


LIFE GROUP STARTER GUIDE

LEADER GUIDE



A group of people are sitting in lawn chairs in a grassy backyard. In the background, there is a wooden fence, a blue trampoline, and a line of trees. The scene is captured in a slightly desaturated, muted color palette. A white rectangular box is overlaid on the center of the image, containing text.

**THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES
TO THE APOSTLES' TEACHING,
TO THE FELLOWSHIP, TO THE
BREAKING OF BREAD, AND
TO PRAYER.**

ACTS 2:42

WE BELIEVE THAT LIFE CHANGE HAPPENS BEST IN CIRCLES, NOT ROWS.

In his book, *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam claimed that the greatest epidemic in American life is not a disease, but loneliness. Despite technology making communication easier, true connection is rarer. No matter who you are, everyone is craving for true, meaningful relationships.

This is because God created us for community- both with Himself and with each other. Life Groups exist to help foster each of these connections. Our aim is not to provide just any type of community but the life-changing community that we see clearly in the Bible. An all-inclusive community centered on Christ that allows His Spirit to move mightily in and through us.

At Calvary, we define Life Groups as Life-changing communities where you can connect, grow, and become.

- **CONNECT:** A place where you can get connected in community and have a place to belong.
- **GROW:** A place where you can take your next steps in your journey of faith.
- **BECOME:** A place where you can follow Jesus as you become who God designed you to be.

This booklet will unpack these definitions and prepare you to lead your own Life Group with your friends. As you read, answer the questions at the bottom of each page so that we can discuss the booklet with you.

**WHAT MOST EXCITES YOU ABOUT CREATING
A COMMUNITY LIKE THE ONE ABOVE?**

KEY COMPONENTS OF LIFE-CHANGING COMMUNITY

In Acts 2: 42-47, we see a snapshot of the life-changing community that our Life Groups foster.

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

LIFE GROUPS ENGAGE WITH THE BIBLE, PRAYER, AND ONE ANOTHER:

In verse 42, Luke describes how the early church was engaged in the apostles' teaching, fellowship, and prayer. These three things guide our Life Groups today. In all our discussions, we focus on biblical passages. Though we may reference other books or use other speakers to help further our discussion, the biblical text always is our focal point.

Our Life Groups, are more than just a Bible study. We take the fellowship part (and the breaking of bread) of Acts 2:42 seriously. The Greek word for fellowship (koinonia) means something deeper than a friendly association. It describes people who gather under a common idea or purpose.

Though they may differ in wealth, social status, ethnicity, interests, and maturity, they are unified by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It's the unity of the whole, despite its diversity, that makes the Gospel fellowship so powerful. Our Hangout Nights once a month have no set agenda, other than to connect with one another "and invite new people in."

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INWARD AND OUTWARD FOCUS:

As the early church committed to the Word, fellowship, and prayer, God did something in them (inward) and through them (outward). Starting in Acts 2 and continuing throughout the book (6:7, 9:31, 16:5), Luke describes the church's two-fold impact: the strength of the community and the advancement of the mission. The Church grew both in depth (discipleship, or maturing believers) and in breadth (evangelism, or new believers).

It is our hope that Life Groups would feel like a group of close friends or family, and that they would reflect the kind of unity the Acts 2 Church had. We will approach this kind of unity by living for one another. In doing so, we put Christ on display and share the Gospel with each other through every selfless act.

In verse 47, Luke describes not just the impact the Early Church had with each other, but outside the church. It says that they had favor with “all people” and that the “Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

When our Life Groups function as Acts 2 fellowships, we will provide a life-changing community where non-believers, new believers, and mature believers can connect, grow, and become.

**WHO IN YOUR LIFE (2-8 PEOPLE) WOULD BE
INTERESTED IN STARTING THIS LIFE GROUP WITH YOU?**




CONNECT

**A PLACE WHERE YOU CAN GET CONNECTED IN
COMMUNITY AND HAVE A PLACE TO BELONG.**

If you look at the life of Jesus, He spent time with tax collectors, prostitutes, and Gentiles. He always met people where they were and never required people to clean up their lives before He loved them. Just as Jesus did, we strive to create an environment where everyone feels like they belong.

