



The Leader Connection NEWSLETTER

WHAT'S
NEW
WHAT'S
NEXT

Engaging *Hospitality Hints*

Contributor - Marcia Rickard – Source: LifeWay Women

Seven Fresh Ideas for Engaging Life Groups

1. Make a small group bucket list.

Ask each person in the group to add one or two of their favorite activities (or an activity they've been wanting to try) to the list and discuss options to coordinate these list items into future gatherings

2. Set up a way to communicate with the group consistently.

Try group text or a private Facebook group to chat about life challenges, updates, prayer requests, devotion lessons, thoughtful questions, etc.

3. Do online Bible study together!

Select a Christian Topic that is relevant to the group or to events. Consider the option to Skype or FaceTime with Life Group members that may be sick or out of town.

4. Become connoisseurs of a certain food item available in the local area.

Each person shares their current favorite food item. For example, I like TIFA Gelato and someone else likes the French Café – Chocolatine. Make a plan to visit each of these favorites together. This idea does not need to only focus on food. Perhaps make a plan to visit several area museums together.

5. Did someone say, book club?!

Make a plan to switch it up between the types of study materials that are selected for the group. Perhaps set a schedule to spend 4

– 6 weeks on a topical book and relate it to Doing Life Together as Christians.

6. Memorize Scripture Together

Scripture memory is an area of spiritual discipline that many certainly have not mastered. It can be fun to put your heads together and select a portion of Scripture to memorize. Break the passages into pieces and memorize each piece per week to gradually add more the following week.

7. Select a fun theme or food challenge or Serve Together.

An option might be a 'Take Me Out to the Ballgame'. Host a Salsa Showdown, Guac-Off, or Pie Bake-Off, Local Charity Challenge, etc. Share ideas and debrief experiences.

Interactive LIFE GROUP Series was launched on January 13th and January 20th in Founders Hall. A typical gathering was demonstrated in a living room setting with members sharing testimonials about their personal experiences with participating in small groups.



What Makes a Successful First Meeting?

Kick off your small group by focusing on three keys.

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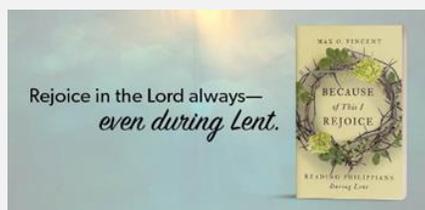
Living Stories & Studies

Contributors - Ron & Kathleen Rudrud / Sandra Bean

SMALLGROUPS.COM

Online stories and studies provide key reference tools for leaders of Life Groups to access and find an array of options for their groups to decide on the topic that best fits the majority interests of the group depending on the season and session timeframe.

BOOK CLUB SERIES FOR LENT



Have you found your Lenten small-group study yet?

Many Christians think of Lent as a season of self-sacrifice and spiritual chores. But this year, what if Lent was different? What if we approached Lent with the spirit of joy?

Because of This I Rejoice is a 6-week study of Philippians that explores what Paul teaches about joyfully practicing spiritual disciplines. The intent of these disciplines is to help us focus less on ourselves and more on God. This Lenten study invites us to engage in the same spiritual practices as a way to grow closer to God and allow joy to flow through our lives.

Key Features

- A reading for Ash Wednesday, one chapter for each week of Lent, and a reading for Good Friday
- Daily scripture readings
- Reflection questions
- Leader's Guide contains a suggested format for small groups

Rejoice in the Lord always—even during Lent.

Article: by Carter Moss
What Makes a Successful First Meeting?

Kick off your small group by focusing on three keys.

So, you've got your small group ready to go: you picked a time and place, you selected what you want to study, and you've got people showing up for it! What do you do now? The first meeting together can have a lot of fun energy, but there can also be a lot of anxiety in people—especially if it's a new group and they don't know many people there, or if they haven't experienced a small group before. It's important to make good impression at that first meeting.

How do we make our first meeting fun, compelling, and informative?

1. Keep it Relational

The most important goal on the first night is to set up the relational feel that you want the group to have and help everyone feel comfortable with each other. This is what sets small groups apart from classes and other meetings. It's also the easiest way to ease people's anxiety—after all, it's sort of like the first day of school. As the leader, introduce each person who arrives to the other people in the group.

Don't rush the start of the group on the first week. People may show up late because they are nervous or they might have trouble finding the place you're meeting. Instead, intentionally engage in casual conversation before sitting down to start the group discussion. When you do gather everyone to start, it might help to call out the relational



tension to show them they're not alone and it's okay to laugh about it. You could say something like, "Let's just all feel awkward together—it'll be fun!" or, "Kinda feels like the first day of school doesn't it? Don't worry, we're way less mean than those kids!" You can also mention that it may take a few weeks to learn each other's names, and that's normal. (To help with this, you could use nametags for the first weeks.)

Icebreaker questions are a great tool to use anytime to help put people at ease, to get them comfortable talking, and to help them get to know each other. They're especially valuable at the first meeting. Sharing even one or two personal things creates lots of opportunity for connecting with each other. People will learn they're in similar careers, live near each other, have kids the same age, or come from the same hometown. My favorite icebreakers for the first week are:

- Tell us your name, how long you've lived in this community, and what you do for a living.
- Share one of your favorite things about your current job.
- Share your favorite local restaurant that you'd recommend.

