

there's Hope

A SEVEN-WEEK GROUP STUDY



SHEPHERD CHURCH

There's Hope
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should be addressed to:
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Porter Ranch, CA 91326

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INTRODUCTION

Dear Life Group members,

WHY SHOULD I BE IN THIS GROUP?

Life Groups are designed to help you experience the life God has for you by helping you CONNECT with other believers, by helping you GROW to be more like Christ, and helping you make an IMPACT with the gospel.

Every time a group meets, they spend time connecting by building relationships, growing through a discussion-led Bible study, and making an impact by supporting each other through prayer and service. And as a result, group members experience growth, belonging, and care. A Life Group is your chance to pursue healthy relationships and spiritual growth. You can't grow spiritually without connecting relationally.

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HOW WILL THIS SERIES HELP ME?

Life can get pretty rough, even for the most seasoned of Christ followers. Both Jesus and Paul warn of coming trials and instruct us to stay connected with God to receive His peace and comfort. Followers of Christ know the promises we have been given that He will be with us during all times. It is this hope that we cling to even during the roughest of life's challenges.

This Life Group series will help give you a better understanding of the hope that we have in Jesus, even through the difficult times of life. With the help of Scripture, you will learn how God's love brings you hope and gives you encouragement to share the burdens of others as they go through difficulties. Ultimately, the goal of this series is to help you better understand and realize that wherever Christ is present, there is always hope. It is our prayer and desire that through this series, you will find Jesus' hope and strength during troubling times, experience the peace and comfort that only God can provide, and consequently, grow your faith in Jesus.

WHAT IS MY ROLE IN THIS GROUP?

As you attend a weekend service and participate in this Life Group series, you will be equipped to live the life that God desires for you. Of course, the bottom line is, it comes down to you. Only you can share in your group, pray about the things God is teaching you, and take action to allow Jesus to work in you and through you. Enjoy the encouragement and challenges that God desires as His grace abounds in your Life Group.

The Life Groups Team

USING THIS WORKBOOK

(Stuff to Help You Have a Great Life Group Experience!)

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1 Notice in the Table of Contents there are three sections: (1) Sessions; (2) Life Group Toolbox; and (3) Life Group Leaders. Familiarize yourself with the Appendix parts. Some of them will be used in the sessions themselves.

2 If you are leading or co-leading a Life Group, the section for Life Group Leaders will give you some hard-learned experiences of others that will encourage you and help you avoid many common obstacles to effective small group leadership.

3 Use this workbook as a guide, not a straightjacket. If the group responds to the lesson in an unexpected but honest way, go with that. If you think of a better question than the next one in the lesson, ask it. Take to heart the insights included in the Frequently Asked Questions (pg 96) and the Life Group Leaders section.

4 Enjoy your Life Group experience.

5 Now read the “Outline for Each Session” on the next page so that you understand how the sessions will flow.

OUTLINE OF EACH SESSION

Most people want to live a life that is orderly, meaningful, and satisfying, but few achieve this by themselves. Most small groups struggle to balance all of God’s purposes in their meetings. Groups tend to overemphasize one of the various reasons for meeting.

Every Life Group session is structured to reflect the values of Life Groups, which are: **Connect**, **Grow** and **Impact**. Therefore, the

sessions are designed to help each group member participate and gain deeper insight into each topic by connecting with others, growing to be more like Christ, and impacting the community with the gospel.

A typical Life Group session will include the following:



CONNECT

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The foundation for spiritual growth is an intimate connection with God and His family (a few people who really know you and share their lives with you). This section of each session is designed to allow group members to get to know each other. You can do this by using the icebreaker questions provided or by asking light, easy-to-answer questions of your own that invite involvement from everyone.

As your group begins, use the Life Group Agreement, Life Group Calendar and Life Group Community Project Worksheet to help your group see how everyone has a part in making a Life Group come to life. As the group develops intimacy, use the Prayer and Praise Report to keep the group connected.



DVD SESSION

Serving as a companion to the “There’s Hope” Study Guide is the “There’s Hope” video teachings and testimonies. This DVD is designed to combine teaching segments from pastors and teachers along with leadership insights and personal stories of life change. Using the teaching video will add value to this seven-week series.



GROW

Here is where you will process the teaching you heard and saw as a group. The focus won't be on accumulating information, but on how we should live in light of the Word of God. We want to help you apply the insights from Scripture practically, creatively, and from your heart as well as your head. At the end of the day, allowing the timeless truths from God's Word to transform our lives in Christ is our greatest aim.

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IMPACT

Impact is about putting what you just learned into action. It is about walking the talk. This section is to help apply the insights and principles learned in the lesson. It is by this application that the lessons will have an impact in you as well as through you. We ask that all groups do some sort of community project together, some time during each series. Most groups have found that they have made significant contributions to society through this, and have made a lasting impact on people's lives for Jesus.

This is a good place to have different group members close in prayer, even when the instructions don't specify. You can also provide some time, if the schedule allows, for people to reflect on the Prayer and Praise Report at the end of each session or take a little time to meet with a Spiritual Growth Partner.



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SESSION ONE

Running On Empty



CONNECT

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During each session, we will begin with a few questions to help you connect with one another and grow in your intimacy. Since this is your first time together (at least for this new series), take a few minutes to make sure everyone knows each other's names.

- As you begin, turn to the “Life Group Roster” on page 92. Take time to pass around your study guides and have everyone write down their contact information.
- Whether your group is new or ongoing, it's always important to reflect on and review your values together. On page 93, there is a Life Group Agreement with the values we've found most useful in sustaining healthy, balanced groups. Take a few minutes to go over the agreement together.
- One of the markers of a healthy and happy group is when everyone takes ownership of the group. A great way to help everyone be involved is to share in weekly responsibilities, whether it's taking turns praying for the group, providing snacks or providing drinks. You can turn to page 94 where you will find the Life Group Calendar and blank group tasks.
- In this series, we will have discussions based on God's promises of love, grace, mercy, peace, and comfort that we find all throughout Scripture. Through these discussions, we will discover more reasons for the hope that we find in Jesus. To start our series and help break the ice, go around and answer one of the following questions:

- Describe a time when you were the most tired you've ever been.



- If money was no object, where would you vacation and why?

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DVD SESSION

This study is designed to be used with an accompanying video teaching. Please play DVD Session One. Use the space below for notes, questions or comments you want to bring up in the discussion later.



GROW

In the following section, you will explore Bible passages and take part in discussions to help expand your knowledge on the topic of this session. If time is a concern, please choose just a few of the questions to answer and discuss in your group.

Take a minute and discuss what you learned or found most interesting or important from the video.

Read 1 Samuel 30:1-6

1 How would you describe David and his men's emotional state throughout this passage?

2 What do you think the writer of this book wants us to feel by writing, they "wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep"? How have you experienced these feelings in your own life?

3 Share some life circumstances, which drive people to the point where they just don't feel that they can go on?



4 What thoughts do you think were running through the minds of David and his men at this, their lowest point? How does David find strength and hope in this passage?

5 What are some ways we can find our strength in the Lord when we are running on empty?

Read Matthew 11:28-30

6 What does it mean to you, to go to Jesus? In what way or area do you feel Jesus calling you to “come to Him”?

7 How have you experienced Jesus’ rest and refreshment in the past? Why do you think rest always comes with surrender?

Read Isaiah 40:28-31

8 What state would you describe your life right now...walking, running, soaring, or something else?

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9 How do these passages give you a hope and desire to connect with God?

10 What is one thing you can do this week to start connecting with God on a deeper level?

Deeper Study

Read Romans 5:1-5

11 According to these verses, why can we find hope even in our sufferings? How have you seen the process that Paul describes in verses 3 and 4 in your life?



12 How does verse 5 bring you comfort and strength? According to verse 5, who is the source of our strength when we are running on empty?

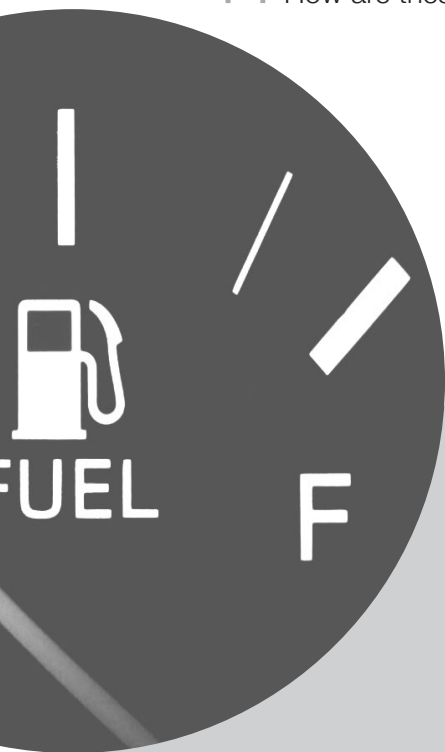
13 What are some practical ways we can tap into the power of the Holy Spirit when we are running on empty?

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Read Matthew 24:13, 2 Timothy 2:12, Hebrews 10:36, James 1:2-4, and James 1:12

14 How are these verses similar?

15 According to the above verses, what are some of the promises for those who endure?





IMPACT

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One of the core principles in Life Groups is to have an impact on the community around us. In the following section, we have given you some ideas of how you can have an impact in the community, both as a group and individually. Please go through and discuss how you can impact the community around you with the gospel.

- One of the greatest tools we have in spending time with God is to pray over other followers of Jesus. God has given us a community in the Church, to support and love each other. This communal bond is extremely beneficial to strengthen others through prayer.

Fill out the circles with names of people who could experience support and love in the manner God intended us to experience it. You've experienced this love and support; now pray for someone to experience that same support and love, and to come to your Life Group to get plugged in.