OPEN GROUPS:

Life Groups create a place where people come just as they are, and meet Jesus just as He is. Our groups are open to anyone at any time, and we create an environment where everyone is welcomed and accepted. When this happens, people are able to experience Christ through the life-changing power of biblical community. Todd Engstrom described it this way:



"The most persuasive argument for the Christian faith is the Christian community. The majority of conversations throughout church history have come not through argumentation, but through belonging to a meaningful community before belief is ever required."

INTENTIONALLY INVITING:

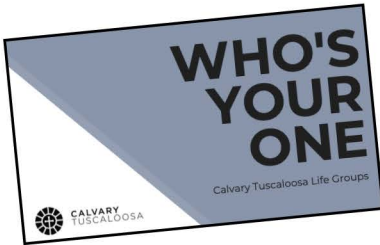
We want every member of our Life Group to ask, "Who in my life would benefit from a group like this?" And for this person, we want the members of our group to pray for that person, invest in that relationship, and invite them to join the group.

To help our Life Group members be intentional on inviting new people into their group, we ask each member: "Who's Your One?" Take a moment and identify who in your life would benefit from a group like this and how you can pray for and invest in that relationship.

WHO'S YOUR ONE?

At Calvary, we want every believer to identify ONE person in their life who is far from God and intentionally pursue that person with the hope of the gospel by praying, investing, and inviting.

Take a moment and identify one person in your life who either doesn't have a relationship with Jesus or is disengaged with the local church. This person should be someone you see on a regular basis. Consider your family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, classmates, etc. Once you identify this person, write their name down on the card below.



After you identify this person, we want you to commit to doing three things:

- 1. Pray-** I will pray daily for my ONE. I will ask God to make my ONE aware of Christ's love and their need for Him (2 Corinth. 4:4, Matt. 13:15) and to give them the faith to repent and believe (Acts 20:21; Rom. 10:9-10). I will also ask that God allows me to share the Gospel with them.
- 2. Invest-** I will create ways to invest weekly in my ONE. My hope is to build a relationship where I can share Christ's love with my ONE (1 Cor. 9:19-23). Simple investments like text messages, phone calls, and acts of kindness are easy, but they are impactful ways to building trust and invest in a relationship. They can also create more opportunities to share the Gospel.
- 3. Invite-** As I pray and invest, I will invite my ONE to the next right thing. The ideal would be to share your faith and invite your ONE to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. When he or she isn't there yet, I will invite them to an intentional environment where they can belong before they believe. I will do this by inviting them to events like Life Group, a Hangout Night, a church outreach event, or a Sunday morning service, either online or in person.



GROW

A PLACE WHERE YOU CAN TAKE YOUR NEXT STEPS
IN YOUR JOURNEY OF FAITH.

Along with creating the welcoming and accepting place where you can meet Jesus personally, our Life Groups provide a place where you can know Jesus through his Word and His people. When you meet weekly, you will facilitate group discussion where people can encounter Jesus and experience life change. Here are five key elements of life-changing discussion:

- **Word-centered:** Life-changing discussion starts and ends with God's living and active Word. We believe that the Bible is sufficient and relevant for all issues of our life (Heb 4:12).
- **Conversational:** Life-changing discussion focuses on facilitating a conversation, not teaching a Bible lesson. Better learning and connection are accomplished when people are able to ask questions and share their personal insights and experience.
- **Authentic:** Life-changing discussions happen when people are real with themselves, with God, and with others. We foster authenticity by providing a safe environment where people can be honest and transparent.
- **Application-focused:** Life-changing discussion focuses on application because the measure of maturity is not information, but obedience. Healthy Bible discussion doesn't just answer the questions "What does the Bible say?" but it also helps people answer, "How does this personally impact my life today?" That is why we end each discussion by helping people identify a personal, relevant, and practical step they can take to grow in their faith.
- **Newcomer-friendly:** Life-changing discussion should always consider the person who is joining for the first time. We want to eliminate any barriers that would prevent new people from participating.

By focusing on application, it allows non, new, and mature believers to engage in conversation together.

When our Life Groups function as Acts 2 fellowships, we will provide a life-changing community where both non-believers, new believers, and mature believers can connect, grow, and become.

