



LIFE GROUP LEADER GUIDE



A Guide for New Leaders

LIFE GROUPS

WELCOME TO LIFE GROUP LEADERSHIP

**A Life Group Leader joins the Jesus Way
by making disciples who make disciples.**

This guide contains four leadership conversations to have with your Groups Staff/Coach before leading your group, followed by four check-in conversations after launching your group. You'll also find additional resources for your journey as a disciple-maker at menlo.church/leaderresources.



*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***

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” **Acts 1:8***

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*Find the links to these resources at menlo.church/leaderresources.

BECOMING A LIFE GROUP LEADER: THE PROCESS, EXPECTATIONS AND COMMITMENTS

A Life Group Leader joins the Jesus Way by making disciples who make disciples.

**The mission of Menlo Church
is to help people find and
follow Jesus.**

**This is discipleship. A follower
of Jesus is a disciple of Jesus.**

Life Group Leaders are disciple-makers who help others find and follow Jesus. They serve as “pastors” among us as they gather a small group of people to follow the Jesus Way together.

THE LEADERSHIP PROCESS:

- 1.** Fill out a Volunteer Application (this includes a background check).
- 2.** Meet with your Groups Staff/Coach to discuss your application and the commitments involved (see pg. 4). Coaches are volunteer leaders approved and trained by the Menlo Church Staff. When you meet, share with one another:
 - How you came to faith in Jesus.
 - Highs and lows of your spiritual journey.
 - Your hopes for your Life Group.
 - Any questions and concerns you have about the commitments and expectations.
- 3.** Go through this guide with your Groups Staff/Coach. It involves four conversations to help launch your group and four follow-up conversations for the first six months of leadership.

LIFE GROUP LEADER EXPECTATIONS AND COMMITMENTS:

Prayerfully consider this agreement and bring any questions or thoughts to your Groups Staff/Coach.

A Life Group Leader is Not...	A Life Group Leader Is...
A BIBLE SCHOLAR	A humble, teachable person who values Scripture and seeks to apply it to their life; they are always learning and growing in their relationship with Jesus and others. A leader communicates with grace, growing in self-awareness and emotional wholeness as they lead.
A MASTER TEACHER, WITH ALL THE ANSWERS	A facilitator of conversation who shares in the discussion, bringing their own questions and thoughts without over-talking or dominating the time.
SOMEONE WHO HAS FOLLOWED JESUS FOREVER	A follower of Jesus (at any stage in their journey) who is willing to invite others to join them as they grow as a Christian. Group leaders are always willing to share not only the good news of Jesus but also their lives (1 Thessalonian 2:8).
SELF-RELIANT; BELIEVING IT'S ALL UP TO THEM	A person who relies on God and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Group leaders are not lone rangers but lead with the help of others. They rely on the promise of Jesus that he will always be with them as they make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). They delight to lead with Jesus not just for Jesus (2 Corinthians 6:1a) and they pray about all things.

Group Leaders are not perfect, but leadership does come with responsibilities and expectations. We do not expect the same from a participant as from a leader. In the Scripture we see different expectations for those far from faith, those new to following Jesus and those accepting the responsibility of leading within the church.

When someone considers committing to Life Group leadership we start with a conversation, not an obligation. Please bring any questions you have to the Menlo Groups Staff/Coach so you can take this journey together.

EXPECTATIONS OF A GROUP LEADER:

LOVE: A leader seeks to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength; and to love all people, knowing they are created in the glorious image of God (Matthew 12:30-31; Genesis 1:27).

DISCIPLESHIP: A leader is a believer in the gospel of Jesus Christ and has a personal and growing relationship with Jesus (Matthew 22:37-29, Colossians 2:12-15). A leader understands the calling to be a disciple and to make disciples (Matthew 28:16-20). A disciple is a follower of Jesus.

SCRIPTURE: A leader recognizes the authority of the Bible and actively deepens their knowledge of God's Word while also living according to the Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

FAITHFULNESS: A leader follows through on commitments made to their group, fellow leaders, and church staff (Proverbs 28:20; Matthew 25:21; Psalm 89:34).

PRAYER: A leader enjoys a life of prayer, living in an ongoing conversation with God. They listen to God through his written word and the promptings of his Spirit. A leader prays for their group and invites others to pray for them as they lead.

OBEDIENCE: When Jesus commissions his followers to "make disciples," he directs them to teach these disciples to "obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). Discipleship is marked by growing obedience to God. Menlo Church is a part of ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians. As part of ECO, we ask our Group Leaders to join the way of Jesus by pursuing these ECO tenets of humility and self-examination.



As we practice the discipline of regular self-examination and confession, we are especially guided by the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20; Matthew 5-7).

We therefore hold one another accountable to:

eco-press.org

- 1.** Worshipping God alone, living all of life to His glory, renouncing all idolatry and all inordinate loves that might lead us to trust in any other help.
- 2.** Worshipping God in humility, recognizing that right worship is best supported through the teachings of the Word and the faithful administration of the Sacraments.
- 3.** Eliminating from both speech and thought any blasphemy, irreverence, or impurity.
- 4.** Observing the Sabbath as a day of worship and rest, being faithful in gathering with the people of God.
- 5.** Giving honor toward those in authority over us and practicing mutual submission within the community of the church.
- 6.** Eradicating a spirit of anger, resentment, callousness, violence, or bitterness, and instead cultivating a spirit of gentleness, kindness, peace, and love; recognizing and honoring the image of God in every human being from conception to natural death.
- 7.** Maintaining chastity in thought and deed, being faithful within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman as established by God at the creation or embracing a celibate life as established by Jesus in the new covenant.
- 8.** Practicing right stewardship of the goods we have been given, showing charity to those in need and offering generous support of the Church and its ministries.
- 9.** Pursuing truth, even when such pursuit is costly, and defending truth when it is challenged, recognizing that goodness requires truth and that its preservation matters.
- 10.** Resisting the pull of envy, greed, and acquisition, and instead cultivating a spirit of contentment with the gifts God has given us. In Jesus Christ we see the perfect expression of God's holy will for human beings offered to God in our place. His holy life must now become our holy life. In Christ, God's will is now written on our hearts, and we look forward to the day (in the new heaven and new earth; Revelation 21-22) when we will be so confirmed in holiness that we will no longer be able to sin. As the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, Jesus leads us along the path of life toward that goal, bringing us into ever deeper intimacy with the Triune God, in whose presence is fullness of joy.

GROUP LEADERS WILL:

- 1.** Make Menlo Church their home church and have completed Starting Point. Starting Point can be completed while leading a group in agreement with your Groups Staff/Coach. If you are a part of another Church but desire to lead within the Menlo Church community, please discuss this with our staff.
- 2.** Complete Group Leader training before starting their group. This involves four leadership conversations before the group begins and four check-ins during the first six months of the group.
- 3.** Meet with their Groups Staff/Coach at least two times a year for equipping and prayer as they lead their group.
- 4.** Respond to all emails and check-ins from their Group Staff/Coach.
- 5.** Attend all leader gatherings and training as determined with their Groups Staff/Coach.
- 6.** Commit to the mission of Menlo Church (to help people find and follow Jesus) and extend grace, truth, and love as they make disciples. Everybody is welcome. Nobody is perfect. Anything is possible (through the power of God and work of his Spirit).

MENLO'S COMMITMENT TO OUR GROUP LEADERS

PASTORAL CARE AND PRAYER: Our Groups Staff/Coaches commit to praying weekly for our leaders and being available for personal care as well as leadership support.

EQUIPPING: Every Group Leader receives ongoing equipping as determined together with their Groups Staff/Coach.

COMMUNITY: Group leaders are part of a larger Menlo Church Leadership community and will gather with other leaders from their campus (and across all campuses) as determined by the Groups staff.

COMMUNICATION AND RESOURCES: Leadership tools and curriculum are easily accessible from the Groups Staff/Coaches, The Bible Project, Right Now Media, Monthly Newsletters, and the Menlo Life Group Leader Facebook Group.

MENLO CHURCH DISCIPLESHIP

THE JESUS WAY

Menlo Church exists to help people find and follow Jesus, so we organize our lives around the Jesus Way (Up, In and Out).



The image features three circular icons on an orange background, each containing a stylized white arrow pointing in a specific direction. The top icon points upwards, the middle icon points downwards, and the bottom icon points outwards.

UP WORSHIP

We live upwardly in loving union with Christ, following the Jesus Way through spiritual formation, gathering for corporate worship, and living dependently upon God's Spirit. We desire to be like Jesus who lived to glorify the Father. He only did what the Father told him to do and only said what the Father told him to say (see the gospel of John).

IN COMMUNITY

We live in community by gathering in smaller groups. These groups are committed to growing in spiritual and emotional wholeness expressed in love for God and one another. We desire to be like Jesus who chose to accomplish his mission in and through community. The Triune God is a community (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) that embodies love. God is love (1 John 4:16) and Jesus declared, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:15).

OUT KINGDOM

We live outwardly when we serve one another and join the Jesus Way of justice, grace, mercy, redemption, gospel proclamation, love, and good deeds locally and globally. We desire to be like Jesus who came proclaiming the Kingdom of God (his rule and reign over all creation). God's kingdom is expressed in the message of his gospel.

LEADERSHIP CONVERSATION ONE: WHY LEAD A LIFE GROUP?

Take a moment to read these Scripture and record your answers to the following questions on the right.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He (Jesus) was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word (God) 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 1:9-14

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

[Jesus said:] But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Acts 1:8

What do these passages reveal about Jesus and His mission?

What is Jesus inviting His followers to do and believe?

What does Jesus give to empower His followers to accomplish what He calls them to do?

CONVERSATION ONE

Share your reflections on these Scripture.

How do these passages relate to Life Group Leadership?