Family
(immediate or extended)

Familiar
(neighbors, kids, sports teams, school, and so forth)

Friends

Fun
(game, hobbies, hangouts)

Firm
(work)

● As we learned in this week's session, life gets busy, and we even get to a point that we don't have a whole lot of room to rest or time to spend with God. Some of these things are not our fault, it is just the hand we've been dealt, and we are just trying to survive. Others of us create a busy schedule without thought of rest for ourselves or our family. However it has happened, that is not how God intended for us to live our lives. We are created to need rest, and God built that into His instructions to live a full, godly life.

This week, ask God to guide you to see what needs to be cut out of your daily routine, to allow you to rest and even spend time with God. Write out some of these ideas and pray over them. Time spent with God will help you to have a clearer revelation of what God is showing you about your heart and how to deal with it. Through practice and conditioning, God will give you the rest that you so desperately need. Time spent with God will also ease your heart and give you a peace that you may not have felt in a long time, if ever. Prioritize God and enjoy the life that He intended you to live.

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Please take some time to end your group in prayer. You may use the Prayer and Praise Report on the following page as you pray and close your session for this week.



• RESOURCES

CHRISTIAN COUNSELING RESOURCES – Call for appointment

Jim Beebe	- 818.787.1242
Scott Williams	- 818.677.6898
Jan Rosser	- 818.378.9289
Leslie Sears	- 805.587.3956

- 18 FULLER PSYCHOLOGICAL & FAMILY SERVICES
Clinic Hours: Monday-Thursday 8:00 am - 9:00 pm and Friday 8:00 am - 5:00 pm
Pasadena (Main Office)
180 North Oakland Avenue
Pasadena, CA 91101
Phone: 626.584.5555 // www.fuller.edu/fuller-psychological-and-family-services
Correo de voz en Español 626.304.3754

CAL LUTHERAN COMMUNITY COUNSELING SERVICE
Clinic Hours: Monday-Thursday 9:00 am - 9:00 pm and Friday 9:00 am - 5:00 pm
31416 Agoura Rd, Suite 115
Agoura, Ca 91361
805.493.3390 // www.clucounseling.org

MONDAY PRAYER MEETING

Do you need prayer for the challenges and obstacles that life can bring? If so, please join us on Mondays, between the hours of 9:45 am - 11:30 am in Room 140. Please check in at the front office and you will be directed where to go from there.

Our Prayer Team is dedicated to pray, anoint, and give communion in Jesus' name, for every person who comes to the Prayer Room seeking prayer, according to their needs. Please note that we are closed on all major holidays or when the Shepherd Church office is closed.

Contact | Janet Velasquez – 818.428.8584

PRAYER AND PRAISE REPORT

This is a place where you can write each other's requests for prayer. You can also make a note when God answers a prayer. Pray for each other's requests. If you're new to group prayer, it's okay to pray silently.

Prayer Requests:

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Praise Reports:

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SESSION TWO

Losing a Loved One



CONNECT

During each session, we will begin with a few questions to help you connect with one another and grow in your intimacy. Please take a few minutes and answer at least one of the following questions:

- What day of your life would you most like to re-live and why?
- What would you want to be said about you at your memorial service?



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DVD SESSION

This study is designed to be used with an accompanying video teaching. Please play DVD Session Two. Use the space below for notes, questions or comments you want to bring up in the discussion later.



GROW

In the following section, you will explore Bible passages and take part in discussions to help expand your knowledge on the topic of this session. If time is a concern, please choose just a few of the questions to answer and discuss in your group.

Go around and share what stood out to you from the video testimony and teaching.

Read John 11:33-44

1 According to this passage, how would you describe Jesus' emotional state? How did Jesus react when He was confronted with the loss of His friend?



2 Why do you suppose Jesus reacted the way He did, in light of the fact that He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead?

*Grief is not a sign of weakness
nor a lack of faith... It is the
price of love*

– Unknown

3 What does Jesus' reaction to His friend Lazarus' death and the mourning people around Him, tell us about the character of God?

4 In what ways does Jesus' weeping at the loss of His friend, bring you comfort and hope? In what ways does it draw you closer to Him?

5 How can you help to bring God's comfort, compassion, sympathy, encouragement, etc. to someone who is mourning? In a world where people are experiencing loss everyday, how important is it for us to lift up Jesus?



*Blessed are those
who mourn, for they
will be comforted*

– Matthew 5:4

Read Isaiah 41:10, Matthew 5:4, and 1
Thessalonians 4:13-18

6 According to these verses, why
do Christ followers have hope even when
faced with a devastating loss of a loved one?

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Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

7 In what ways does God comfort us when we are mourning? How
has God comforted you in times of loss?

Read Revelation 21:4

8 How does this verse give you hope to keep seeking God in time
of loss?

9 What are some comforting words or actions that we can do,
individually and as a Life Group, for someone who has experienced
the loss of a loved one? As a Life Group, how can you help one
another through the process of mourning?

10 What steps can you take toward connecting with God to
receive the comfort, peace, and hope that only He can bring?

Deeper Study

Read Matthew 5:4 and Revelation 21:1-4

11 What does Jesus say will happen in the kingdom of heaven? How do these verses bring you hope in times of grief?

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Read Isaiah 43:1-2

12 According to these verses, why can we have hope in times of loss? Why is faith so important in times of mourning?

13 What three metaphors does the Isaiah passage use to describe difficult times in our lives? How could losing a loved one evoke similar emotions as each one of those metaphors used by Isaiah?

14 How do these verses bring you hope in times of loss?





IMPACT

One of the core principles in Life Groups is to have an impact on the community around us. In the following section, we have given you some ideas of how you can have an impact in the community, both as a group and individually. Please go through and discuss how you can impact the community around you with the gospel.

- Tonight as a group, we would like you to spend some time with your group specifically praying for any group member who has lost a loved one. You may consider surrounding each person and laying hands on them as you all pray for them.

There may not be anyone in your group who has lost someone recently, but we all know someone who has. Lift them up in prayer. Allow everyone in your group a chance to pray and be a part of this small community building exercise. Even if the same words are spoken, the power of prayer is that it is reflective, can cause one to think, be thankful, and is powerful in bringing people together for peace and comfort.



- This week, we learned that losing a loved one is extremely difficult, and there are ways of mourning that are productive and healthy, and others that restrict the process. Because we are a community, we are all a part of someone's grieving process. Some may be more involved than others but we are all still connected.

Prayer is a huge connection that we all have to God and for one another. Prayer is a powerful discipline of connection that can take the focus off of ourselves and put it on God and others. This week, we want to encourage you to go for a prayer walk. During your prayer walk, pray about friends, family, co-workers, and neighbors who have lost a loved. Ask God to teach you through your time of prayer, how to interact with these people and show them love and sympathy during their grieving process. Ask God to guide you in what words to say and when not to say anything at all, but just listen to them as they talk and share about their pain.

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If you have recently lost someone close to you, take time to remember your lost loved one and ask God to heal the pain that you feel. Their loss will leave a hole, but time with God will allow you to remember the good times you had with them, and the joy that that part of your lives together brought. The memory of this person and their powerful and inspiring characteristics are good for our healing as they can lead us to connecting with God and seeking God for peace and comfort in such difficult times. It is said that time heals all wounds. That is true, but there is time with God that is far more healing than just sweeping the pain under a rug and trying to forget about it. Allow God to cleanse you as you mourn your loss. Allow the tears to flow as you remember the good times with your loved one. Pray to God for peace and comfort as you recall your memories and relive your experiences in your mind and heart.

Please take some time to end your group in prayer. You may use the Prayer and Praise Report on the following page as you pray and close your session for this week.

• RESOURCES

GRIEF SHARE

Grief Share is a seminar and support group that features biblical teaching on grief and recovery topics. This is a place where you can find help as you grieve. You don't have to be alone as you make the journey through grief. We invite anyone suffering from the loss of a loved one to join us for this healing time. You are invited to participate in one or all of the sessions beginning at any time. Please let us know if you will be attending so we can provide materials for you. Visit www.griefshare.org or call for our current class dates, time and room number.

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Contact | Kay Norris - 818.831.9333 x225

IN HIS ARMS: A MISCARRIAGE MINISTRY

Losing a baby leaves behind a pain that is often hard for others to understand. If your miscarriage has left you feeling hopeless, angry or confused, you are not alone. In His Arms is a six-week support class that helps hurting moms come together to find comfort and healing. We will explore tough questions through God's Word and the testimonies of moms who have found healing after their loss.

The next two support group sessions begin on Thursday, January 26 and September 29, 2016 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm off campus.

Contact | Kim Wynott - 818.927.2767

THRONE OF GRACE

Throne of Grace is a confidential 12-week ministry set out to assist women in their post abortive trauma that will enable them to seek healing and forgiveness in Christ. The complex issues surrounding the choice to terminate a crisis pregnancy makes every woman's journey individual. Post abortion stress may affect the spiritual and mental health of women desperately trying to cope in a society and culture that leave no area for her to mourn her loss. She needs to know that God's sacrifice covers all of her sins. When a woman is restored to the right relationship with God, she is open to a brighter future benefiting His kingdom.