WEEKLY CURRICULUM:

Whether your group watches the sermon online together or discusses it later in the week, we will provide questions each week to help you facilitate discussion. We will email the curriculum in our weekly Group Leader Update.

- **Icebreaker:** Starting your time off with something light-hearted helps you get to know on another more and gets people talking.
- **Context:** This quick summary will give you the contact of the passage and help you best understand what the author's intention is.
- **Passage:** We will include a primary passage for your group to read together.
- **Discussion questions:** These questions will help you understand the passage and its importance in your life today.
- **Next step:** These final 1-2 questions will help each person identify how they personal should respond to what they have read and discussed.

**HOW COMFORTABLE DO YOU FEEL FACILITATING
A GROUP DISCUSSION WITH THE RESOURCES
MENTIONED?**



BECOME

**A PLACE WHERE YOU CAN FOLLOW JESUS AND
BECOME WHO GOD DESIGNED YOU TO BE.**

Lastly, our Life Groups provide a place where you can follow Jesus as you become who God designed you to be. We believe we were created to be a part of the Body of Christ. We were all created with gifts and called to use those gifts. Life Groups are a way for us to understand and develop those gifts.

One of the best ways to do this is to encourage your group's members to not just attend Life Group, but to participate. Encourage people to share their perspective in the discussions and consider how they might contribute to their time, talent, and resources to serve the group.

RECOMMENDED MEETING RHYTHMS

- MEET WEEKLY
- PARTY MONTHLY
- SERVE QUARTERLY

This simple framework helps our groups provide a life-changing community where you can connect, grow, and become.

MEET WEEKLY:

Our Life Groups meet every week because consistency builds community. We want our groups to become part of the weekly rhythms of our people's lives. Whenever you schedule Life Groups less frequently, it can be difficult to gain traction and if someone misses, they will go a month without seeing the group members. By meeting weekly, you make the group a priority on your calendar and community forms quickly.

PARTY MONTHLY:

Once a month, our groups host a Hangout Night, which is when the group intentionally creates a warm and welcoming place to invite new people to experience their life-changing community. These nights provide strategic invite opportunities for each person's ONE that they are praying for and investing in.

Bryan's story is a great example of this. Bryan was married to a girl named Kim, who was very involved at church and in a life group. She tried all the time to get Bryan to come with her to church and life group all the time, but Bryan never wanted to come. He was comfortable with the life he was living and didn't want to upset the apple cart. One month, Kim's life group was going to have a group outing at an axe throwing establishment. This sounded like something Bryan would love, so Kim invited him one more time. To her disbelief, he said yes! He finally came to something that appealed to him. The most incredible part is that he had a great time. He connected some of the guys at Life Group and

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started a friendship. The next week when Kim was getting ready to leave for Life Group, Bryan asked if it was ok for him to come! She was ecstatic! This is what Hangout nights are all about. Giving people a place to connect with us so they can also connect with Jesus! Hang out nights are an incredible way to bring people into our family!

SERVE QUARTERLY:

Along with your weekly and monthly rhythm, we want groups to choose one way that your group can reach your neighborhood, city, or world. One of the ways you can do this is by joining something Calvary is doing. Throughout the year, the church hosts multiple events each year focused on serving the city and world and we want your group to join us in these efforts.

Another way that you can serve together is to adopt a local school or gathering of people to partner with through service projects. You can paint hallways, trim hedges, mend fences and dream up local outreach that you want to lead.

Periodically, we provide groups with the money to fund events like big neighborhood block parties. As you serve together, it is amazing the memories you will make as a group and what God will begin to stir in the hearts of your members.

“**WE WANT OUR GROUPS
TO BECOME PART OF THE
WEEKLY RHYTHMS OF
OUR PEOPLE’S LIVES.”**

**WHAT DAY OF THE WEEK DO YOU PLAN TO HOST
YOUR GROUP?** _____

**HOW DO YOU SEE HANGOUT NIGHTS
ENHANCING YOUR LIFE GROUP EXPERIENCE?**

HOW TO SHARE RESPONSIBILITY:

A good leader shares responsibility; they don't hoard it. Hosting and leading Life Group should be a team approach. For the sake of the leader's health, we don't want any individual to have all the responsibility, but instead to share it with other capable members. When you are able to not just give, but receive from the group, leadership becomes a blessing, not a burden.