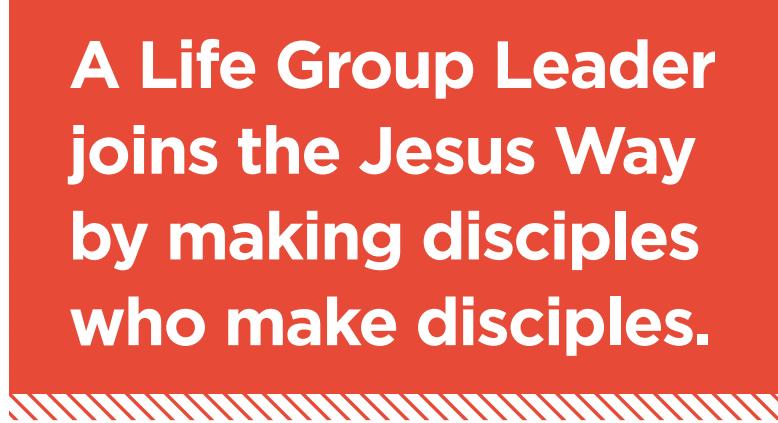
How would you define discipleship and what it means to make disciples?

MULTIPLICATION

Jesus made disciples and then asked them to go and make disciples. We call this multiplication.

A Life Group Leader joins the Jesus Way by making disciples who make disciples.

**A Life Group Leader
joins the Jesus Way
by making disciples
who make disciples.**



What could it look like for you to help someone become a disciple-maker (not only follow Jesus but also help others follow Jesus)?

Why would it be important for a Life Group Leader to have a vision for multiplication before they launch their group?

PRAYER

Pray together for your future group and how God is leading you to make disciples.

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Hebrews 13:20-21

BEFORE YOUR NEXT CONVERSATION

Reflect upon the following passage and answer the questions on the right.

You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition. For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. Instead, we were like young children among you.

Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe. For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

*But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way. For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy. **1 Thessalonians 2***

Where did Paul's approval come from and why is this important for a Life Group Leader to understand?

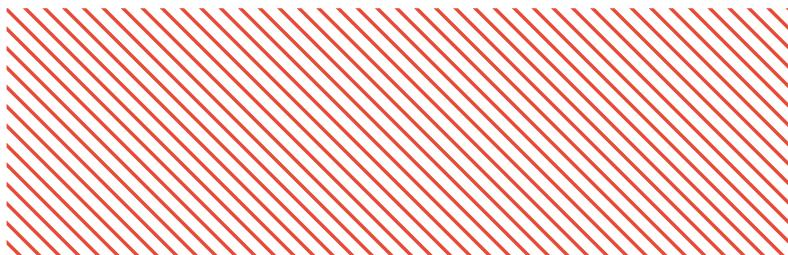
How does Paul describe how he made disciples?

What could it look like for you to love your group and share “not only the gospel of God” but your life as well (verse 8)?

SHARING YOUR LIFE

Make a list of activities you enjoy that you could do with your group or with individuals in your group.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON DISCIPLESHIP



[**Why Bother with Discipleship, by Dallas Willard**](#)

[**How Does the Disciple Live, by Dallas Willard**](#)

[**Make Disciples: A Sermon by Albert Tate**](#)

[**Your Church is Only as Good as its Disciples \(4 min Video\)**](#)

[**The New Testament Picture of Discipleship, by Dallas Willard**](#)

► Find these resources at menlo.church/leaderresources

LEADERSHIP CONVERSATION TWO: WHAT ARE LIFE GROUPS?

Before diving into the topic for this conversation, share your observations from 1 Thessalonians 2.

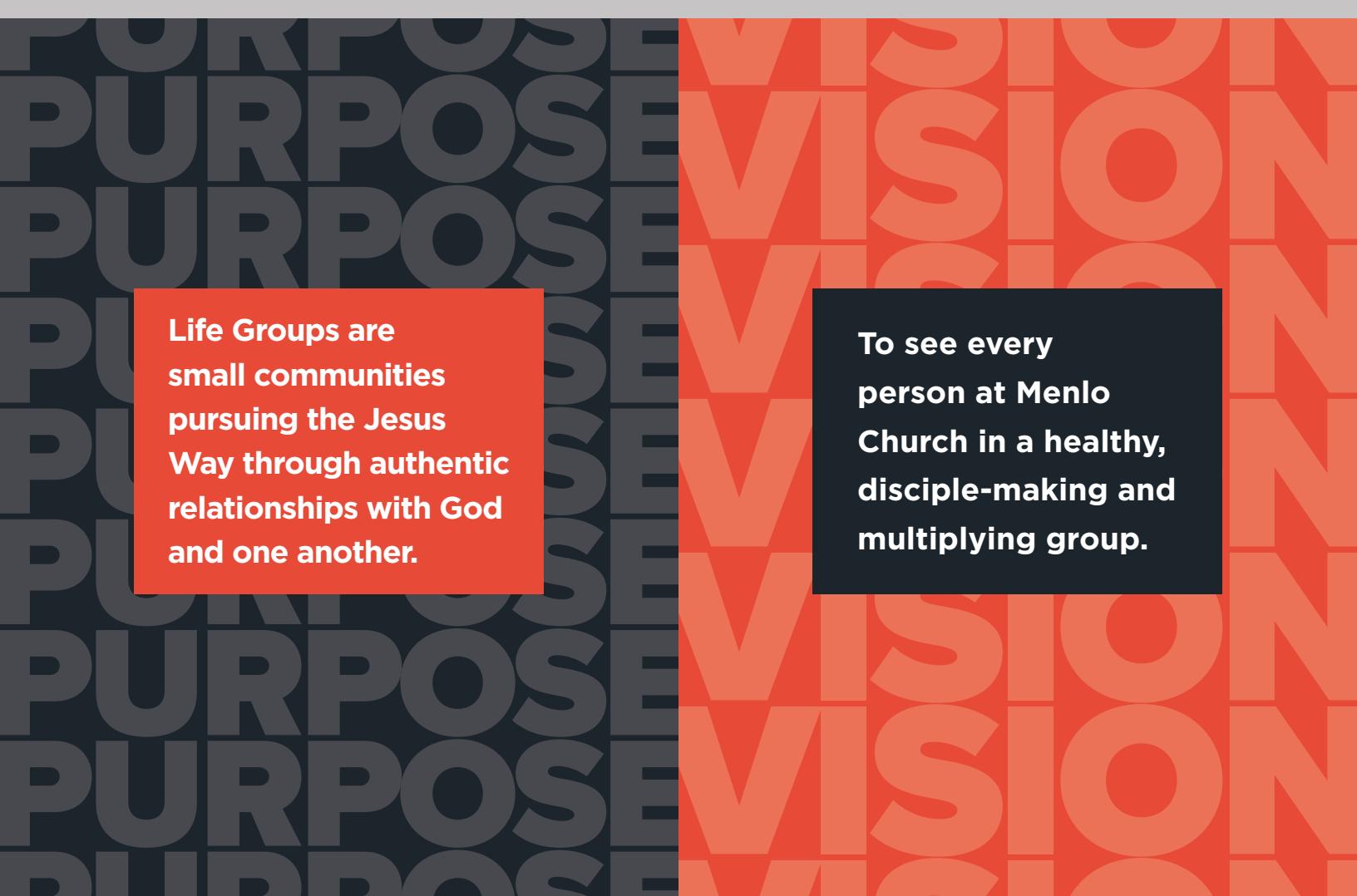
Did you have any new questions or thoughts about making disciples as you reflected upon this passage?

Take a moment to read out loud the purpose, vision, values of Menlo Life Groups and the aim of every Life Group Leader. Then discuss the reflection questions that follow.

“No one accidentally creates disciples. Discipleship is an intentional pursuit.”

- Mike Breen

MENLO CHURCH LIFE GROUPS



Life Groups are small communities pursuing the Jesus Way through authentic relationships with God and one another.

To see every person at Menlo Church in a healthy, disciple-making and multiplying group.

VALUES

LEADERSHIP: Every Life Group is led by leaders equipped and passionate to join the mission of Jesus in making disciples, who make disciples. Life Group Leaders are more passionate about multiplying the mission of discipleship than growing the size of their group.

THE JESUS WAY: Every Life Group commits to doing the Up, In and Out life together in their gatherings and throughout the week. See page 8 for the larger definition of the Up, In and Out life.

Here are ways the Up, In and Out life might be reflected in your group:



UP: Reading, meditating upon, and studying Scripture. Praying privately and as a group. Seeking to be more and more like Jesus by following his way together.



IN: Participants feel safely seen and heard, with a growing and appropriate invitation to vulnerability and authenticity. The aim of a Life Group is transformation expressed in growing love for God and others, not religious performance or striving.



OUT: Every group joins together to learn, experience, and live out the heart of God. They serve one another, their community, and the world by joining the Jesus way of justice, grace, mercy, redemption, gospel proclamation, love, and good deeds. They pray for and serve with our local and global partners when possible. Serving together can take many forms. Talk to your Groups Staff about opportunities available at Menlo Church for living outwardly together.

LOVE: Every Life Group seeks to help one another live in loving union with God, growing in love for him and their community. We believe the ultimate mark of spiritual maturity and wholeness is love.

*When Jesus was asked which commandment in the Scripture was the greatest, he replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" **Matthew 22:37-39***

*After serving his disciples by washing their feet, Jesus said: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." **John 13:34-35***

THE AIM OF EVERY LIFE GROUP LEADER: MAKING DISCIPLES WHO MAKE DISCIPLES

The goal of a Life Group is not to form a clique or a holy huddle that stays together forever. The primary aim of a Life Group is to pursue the Jesus Way through authentic relationships with God and one another. Life Groups help us live in loving union with Christ, forming us into his image as we find and follow him together.

Being a leader is an aspect of spiritual formation. We grow in faith, prayer, and wholeness when we help others grow in these areas. A leader shows up differently, prays differently and turns to God with greater dependency. For this reason, we desire for many to join in the leadership journey of disciple-making. Life Group leaders look for future leaders and encourage them to step into leadership and form their own Life Group.*

***Note:** Not everyone is designed by God for group leadership. There are multiple ways to make disciples and to be a part of Jesus' mission. As a leader you will prayerfully seek to help each person in your group discover what God has designed them for in their journey of discipleship. Your Groups Staff/Coach would love to help you in this process.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What thoughts or questions come to mind as you reflect on Discipleship at Menlo Church and the purpose, vision, values of Life Groups and the aim of every Life Group Leader?