Contact | Ruth Martenson - 818.935.2214 or 818.831.9333 x444 (calls are confidential)

CHRISTIAN COUNSELING RESOURCES – Call for appointment

Jim Beebe	- 818.787.1242
Scott Williams	- 818.677.6898
Jan Rosser	- 818.378.9289
Leslie Sears	- 805.587.3956

FULLER PSYCHOLOGICAL & FAMILY SERVICES

Clinic Hours: Monday-Thursday 8:00 am - 9:00 pm and Friday 8:00 am - 5:00 pm

Pasadena (Main Office)
180 North Oakland Avenue
Pasadena, CA 91101

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Phone: 626.584.5555 // www.fuller.edu/fuller-psychological-and-family-services

Correo de voz en Español 626.304.3754

CAL LUTHERAN COMMUNITY COUNSELING SERVICE

Clinic Hours: Monday - Thursday 9:00 am - 9:00 pm and Friday 9:00 am - 5:00 pm

31416 Agoura Rd, Suite 115
Agoura, Ca 91361

Westlake Village 805.493.3390 // www.clucounseling.org

CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLY COUNSELING SERVICES

Counseling is available from 10:00 am to 8:00 pm on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, and for couples only 11:00 am – 5:00 pm every other Saturday.

2424 Colorado Blvd.
Los Angeles, Ca 90041

Call Blythe at 323.315.0963 // trc@cachurch.com // cachurch.com

WEST VALLEY COUNSELING CENTER

The mission at West Valley Counseling Center is to provide high-quality, affordable therapy and family counseling in a comfortable, private practice setting. Our qualified therapists work with individuals, relationships, traditional families, and non-traditional families to help ease life's burdens and to provide specialty services, such as marriage counseling, child custody mediation, and parenting education.

818.758.9450 // info@westvalleycounseling.org

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SAN FERNANDO VALLEY COUNSELING CENTER

The Center is a self-supporting, nonprofit agency, which provides low-fee, psychological counseling to the community, on a sliding scale basis. We also provide outreach services to the community, as well as referral sources. Licensed professionals from the mental health field donate their time to train, supervise, and provide continuing education to our volunteer counselors.

818.341.1111 // sfvcc7@sbcglobal.net

THE CENTER FOR INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY COUNSELING

At CIFIC, we are dedicated to providing a diverse spectrum of mental health services for individuals and families from lower to middle income homes. Our counseling programs are designed to promote healthy relationships and improve the overall well-being of our clients. We are also an educational and training facility for Marriage and Family Therapist trainees and interns who are in the process of earning their hours towards becoming licensed counselors. This service allows us to provide greater mental health resources for the community.

818.761.2227 // information@cifc1.org

PRAYER AND PRAISE REPORT

This is a place where you can write each other's requests for prayer. You can also make a note when God answers a prayer. Pray for each other's requests. If you're new to group prayer, it's okay to pray silently.

Prayer Requests:

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Praise Reports:

there's Hope



SESSION THREE

Shattered Dreams



CONNECT

During each session, we will begin with a few questions to help you connect with one another and grow in your intimacy. Please take a few minutes and answer at least one of the following questions:

- Describe the worst storm or natural disaster you ever had to live through.
- What is one thing on your “bucket list”?

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DVD SESSION

This study is designed to be used with an accompanying video teaching. Please play DVD Session Three. Use the space below for notes, questions or comments you want to bring up in the discussion later.



GROW

In the following section, you will explore Bible passages and take part in discussions to help expand your knowledge on the topic of this session. If time is a concern, please choose just a few of the questions to answer and discuss in your group.

Go around the group and allow everyone to share what they found interesting from the video lesson and testimony.

- 1 What does it mean to have your dreams shattered? Describe one of your dreams that did not come to be. What did that do to the course of your life?

Read John 4:1-30

2 What seems to be the problem with this woman's life before she met Jesus?

3 List some of the dreams that were shattered for this woman. What physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual symptoms could possibly be evident in her life?

4 What do you think her self-worth would have been like? How would you describe the state of this woman's self-worth?

5 How do you relate to this woman's shattered dreams? How have you experienced some of the same emotions or maybe some others not listed by the group?

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*You
become like
what you worship.
When you gaze in awe,
admiration, and wonder at
something or someone, you
begin to take on something of
the character of the object of
your worship*

– N.T. Wright

6 Even though this woman was a Samaritan, and living a life far from God, what kind of hope did Jesus give her, just by His treatment of her? What does this teach you about how to treat others in similar situations?

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Re-read John 4:25-26

7 What does Jesus reveal to this woman? How did this information bring hope to her life? How does this bring hope to your life?

8 What does this story teach you about encounters with Jesus? How have you encountered Jesus?

9 How is Jesus the hope and solution to all of our shattered dreams?

10 What step do you need to take to encounter Jesus, and allow Him to relieve your worries and pain of your shattered dreams?



Deeper Study

Read Psalm 34:4 and Jeremiah 29:11

11 How do these verses bring you hope when your dreams have been shattered?

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Read Job 14:7-9

12 How does this verse help us better understand the two verses in the previous question better? How does it encourage you when you have lost hope?

Read John 4:39-42

13 What is the woman's response to Jesus? How do you think this woman of poor reputation, was able to convince the whole town of what happened?

14 What hope does it bring you to know that encountering Jesus will bring you self-worth and fulfillment, so that you will never thirst again?





IMPACT

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One of the core principles in Life Groups is to have an impact on the community around us. In the following section, we have given you some ideas of how you can have an impact in the community, both as a group and individually. Please go through and discuss how you can impact the community around you with the gospel.

- It is our desire to see our Life Groups serve in their communities. One way of doing that is through the Community Impact Project. The Community Impact Project serves as a way for you and your Life Group to be a light in your neighborhood. It is often noted, “Preach always, and if necessary, use words.” The point is that we are walking witnesses of our relationship with Jesus as we become His hands and feet to the world.

Another benefit of doing a Community Impact Project is the bond that is formed in your group by serving together. Over the course of a seven-week series, your Life Group will bond over discussion, but during a few hours of serving others, your Life Group can deepen that bond as you work and serve together.

On our website, www.lifegroups.org/impact, there are the names, contact information, and descriptions of organizations you can partner with. These outreach ideas range from inviting someone to Life Group to serving in different areas of the city. Feel free to be creative. If your Life Group comes up with an idea not listed, please contact us so we can share ideas and help you bring your Community Impact Project to life.

You may also turn to page 95 where you will find the Community Impact Project worksheet. This worksheet will help you organize your project and ensure it gets done.

- You learned in your discussion time and video lesson this week, that hope comes from Christ and His Spirit that indwells you. The Holy Spirit will help you to accomplish amazing and astonishing feats, far beyond your perceived capabilities, and give you a sense of worth that has eternal value. Your job is to connect with the Holy Spirit in order to realize these incredible powers.

Take some time during the next few days to pray, and then write out the kind of person that you want to be. Pray that God will reveal some characteristics that He wants to enhance in you or that He would like to trim down or cut out. Next, write a letter to yourself to explain what you feel God has revealed to you. Write out the good things that you want to do in your community and for God's kingdom. Write down how you would like your relationship with God to be and how much more you would like to experience His love and grace. Write how you would like God's love to overflow in your life to others with whom you share your life.

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This can be a very powerful exercise for you as you stow away this letter for the next six months. Do not open it until then, but pray and connect with God, allowing Him to make changes in your heart and mind. In six months, open the letter and see where God has taken you.

Please take some time to end your group in prayer. You may use the Prayer and Praise Report on the following page as you pray and close your session for this week.



• RESOURCES

CHRISTIAN COUNSELING RESOURCES – Call for appointment

Jim Beebe	- 818.787.1242
Scott Williams	- 818.677.6898
Jan Rosser	- 818.378.9289
Leslie Sears	- 805.587.3956

40 MONDAY PRAYER MEETING

Do you need prayer for the challenges and obstacles that life can bring? If so, please join us on Mondays, between the hours of 9:45 am - 11:30 am in Room 140. Please check in at the front office and you will be directed where to go from there.

Our Prayer Team is dedicated to pray, anoint, and give communion in Jesus' name, for every person who comes to the Prayer Room seeking prayer, according to their needs. Please note that we are closed on all major holidays or when the Shepherd Church office is closed.

Contact | Janet Velasquez – 818.428.8584

FULLER PSYCHOLOGICAL & FAMILY SERVICES

Clinic Hours: Monday-Thursday 8:00 am - 9:00 pm and Friday 8:00 am - 5:00 pm

Pasadena (Main Office)
180 North Oakland Avenue
Pasadena, CA 91101

Phone: 626.584.5555 // www.fuller.edu/fuller-psychological-and-family-services

Correo de voz en Español 626.304.3754

CAL LUTHERAN COMMUNITY COUNSELING SERVICE

Clinic Hours: 9:00 am - 9:00 pm Monday - Thursday and 9:00 am - 5:00 pm Friday

31416 Agoura Rd
Suite 115
Agoura, Ca 91361

Westlake Village 805.493.3390 // www.clucounseling.org

CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLY COUNSELING SERVICES

Counseling is available from 10:00 am to 8:00 pm on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, and for couples only 11:00 am – 5:00 pm every other Saturday.

2424 Colorado Blvd.
Los Angeles, Ca 90041

Call Blythe at 323.315.0963 // trc@cachurch.com // cachurch.com

WEST VALLEY COUNSELING CENTER

41

The mission at West Valley Counseling Center is to provide high-quality, affordable therapy and family counseling in a comfortable, private practice setting. Our qualified therapists work with individuals, relationships, traditional families, and non-traditional families to help ease life's burdens and to provide specialty services, such as marriage counseling, child custody mediation, and parenting education.

818.758.9450 // info@westvalleycounseling.org

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY COUNSELING CENTER

The Center is a self-supporting, nonprofit agency, which provides low-fee, psychological counseling to the community, on a sliding scale basis. We also provide outreach services to the community, as well as referral sources. Licensed professionals from the mental health field donate their time to train, supervise, and provide continuing education to our volunteer counselors.