2. Cast a Clear Vision

The first week is your chance to cast a clear and compelling vision about what

group members can expect their group experience to be like. It's often helpful to hand out a small list of "Group Guidelines". You don't want to make them feel overwhelmed with "rules," but setting up simple guidelines can help everyone feel more comfortable. You may like to include:

- Everything that is shared in this group stays here—it's all confidential.
- The goal is for everyone to be heard in this group, and for no one to dominate.
- When people share, we listen without judging, criticizing, or giving advice.
- We commit to pray for each other.

In addition, it's helpful to be clear about the start and end time for the meetings. I like to commit to ending the group on time every week, and then I ask them to commit to being on time so we can start on time every week. This helps group members plan better, and it immediately starts to build trust. I also like to ask people to tell me if they won't be able to make it. Life happens, and not everyone will be able to make it every week, but you as the leader definitely want to know if someone can't make it.

Depending on what you plan to study in the group, make sure group members are prepared. Let them know where to purchase the book (or that you will get the book for them), or let them know to bring their Bible each week (and whether it's okay to use a Bible app on their phone or tablet). If you're using video curriculum, let group members know that and if they will need any accompanying book or questions ahead of time. I've found it's really helpful to share the vision for the study you'll be doing together. This is an opportunity to get them excited about it, so share how you hope it will impact them, why you're excited about it, and any interesting details that might pull them in. Your excitement will be contagious, so don't under-sell it!

Lastly, spend some time talking about your goals for the group in general. Maybe your hope is that friendships will be formed or that people will learn new things about the Bible. If you'd led groups before, share why you love leading groups. If it's your first time leading, share

why you've decided to start. When I was a new leader, I liked to say something like, "I'm still pretty new to leading, so I appreciate your grace as I figure it out." This put me at ease and the rest of the group at ease, too.

3. Find the Balance

There's pressure to start with a bang. We want to get to know each other, share expectations, start the study, give everyone a memorable moment, and more. But don't give into the pressure to do all these things on the first night. Be sure to end on time (or a little early) the first week to set up the expectation that you'll start and end on time. You also don't want to overwhelm your group members with information. It's really okay to not even touch the study the first night. Instead, you can focus on introductions, icebreakers, and guidelines. At the same time, you want the first week to feel valuable so people want to come back. After all, the last thing you want is for people to feel like they wasted their evening. You also want to communicate that you have a plan and that it's not all go-with-the-flow. So there is a balance to find.

Another caution is to not force the relational part to move too quickly. Make sure to personally introduce everyone to each other, but it's okay if not everyone has a deep conversation with each of the group members. Don't be surprised if people leave pretty quickly from your group rather than stick around to socialize. That's totally normal, and it doesn't mean you had a bad meeting. The fact is that it typically takes a few weeks for that relational comfort to build to a level where people stick around to chat for a while.

Remember that the ultimate goal is that your group members leave the first meeting having met some people, knowing what to expect in the group, and trusting you are a safe leader who will lead them into a time of relationship building and faith building. That leaves them wanting more, and excited to come back! And it'll leave you feeling the same way.

Friendship

Referral Tips

Life Groups Leadership Team:

Pastor Tim, Sandra & Scott Bean, Carrie Leonard, Marcia Rickard, Ron & Kathleen Rudrud, Paul Trent
We're here to provide referrals and helpful tips! See below to contact us ...

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit the Ascension Lutheran Church website...

ALCTO.ORG

<https://alcto.org/life-groups/>

Email: LIFEGROUPS@ALCTO.org



DOING LIFE TOGETHER



Affinity Based GATHERINGS

Whether you are students or fitness enthusiasts, etc. you can meet one another and encourage one another in our daily lives rooted in our faith in Christ.



Name Your Life Group Affinity...

Email: LIFEGROUPS@alcto.org

What is your favorite activity or current life season?

FAST FACTS

40%

A recent LifeWay research study says that only 40% of people attending church read their Bibles occasionally, once or twice a month. Yet, we know It is God's divinely inspired, inerrant message to us. Let's read together!

Inspiration

by Pastor Tim

I have been praying for Life Groups since I became the Senior Pastor of Ascension. When I was prayerfully considering being called as senior pastor, I knew something at Ascension needed to change. Just like so many churches in our culture, the people of the church have been losing focus. Many of us have been getting caught up in the busyness of our lives and our church and faith, have stopped becoming a priority.

But this is where prayer comes in. When I read in the book of Acts about the joy of the early church, when I am reminded in Acts 2 of how those early Christians "devoted" themselves to "the apostles teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer," when I hear how they came alive and watched in awe at what God was doing in their lives- I knew I wanted that for Ascension. I believe that Life Groups is a tool that God will use to bring this joy to Ascension. So, I have been praying for this program. I have been praying that people will experience what I myself have experienced in my own Life Groups: prayer, study, fellowship and service.

So, I am asking you: Would you join me? Could you read Acts 2:42 and ask for God to make this joy happen in your life? Could you think about the people that you know who need that joy and pray that God would provide this for them through Life Groups?

It all starts with prayer and it leads to joy. Thank you for joining me.

Prayer Prompts

by Pastor Tim

Would you join me in prayer?

Pray for the joy of prayer, study, fellowship, and service in your life.

Pray that God would use you to help others find this joy in their lives.

BIBLE PASSAGE:

Acts 2:42: They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.



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