What has your experience been with Small Groups in the past (if any)? What were their strengths and weaknesses?

How might you shape the rhythms and content of your Life Group gathering to express the key components of Up, In and Out?

What are the benefits for those in your group to step into leading their own group? What might keep you from encouraging group members to lead their own group?

PRAYER

Read these passages out loud and then pray together for the formation of your Life Group.

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him.
Mark 1:16-18

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. **Colossians 1:27-29**

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. **Galatians 4:19**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON THE PURPOSE OF LIFE GROUPS AND LEADERSHIP

Four Reason Small Groups are Vital to Your Church's Health

Your Small Group Should be Making Disciples

Dallas Willard: You Can't have Community without Sabbath

► Find these resources at menlo.church/leaderresources

BEFORE YOUR NEXT CONVERSATION

*Work through the brainstorming
worksheet on the following page.* **>>>**



BRAINSTORMING TO START A LIFE GROUP

BEGIN WITH PRAYER *Set aside a specific time to talk with God about starting a Life Group.*

1. Listen for God's heart for discipleship and people.

Matthew 28:16-20; 1 Thessalonians 2; John 8:28-32, 13:34-35; 2 Timothy 2:1-10; Matthew 4:18-22; Hebrews 10:23-25.

2. Ask God to lead you to the kind of group he would like you to lead.

God is revealing this about leading a Life Group (through Scripture and my time with Him): _____

WHAT TYPE OF LIFE GROUP WILL YOU LEAD?

Prayerfully consider how God has made you and what passions he has placed within you.

Types of Groups: Men, Women Singles, Marrieds, Mixed (couples and singles), Young Adults.

I will lead a _____ Life Group.

WHAT WILL BE THE FOCUS OF YOUR GROUP?

Life Groups are small communities pursuing the Jesus Way through authentic relationships with God and one another.

All Life Groups focus on Jesus and growing as a community in which participants feel safely seen and heard. All Life Groups open the Bible and pray for one another. All Life Groups want to live outwardly, learning and living out the heart of God. But what will be unique to your group? Is there an area you want to grow in or something you are passionate about? Here are examples of different Life Group emphasis to get you started:

Studying a Particular Book of the Bible

Using the Sermon Study Guides provided on the Menlo.Church website

Practicing Spiritual Disciplines

Leaning into a felt need for God's wisdom and the help of the group (i.e., parenting, anxiety, financial freedom, etc.)

Reading a Christian Book together to grow in understanding and living differently (racial equity, missions, generosity, prayer, how to study the Bible, etc.)

My Group will do the following: _____

*Pro-Tip: When starting a group, have a plan. Don't take a poll. People want to be a part of something that is intentional and going someplace.

WHEN AND WHERE WILL YOU MEET?

Will you meet in person?

Will you meet online?

Will you practice a hybrid-model, meeting some online and some in person?

Set the day, time and start date.

My Life Group will meet on _____ (day) at _____ (time) at _____ (place/online site).

We will start on _____ (date).

LIFE GROUPS

LEADERSHIP CONVERSATION THREE: HOW DO I START A LIFE GROUP?

Before discussing your plan for your Life Group, pause to pray for one another.

Share your Life Group Brainstorming Sheet with your Group Staff/Coach and consider the following to add to your plan:

WHAT WILL BE YOUR RHYTHMS?

Possible rhythms: weekly; three weeks on and one week off; every other week?

Note: We ask all Life Groups to meet a minimum of twice a month (with breaks for holidays and summer).

HOW LONG WILL YOU MEET?

All Leaders commit to leading for a year. Most groups will take a break in the summer (or at least change their rhythm/content). Each July your Groups staff will ask if you plan to return as a leader for the upcoming Life Group season that will typically launch in August/September.

You also want to set the length of time for each Life Group Gathering. Will you meet for an hour, an hour-and-a-half or longer? Note: more than two hours is a lot if you are not sharing a meal or an activity like a family gathering in the park, etc. If you are meeting online, we recommend you don't meet for more than an hour and fifteen minutes.

WHEN WILL YOU TAKE BREAKS?

We don't want you to burn-out, so please take breaks as a group and as a leader. Be sure to set some weeks where you are present at your group but not leading. On those weeks, give the leadership to an emerging leader and be sure to give them encouragement and feedback.

HOW MIGHT YOU SHARE LEADERSHIP?

Consider having a co-leader or an apprentice leader (someone you are intentionally preparing for future leadership). Be sure to share different responsibilities with your group (snacks, hosting location, leading the prayer time, etc.). When you share leadership, be sure to set others up to succeed through clear communication and expectations as well as giving them freedom to do it differently than you.

Note: Please do not name a person a Life Group Leader until they go through the leadership process with your Groups Staff/Coach. We want them to be fully aware of expectations and receive equipping and care.

MULTIPLICATION

How will you identify emerging Life Group Leaders and give them a vision for starting their own group? Discuss this with your Groups Staff/Coach. Begin with prayer.

PROMOTING YOUR GROUP: PERSONAL INVITATION AND GETTING HELP

The best way to form a Life Group is through personal invitation.

Who do you hope to invite? Write down their names.

What is the best way to invite someone to your group?

What is not helpful when inviting someone to a group?

According to surveys by Religion in American Life, only 2% or 3% of people attended church because of advertising, while 85% went after being invited by a friend or relative.

YOUR GROUPS STAFF/COACH CAN HELP YOU GATHER TO YOUR GROUP BY:

Pointing people to your group and introducing you to those they think might be interested.

Encouraging you to network at your campus and in your neighborhood/workplace.

Helping you get your information on the Menlo Website: Write a description, provide a picture, etc.

Making sure you know how to respond when someone reaches out to you through the website.

HERE ARE SOME TIPS:

- Check your spam and junkmail accounts.
- Respond within 24 hours with a clear invitation and description of your group.
- If your group is online: share Zoom links; make sure the person knows how to connect, etc...
(See page 45 for Leading an Online Group).

RESPONSE EMAIL TEMPLATE

The screenshot shows a "New message" window with a dark header bar containing standard operating system icons (red, yellow, green circles, back, forward, search, refresh, and menu). The main area is titled "New message". It includes fields for "To..." and "Subject...". The body of the email begins with "Dear (name),". The message content is as follows:

I'm thrilled you are interested in our Life Group. We would love for you to visit and see if it might be a fit for you. We know that fit, timing and location are all important. Sometimes people need to visit 3-4 groups before they find their people. We would love for you to visit, but please don't feel like you have to commit after one visit.

We meet (day, time, rhythms of meeting).

Currently our group is (what you are doing – reading through the gospel of Luke or reading a Christian book together or using a curriculum to guide your time).

I'd love to talk more and share the location if you are interested in trying out our group.

(your name + phone #)

At the bottom of the email window are icons for font size, image, smiley face, and attachment, followed by a red "Send" button.



BONUS CONVERSATION: THE PRAYER LIFE OF A LEADER

The most important thing you do as a leader is pray. Read through Ephesians 6:10-20 and discuss the significance of prayer to your ministry of discipleship (along with all the pieces of armor). Record your observations to the right of the passage.

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. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Ephesians 6:10-20

Observations

**It's funny how
coincidence happens
when we pray.**

PRAYER

Pray together for your group using Ephesians 6:10-20 as your guide.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR STARTING A LIFE GROUP

[NT Wright: What is Prayer? \(4 min video\)](#)

[How to Pray in the Spirit \(it's not weird\)](#)

[How to Pray for Your Small Group Ministry](#)

[Three Ways to Recruit People to your Small Group](#)

[Train Your Group to be Invitational](#)

[Planning and Leading a Small Group: Mapping Your Strategy](#)

► Find these resources at menlo.church/leaderresources

BEFORE YOUR NEXT CONVERSATION

Ask two to three people to pray for you as you seek to start your Life Group.

CONSIDER BUILDING AN ONGOING PRAYER TEAM: Invite two to three people to commit to praying twice a month for your Life Group. You will send them 2-3 requests for the group every other week.

LIFE GROUP CONTENT: We desire for every Life Group to spend time in the following topics over a two-year period of gathering. Circle where you might like to start and talk to your Group Staff/Coach about resources.

- 1.** Bible: Study a book of the Bible together; How to study the Bible; Bible overview, etc
- 2.** Spiritual formation practices: Prayer, Sabbath, Silence, Scripture Meditation, Worship, Service, etc.
- 3.** Knowing and sharing the gospel
- 4.** The Biblical mandate for compassion, justice, mercy and dignity of all people
- 5.** Felt needs specific to your group: Faith and work, Marriage, Parenting, Singleness, Financial Stewardship, etc.
- 6.** Helping people discover what they are uniquely designed for in light of their passions, talents, and gifting
- 7.** The nature of God: Trinity + Character
- 8.** Jesus: Reading through one of the gospels
- 9.** The Holy Spirit: Fruit of the Spirit and the Work of the Spirit
- 10.** Love
- 11.** Discipleship

Glance through the next conversation and come prepared with thoughts and questions.

LIFE GROUPS

LEADERSHIP CONVERSATION FOUR: HOW DO I LEAD A LIFE GROUP?

You have your plan and your people, so now it's time to actually lead your group. Pause to pray and then discuss the following questions and tips.

SMALL GROUP EXPERIENCE

Have you led a group before? What were its strengths and weaknesses?

Have you been in a group before? What did the leader do that you appreciated and what did they do that was unhelpful?