818.341.1111 // sfvcc7@sbcglobal.net

THE CENTER FOR INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY COUNSELING

At CIFIC, we are dedicated to providing a diverse spectrum of mental health services for individuals and families from lower to middle income homes. Our counseling programs are designed to promote healthy relationships and improve the overall well-being of our clients. We are also an educational and training facility for Marriage and Family Therapist trainees and interns who are in the process of earning their hours towards becoming licensed counselors. This service allows us to provide greater mental health resources for the community.

818.761.2227 // information@cific1.org

SUPPORT GROUPS

Lean on us for support. You are not alone. Come to a meeting. All NAMI-SFV programs are FREE! <http://www.namisfv.org>

FREE small groups for individuals and family members.

42 Small groups (usually a group of six to ten) share their mental illness problems and stories. Since everyone attending has or is going through the same things, everyone understands and offers comfort. Often someone has a helpful idea or describes a similar experience and how it worked out. NAMI San Fernando Valley is made up of volunteers who have faced mental illness and have experience that can help you. We've been there and we are here to help you. We welcome you to visit any of our regularly scheduled meetings. No one has to share unless he or she wants to. There is no need to register in advance, RSVP or prepare. Simply join us at any time to see and hear for yourself how NAMI San Fernando Valley helps. Each group is coordinated by a long-time NAMI San Fernando Valley volunteer who keeps things going and makes sure everyone who wants to talk gets a chance.

NAMI SFV SUPPORT GROUPS

Attend any meeting, any time, for support and answers to important questions regarding you and your loved one with mental illness. Locations throughout the San Fernando and Santa Clarita Valleys.

VAN NUYS

SFV Community Mental Health Inc. Center for Family Living
14545 Sherman Circle, Van Nuys, CA 91405

Project Return is dedicated to improving the quality of life for people experiencing mental illnesses through educational, vocational, and supportive housing services so that they may live productive and fulfilling lives in the community.

Project Return Support and Recovery group for Mental Health Consumers

888.448.9777 // <http://www.mhala.org/project-return.htm>

RESEDA/NORTHRIDGE

Northridge Hospital Medical Center, 18300 Roscoe Blvd., Northridge, CA 91325

DBSA (Depression, Bipolar Support Alliance) peer to peer support group for mental health consumers.

818.570.DBSA (3272) // <http://www.dbsanorthridge.org>

Para información en español por favor póngase en contacto con Cindy en 818.921.6444

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SANTA CLARITA

Santa Clarita Mental Health Clinic
23501 Cinema Drive #210, Santa Clarita, CA 91355
Support Group for all family members and friends of people with mental illness.

Real Life Church (Rm. 212)
23841 Newhall Ranch Road, Valencia, CA 91355

818.994.6747

SYLMAR

GRUPOS de APOYO en Español
Olive View Community Mental Health Urgent Care Center
14659 Olive View Dr., Sylmar, CA 91342

Para informacion en espanol: spanish@namisfv.org // 818.994.6747

Marque el simbolo denumero. Despues del tono, diga su nombre y un numero de telefono donde podamos localizarlo durante el dia. Alquien que habla espanol lo llamara en cuarenta y ocho horas.

PRAYER AND PRAISE REPORT

This is a place where you can write each other's requests for prayer. You can also make a note when God answers a prayer. Pray for each other's requests. If you're new to group prayer, it's okay to pray silently.

44

Prayer Requests:

Praise Reports:

there's
Hope

SESSION FOUR

Marriage in Turmoil



CONNECT

During each session, we will begin with a few questions to help you connect with one another and grow in your intimacy. Since this is your first time together (at least for this new series), take a few minutes to make sure everyone knows each other's names.

46

What are a couple of things that you remember about your grandparents?

What is one of your biggest pet peeves?



DVD SESSION

This study is designed to be used with an accompanying video teaching. Please play DVD Session Four. Use the space below for notes, questions or comments you want to bring up in the discussion later.



GROW

In the following section, you will explore Bible passages and take part in discussions to help expand your knowledge on the topic of this session. If time is a concern, please choose just a few of the questions to answer and discuss in your group.

Go around and share what stood out to you from the video.

- 1 Share the model of marriage that you grew up with.

2 How was the model of marriage that you experienced growing up, different from the models of marriage that you have seen in the movies or read about in books and magazines?

48

3 There are many reasons for marriages to begin to fail. List and describe some of the symptoms of a failing marriage.

Read Proverbs 18:1, Philippians 2:3-4, and James 3:16, 4:1-4

4 How do these passages describe what many people experience in their marriages?

5 Define selfishness and coveting separately. How do selfishness and covetousness show themselves to be the root of most of the problems that are faced in marriages?



6 What does it mean to “Lift Up Jesus”?
What are some ways people can “Lift Up Jesus” in their marriages?

Every good relationship, especially marriage, is based on respect. If it isn't based on respect, nothing that appears to be good will last very long

– Amy Grant

7 Describe what aspects/characteristics from both people that are needed to complete a thriving, Jesus honoring marriage?

8 How can “Lifting Up Jesus” in our individual lives, improve our marriages?

Read Philippians 2:5-8

9 According to Paul, what does it mean to have the same attitude as Christ Jesus? How can an attitude of Christ Jesus change the relationship within your marriage?



10 Based upon the fact that marriages are failing at an all time rate, how important is it for Christians to “Life Up Jesus” in every aspect of our lives?

50 11 What is the next step in your relationship with God so that He can begin to change your perspective within your marriage?

Deeper Study

Read Ephesians 4:32-5:2

12 How is it possible to live a life of love? What are the connections of our faith in Christ and our marriages?

Love is not just tolerance. It's not just distant appreciation. It's a warm sense of, 'I am enjoying the fact that you are you'

– N.T. Wright

13 How do you think God can use our marriages as part of our spiritual growth?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

14 How does love suppress selfishness and covetousness? How does losing selfishness and covetousness further transform you into the likeness of Christ?

51

15 What are some things in your life that you covet? What are some specific areas in your marriage where your selfishness can seep in? What do you think could happen in your marriage if you trust God to meet your needs?





IMPACT

52

One of the core principles in Life Groups is to have an impact on the community around us. In the following section, we have given you some ideas of how you can have an impact in the community, both as a group and individually. Please go through and discuss how you can impact the community around you with the gospel.

- Take some time at the end of your group time and pray over each of the couples and/or married individuals in your group. You may not know what is going on with each person or the relationship with some of the couples, and that is okay. Specifics are not necessarily important for this. Pray that each couple will be centered on the Holy Spirit's power and that each individual will follow the lead of the Spirit in humble service of their spouse. Pray that love will be at the forefront of every action and word that takes place within each home. Prayer is powerful and can heal many ills, including relationships that have soured. Take time to invite God to be active in each family, as the Life Group lifts up each person and family in the powerful discipline of prayer.



- This week, come up with and execute a plan to serve your spouse. Jesus teaches that we are to serve one another humbly and this concept starts with those closest to us. This service is not to get them to reciprocate and do something for you. This is simply a way of showing that you love them and care about your relationship. Some ideas might be:

Do a chore that neither of you care to do

Write a love letter or poem

Buy and give a small gift like chocolates or a small gadget

Give a foot massage or do her nails

Take the kids out to give your spouse some time alone

These are just a few ideas. Be creative! You know your spouse and know how to make them feel special! Have fun with it and enjoy the time you spend doing it!

*You will find it hard to hear
from God until you let
go your rights and your
agenda*

– John Eldredge



Please take some time to end your group in prayer. You may use the Prayer and Praise Report on the following page as you pray and close your session for this week.

• RESOURCES

MASTERING YOUR MARRIAGE

Perhaps the most rewarding and yet most frustrating relationship in our lives is the one with our spouse. No other relationship holds such promise for good or potential for pain. Even having a Christian marriage does not immunize us from the problems and pressures of the world. We struggle with the same issues that others do: communication, time management, money, sex, etc.

- 54 Mastering your Marriage provides tools for developing strong and divorce-proof marriages. The series is designed to be fun while looking at ways to understand ourselves, our spouse, and our marriage.

The next classes start February 19. Please register by calling Jim Beebe at Abundant Life Christian Counseling.

Contact | Abundant Life Counseling - 818.787.1242

LOCAL CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY COUNSELING RESOURCES

– Call for appointment

Jim Beebe	- 818.787.1242
Scott Williams	- 818.677.6898
Jan Rosser	- 818.378.9289
Leslie Sears	- 805.587.3956

FULLER PSYCHOLOGICAL & FAMILY SERVICES

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Pasadena (Main Office)

180 North Oakland Avenue

Pasadena, CA 91101

Phone: 626.584.5555 // www.fuller.edu/fuller-psychological-and-family-services

Correo de voz en Español 626.304.3754

CAL LUTHERAN COMMUNITY COUNSELING SERVICE

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31416 Agoura Rd, Suite 115

Agoura, Ca 91361

Westlake Village 805.493.3390 // www.clucounseling.org

CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLY COUNSELING SERVICES

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2424 Colorado Blvd.

Los Angeles, Ca 90041

Call Blythe at 323.315.0963 // trc@cachurch.com // cachurch.com

DIVORCE CARE

Divorce Care is a friendly, caring group of people who will walk alongside you through one of life's most difficult experiences. Don't go through separation or divorce alone. This fourteen week class occurs twice a year: in the spring and in the fall. Visit www.divorcecare.org and click on the link "Find a Group" in the top left corner. Enter your zip code to locate current classes that are close to your home. Please call 800-489-7778 for class dates and times.