Secondly, we share leadership for the sake of our people. Life Groups are not a group of people with a gifted leader, but a leader with a group of gifted people. A good leader creates opportunities for people to use their gifts to contribute to the group.

However big or small the contribution may be, we encourage people to not just think about what they can receive from the group, but what they can give. The next page has four different roles that we recommend for our groups. This is not an exact science, but an art. Certain individuals may lead in two roles or multiple people can help facilitate the discussion weekly. We just don't want one person doing all four roles.

“**LIFE GROUP IS NOT A
GROUP OF PEOPLE WITH A
GIFTED LEADER, BUT A
LEADER WITH A GROUP OF
GIFTED PEOPLE.”**

FACILITATOR:

The Facilitator leads the group discussion weekly. This role may be done by one person or by a couple. The important part of this role is that the leader facilitates a discussion rather than preaching a message. We want as many people to participate in the discussion as possible. As people contribute to the discussion it creates a sense of belonging and it helps them better process what they are hearing.

HOST:

The Host opens up their home for the group to meet. They also think through their living spaces and design them in a way that accommodates the group and helps foster connection. For example, the Host may reorganize their living room to create one big circle so that it better facilitates discussion.

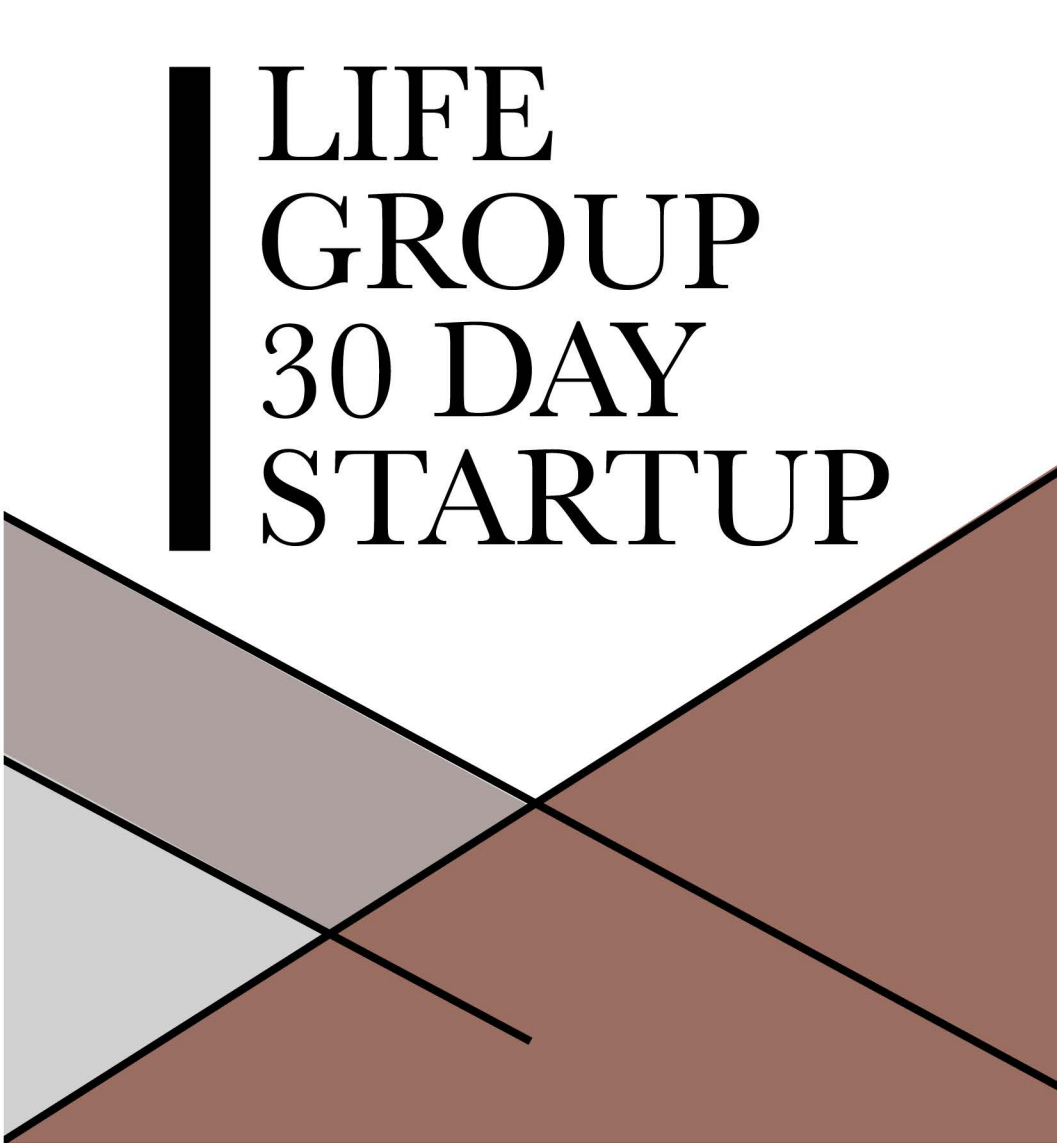
COORDINATOR:

The Coordinator focuses on organizing and communicating with the group. If your group has a snack list, the Coordinator organizes whose week it is and sends reminders. They also communicate with the whole group about what is coming up this week. If the group meets online, the coordinator can set up and send out the link each week. Lastly, if your group does childcare, this person will coordinate with the babysitter and the group.

HANGOUT NIGHT LEADER:

The Hangout Night Leader helps the whole group get involved in your monthly Hangout. This includes planning activities that are welcoming to new people and encouraging current group members to invite their ONE. The Hangout Night Leader should be familiar with the Hangout Night overview.

**WHAT ROLE(S) WOULD YOUR FRIENDS
BE INTERESTED IN HELPING WITH?**



LIFE GROUP 30 DAY STARTUP

BEFORE WEEK 1:

Invite your friends: Reach out to your friends and ask them to help you start your Life Group. Having a core group of 4-10 people is a crucial part of starting strong.

Register your Life Group: Let us know the details about your group so we can support you as you lead and let others know about your groups. Go to calvarytusc.org/groups to register.

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WEEK 1: STRONG BEGINNINGS

Week 1 discussion: The Facilitator will use this curriculum to accomplish two things. One, you will want to spend time getting to know one another. Secondly, you will set expectations for the group as you share the intention of Life Groups as a place that you can connect, grow, and become.

Setup a group chat: It's important to stay in touch with your members outside of your meeting time. Have the Coordinator choose a platform that works best for the group and get everyone on it.

WEEK 2: DISCUSSION

Week 2 discussion: In this discussion, the group will discuss Acts 2 and how it gives us the model for our Life Group. For the application, your group will focus on the inward impact that we can experience through Life Groups.

WEEK 3: THE IMPACT LIFE GROUP WILL HAVE ON OTHERS (OUTWARD IMPACT)

Week 3 discussion: The group will discuss Matthew 9 and the outward impact that your Life Group will have as it provides a place for people to belong before they believe.

Handout ONE cards: As an application to the discussion, pass out the ONE cards and have each person take it home and bring it back the next week.

WEEK 4: PLANNING YOUR HANGOUT NIGHT

Share about your ONE: Have each person share briefly about who they are praying for and how they hope to regularly invest in that person.

Plan your Hangout Night: The group will discuss the vision of Hangout Nights and begin to plan their first one for the following week.

LIFE GROUP RESOURCES

Life Group Leader email: Each week, you will receive an email from Tyler Nunn with discussion questions and important updates.

Calvarytusc.org/groups: Go to calvarytusc.org/groups to do all of the following:

- Register your group
- Access digital Life Group guides, Hangout Night guide, and Icebreaker questions
- Use Right Now Media for your Life Group

Right Now Media: This is a digital resource for our church to fuel personal and group study of the Word. Each member at Calvary can register for an account at calvarytusc.org/rightnowmedia.

Email tnunn@calvarytuscaloosa.org: If you have questions about Life Groups, please contact Tyler Nunn, our Connections Pastor at Calvary.



[CALVARYTUSC.ORG/GROUPS](https://calvarytusc.org/groups)



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