List five things you want to do to lead well:

- 1.** _____
- 2.** _____
- 3.** _____
- 4.** _____
- 5.** _____

TYPES OF GROUPS

Life Groups can take different forms. Here are some options:

- 1. IN PERSON** These groups meet in a home or a neutral space (a park, coffee shop, workplace conference room, etc.). You can meet at the same place or rotate locations. An in-person group might choose to meet online when someone is traveling to make sure that person is seen and included. If you do this, we recommend the whole group meets online rather meeting together and zooming in on the person. It is difficult to feel a part of the group time if you are the only one online.
- 2. ONLINE** These groups meet solely online. They use Zoom or other platforms to connect. See the guide for leading a group online on page 45.
- 3. HYBRID (*In-Person and Online*)** These groups meet in person and online. They might meet once a month in person and once online. Or twice a month online and once in person. Use the best rhythm for you.

SAMPLE SCHEDULE

7:30-7:45PM Hanging Out. Consider having snacks and rotating who brings them each week.

7:45-8:45PM Gather the group in a circle. Start on time to honor those who are there and communicate that you will always begin at 7:45PM (even if it is just two of you). Dive into your study or start with ice-breaker questions. Mix it up.

8:45-9PM Prayer and Announcements.

GROUP SCHEDULE TIPS

End on time, even if the group wants to go longer. If you continually go late people will hesitate to come when they have a lot to do or have an early morning the next day.

Start on time and clearly communicate expectations. If you plan to hang out, eat snacks and chat for the first 15 minutes, let your group know this is the plan. Then they can decide to come for that time or not.

Meet at least twice a month. We encourage a three-weeks-on/one-week-off rhythm. If you meet every other week that means a person who misses a week will not be with you for an entire month. Be sure to take breaks – breaks help sustain the life of a group. The rhythm needs to work for you as a leader – this is not decision by committee!

Give clear expectations. When a person expresses interest in your group, share the expectations with them.

- How often you meet and when you take breaks.
- The desire for everyone to be there unless they are sick or traveling.
- The duration of your group. We desire every group to meet for at least a year and then recommit, multiply or disband. This gives a person clarity and allows them to decide what is best for them after a year of meeting together.
- Snacks: do you have them or not? Do you provide them or does the group rotate who brings snacks each week?

Be relational. Here are some ways to grow in relationship with one another:

• **Share Life Stories (see page 50).** Take 20 minutes each week to have someone share their story. Or take a break from your content for Life Stories. Sometimes this is a great activity to do when you first start meeting, but it can also be wise to wait until there is more consistency and trust. You will have to prayerfully discern what is best for your gathering.

• **The Question Game:** An easy way to get to know one another is to occasionally start your group time with “get-to-know-you” questions. You can find hundreds of these type of questions with a quick google search. Mix up fun and deeper questions.

• **Do not bifurcate “relationship building” and “content learning”.** As you dive into your content (reading through a book of the Bible, learning about Spiritual Formation practices, etc.), use the time to get to know one another by being curious and asking questions like:

- Why do you think that verse stood out to you in this season of life?
- How have you seen someone close to you put this into practice?
- When have you had the opportunity to try this?
- Share a time in your life when this (truth/principle/practice/belief) was challenging/difficult/helpful.

• **Just hang out.** Take a break from your regular meeting and go to dinner or meet in the park. Do something fun that everyone can do (Top Golf; Bowling; Visiting a museum; Going to a movie/play/concert; Hiking; Exploring SF; etc.).

MENLO LIFE GROUP AGREEMENT FOR ALL GROUPS

Be sure to share this with all new attenders and review with your group on occasion.

We desire all Life Group participants agree to this.

- We respect each person's journey with God and listen without judgment.
 - We love one another by committing to the time together and praying for one another outside of gatherings.
 - We do not give advice unless the person sharing begs us to (and they really have to beg).
 - We honor confidentiality and never share what another has shared in the group (not even with a spouse or significant other).
 - We listen and share with appropriate vulnerability. We never dominate the conversation or force someone to share.
 - We understand the time constraints of our meetings and commit to ending on time.
 - We will open Scripture and pray when we are together. If someone does not feel comfortable praying aloud, they are encouraged to pray silently and are never forced to pray aloud.
 - We agree to serve together at least twice a year through a Menlo Serve Your City event or another opportunity agreed upon by our group.
 - We welcome newcomers unless we have closed our group due to size or the vulnerable nature of the content.
 - We know the purpose of a Life Group is to grow in our relationship with God and others. Jesus calls this making disciples and desires that all of us help others do the same. For this reason, we delight for our group to multiply into more groups.
- OTHER AGREEMENTS:** Your group may decide on other commitments as a group, just be sure they are clear and communicated to every new person and discussed with your Groups Staff/Coach.



LEADING A GROUP: THE SECRET SAUCE

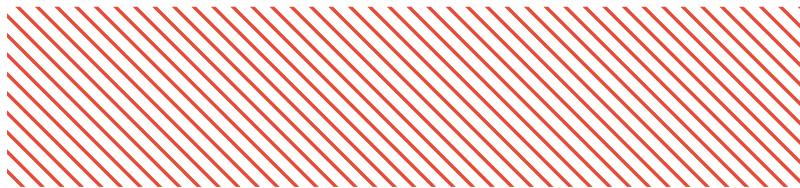
No pressure, but you, the leader, are the secret sauce to a healthy and growing group. Your leadership begins with humility. You value every single member of the group and believe in the work of God. We encourage you to:

- Have a passion to make disciples.
- Create an environment where people can truly find and follow Jesus, living in loving union with him and beginning to look more and more like him as a result.
- Open the Scripture, pray together, serve together, worship together.
- Look for the emerging disciple-makers in your group and give them opportunities to lead and ultimately form their own Life Group under the leadership of the Menlo Staff. Make it a practice to share leadership.
- Pray. Pray a lot for each person in your group. Ask friends to pray for you as you lead.
- Promote relationships outside group time. Meet for dinner (with individuals or the whole group); take a weekend trip together; explore the Bay Area (food, hikes, day trips, museums, sporting events); celebrate big events (birthdays, promotions, new jobs, anniversaries); get to know spouses, significant others, friends, and kids; if you attend the same service at Menlo, sit together or go to eat before or after.
- Come prepared for your group time.
- Lead with open-ended questions and a posture of listening. You may have to re-direct the over-talker and draw out the non-talker. Talk with your Coach/Groups Staff about what feels most intimidating for you in leading others and make a plan.

MENLO GROUP CONTENT

Work with your Coach/Groups Staff on the content for your group. Revisit the list of desired Life Group Content on page 23. Have a plan for at least the first four months.

RECOMMENDED READING



The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teaching on Discipleship
by Dallas Willard

Making Small Groups Work by Dr. Henry Cloud

Emotionally Healthy Discipleship: Moving from Shallow Christianity to Deep Transformation
by Pete Scazzero

Boundaries for Leaders: Results, Relationships and Being Ridiculously in Charge
by Dr. Henry Cloud

In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership by Henri Nouwen

► Find these resources at menlo.church/leaderresources

BEFORE YOUR NEXT CONVERSATION:

After Meeting One

Your next conversation will be a check-in with your Groups Staff/Coach after your first Life Group Meeting. Be sure to put it on the calendar. This can be in person, a phone call, or a Zoom meeting. Set what is best for you. Look ahead to see the check-in conversation questions.

We want our leaders to grow in their fellowship of Jesus as they lead. The following Check-in Conversations will turn from the nuts and bolts of leadership to your emotional and spiritual health as a leader.

Before your first Check-in Conversation, prayerfully meditate on the following and consider what it means for you to be in partnership with God as you lead your group.

SPIRITUALLY AND EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY LEADERSHIP: FROM DOING FOR TO DOING WITH

Following Jesus means being with Jesus, not just living for Jesus.

I can read a book about mountain climbing but that does not make me a mountain climber. To be an actual mountain climber I need to step on the trail and ascend the peak — and I'd be wise to follow a skilled guide my first time out.

When Jesus invited Peter, Andrew, James, and John to be his disciples he didn't give them a book, He gave them an invitation: "Follow me."

It takes proximity to follow well, which is why Jesus put priority on being with him. Consider Mark 3:13-15.

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.

Mark 3:13-15

Notice the order:

- 1.** Jesus called those he wanted.
- 2.** Jesus appointed them to be with him.
- 3.** Jesus would then send them out for ministry.

The order is important. Jesus did not first send them out to do ministry to see if he would want them or would desire to be with them. No, FIRST, he wanted them, and wanted to be with them and THEN he sent them out for ministry.

Pause to meditate on these truths as a disciple of Jesus:

- 1.** Jesus wants you. Sit with this for at least three minutes.
- 2.** Jesus wants to be with you.
- 3.** Jesus sends you to participate in his ministry with him – not just for him.

Perhaps you want to protest and say, "But I am not like the original disciples! I don't see Jesus. I can't touch Jesus. I can't physically follow him on the roads of Galilee. What does this mean for me today?"

Jesus anticipated a similar protest when he told those early disciples that he was going to leave them. They would continue his mission but not experience his physical presence. Can you imagine their resistance when he added that it would be better for them if he left?

Jesus said, "But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you". **John 16:7**

The sending of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, would expand the presence of Jesus. The promise of the indwelling Holy Spirit assured that God's mission was not restricted to a physical location but would go wherever God's followers go. Therefore, Jesus could call his followers to make disciples of all nations, and also promise always to be with them.

Jesus tells his followers about the Holy Spirit in John 14-16 and gives them a helpful metaphor to understand what it looks like to live their life in and with the Spirit: it will be like a branch connected to a vine with a gardener making sure everything grows!

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 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."

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.

*I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other. **John 15:1-17***

**PAUSE TO
CONSIDER:**
**How do you
picture
yourself
“remaining
in the vine”
as you lead
your group?**

*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***

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us... **2 Corinthians 5:17-20***

*As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. **2 Corinthians 6:1***

*[Jesus said:] "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." **Acts 1:8***

LEADERSHIP CHECK-IN CONVERSATION: AFTER MEETING ONE

How was your first meeting?

What are three things to celebrate?

Were there any challenges?

How can your staff/coach pray for you?

What are your hopes for the next meeting?

Discuss: *Spiritually and Emotionally Healthy Leadership: From Doing for to Doing with*

What encouraged you in the reading and Scripture meditation?