PRAYER AND PRAISE REPORT

This is a place where you can write each other's requests for prayer. You can also make a note when God answers a prayer. Pray for each other's requests. If you're new to group prayer, it's okay to pray silently.

Prayer Requests:

56

Praise Reports:

there's
Hope

SESSION FIVE

Financial Crisis



CONNECT

During each session, we will begin with a few questions to help you connect with one another and grow in your intimacy. Please take a few minutes and answer at least one of the following questions:

58

- What is the first thing you would buy if you won the lottery?
- Describe your financial position when you first were out on your own, graduated college, and/or first married. How did you manage through this time?



DVD SESSION

This study is designed to be used with an accompanying video teaching. Please play DVD Session Five. Use the space below for notes, questions or comments you want to bring up in the discussion later.



GROW

In the following section, you will explore Bible passages and take part in discussions to help expand your knowledge on the topic of this session. If time is a concern, please choose just a few of the questions to answer and discuss in your group.

Go around and share one thing that stood out to you from the video lesson and testimony.

1 What are some identifying markers that reveal a person to be in a financial crisis?



Read Luke 12:22-34

2 What do these passages teach you about God's provision and faithfulness to His creation? What reasons does Luke give us to not worry?

3 What are some worries that we often feel during times of financial crisis?

4 Go around and share how you have experienced God's provision in time of financial difficulty.



Read Psalm 34:4

5 According to this verse, what must we do in order to live out Luke 12:22-34?

6 Why do you think seeking God relieves our worry and anxiety in times of financial crisis? What are some ways we can seek God in these times?

7 How is reading God's word, one way of seeking Him? Why is reading God's word so important in times of any crisis, especially financial crisis?

61



8 How do the Psalm 34 and Luke 12 passages bring you hope?

Read Hebrews 4:12

9 According to this verse, how can God's word bring hope in times of financial crisis?

10 Go around and share a time when God's word brought you comfort and hope in a difficult time.

Deeper Study

Read Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-37

*Let us think often that
our only business in
this life is to please God.
Perhaps all besides is but
folly and vanity*

– Brother Lawrence

11 According to these passages, how did the early Church take care of each other? How is this concept so entirely foreign to the western Church culture today?

12 Keeping in mind that the Church is made up of people, not an organization, how does this passage, especially verses 33-34, further the responsibility of the Church body to take care of each other?

13 How does this concept of taking care of each other, go along with the theme in Luke 12 of “do not worry” that is weaved in throughout this entire passage?

14 How is the hope in Jesus evident in a situation where believers are taking care of one another’s needs?



IMPACT

One of the core principles in Life Groups is to have an impact on the community around us. In the following section, we have given you some ideas of how you can have an impact in the community, both as a group and individually. Please go through and discuss how you can impact the community around you with the gospel.

63

- We all have friends, family, and co-workers who need to experience God in a good way. One way to help them come to a knowing relationship with Him is to pray for them with your Life Group, that they would find a loving relationship with Jesus. We would like for you and your Life Group to visit the Blessing List on page 100. Spend some time in your Life Group sharing names of men and women to encounter Jesus. Pray for them to submit their lives to the love of Jesus. After all, the greatest blessing anyone can receive is to be in relationship with the living God.

- As we learned in this session, learning to rely on God can be difficult, but necessary, to live the way God intended for us to live. God knows that we will struggle but wants us to experience victory as we willingly give up certain things we have placed in higher priority to God. This reprioritization will help you to step into a more disciplined way of living so that you might encounter God more throughout our days.

Take time this week to sit down, pray, and write out some of the things that keep you from God. These may actually be good things in your life, but write them down anyway. Talk with a godly person in your life that you trust to be honest with you on these things. Take time to pray over the next week or two about your schedule and busy-ness that keeps you from experiencing God's grace the way He wants you to.

Ultimately, this time spent with God helps you in putting Him at the center of your life, and letting go of the things that hinder the power of the Holy Spirit and His influence on your whole life. Let Him in and experience life in a new and exciting way!

Please take some time to end your group in prayer. You may use the Prayer and Praise Report on the following page as you pray and close your session for this week.

• RESOURCES

FINANCIAL PEACE

Join the Financial Peace University from finance guru Dave Ramsey as this Bible-based curriculum teaches people how to handle money God's way. These all new nine-week DVD lessons from Dave provide you with the information you need to achieve your financial goals. Contact Pastor Rick Kasel for more information. You can also register for another location and time at www.daveramsey.com/fpu.

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Contact | Rick Kasel - 818.831.9333 x435 Stewardship Pastor

FINANCIAL COUNSELING

We meet with individual members to discuss financial challenges and work with them finding appropriate solutions for their individual situations. We help with debt reduction, savings and investments, major purchase decisions, lease vs. buy and more.

Contact | Rick Kasel - 818.831.9333 x435 Stewardship Pastor



PRAYER AND PRAISE REPORT

This is a place where you can write each other's requests for prayer. You can also make a note when God answers a prayer. Pray for each other's requests. If you're new to group prayer, it's okay to pray silently.

Prayer Requests:

65

Praise Reports:

there's
Hope

SESSION SIX

Trapped in Sin



CONNECT

During each session, we will begin with a few questions to help you connect with one another and grow in your intimacy. Please take a few minutes and answer at least one of the following questions:

67

- What is the funniest or most embarrassing thing you actually got in trouble for?
- If you could time travel back to any point in your life, what would you tell your younger self?



DVD SESSION

This study is designed to be used with an accompanying video teaching. Please play DVD Session Six. Use the space below for notes, questions or comments you want to bring up in the discussion later.



GROW

In the following section, you will explore Bible passages and take part in discussions to help expand your knowledge on the topic of this session. If time is a concern, please choose just a few of the questions to answer and discuss in your group.

Go around and share what points stood out to you from the video.

Read Luke 7:36-50 and Luke 18:9-14

1 What do the two men have in common? How are each of the two men “stuck in sin”?

2 These passages show us real people who were stuck in sin. How do you relate to either of these two people?



69

3 What is Jesus' response to these two "sinners" when they were finally ready to repent, turning away from their old way of life? What about Jesus' response to these "sinners" brings hope to you in your sin?

Read Luke 5:29-32

4 What is Jesus' response to the Pharisees' questions? How is Jesus' response so different than the response of people and the world, even today?

5 How do Jesus' response in the Luke passages we read, bring freedom from shame and guilt, yet also draw us toward holiness?

*You were made by God
and for God and until
you understand that, life will
never make sense*

– Rick Warren

*Jesus replied,
"Very truly I tell you,
everyone who sins is
a slave to sin. Now a
slave has no permanent
place in the family, but a son
belongs to it forever. So if the
Son sets you free, you will be
free indeed.*

– John 8:34-36

Read Romans 8:26-27

6 According to these verses, in what ways is the Holy Spirit a huge part of our finding freedom from sin?

7 How have you experienced the power of the Holy Spirit, free you from a sin or temptation in your life?

Read 2 Corinthians 12:9

8 How does this verse bring you hope when you are “stuck in sin”? Knowing that God does not want us to keep sinning, what do you think Paul means by “I will boast in my weakness”?

9 Go around and share a time when God was strong in your weakness.

10 In what ways can the Holy Spirit help us to live out Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 12:9?

11 What steps can you take this week in order to experience the power of God breaking the chains of sin in your life?

Deeper Study

Read Matthew 9:1-8 and John 8:1-11

12 Describe some of the similarities and differences in the “adulterous woman’s” and the “paralytic man’s” encounters with Jesus.

71

13 What was the reaction of Jesus in both situations? What can we learn from Jesus’ reaction that will help us when we are “stuck in sin”? What can we learn from Jesus’ reaction when we are helping someone who is “stuck in sin”?

14 Both individuals came to Jesus in very different situations but both involved people other than the main individuals. One scenario involved friends and the other involved the “justice system” of the time. How have you seen the church community help someone who is “stuck in sin”?

Read Hebrews 12:1-2

15 How does this passage show the importance of community in our spiritual growth? What are some ways we can fix our eyes on Jesus in order to “throw off” our sin and run the race set before us?



IMPACT

One of the core principles in Life Groups is to have an impact on the community around us. In the following section, we have given you some ideas of how you can have an impact in the community, both as a group and individually. Please go through and discuss how you can impact the community around you with the gospel.

72

- Confession is something that is too often ignored in today's churches. The truth is, this can truly be one of the most liberating Christian practices that we have available. Here are a couple of suggestions on how to do this as a group.

Try and break into gender specific groups. Make this a quiet and intimate time between group members. Take some time to quiet your heart, pray silently, and ask God to help you "confess" something real that you are holding on to. Group members may not want to confess aloud, and that's perfectly okay for the first time.

Note: if you have a prayer partner, a mentor, a growth partner, accountability partner, then take this week to meet with them and begin this process of healing.



● This week, we learned that sin has a powerful hold on many people. But we also learned what a transformed life looks like, as well as our responsibilities to live out our faith in practical ways. For this week, we want to encourage you to step out of your comfort zone and do something that you perhaps didn't think possible. As transformed followers of Jesus, we are able to bless the world around us by showing them love. One practical way we can do that this week, is by visiting a local convalescent home or boys home/ girls home.

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On the Life Groups website, www.lifegroups.org, you will find the contact information for Pacific Lodge Youth Services, Phoenix House, and different convalescent homes, all of which are located in the San Fernando Valley. Click the RESOURCES button, then click Life Group Impact Activities for details. This list is only a suggestion for those who reside in the San Fernando Valley, but do not limit yourselves to these places. There are plenty of opportunities for you to be able to serve in your own community, but it does require a little bit of research.

