the Lord weekly by engaging in a corporate worship service.
- Deliberately meet together at a frequency (about 3 gatherings/month and 9 months/year) that is conducive for heart transformation in Christ and at a length (90 minutes/gathering) that provides adequate time to:
 - Fellowship in a way where we share in the joy of Christ together.
 - Study Scripture and apply Scripture to our lives.
 - Enter into fervent prayer that includes vulnerable confession of sin.
 - Plan and commit to strategic witnessing initiatives.
- Hold and be held accountable to transformation in Christ according to the above structure.
- Maintain utmost confidentiality whenever possible.
- Reach out to the appropriate pastoral staff person whenever appropriate.
- Strive to become a person marked more and more by truth and grace.
- Serve others well by showing Jesus to those in my Life Group.
- Actively build an atmosphere of trust, vulnerability, truth and grace.
- Continuously offer myself to the Lord for His good purpose of conforming me to Himself.
- Seek opportunities to reach the lost around me.
- Maintain a heart of flexibility in how God may be leading our Life Group to add to our numbers, raise up new leadership, and/or multiply for the sake of the ever-growing Kingdom of God.

This covenant is good until _____ (e.g. nine months from today), at which point I will discern if God is calling me to renew my covenant with my Life Group.

The frequency our Life Group has chosen is: _____
(the recommendation is 3 gatherings/month and 9 months/year.)

Signed: _____

Dated: _____

As a Life Group, you may use this document as your covenant or you may use this document as a template to build your own. This document represents a minimum commitment needed to cultivate a highly flourishing environment for heart transformation unto Christ.

Visit the Life Group leader resource page to download a PDF version of this template:
firstprescos.org/lgtraining.



The First Pres Way: 7 Values in Our Pursuit of Jesus



Live for God

Worship trains our hearts to beat for God.
Do you worship with passion and joy every week?



Hold Fast

Stay founded on Scripture and centered on Christ, who holds you steady.
Are your priorities consistent with Scripture?



Keep Growing

Learn to grow, and when your life changes give God the credit.
Are you learning and living faith with others?



Love Like Jesus

Live for others, even when it takes sacrifice.
Where are you serving?



Share Good News

Do all it takes to reach those who do not know Christ.
Are you invested in someone else knowing Jesus?



Deploy Generosity

Invest who you are and what you have in what God wants to do.
Where are you giving?



Make Beauty

Creativity reflects the goodness of God our Maker.
Where do your spiritual gifts do good?



APPENDIX C

Spiritual Gifts Assessment Tool

Life Groups at First Pres are for followers of Christ to continue to be transformed into the likeness of Christ while helping other followers of Christ do the same.

Life Groups are marked by times of fellowship, application of Scripture, fervent prayer (which includes vulnerable confession of sin), and strategic witnessing initiatives. Each of these four pillars of the Life Group structure are best led by an individual spiritually gifted in that particular area.

Spiritual gifts are special graces given by God to His children for the primary purpose that the people of God be fully equipped to join the Spirit in building one another up in Christ and thereby reflecting the love of Christ throughout the earth.

This Spiritual Gifts Assessment Tool is designed to help you arrive at further clarity on how God has gifted you to be a blessing to the rest of the body and the world.

On the following two pages, score yourself:

1 - Strongly Disagree

2 - Disagree

3 - Somewhat Agree

4 - Agree

5 - Strongly Agree

HOSPITALITY

Fellowship is best led by an individual with a gifting in hospitality. This person blesses the body by curating regular times together that are marked by the sharing of joy.

I enjoy hosting people in my house whenever possible.

I regularly invite people to get together.

I cherish opportunities to host out-of-town guests.

People find me to be an exceptionally welcoming person.

I seek to be mindful of the needs of others before my own.

I would happily leave behind my preferences so someone would feel welcome.

People who know me are quick to type me as gifted in hospitality.

Total Hospitality Score: _____ / 35

TEACHING

Application of Scripture is best led by an individual with a gifting in teaching. This person blesses the body by helping each person know how to apply God's Word to their life in extremely practical ways.

I love to study theology.

I want my friends to be "doers" of the Word, not just "hearers."

I work hard to have an answer for common questions regarding Christianity.

I am gifted at helping others take practical action steps that help them grow in Christ.

People who know me are quick to type me as gifted in teaching.

People look to me to teach and lead.

I desire to help others apply God's Word to their life.

Total Teaching Score: _____ / 35

FAITH

Fervent prayer, marked by vulnerable confession of sin, is best led by an individual with a gifting in faith. This person blesses the body by helping others walk with the Lord more closely by growing in the spiritual practices and graces of prayer and confession.

I constantly find myself turning to the Lord in prayer.

My heart is filled with joy when I am praying with members of my church family.

I believe my church needs to pray more.

I am more than happy to set down whatever I am working on to pray with someone.

I believe confession is vital in my relationship with God.

People confide in me.

My friends know me as a person who is passionate about prayer.

Total Faith Score: _____ / 35

MERCY

Strategic witnessing initiatives (service and evangelism) are best led by an individual gifted in mercy. This person blesses the body by helping others engage in ways where they can joyfully witness the grace of God to the watching world by living on mission for God.

I am deeply burdened by, and I think often about, those near me who are not yet saved.

I often ask God to use me to reach the lost.

I invite others to join me in a meaningful act of service.

I know a lot of places in town where I can serve my neighbors.

I would be thrilled to be a part of a church plant.

I set aside my own comfort in order for others to see Jesus.

My friends describe me as someone completely sold out for Jesus.

Total Mercy Score: _____ / 35

For which gift did you score the highest?

Do you feel this assessment accurately reflects how God has gifted you within the context of Life Groups? If not, how do you feel God has gifted you within the context of Life Groups?

If so, take a moment to write down a few additional thoughts regarding how God has gifted you to most contribute to the thriving of a Life Group?

Close this time thanking God that He draws us together and gives us gifts to be a blessing to one another.

APPENDIX D

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting.

APPENDIX E

Answer Key to Fill in the Blanks

Session 1

the Great Commission, disciples, obey, follow, each moment of your life, Learn to grow, own your faith, disciples, lone rangers, one another, be transformed, faithfulness, self-control, heart, transform me, vulnerability, applying, 59, serve, encourage, forgive, passing judgment, discipleship, apply, confidentiality

Session 2

Commission, Commandment, abiding, fitness, growth, integrity, faithfulness, union, witnessing, alignment, burdened, humility, vision, applying, pain, sin

Session 3

sanctification, more and more, intentionality, instructed, have His way, heal you, attention, affirmation, control, security, identity, cared, encouraged, prayed, planned, responsibility

Session 4

reflecting, joy, authority, trust, witness, prayer, fellowship, witness, Scripture, Love, equipped, reflecting

Session 5

grace, truth, expectation, speak truth in love, decreases, sent on mission, union, hidden, poured out, crucified, love and good deeds

Session 6

crisis remains, great crisis, every, think, love, worship, union, participation, abide, prayer, proximity, never, Covenant

Journaling

Journaling



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