What is the subtle difference between doing for and doing with?

How does Jesus' gift of the Holy Spirit change how you think about making disciples and leading your Life Group?

BEFORE YOUR NEXT CONVERSATION AFTER MEETING SIX

Prayerfully meditate on the following and consider what it means for you to resist the temptation to perform as a leader and embrace the calling of faithfulness.



SPIRITUALLY AND EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY LEADERSHIP: FROM PERFORMANCE TO FAITHFULNESS

*Take time to read this excerpt from *In the Name of Jesus*, by Henri Nouwen*

THREE TEMPTATIONS OF A CHRISTIAN LEADER *by Henri Nouwen*

My movement from Harvard to L'Arche made me aware in a new way how much my own thinking about Christian leadership had been affected by the desire to be relevant, the desire for popularity, and the desire for power. Too often, I looked at being relevant, popular and powerful as ingredients of an effective ministry. The truth, however, is that these are not vocations, but temptations.

Jesus asks us to move from concern for relevance to a life of prayer, from worries about popularity to communal and mutual ministry, and from a leadership built on power to a leadership in which we critically discern where God is leading us and our people.

THE TEMPTATION TO BE RELEVANT

The first thing that struck me when I came to live in a house with mentally handicapped people was that their liking or disliking me had absolutely nothing to do with any of the many useful things I had done until then. Since nobody could read my books, they could not impress anyone, and since most of them never went to school, my twenty years at Notre Dame, Yale and Harvard did not provide a significant introduction. My considerable ecumenical experience proved even less valuable. When I offered some meat to one of the assistants during dinner, one of the handicapped men said to me, "Don't give him meat, he doesn't eat meat, he's a Presbyterian."

Not able to use any of the skills that had proved so practical in the past was a real source of anxiety. I was suddenly faced with my naked self, open for affirmations and rejections, hugs, and punches, smiles and tears, all dependent simply on how I was perceived at the moment. In a way, it seemed as though I was starting my life all over again. Relationships, connections, reputations could no longer be counted on.

This experience was and, in many ways, is still the most important experience of my new life because it forced me to rediscover my true identity. These broken, wounded and completely unpretentious people forced me to let go of my relevant self—the self that can do things, show things, prove things, build things—and forced me to reclaim that unadorned self in which I am completely vulnerable, open to receive and give love regardless of any accomplishments.

I am telling you all this because I am deeply convinced that the Christian leader of the future is called to be completely irrelevant and to stand in this world with nothing to offer but his or her vulnerable self. That is the way Jesus came to reveal God's love.

The great message that we have to carry, as ministers of God's Word and followers of Jesus, is that God loves us not because of what we do or accomplish, but because God has created and redeemed us in love and has chosen to proclaim that love as the true source of all human life.

Jesus' first temptation was to be relevant: to turn stones into bread. Oh, how I wished I could do that! Are we not called to do something that makes people realize that we do make a difference in their lives? Aren't we called to heal the sick, feed the hungry, and alleviate the suffering of the poor? Jesus was faced with the same questions, but when he was asked to prove his power as the Son of God by the relevant behavior of turning stones into bread, he clung to his mission to proclaim the word and said, "Human beings live not by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Beneath all the great accomplishments of our time there is a deep current of despair. While efficiency and control are the great aspirations of our society, the loneliness, isolation, lack of friendship and intimacy, broken relationships, boredom, feelings of emptiness and depression, and deep sense of uselessness fill the hearts of millions of people in our success-oriented world. It is here that the need for a new Christian leadership becomes clear. The leader of the future will be one who dares to claim his irrelevance in the contemporary world as a divine vocation that allows him or her to enter into a deeper solidarity with the anguish underlying all the glitter of success and bring the light of Jesus there.

ADDRESSING THE TEMPTATION THROUGH CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

To live a life that is not dominated by the desire to be relevant but is instead safely anchored in the knowledge of God's first love—the unconditional and unlimited love that John reveals when he says, "Let us love because God first loved us" (1 John 4:19)—we have to be mystics. A mystic is a person whose identity is deeply rooted in God's first love.

If there is any focus that the Christian leader of the future will need, it is the discipline of dwelling in the presence of the One who keeps asking, "Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?" It is the discipline of contemplative prayer. Through contemplative prayer, we keep ourselves from being pulled from one urgent issue to another and from becoming strangers to our own and God's heart. Contemplative prayer keeps us home, rooted, and safe, even when we are on the road.

It is not enough for Christian leaders of the future to be moral people, well trained, eager to help their fellow humans, and able to respond creatively to the burning issues of their time. All of that is very valuable and important, but it is not the heart of Christian leadership.

The central question is, are the leaders of the future truly men and women of God, people with an ardent desire to dwell in God's presence, to listen to God's voice, to look at God's beauty, to touch God's incarnate Word and to taste fully God's infinite goodness?

THE TEMPTATION TO BE SPECTACULAR

Let me tell you about another experience that came out of my move from Harvard to L'Arche. It was the experience of shared ministry. I was educated in a seminary that made me believe that ministry was essentially an individual affair. I had to be well-trained and well-formed, and after six years of training and formation, I was considered well-equipped to preach, administer the sacraments, counsel, and run a parish. I was made to feel like a man sent on a long, long hike with a huge backpack containing all the things necessary to help the people I would meet on the road. Questions had answers, problems had solutions and pains had their medicines. Just be sure that you know with which one of the three you are dealing.

Over the years I realized that things were not as simple as that, but my basic individualistic approach to ministry did not change. When I became a teacher, I was even more encouraged to do my own thing. I could choose my own subject, my own method, and sometimes, even my own students. Nobody would even question my way of doing things. And when I left the classroom, I was completely free to do whatever I saw fit. After all, everyone has the right to live his private life!

When I went to L'Arche, however, this individualism was radically challenged. Living in a community with very wounded people, I came to see that I had lived most of my life as a tightrope artist trying to walk on a high, thin cable from one tower to the other, always waiting for the applause when I had not fallen off and broken my leg.

The second temptation to which Jesus was exposed was precisely the temptation to do something spectacular, something that could win him great applause. "Throw yourself from the parapet of the temple and let the angels catch you and carry you in their arms." But Jesus refused to be a stunt man. He did not come to prove himself. He did not come to walk on hot coals, swallow fire, or put his hand in the lion's mouth to demonstrate that he had something worthwhile to say. "Don't put the Lord your God to the test," he said.

When you look at today's Church, it is easy to see the prevalence of individualism among ministers and priests. Not too many of us have a vast repertoire of skills to be proud of, but most of us feel that if we have anything at all to show, it is something that we have to do solo. You could say that many of us feel like failed tightrope walkers who discovered we do not have the power to draw thousands of people, that we could not make many conversions—that we were not as popular with the youth, the young adults, or the elderly as we had hoped, and that we were not as able to respond to the needs of our people as we had expected. But most of us still feel that, ideally, we should have been able to do it all and do it successfully. Stardom and individual heroism, which are such obvious aspects of our competitive society, are not at all alien to the Church. There too the dominant image is that of the self-made man or woman who can do it all alone.

ADDRESSING THE TEMPTATION THROUGH CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Having said this, we are faced with the question: What discipline is required for the future leader to overcome the temptation of individual heroism? I would like to propose the discipline of confession and forgiveness. Just as future leaders must be mystics deeply steeped in contemplative prayer, so also they must be persons willing to confess their own brokenness and ask for forgiveness from those to whom they minister.

(But) often they seem to say, "What if my people knew how I really feel, what I think and daydream about, and where my mind wanders when I am sitting by myself in my study?" It is precisely the men and women who are dedicated to spiritual leadership who are easily subject to very raw carnality. The reason for this is that they do not know how to live the truth of the Incarnation. They separate themselves from their own concrete community, try to deal with their needs by ignoring them or satisfying them in distant or anonymous places, and then experience an increasing split between their own most private inner world and the good news they announce. When spirituality becomes spiritualization, life in the body becomes carnality.

Confession and forgiveness are exactly the disciplines by which spiritualization and carnality can be avoided and true incarnation lives. Through confession, the dark powers are taken out of their carnal isolation, brought into the light, and made visible to the community. Through forgiveness they are disarmed and dispelled and a new integration between body and spirit is made possible.

All of this does not mean that [leaders] must, explicitly, bring their own sins and failures into their daily ministries. That would be unhealthy and imprudent and not at all a form of servant leadership. What it means is that [leaders] are also called to be full members of their communities, are accountable to them and need their full affection and support, and are called to minister their whole being, including their wounded selves.

THE TEMPTATION TO BE POWERFUL

Let me tell you about a third experience connected with my move from Harvard to L'Arche. It was clearly a move from leading to being led. Somehow, I had come to believe that growing older and more mature meant that I would be increasingly able to offer leadership. In fact, I had grown more self-confident over the years. I felt I knew something and had the ability to express it and be heard. In that sense I felt more and more in control.

But when I entered my community with mentally handicapped people and their assistants, all controls fell apart and I came to realize that every hour, day, and month was full of surprises—often surprises I was least prepared for.

Without realizing it, the people I came to live with made me aware of the extent to which my leadership was still a desire to control complex situations, confused emotions, and anxious minds. It took me a long time to feel safe in this unpredictable climate, and I still have moments in which I clamp down and tell everyone to shut up, get in line, listen to me, and believe in what I say. But I am also getting in touch with the mystery that leadership, for a large part, means to be led.

You all know what the third temptation of Jesus was. It was the temptation of power. "I will give you all the kingdoms of this world in their splendor," the demon said to Jesus. When I ask myself the main reason for so many people having left the Church during the past decades in France, Germany, Holland, and also in Canada and America, the word "power" easily comes to mind. One of the greatest ironies of the history of Christianity is that its leaders constantly gave in to the temptation to power-political power, military power, economic power, or moral and spiritual power—even though they continued to speak in the name of Jesus, who did not cling to his divine power but emptied himself and became as we are.