Our goal is to partner with existing agencies and come alongside what they are already doing. There is no need to reinvent the wheel. Most of the time, the simple act of spending time and hearing people's stories is all they are looking for. Can you imagine being confined to a group home and rarely getting visitors? Most people are so appreciative that you would take the time to visit them and spend some time talking to them. Who knows, you may even get a chance to pray for some of them. Showing up with a servant's heart is what many of these places lack. We can make an IMPACT, one visitation at a time.

Please take some time to end your group in prayer. You may use the Prayer and Praise Report on the following page as you pray and close your session for this week.

• RESOURCES

CHRIST POWERED RECOVERY

Christ Powered Recovery is a fellowship of men and women who have been affected by alcohol, drugs or sexual addictions, as well as the families who have also been affected. We, as a fellowship, practice the 12-step recovery program of Alcoholics Anonymous. We believe these steps to be a practical guide to biblical life-changing principles. We believe and trust in the Holy Trinity (The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit) to be our higher power.

- 74 The ultimate goal of Christ Powered Recovery is to build a personal relationship with Jesus Christ in people's lives. We welcome you and pray you find hope in these words spoken by Jesus Christ, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28). This group meets every Monday at Shepherd Church, Porter Ranch from 7 pm to 8:30 pm in Rooms 130-132.

Contact | Jeff – 818.888.7501

XXXCHURCH

Here's what we're about: we're about helping people live better lives.

Porn addiction is one of the most difficult addictions to overcome, but XXXchurch is your resource online for pornography addiction help. We prevail over sex and porn addiction through awareness, prevention, and recovery.

Sometimes just talking about this stuff is enough to start a breakthrough. Don't let sex addiction or pornography addiction keep you feeling trapped. There is freedom for all of us.

Pornography is threatening lives, families, and children, which is why XXXchurch offers addiction recovery resources for men, women, parents, and couples. We have frequent articles and blog posts on how to conquer difficult issues, as well as porn accountability and filtering software called X3watch.

Why porn? There are plenty of statistics about the ways porn is encroaching on our society, especially among the younger generation – we saw the need and decided to do something about it.

Beyond porn, our larger mission is this: we love Jesus and we want people to learn about him. We believe the best way to do that is to talk to people wherever they are and show them through our actions how much Jesus loves them.

Got a question you can't find the answer for? Send us an email to info@XXXchurch.com and we'll get back to you as quickly as we can.

NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

Narcotics Anonymous is a fellowship or society of men and women for whom Drugs had become a major problem. ...We are not interested in what 75 or how much you used or who your connections were, what you have done in the past, how much or how little you have, but only in what you want to do about your problem and how we can help.

Our Primary Purpose - to carry the message to the addict who still suffers.

If you think you may have a problem with drugs of any kind, please call our helpline or come to one of our meetings! This simple act can be the start of a new life free from the constant pain of addiction.

Regional Helpline Numbers

English: 800.TODAYNA // 800.863.2962

Espanol: 888.NAAHORA // 888.622.4672

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Alcoholics Anonymous is an international fellowship of men and women who have had a drinking problem. It is nonprofessional, self-supporting, multiracial, apolitical, and available almost everywhere. There are no age or education requirements. Membership is open to anyone who wants to do something about his or her drinking problem.

Van Nuys, California

A.A. San Fernando Valley C.O.

Main: 818.988.3001

TDD: 818.988.0342

Site: www.sfvaa.org

Santa Clarita, California

SCV Central Office Of A.A.

24 Hour Phone: 661.250.9922

Site: www.aascv.org

Thousand Oaks, California
24-Hour Answering Svc: 805.495.1111

BAND OF BROTHERS

Band of Brothers is a men's Life Group that focuses on using the tools God has given to live a successful life through study, discussion, and accountability, in order that men might continue to be built up into men of integrity. This men's group meets every Monday evening at 7 pm in room 201. Acts 4:13 says, "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and
76 took note that these men had been with Jesus."

Contact | Martin Morehouse - 818.831.9333 x2253

ENCOUNTERS

An Encounter, through the Life Groups Ministry, is an invitation to surrender completely to God. In order to experience freedom from habits, burdens, wrong thinking, bitterness and past experiences that hold you back, you must be willing to surrender every area of your life to the Lord.

Freedom to live the life God created you to live. Can you imagine what that would be like for you?

Hundreds of people have attended these life-changing weekends and walked away with tremendous testimonies of how God has changed their lives. Be ready for God to change you from the inside out. You will truly be blessed.

There will be approximately 60 to 80 other men or women on the weekend with you. Food, lodging, and transportation will be included in the cost of registration. They are held at Christian camps in the Southern California area. You will experience fellowship like never before, with others from Shepherd.

During the weekend, there will be testimonies, biblical teachings, and time with the Lord, which will help you understand what freedom looks like for you in every area of your life. If you're open, your life will be changed forever.

Contact | Lori Lewis - 818.831.9333 x2111 Life Groups Administrator

PRAYER AND PRAISE REPORT

This is a place where you can write each other's requests for prayer. You can also make a note when God answers a prayer. Pray for each other's requests. If you're new to group prayer, it's okay to pray silently.

Prayer Requests:

77

Praise Reports:

there's
Hope

SESSION SEVEN

Battling Depression



CONNECT

During each session, we will begin with a few questions to help you connect with one another and grow in your intimacy. Please take a few minutes and answer at least one of the following questions:

- What is your favorite “sad” movie?
- Share your thoughts about a dark, cloudy, drizzly day.



DVD SESSION

This study is designed to be used with an accompanying video teaching. Please play DVD Session Seven. Use the space below for notes, questions or comments you want to bring up in the discussion later.



GROW

In the following section, you will explore Bible passages and take part in discussions to help expand your knowledge on the topic of this session. If time is a concern, please choose just a few of the questions to answer and discuss in your group.

Take a couple of minutes to discuss what everyone thought about the video.

Read Psalm 42

1 What seems to be the general mood of the psalmist? What kinds of things could the psalmist be experiencing to come to this point of distress and depression in his life?

2 Share about a time when you experienced the same emotions as the psalmist.

3 Despite how the psalmist appears to feel, what is his overall attitude and perspective of God? According to the Scriptures, how does the psalmist plan to get through this difficult time?

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4 How do you typically try to get through a difficult time? How is your reaction similar/different than how the psalmist explains his direction?

5 How do your answers to the two previous questions, and the fact that depression is at an all time high in our society, reveal the importance of evangelism?

Read Matthew 5:45 and Matthew 7:24-27

6 In what ways are the two builders in Matthew 7 a confirmation of Jesus' words in Matthew 5? How does the Matthew 7 passage, give us a somber reminder to the fact that although we have life in Christ, we still live in a broken world?

7 How does the passage we read in Matthew 7, reveal the need for discipleship, especially in the storms of life?

For the soul to be well, it needs to be with God. Our souls were made to walk with God

– John Ortberg

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Read Psalm 34

8 What is the general mood of the psalmist in his writing of this psalm? Compare and contrast the mood and attitude of the psalmists between Psalm 34 and Psalm 42.

9 To what does the psalmist attribute his overall joy in Psalm 34? What does David's perspective of God, teach us about God and His presence in times of distress?

10 In what ways can our personal discipleship, bring us joy in the midst of depression?



Deeper Study

Read Psalm 23

11 David is considered a man after God's own heart (cf: 1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22), yet he still goes through times of great sorrow, doubt, loss, isolation, and fear. What does that tell you about these feelings? Is it possible to have all of those emotions and still be seeking Christ in all you do?

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12 According to Psalm 23, how does God respond in difficult times? How do these Old Testament phrases connect to our daily lives today?

Read Psalm 42:11 and John 16:33

13 Sometimes, there can be a stigma on Christians who deal with depression. How do these verses show that times of turmoil and sadness are just a part of this broken world? How do both these verses bring hope in times of depression?

14 How can a time of doubt, pain, fear, etc., actually increase your faith and relationship with God? Share how you have experienced this.



IMPACT

One of the core principles in Life Groups is to have an impact on the community around us. In the following section, we have given you some ideas of how you can have an impact in the community, both as a group and individually. Please go through and discuss how you can impact the community around you with the gospel.

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- This week as a group, finish up your group time and discuss the good things that God has done for you in your lives. It can be anything from hitting consecutive green lights on the way home from work to a good bill of health from your doctor at your last appointment. Have someone in the group act as secretary and write down all the good things that God is doing. There does not need to be a big story or amazing miracle behind these good things. God often works in the smallest areas that we don't always recognize. Take the time to recognize them now as a group.

Once everyone has had a chance to share a few good things that God is doing or has done, spend some time in prayer and focus on thanking Him for everything. It might even be good to let everyone have a chance to pray for a few things and express their thankfulness to God for His amazing goodness.

Prayer is transformational, and when we spend time telling God how thankful we are for Him, we put ourselves in a position of glorifying God rather than continually asking Him for more. We recognize that He has done so many great things for us already which is truly humbling.



- This week, we want to encourage you to individually enter into practicing the spiritual discipline of “Celebration”.

This discipline is us celebrating what God is doing and has done in our lives. In the Old Testament, we see celebration with the Passover feast, Pentecost, David celebrated when they retrieved the ark of the covenant, they celebrated being taken out of slavery etc. Jesus also said that His disciples would eat and drink while He was with them as a form of celebration.

Celebrating is a discipline of engagement, engaging in celebrating the things of God. Some of the things we could celebrate would be: fellowship, Jesus dying on a cross, basically anything God has done and is doing. Celebrating is something we do to engage God and rejoice in all that He is. It is not just for pleasure; it is also to seek God's goodness.

Devote a day when you will eat your favorite meal or listen to your favorite music or do something that you really enjoy doing, all the while recognizing God for His goodness in your life. The goal is to truly celebrate and allow this time to connect you with God. When you get the chance, share with the group what your experience was like.