What makes the temptation of power so seemingly irresistible? Maybe it is that power offers an easy substitute for the hard task of love. It seems easier to be God than to love God, easier to control people than to love people, easier to own life than to love life.

One thing is clear to me: the temptation of power is greatest when intimacy is a threat. Much Christian leadership is exercised by people who do not know how to develop healthy, intimate relationships and have opted for power and control instead. Many Christian empire-builders have been people unable to give and receive love.

ADDRESSING THE TEMPTATION THROUGH THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

I propose here the discipline of strenuous theological reflection. Just as prayer keeps us connected with the first love and just as confession and forgiveness keep our ministry communal and mutual, so strenuous theological reflection will allow us to discern critically where we are being led.

Most Christian leaders today raise psychological or sociological questions even though they frame them in scriptural terms. Real theological thinking, which is thinking with the mind of Christ, is hard to find in the practice of ministry. Without solid theological reflection, future leaders will be little more than pseudo-psychologist, pseudo-sociologist, pseudo-social works. They will think of themselves as enablers, facilitators, role models, father or mother figures, big brothers, or big sisters, and so on, and thus join the countless men and women who make a living by trying to help their fellow human beings to cope with the stresses and strains of everyday living.

But that has little to do with Christian leadership because the Christian leader thinks, speaks and acts in the name of Jesus, who came to free humanity from the power of death and open the way to eternal life.

Theological reflection is reflecting on the painful and joyful realities of every day with the mind of Jesus and thereby raising human consciousness to the knowledge of God's gentle guidance. This is a hard discipline since God's presence is often a hidden presence, a presence that needs to be discovered. The loud, boisterous noises of the world make us deaf to the soft, gentle, and loving voice of God. A Christian leader is called to help people hear that voice and so be comforted and consoled.

Thinking about the future of Christian leadership, I am convinced that it needs to be a theological leadership. This cannot just be an intellectual training. It requires deep spiritual formation involving the whole person—body, mind, and heart. Everything in our competitive and ambitious world militates against it. But to the degree that such formation is being sought for and realized, there is hope."

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LEADERSHIP CHECK-IN CONVERSATION: AFTER MEETING SIX

Spiritually and Emotionally Healthy Leadership: From Performance to Faithfulness

What one word would you use to describe your Life Group after six weeks of meeting together?

What is one thing you are celebrating?

Were there any challenges?

How is leading this group impacting your personal followership of Jesus?

What are your hopes for the coming weeks?

Discuss: *Spiritually and Emotionally Healthy Leadership: From Performance to Faithfulness*

When are you most tempted to perform, seeking to impress?

What is your top take-away from the Nouwen article?

What is one question you have from the article?

How would you describe faithfulness in spiritual leadership in 2-3 sentences?

BEFORE YOUR NEXT CHECK-IN CONVERSATION: AFTER THREE MONTHS

Groups need rhythms of rest that come with time off. Leaders also need rest.

How are you doing with the following:

Getting enough sleep each night?

Sharing the leadership of your group?

Loving those closest to you (spouse, children, family, friends, co-workers)?

Sabbath?

LIFE GROUPS

SPIRITUALLY AND EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY LEADERSHIP: THE RHYTHMS OF REST

AN UNHURRIED LIFE: REFLECTIONS ON REST AND SABBATH

by Jimmy Young

Prominent theologian and pastor Dallas Willard once asked a friend this question: “If you had one word to describe Jesus, what would it be?”

Many fit well. Courageous and loving, patient and kind. He did the miraculous, loved the unlovable, stood up to the powerful and spoke truth to the influential. He was courageous and strong-willed yet had a heart for those others moved past quickly. He died on a cross and conquered death. He rose again and reigns in glory.

Willard offers his own word though: Jesus was relaxed.

There is a part of me that doesn't like the word relaxed. It sounds far too much like lazy and selfish. Relaxed sounds inadequate and unhelpful to describe who Jesus was, yet others such as Alan Fadling describe Jesus as the unhurried savior. The more that I think about it though, the more it rings true.

After waiting thirty years for his ministry to begin, his first act was to follow the Spirit into the wilderness. He seems frustratingly unhurried on his way to heal the synagogue official's daughter (Mk 5:22-43) and to visit his sick friend Lazarus, who died during Jesus two-day delay (John 11:1-43). On several occasions, Jesus retreated from the crowds and the attention to spend time one on one with His Father, to the point that the disciples even left him behind one day (John 6:16-21). His sense of timing often seems strange by our standards.

CULTURAL ADDICTION TO HURRY

“Our grandchildren”, wrote John Maynard Keynes in 1930, would work around “three hours a day” – and probably only by choice. Economic progress and technological advances had already shrunk working hours considerably by his day, and there was no reason to believe that this trend would not continue. Social psychologists began to fret: whatever would people do with all their free time?

That sounds like a dream compared to what most of us experience in every life. Ours is a culture that values the hustle, the overzealous achiever, and the omnipresent email. We boast about how busy we have been, how fast our pace of life is and how little free time we have now that we are all grown up. We dream about long holidays and winning the lottery to escape the sapping drudgery of our hurried lives, yet we rarely stop to ask if what we are getting is even what we most deeply desire.

Many of us have been so conditioned to be efficient that times of slowing down and relenting seem unproductive, irresponsible, lazy, and even selfish. We know that we need rest but can no longer see the value of it as an end in itself. It is only worthwhile if it helps us recharge our batteries so that we can be even more efficient in the next period of productivity.

There are many times where hurry is the best response, such as an emergency. People get injured or sick and need to be hurried to the hospital. Urgent issues arise that need immediate attention and quick action. The problem is that when we find ourselves living with a constant sense of urgency, we get stuck here. Every situation feels like an emergency, whether it is or not. Our bodies weren't designed to live with the constant adrenaline shot that hurry brings, and our souls don't function well when we live there.

Overwork is heart-hardening, literally. People who are driven and work long hours are more prone to developing atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries). Thomas Merton, a Trappist prophet in the early twentieth century had this to say about the effects of overwork:

"The fact that our works are done in the service of God, is not, by itself, enough to prevent us from losing our interior life if we let them devour all our time and all our strength. Work is good and necessary, but too much of it renders the soul insensitive to spiritual values, hardens the heart against prayer and divine things. It requires serious effort and courageous sacrifice to resist this hardening of the heart."

Many of us are permanently stuck in deadline mode, hurrying, and hustling ourselves to the next task and leaving little time to ease off and recharge. The things that need slowness – friendship, laughter, creative thought, loving and planning – get lost in the mad dash to keep up with the crowd.

HEART ISSUE

At the heart of our busyness is our heart. We are busy because we are working hard to meet the desires of our hearts.

Tim Chester wrote one of the most helpful polemics on busyness, *The Busy Christians Guide to Busyness*. Chester believes that a life of over-busyness is rooted in a false belief that God does not meet the desires of our heart, so we must meet them ourselves. We believe the lies of the world such as "I need money" or "I need to prove myself". The great news for every Christian is that, in God, we have liberating truths that set us free from the slavery to our schedules.

Chester looks specifically at six lies that have captured our culture.

- 1.** I'm busy because I need to prove myself
- 2.** I'm busy because of other people's expectations
- 3.** I'm busy because otherwise, things get out of control
- 4.** I'm busy because I prefer being under pressure
- 5.** I'm busy because I need money
- 6.** I'm busy because I want to make the most of life

These lies have become so all-encompassing that they have worked their way into almost every area of our lives.

SHABAT

Jesus laid out a radically different vision for his people. He says:

"Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (**Matt 11:29-30**).

There is something deeply appealing about those words. God's intention isn't for us to be perpetually burnt out, rushing from one activity to the next in the hope that our next action will be so glorious it will complete us. God instead invites us to rest in Him, because he knows that is where we will find our satisfaction, our joy and true contentment.

He knows that our hearts are most satisfied when they are resting in Him, for it is there that we can discover how deeply God loves us and desires us for who we are, who He has created and who He has redeemed, and not for what we can bring Him. We can easily convince ourselves that God loves us because of what we do and what we can bring him in the middle of a busy season. Yet when we rest, we acknowledge that we have nothing to give God and He is what we truly, deeply need.

Rest has been important from the beginning of creation. God uses the example of His own resting on the seventh day of creation to establish the principle of Shabat, which simply means “to cease, to end, to rest.” We call this Sabbath. One day out of every seven, Israel was to rest from their labor and remember the Sabbath.

The rest has become deeper and more satisfying now that Jesus has come. Whilst Israel kept the Sabbath to be made right with God (as part of the Law), Christians can trust in Jesus for their rest. They can rest in the knowledge that he has satisfied every need that we will ever have.

We can rest because we are accepted by God, and don't need to prove ourselves.

We can rest because Jesus has met God's expectations for us.

We can rest because Jesus is in full control.

We can rest because Jesus is our safe refuge in all circumstances.

We can rest because through Jesus, God has gifted us everything we need.

We can rest because through Jesus, we can have life and life to the full.

Every emotion and urging that fuels our over-busyness has been dealt with on the cross and the resurrection, through Jesus. Every fear that we have about ourselves before God has been matched by Jesus. God now invites us to stop the busyness, to cease, to rest, to end, and to draw closer to him and be filled with satisfaction and contentment.

PILLARS OF SABBATH

Having a weekly time of Sabbath has not been easy for me, and when I do so, I often felt more tired than before. Most of the time, I slept in and watched movies all day. This is the image I had of a day of rest. However, I was challenged when I heard Tony Miller speak on abiding in Jesus. Miller said that “Sabbath is not about doing nothing, but about doing the right things with great intentions.”

Miller suggested four ideas that we can use to guide us into Sabbath rest: relent, rest, rejoice and reflect.

1. RELENT

Stop thinking about the workload you must go back to. Stop working on the proposal that is due later this week. Stop reading endless articles on Facebook. Stop thinking about the people you need to call. Stop checking your emails on your phone. Stop, cease, relent.

Turn off your mobile phone for the day. Leave your work at work. Don't check your emails. Whatever you need to do to let your mind free from the daily cycle, do it. Stop, cease, relent.

2. REST

Everyone has activities that give them back more than they take. For some, it might be cycling or crocheting. For others it might be watching movies, sleeping in, enjoying a good coffee, surfing on the coast, or going for a hike in the wilderness. Whatever it is that allows you to loosen your tense shoulders, and take a deep breathe out, go and do it.

3. REJOICE

Christians can rejoice in the Sabbath because we have a savior who has accomplished everything we need. Every desire that propels us towards perpetual hustle has been met and matched in Jesus and in this time, it can be so important to let that wash over us. If resting is a deep breath out, rejoicing is a deep breath in. It's a filling of the spirit, of being reminded who Jesus is and how deeply he loves us. It's a meditation on the grace that has saved us and a feasting on the word.

4. REFLECT

One of my personal struggles is simply to stop long enough to consider where I am at personally with God. It's all well and good doing work for God, but unless that work is with God, it will never be fruitful. Doing noble things for God is not the same as spending time with Him. Thinking great thoughts about Jesus is not the same as vital communion with Him. Helping others understand the gospel is not the same thing as drinking deeply from the wellspring of grace for myself.

I pray that this will help you treasure Jesus more as you trust Him in your rest.

LEADERSHIP CHECK-IN CONVERSATION: AFTER THREE MONTHS

How have you seen God show up in your Life Group over the past three months?

What is one thing you're celebrating?

What is one hope you have for future group meetings?

How is leading this group impacting your personal followership of Jesus?

Discuss: *Spiritually and Emotionally Healthy Leadership: The Rhythms for Rest*

How do you find rest?

Name 2-3 activities or practices that refresh you spiritually, emotionally, and physically?

What are 2-3 observations on Sabbath after listening to the interview or reading the article?

What does the practice of Sabbath look like for you in this season of your life?

BEFORE YOUR NEXT CHECK-IN CONVERSATION: AFTER SIX MONTHS

Read and reflect upon the following as you consider how God is shaping you through leading a Life Group.

“The great illusion of leadership is to think that man can be led out of the desert by someone who has never been there ... When our wounds cease to be a source of shame, and become a source of healing, we have become wounded healers.” Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*

If you have *Emotionally Healthy Discipleship*, by Peter Scazzero, read chapter 9: Lead out of Weakness and Vulnerability and record your reflections. If you don't have the book — no worries — simply meditate upon the following passages and record your reflections.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Reflections

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

1 Corinthians 1:18-31; 2:1-5

*Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. **2 Corinthians 12:7-10***

LEADERSHIP CHECK-IN CONVERSATION: AFTER SIX MONTHS

How have you grown in leadership and following Jesus over the past six months?

How have you seen those in your group grow?

Discuss: Spiritually and Emotionally Healthy Leadership: The Wounded Healer

Discuss Chapter 9 of Emotionally Healthy Discipleship and/or the passages of Scripture.

What struck you from the reading and Scripture meditation about weakness and vulnerability?

How can you help your group be more vulnerable with one another?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR LEADERSHIP

[Seven Life Group Ideas Every Leader Should Try](#)

[How Do Good Leaders Give Advice](#)

[Using the Discovery Bible Study Method with Your Group](#)

► Find these resources at menlo.church/leaderresources



LEADING AN ONLINE GROUP

If you haven't decided on a virtual platform, please contact your Groups Director. Though it takes some adjustments, technology has increased opportunities for groups to share life, encourage one another, study together and go beyond geographical boundaries.

Virtual meetings add a layer of complexity, so here are some best practices, a sample format and agenda.

BEST PRACTICES FOR VIDEO CALLING AND ONLINE ETIQUETTE

- 1. Before the Meeting:** Have participants download and get familiar with the software you will use. Send links for online tutorials on YouTube or any other helps.
- 2. At the First Meeting:** Briefly review etiquette at the beginning of your first few meetings. Mute when not talking. Be aware of your background - will people be walking behind you? If you are eating or walking around, turn off video.
- 3. Assign a co-host:** Someone who can help with tech issues, breakout rooms, and monitor the chat (see page 47).
- 4. Breakout Rooms:** Use breakout rooms for groups of more than six.
- 5. Be Aware of How You Look on Camera:** Make sure your face has sufficient lighting. In general, lighting works best in front of your face, not behind. Brighter light is preferred to yellow/warm light. Make sure your face is centered in the video camera. It's best to position the camera to eye level or slightly above. When talking, look directly into the camera. When not talking, look at the computer screen to watch others.
- 6. Select the Quietest Location You Can Find:** Turn off anything making noise in the background (TV, radio, appliances, etc.). Put pets in a different room or have them in a place where they will be most quiet. Have a plan for childcare to minimize interruptions - or meet after bedtime!
- 7. Mute Your Computer, Unless You are the Person Talking:** Whichever platform you're using, know how to turn off and on your mute button. If everyone's microphone is turned on at the same time, the sound quality can be an issue and it can be hard to hear the person who is talking. If you are muted, make sure to nod your head and listen well so people can recognize you are following them. Find creative ways to practice non-verbal communication. The host can mute individual participants - use this feature to serve your group.
- 8. Be Both Positive and Assertive as the Leader:** Your demeanor sets the tone for the attitude of the group. The leader of the group needs to be welcoming and in charge. Make sure you jump on a few minutes early to welcome everyone (15 minutes to check tech and get chatter out of the way is great). Redirect the conversation or mute participants, as necessary. This may feel rude, but it is sometimes necessary to manage a good online experience. As a rule of thumb, the leader should talk 20% of the time and listen 80% of the time.
- 9. Create a Plan for Participants to Indicate When They Want to Share:** You may try things like raising a hand, answering in a specific order, or another signal. Since participants will often be muted, having a plan will help you know when to mute and unmute.
- 10. Encourage Group Participants to Give Their Full Attention and not Multi-task:** When participants are not giving their full attention, it can be a big distraction with an online group.
- 11. Have a Plan to Stay in Touch Outside of Your Scheduled Gathering:** Leverage resources and platforms like calling, texting, emailing, GroupMe, Facebook Groups and Messenger, WhatsApp, etc. as a place to stay connected and keep the conversation going throughout the week. Assign group members to follow up with one another and engage in prayer requests.

SUGGESTED ONLINE GROUP SCHEDULE AND FORMAT

1. Practice Session/First Meeting (30 minutes)

It can be helpful to have a 30-minute practice session before your first official group meeting. Or take the first half of your first meeting to get everyone acquainted with how an online format will work.

Review the best practices/online etiquette (listed above). You may want to review these practices the first several meetings until they become more natural for people.

Help people learn how to use the technology and answer any questions.

Introduce yourself, share your name, and share how you got connected with Menlo Church and this online group.

End your group time by sharing prayer requests; have one person pray.

2. Typical Meeting (60-75 minutes)

A. Moderator/Host Welcomes Everyone to the Online Group (5 minutes)

Buffer time is important, as people tend to arrive late online (as with in-person groups).

Allow for people, if necessary, to adjust their lighting, camera, and microphone settings.

B. Warm Up/Connection Time (15 minutes)

This is where you'll ask a getting-to-know you question or something that puts the group at ease (share one high and one low from this past week, etc.). The key here is to get everyone talking. This also allows the group members to get comfortable learning how to mute/unmute themselves when talking and listening.

C. Discussion Time (40 minutes)

Set up this time with 2-3 questions.

Listen well and ask great follow up questions. Let the conversation flow among your group members and redirect/keep-on-track as needed. Use breakout groups to encourage engagement.

D. Take Prayer Requests and Close in Prayer (15 minutes)

Break into smaller groups.

Have one person pray for the group, or assign prayer requests to different people with the contingency that someone can “pass” (not everyone is comfortable praying out loud, and virtual prayer adds another layer of complexity).

BEFORE YOUR FIRST MEETING AS A LEADER

Reach out to your group members – send them a reminder of the time and online meeting link.

Be sure everyone has the participants guide and links to resources if you're using them.

Get familiar with your leader materials as well as participant materials so you're prepared.

GUIDE FOR TECH ASSISTANT

TECH ASSISTANT COORDINATION

If your online group has more than 6 people, we recommend having a Tech Assistant who will:

Create and maintain meeting links.

Put people into breakout rooms during discussion time.

Monitor the chat and waiting room (if using that feature)

Share screen to show slides, videos or other media needed to run the group.

Finding a Tech Assistant:

Ask a friend or group member that you know is comfortable with the online meeting platform.

Ask your Menlo Staff Group director if they have a volunteer who can assist.

A few tips:

Meet with Tech Assistant and decide ahead of time what features are needed (i.e., breakout rooms, screen sharing, muting all participants).

Tech Assistant should familiarize themselves with features a week before the meeting and hold a practice session to try out functions.

If you are the meeting host, transfer host status to the Tech Assistant or make them a co-host when you start the meeting.

Breakout rooms:

Assign participants to groups prior to the first meeting. Share that info with your Tech Assistant prior to group start.

Or let Zoom assign the groups at random.

Leave enough time at the beginning of the meeting for the Tech Assistant to add new additions into groups if they are pre-set.

Only people in individual breakout rooms can share screens. If there is anything you want shared on screen in breakout rooms, identify someone in each breakout room to share their screen (and make sure they are equipped to do so prior to the start of the meeting).

Breakout rooms work best if there is a designated host. You can accomplish this in three ways:

- 1.** Recruit hosts for the number of rooms you have prior to start of group.
- 2.** Identify people on the registration for this group to be breakout room hosts.
- 3.** Before groups go to breakout rooms, call on one person per room to be the host.