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Please take some time to end your group in prayer. You may use the Prayer and Praise Report on the following page as

you pray and close your session for this week.



• RESOURCES

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE

We can all help prevent suicide. The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals.

1-800-273-8255 - <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

86 SAN FERNANDO VALLEY COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH CENTER HOTLINE

The San Fernando Valley Community Mental Health Center, Inc. founded in 1970, is a private, non-profit agency dedicated to improving the mental health of individuals and families within the community. Primary emphasis is placed on providing services to children, adolescents and transitional age youth with serious emotional disorders, and services for adults and older adults with severe and persistent mental illness.

877.727.4747

CHRISTIAN COUNSELING RESOURCES – Call for appointment

Jim Beebe	- 818.787.1242
Scott Williams	- 818.677.6898
Jan Rosser	- 818.378.9289
Leslie Sears	- 805.587.3956

FULLER PSYCHOLOGICAL & FAMILY SERVICES

Clinic Hours: Monday-Thursday 8:00 am - 9:00 pm and Friday 8:00 am - 5:00 pm

Pasadena (Main Office)
180 North Oakland Avenue
Pasadena, CA 91101

Phone: 626.584.5555 // www.fuller.edu/fuller-psychological-and-family-services

Correo de voz en Español 626.304.3754

CAL LUTHERAN COMMUNITY COUNSELING SERVICE

Clinic Hours: Monday-Thursday 9:00 am - 9:00 pm and Friday 9:00 am - 5:00 pm

31416 Agoura Rd, Suite 115

Agoura, Ca 91361

Westlake Village 805.493.3390 // www.clucounseling.org

CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLY COUNSELING SERVICES

Counseling is available from 10:00 AM to 8:00 PM on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, and for couples only 11:00 AM – 5:00 PM every other Saturday.

2424 Colorado Blvd.

Los Angeles, Ca 90041

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Call Blythe at 323.315.0963 // trc@cachurch.com // cachurch.com

WEST VALLEY COUNSELING CENTER

The mission at West Valley Counseling Center is to provide high-quality, affordable therapy and family counseling in a comfortable, private practice setting. Our qualified therapists work with individuals, relationships, traditional families, and non-traditional families to help ease life's burdens and to provide specialty services, such as marriage counseling, child custody mediation, and parenting education.

818.758.9450 // info@westvalleycounseling.org

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY COUNSELING CENTER

The Center is a self-supporting, nonprofit agency, which provides low-fee, psychological counseling to the community, on a sliding scale basis. We also provide outreach services to the community, as well as referral sources. Licensed professionals from the mental health field donate their time to train, supervise, and provide continuing education to our volunteer counselors.

818.341.1111 // sfvcc7@sbcglobal.net

THE CENTER FOR INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY COUNSELING

At CIFIC, we are dedicated to providing a diverse spectrum of mental health services for individuals and families from lower to middle income homes.

Our counseling programs are designed to promote healthy relationships and improve the overall well-being of our clients. We are also an educational and training facility for Marriage and Family Therapist trainees and interns

who are in the process of earning their hours towards becoming licensed counselors. This service allows us to provide greater mental health resources for the community.

818.761.2227 // information@cifc1.org

SUPPORT GROUPS

Lean on us for support. You are not alone. Come to a meeting. All NAMI-SFV programs are FREE! <http://www.namisfv.org>

88 FREE small groups for individuals and family members.

Small groups (usually a group of six to ten) share their mental illness problems and stories. Since everyone attending has or is going through the same things, everyone understands and offers comfort. Often someone has a helpful idea or describes a similar experience and how it worked out. NAMI San Fernando Valley is made up of volunteers who have faced mental illness and have experience that can help you. We've been there and we are here to help you. We welcome you to visit any of our regularly scheduled meetings. No one has to share unless he or she wants to. There is no need to register in advance, RSVP or prepare. Simply join us at any time to see and hear for yourself how NAMI San Fernando Valley helps. Each group is coordinated by a long-time NAMI San Fernando Valley volunteer who keeps things going and makes sure everyone who wants to talk gets a chance.

NAMI SFV SUPPORT GROUPS

Attend any meeting, any time, for support and answers to important questions regarding you and your loved one with mental illness. Locations throughout the San Fernando and Santa Clarita Valleys.

VAN NUYS

SFV Community Mental Health Inc. Center for Family Living
14545 Sherman Circle, Van Nuys, CA 91405

Project Return is dedicated to improving the quality of life for people experiencing mental illnesses through educational, vocational, and supportive housing services so that they may live productive and fulfilling lives in the community.

Project Return Support and Recovery group for Mental Health Consumers

888.448.9777 // <http://www.mhala.org/project-return.htm>

RESEDA/NORTHRIDGE

Northridge Hospital Medical Center, 18300 Roscoe Blvd., Northridge, CA 91325

DBSA (Depression, Bipolar Support Alliance) peer to peer support group for mental health consumers.

818.570.DBSA (3272) // <http://www.dbsanorthridge.org>

Para información en español por favor póngase en contacto con Cindy en 818.921.6444

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SANTA CLARITA

Santa Clarita Mental Health Clinic
23501 Cinema Drive #210, Santa Clarita, CA 91355
Support Group for all family members and friends of people with mental illness.

Real Life Church (Rm. 212)
23841 Newhall Ranch Road, Valencia, CA 91355

Support Group for all family members and friends of people with mental illness.

818.994.6747

SYLMAR

GRUPOS de APOYO en Español
Olive View Community Mental Health Urgent Care Center
14659 Olive View Dr., Sylmar, CA 91342

Para informacion en espanol: spanish@namisfv.org // 818.994.6747

Marque el simbolo denumero. Despues del tono, diga su nombre y un numero de telefono donde podamos localizarlo durante el dia. Alquien que habla espanol lo llamara en cuarenta y ocho horas.

PRAYER AND PRAISE REPORT

This is a place where you can write each other's requests for prayer. You can also make a note when God answers a prayer. Pray for each other's requests. If you're new to group prayer, it's okay to pray silently.

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Prayer Requests:

Praise Reports:

*The function of
prayer is not to
influence God, but
rather to change the
nature of the one who
prays*

– Soren Kierkegaard



LIFE GROUP TOOLBOX

LIFE GROUP ROSTER

Name	Phone	Email
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		
13.		
14.		

LIFE GROUP AGREEMENT

It's a good idea for every group to put words to their shared values, expectations and commitments. Such guidelines will help you avoid unspoken agendas and unmet expectations. We recommend you discuss your guidelines in order to lay the foundation for a healthy group experience. Feel free to modify anything that does not work for your group. If the idea of a written agreement is unfamiliar to your group, we encourage you to give it a try.

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WE AGREE TO THE FOLLOWING VALUES:

Clear Purpose	To encourage and challenge each other to live the LIFE God has called us to live (John 10:10, Matthew 28:18-20).
Group Attendance	To give priority to the group meeting (call if I am absent or late).
Safe Environment	To help create a safe place where people can be heard and feel loved (no quick answers, snap judgments or simple fixes).
Be Confidential	To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential and within the group.
Spiritual Health	To give group members permission to help me live a healthy, balanced spiritual life that is pleasing to God.
Welcome Newcomers	To invite our friends who might benefit from this study and warmly welcome newcomers.
Building Relationships	To get to know the other members of the group and pray for them regularly.

WE HAVE ALSO DISCUSSED AND AGREE ON THE FOLLOWING ITEMS:

Childcare _____

Starting Time _____

Ending Time _____

LIFE GROUP CALENDAR

Healthy groups share responsibilities and group ownership. It might take some time for this to develop. Shared ownership ensures no one person has responsibility for the group. Use the calendar to keep track of social events, mission projects, birthdays, or days off. Complete this calendar at your first or second meeting. Planning ahead will increase attendance and shared ownership.

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[illegible]

LIFE GROUP COMMUNITY IMPACT PROJECT WORKSHEET

Where?	
When?	
Task Assignments	
<u>Name</u>	<u>Task</u>

Please go to our website www.lifegroups.org/impact for Outreach Opportunities and contact information to local organizations you and your group may partner with to serve.

FAQS

What do we do on the first night of our group?

Like all fun things in life—have a party! A “get to know you” coffee, dinner, or dessert is a great way to launch a new series. You may want to review the Life Group Agreement (page 93) and share the names of a few friends you can invite to join you. But most importantly, have fun before your study time begins.

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Where do we find new members for our group?

This can be troubling, especially for new groups that have only a few people or for existing groups that lose a few people along the way. We encourage you to pray with your group and then brainstorm a list of people from work, church, your neighborhood, your children’s school, family, the gym, and so forth. Then have each group member invite several of the people on his or her list.

Before every series, the Life Groups Team will conduct Life Group sign-ups, which allow people to sign-up for “Open” Life Groups. However, studies show it is exponentially more effective when Life Group members personally invite others to their group.

No matter how you find members, it’s vital that you stay on the lookout for new people to join your group. All groups tend to go through healthy attrition—the result of moves, releasing new leaders, ministry opportunities, etc. If you and your group stay open, you’ll be amazed at the people God sends your way. The next person just might become a friend for life. You never know!

How long will this group meet?

It’s totally up to the group once you come to the end of this 7-week study. Most groups meet weekly for at least their first seven weeks, but every other week can work as well. We strongly recommend that the group meet for the first six months on a weekly basis if at all possible. This allows for continuity, and if people miss a meeting, they aren’t gone for a whole month.

At the end of this series, each group member may decide if he or she wants to continue on for another study. Some groups launch

relationships for years to come, and others are stepping stones into another group experience. Either way, enjoy the journey.