Tutorials on Zoom Meetings:

[Zoom breakout rooms video tutorial](#)

[How to pre-assign breakout room groups – written description](#)

[Sharing your screen](#)

[Taylor's tips from her experience as Tech Assistant](#)

► These links are available at menlo.church/leaderresources

IDEAS FOR GROUP PRAYER

Adapted from the Navigator's Conversational Prayer Guidelines for Groups

GUIDING THE NEW BELIEVER OR NON-PRAY-ER IN YOUR GROUP

We always want to be sensitive to the person who is not comfortable praying out loud. Many of us remember that sinking feeling when we first started going to Bible study-type groups and fearing that we would be called on to pray. Here are a few things you can do as the leader to care for those who might be uncomfortable:

1. Address the Situation Directly: Simply acknowledge what people are feeling and let them know that you'll never call on them to pray and you don't ever want them to feel obligated to pray out loud. Let them know you've felt this too and you hope that one day they will feel comfortable joining in.

2. Model Simple Prayers: Make sure you don't set a precedent for prayers that sound like only you and the Pope could ever pray this way. Keep your prayers short and simple – avoiding pious/churchy/thee-thou language. Pray a simple prayer and then leave a pause so others can join in – avoid the temptation to fill the silence too quickly.

3. Guide the Prayer Time: Introduce how you will pray. Let the group know that you just want to go in a circle and pray a simple prayer that begins: "God, thank you for....." or "Jesus I am thankful that you are....." You go first and stick to the pattern, or you will throw everyone off.

CREATIVE SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUR PRAYER TIME

THE 3X5 CARD

This is a simple way to gather prayer requests and to keep these prayers before the group during the next week. It also helps members of your group connect outside of the meeting time. Pass out 3x5 cards and ask each person to write their name and phone number along with 3 prayer requests. Sometimes it is helpful to suggest that at least two requests need to do with the person (rather than a relative, friend, etc.). Let them know that you want them to write down their phone number and not their email because you want them to talk during the week, not just live out their relationship in cyber-space. If they feel comfortable, encourage them to pray for one another over the phone (this helps us see that prayer does not have to happen at a prayer meeting or as a long event). Encourage them that we want to make personal connections and email often hinders this. Have them pass their card to the right or left. This should help each person connect with two people that week and to know that they are being prayed for.

PRAYER REQUESTS

Taking prayer requests is a great way to get to know one another – and to know how to pray for one another. But as a leader you will need to guide this time so that one person doesn't dominate the time. Keep requests from turning into counseling sessions. Here are some suggestions: (1) Encourage a time limit – let's each take 2-3 minutes to share what we need prayer for this week; (2) Guide the number and content of the requests – we'll each share 2 requests and let's be sure that at least one is for you personally; (3) Break into smaller groups of 2-3 so that each person can share more fully.

Remind the group that time is limited and that what is said here stays here (the Vegas rule of prayer requests). Avoid making "taking requests" your normative way of prayer. Use the other methods suggested.

NO PRAYER REQUESTS

Feel free at times not to take requests. Some groups do this every week. If your group is comfortable praying out loud - just dive into prayer and let people pray to God what they would have requested to the group. Just be sure to remind your folks of the “Circle Not a Line” approach [see below].

THE IMMEDIATE PRAYER

Sometimes it's appropriate to just stop and immediately pray. Someone might share something during your discussion that prompts you to stop the group and pray. For example - he might mention that he's lost his job, or she might say that things have been difficult with one of her children. It is often appropriate to say, “Let's just take a second and pray for Jennifer about that.” You might be the one to pray but if there is someone in the group who feels comfortable praying and is particularly close to the person you might ask them to pray (as a leader be sure you don't always lead out in prayer - share this role with others in your group).

PRAYING AS A COMMUNITY: A CIRCLE NOT A LINE

When a person prays for a long time, it is often hard for the rest of the group to stay engaged. As a leader you can help avoid this by suggesting that prayer in community should be viewed as being in a circle with God rather than a line.

When we view ourselves in a line, we tend to see ourselves lining up to talk to God like a kid visiting Santa. When this happens, we try to say everything we want to say in one long monologue. The line-up version of prayer causes us to pray as individuals rather than as a community. In a Life Group we want to pray as a community.

Another helpful picture is of a gathering with friends at Starbucks. When we gather as friends for conversation, we don't launch into monologues with no regard for the others who are with us (or at least we shouldn't). Instead, we have a group conversation. We build upon and respond to what others in the group are saying. We don't have to say everything all at once because we'll get other chances to speak. This is how communal prayer can look - a group conversation with God. We'll find ourselves saying things like: "...and just like Matt said, I"

Always remember that prayer is a conversation. It will have pauses for listening and invitation for all to participate. As a leader you'll have to help guide this kind of communion.

HAVING FUN AS A GROUP AND WHY IT MATTERS

Fun matters and if you aren't convinced, read: [Why You Need More Fun in Your Life, According to Science.](#)

FUN DURING GROUP TIME

Change locations (meet at a park, coffee shop, restaurant, beach)

Have a potluck and have your group discussion around a meal.

Ask fun and light-hearted connection questions. You can google getting-to-know-you-questions and find a slew. Just be sure they are appropriate.

FUN OUTSIDE GROUP TIME

Have your group make a list of things they do for fun individually that they'd love to do with the group. Put these in a jar and once every two months draw one and name a time when you will do that activity together as a group. You can also use your group time for this activity.

HOW TO SHARE OUR STORIES

Your story is the story of your life: growing up, trials, dreams, fears, and all that is in-between. Your group should constantly be telling their stories. This is not a one-time event.

LEADER TIPS:

When sharing life stories, you play a significant role. You set the tone for vulnerability. It might mean that you go first or that you select someone to go first who you trust to be vulnerable. You will need to guide the time: gently keeping people on track and within a time limit.

Set the guidelines for a safe environment: what is said here, stays here; you don't have to share anything you are not comfortable with; affirm, affirm, affirm, love, love, love. Be sure to have at least one person pray for the person after they share.

If a person shares something particularly intimate/painful/vulnerable, be sure to touch base with them within 24 hours. Just give them a call and thank them for sharing. Often, after people share, they leave feeling great insecurity ("I can't believe I shared that," "These people are going to think I'm such a _____"). Assure them of your love and admiration for them and for how beautifully their story has shaped them.

HERE ARE SOME WAYS TO ENCOURAGE THE PEOPLE IN YOUR GROUP TO SHARE THEIR STORY.

1. The Timeline

Fill in the timeline with significant markers in your life. When did you place your faith in Jesus? Who has been helpful along your journey? What high points and low points have helped draw you near to God or caused you to want to flee from him.

Birth

Today

2. Heroes, High Points, Hard Times and Hopes

Ask your group to name three people or events under each category. You can give them a printed copy of the list with room to record their answers during your group time. Give them five minutes to write what comes to mind. Or send them the handout and ask them to come to your next meeting ready to share. Depending on the size of your group, you might have everyone share or have only 1-2 people share each week. Be sure to pray for the person after they share.

HEROES (people who have had a positive influence on you)

HIGH POINTS (great moments that have shaped you)

HARD TIMES (struggles that have shaped you)

HOPES (things you're looking forward to in the future)

3. The Pipe Cleaner

Have each person spend a few minutes shaping a pipe cleaner into a timeline of their life – ups, downs, spirals, high points, low points, plateaus, etc. Or they can shape it into a shape that represents their story in some way – a cross, a question mark, a circle, etc. Then have each person share their creation and how it tells their story.

Variations: Try Play-Doh or anything that they can be shaped into a fun creation. Have them create something and then share what it symbolizes about them.

4. Photographs

Invite each person to bring a significant photo to your group and then have them share about it.

Variations: 1. Bring 3-5 photos taken at least five years apart that tell your story; 2. Ask for a specific type of photo – baby, vacation, school, family, friend, high school, college, etc.; 3. Ask: what's a photo you don't have but you wish you did? For example: a picture with a significant friend or relative who has passed away, a photo of the moment you found out you were pregnant; a photo of your first car, etc.

5. Some Less Serious Ways to Share Stories

Be sensitive to guiding this time so no one feels made fun of or shamed.

TELL THE TRUTH The leader brings up 3-4 people (or they sit on the couch – this game is also called “three on a couch”). Each person writes down an event in their life that no one in the group should know. They give the event to the leader who picks one and tells it to the group. The group must figure out whose story it is by asking questions. Each person on the panel pretends it’s their story. After a round of questions, the group votes on who they think the story belongs to.

TWO TRUTHS AND A LIE Divide into groups of 3-4. Each person will share two truths about their life and one lie. The group must guess which fact is a lie. You’ll learn amazing stuff. We promise.

6. Asking Good Questions

Questions are the gateway to understanding. If a group is going to know and love one another they must ask questions and actively listen.

TIPS FOR COLLECTING QUESTIONS: Here are some ways to collect questions:

Ask each person in the group to write down 5-10 getting-to-know-you questions on separate pieces of paper. Put those in a box and use them one week or throughout the year.

Google “questions for getting to know people” and see what you get.

There are several question books on the market – you’ll just need to sort through them to make sure they are appropriate and God-honoring (one book we like is, The Complete Book of Questions).

THE QUESTION BOX Type out or copy a bunch of questions. Cut them out and put them in a box or bag. Pass the box around and each person takes out a question and answers it.

Variations: 1. Spend most of a meeting just passing the box; 2. have the box most weeks and have just a few people answer questions – or have everyone answer just one question (recommendation – don’t do this every week but on random weeks so it is not predictable); 3. the person who draws the questions gets to pick who has to answer it.

HOT SEAT A person is selected to be on the “Hot Seat.” This simply means that they will be peppered with question for a pre-determined amount of time. Be sure you have a timer. Basically, the group asks whatever they wish. The person on the Hot Seat can always say, “pass” if they are uncomfortable or don’t want to answer a question.

Recommendation: As the leader, be sure to set some ground rules. Be sure that everyone understands that the goal is to know the person better. Ask people to be careful of the kind of questions they ask and to be sensitive to the person sharing.

FIRSTS... The box, bag or envelope of questions is filled with words or phrases that have to do with a first in someone’s life. When they look at the slip of paper, they talk about their first _____. For example: car, apartment, crush, success, failure, album/8-track/tape/CD, movie in a movie theater, etc.

GOING DEEPER A simple but helpful question is to simply ask: “Where have you seen God show up in the past (week, month, year)?”









LIFE GROUPS