What if this group is not working for us?

You're not alone! This could be the result of a personality conflict, life stage difference, geographical distance, level of spiritual maturity, or any number of things. Relax. Pray for God's direction, and at the end of this 7-week series, decide whether to continue with this group or find another. You don't buy the first car you look at or marry the first person you date, and the same goes with a group. Don't bail out before the seven weeks are up—God might have something to teach you. Also, don't run from conflict or prejudge people before you have given them a chance. God is still working in them too!

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Who is the leader?

Most groups have an official leader. But ideally, the group will mature and members will rotate the leadership of meetings. We have discovered that healthy groups rotate leaders on a regular basis. This model ensures that all members grow, give their unique contribution and develop their gifts. This Study Guide and the Holy Spirit can keep things on track even when you rotate leaders. Christ has promised to be in your midst as you gather. Ultimately, God is your leader each step of the way.

How do we handle the child care needs in our group?

We suggest that you empower the group to openly brainstorm solutions. You may try one option that works for a while and then adjust over time. Our favorite approach is for adults to meet in the living room or dining room, and to share the cost of a baby sitter (or two) who can be with the kids in a different part of the house. In this way, parents don't have to be away from their children all evening when their children are too young to be left at home. A second option is to use one home for the kids and a second home (close by or a phone call away) for the adults. A third idea is to rotate the responsibility of providing a lesson or care for the children either in the same home or in another home nearby. This can be an incredible blessing for kids. Finally, the most common idea is to decide that you need to have a night to invest in your spiritual lives individually or as a couple, and to make your own arrangements for child care.

ENCOUNTERS AND SCHOOL OF DISCIPLESHIP

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Jesus has left each one of us with a task...to Make Disciples! We believe that Life Groups are essential in this task. Life Groups are a place where people can come together to study the Bible and grow to become more like Christ. Life Groups are a great place to make disciples.

Since Life Groups are such a good opportunity and environment to make disciples we want to help equip our leaders to be the best disciple-makers they can be. Therefore, we strongly encourage all of our Life Group leaders and members to go to an Encounter and the subsequent School of Discipleship.

The Encounter is a weekend which will help you connect with God in a way you have never experienced before, and will help you realize what the cross means to us today. The School of Discipleship immediately follows the Encounter and teaches how to become the disciple that Jesus invites all of us to be. The School of Discipleship has three tracks: Doctrine, Transformation, and Serving. Whether you are a current leader, a prospective leader, or you just want to take the next step in your faith, we believe the Encounter and School of Discipleship will change your life and help you become a more fruitful disciple-maker.

<i>Upcoming Encounters</i>	
<i>Men's Encounters</i>	<i>Women's Encounters</i>
<i>March 10-12, 2017</i>	<i>March 24-26, 2017</i>
<i>June 2-4, 2017</i>	<i>July 14-16, 2017</i>
<i>September 15-17, 2017</i>	<i>October 13-15, 2017</i>

Please check our website for future Encounter dates and more general information on Encounters:
www.lifegroups.org Click "Learn About Encounters"

BECOMING A LEADER

What does it take to be a leader?

Have a heart for people.
Open to having people in your home.
Serve some coffee or soft drinks.
Tell others about the group!

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Basically, you need to have a desire to apply the Bible to your life and want to share that with others. The group does not have to meet at your home and you do not have to have a Bible college degree to lead. You simply must have some basic people skills and a desire to grow in the Lord.

How can I become a leader?

First, you do have to be a member of Shepherd Church. To be a member, you must complete the "Membership Inquiry Class". These classes are usually about two hours long and are offered every six weeks. You may call the church office at 818.831.9333 to find out when the next one will be held.

Second, you need to sign-up for the New Leader Training. It is a two-hour training and orientation on Life Groups. Here you will learn the philosophy of Life Groups and how to effectively begin leading a group. Completing this course does not obligate you, but does allow you to become a new leader.

BLESSING LIST

The Blessing List is an opportunity to intentionally pray for people who don't know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. After all, the greatest blessing anyone can receive is to be in relationship with the living God. Throughout the series, pray for God's Spirit to bless and reveal Jesus' love to each person listed.

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[illegible]

LEADING FOR THE FIRST TIME

1 Sweaty palms are a healthy sign. The Bible says God is gracious to the humble. Remember who is in control; the time to worry is when you're not worried. Those who are soft in heart (and sweaty palmed) are those whom God is sure to speak through.

2 Seek support. Ask your leader, co-leader, or a close friend to pray for you and prepare with you before the session. Walking through the study will help you anticipate potentially difficult questions and discussion topics.

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3 Bring your uniqueness to the study. Lean into who you are and how God wants you to uniquely lead the study.

4 Prepare. Prepare. Prepare. Go through the session several times. If you are using the DVD, listen to the teaching segment and take notes for yourself. Go to www.lifegroups.com and download the Leader's Notes. Consider writing in a journal or fasting for a day to prepare yourself for what God wants to do.

5 Don't wait until the last minute to prepare.

6 Ask for feedback so you can grow. Perhaps in an e-mail or on cards handed out at the study, have everyone write down three things you did well and one thing you could improve on. Don't get defensive, but show an openness to learn and grow.

7 Prayerfully consider launching a new group. This doesn't need to happen overnight, but God's heart is for this to happen over time.

8 Not all Christians are called to be leaders or teachers, but we are all called to be "shepherds" of a few someday.

9 Share with your group what God is doing in your heart. God is searching for those whose hearts are fully His. Share your trials and victories. We promise that people will relate.

10 Prayerfully consider whom you would like to pass the baton to next week. It's only fair. God is ready for the next member of your group to go on the faith journey you just traveled. Make it fun, and expect God to do the rest.



LIFE GROUP LEADING 101

Top Ten Ideas For New Leaders

Congratulations! You have responded to the call to help shepherd Jesus' flock. There are a few other tasks in the family of God that surpass the contribution you will be making. As you prepare to lead, whether it is one session or the entire series, here are a few thoughts to keep in mind. We encourage you to read these and review them with each new discussion leader before he or she leads.

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1 Remember that you are not alone. God knows everything about you, and He knew you would be asked to lead your group. Remember it is common for all good leaders to feel that they are not ready to lead. Moses, Solomon, Jeremiah, and Timothy - they all were reluctant to lead. God promises, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). Whether you are leading for one evening, for several weeks, or for a lifetime, you will be blessed as you serve.

2 Don't try to do it alone. Pray right now for God to help you build a healthy leadership team. If you can enlist a co-leader to help you lead the group, you will find your experience to be much richer. This is your chance to involve as many people as you can in building a healthy group. All you have to do is call and ask people to help. You'll be surprised at the response.

3 Just be yourself. If you won't be you, who will? God wants you to use your unique gifts and temperament. Don't try to do things exactly like another leader; do them in a way that fits you! Just admit it when you don't have an answer, and apologize when you make a mistake. Your group will love you for it, and you'll sleep better at night!

4 Prepare for your meeting ahead of time. Review the session and the leader's notes, and write down your responses to each question.

Pay special attention to exercises that ask group members to do something other than engage in discussion.

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5 Pray for your group members by name. Before you begin your session, go around the room in your mind and pray for each member by name. You may want to review the prayer list at least once a week. Ask God to use your time together to touch the heart of every person uniquely. Expect God to lead you to whomever He wants you to encourage or challenge in a special way. If you listen, God will surely lead!

6 When you ask a question, be patient. Someone will eventually respond. Sometimes people need a moment or two of silence to think about the question, and if silence doesn't bother you, it won't bother anyone else. After someone responds, affirm the response with a simple "thanks" or "good job." Then ask, "How about somebody else?" or "Would someone who hasn't shared like to add anything?" Be sensitive to new people or reluctant members who aren't ready to say, pray or do anything. If you give them a safe setting, they will blossom over time.

7 Provide transitions between questions. When guiding the discussion, always read aloud the transitional paragraphs and the questions. Ask the group if anyone would like to read the paragraph or Bible passage. Don't call on anyone, but ask for a volunteer, and then be patient until someone begins. Be sure to thank the person who reads aloud.

8 Break-up into small groups each week, or they won't stay. If your group has more than seven people, we strongly encourage you to have the group occasionally gather in discussion circles of three or four people during the Grow and Impact sections of the study. With a greater opportunity to talk in a small circle, people will connect more with the study, apply more quickly what they're learning and ultimately get more out of it. A small circle also encourages a quiet person to participate and tends to minimize the effects of a more vocal or dominant member. It can also help people feel more loved in your group. When you gather again at the end of the section, you can have one person summarize the highlights from each circle.

Small circles are also helpful during prayer time. People who are unaccustomed to praying aloud will feel more comfortable trying it with just two or three others. Also, prayer requests won't take as much time, so circles will have more time to actually pray. When you gather back with the whole group, you can have one person from each circle briefly update everyone on the prayer requests. People are more willing to pray in small circles if they know that the whole group will hear all the prayer requests.

9 Rotate facilitators weekly. At the end of each meeting, ask the group who should lead the following week. Let the group help select your weekly facilitator. You may be perfectly capable of leading each time, but you will help others grow in their faith and gifts if you give them opportunities to lead. You can use the Life Group Calendar to fill in the names of all meeting leaders at once if you prefer.

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10 One final challenge (for new or first time leaders): Before your first opportunity to lead, look up each of the five passages listed below. Read each one as a devotional exercise to help equip yourself with a shepherd's heart. Trust us on this one. If you do this, you will be more than ready for your first meeting.

Matthew 9:36

1 Peter 5:2-4

Psalms 23

Ezekiel 34:11-16

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, 11-12