

what life groups are all about

Life Groups are our main strategy for encouraging a life of following Jesus. These groups will be focused on learning four life-giving practices. These practices form the pattern of each group, and we will be sharing stories from our week of how these practices are growing in our lives:

- **Life-giving Prayer:** Prayer for the purpose of being with God rather than getting something from God. This kind of prayer is focused on God (The King) and what he is doing (building his Kingdom) rather than on what I want him to do for me. We often use the words “glory, honor, and thanks” from Rev. 4:9 to structure our time.
- **Life-giving Truth:** This is the practice of telling ourselves God’s truth over and over again so that it sinks into our hearts and changes us from the inside out. Practically, this means we will think through the truth which we learned in the Sunday Sermon. We will help each other process the truth of God’s Word together.
- **Life-giving Relationships:** This is an invitation to authenticity, being honest with yourself and others about what’s really going on in our hearts, clinging to the hope that God himself is able and willing to heal our brokenness as we seek him together. This is where learning the truths of grace and humility really will manifest itself. Being real is better than being perfect. Practically this means we will seek to pray for heart issues, not surface issues. For example, someone might want prayer for a job – he might be laid off. We want to know how we can pray for his heart – maybe he realizes that he is struggling with trusting God to care for him. And so we would pray God’s will in this area
- **Life-giving Impact:** Prayer is the work! We use the pattern of “Pray & Watch” – where we pray for those all around us and then watch for how God is working in their lives. When we see the Lord working, then we both rejoice and respond.

Life Groups are what we do during the week—we don’t have other programs. So if you want to be involved beyond Sunday morning, this is for you! We have men’s, women’s, and couples’ groups meeting. And if you want to learn more about these Four Life-giving practices and how they work, tell us you are interested in being part of our 4 week “Getting to know LEFC” where we share about these practices, our mission, and our values.



For the week starting Sunday, January
31st, 2016

**My Heavenly Father is
merciful to me.**

Matthew 7:1-6

Life-giving Prayer (about 10 min)

1. Do you have any stories to share this week about worshiping God in the everyday stuff of life?
2. Spend some time in Life-giving prayer together. Praying short sentences, give God Glory, Honor, and Thanks. If you want, you can use one or more of the ideas below.

Practice learning to give God glory by completing the sentence *'God, it is amazing that you _____.'* We'll see what we can come up with that makes God who he is. Think of what we are doing as brainstorming ideas. Don't close your eyes or bow your heads – just help me complete this sentence “God, it’s amazing that you _____”

Idea: Use the song we sang on Sunday, “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name” as a springboard to give God Glory. For example, say “God, you alone are worthy of being crowned Lord of all.” (words are in your bulletin)

Life-giving Truth (about 45-55 min)

There are a lot of questions here. Your Life Group Coach will pick out a few below that are best suited for your Life Group to help process this week's Life-giving Truth. Don't try to answer every question – just think through a few together.

1. Last week's truth: **Did you think about last week's Life-giving Truth My Heavenly Father will care for me? Was there a situation in your life this week when this Life-giving Truth was (or could have been) applicable?**

2. Consider this description of judgmentalism: “To be judgmental is to have a critical spirit, a condemning attitude. We might think of judgmental people as having 'stricter' views on some standard, but people with 'looser' standards can be judgmental too. Judgmental people practice this sin under the guise of being zealous for what is right. They elevate their strong personal opinion (which they see as obvious and indisputable) in such a way that they look down upon others who disagree.” **What do you like about this description? What does it miss? What might you add to this?**

3. Giving judgment is God's place. Look up these passages to get that concept in your mind: Romans 2:1-3; 1 Corinthians 4:4, and James 4:11-12. And yet we must constantly make judgments about morals and ethics so that we can follow Jesus as he told us to. **When do you think you are crossing the line between the right kind of discernment and becoming judgmental?**

4. Read Matthew 7:3-5. **Why do you think your own sin is so much harder to see than other people's sins? More specifically, what is it about the sin of judgmentalism that makes it so blinding to the one doing the judging?**

5. The Life-giving truth that “My heavenly Father is merciful to me” is the truth that helps us extend mercy to others. **But why do others' sins against me seem so much bigger than my sins against God?**

6. **In what areas do you find yourself most likely to be critical of others? Here are a dozen areas to begin your thinking. What other ones would you add?**

Politics. Health/food. Parenting. Spending money. Exercise. TV/Computer/ Game time. Reading material. Work habits. Marriage. Clothing. Music. Theology.

7. **As you consider the Life-giving Truth “My heavenly Father is merciful to me”, what are the ways you think he is merciful?**

8. **As you think about the truth “My heavenly Father is merciful to me”, what are some Bible verses or songs that can help remind you of this truth?**

9. Our sinful nature means that we are naturally inclined towards mistaken, negative judgments. Here are three chief ways we can be judgmental: 1) We selectively gather data; that is, we minimize or overlook the good qualities and search for or magnify bad qualities in others. 2) We think the worst of someone's words or actions...and then fill in the gaps with assumptions. 3) We try to figure out and assume the worst about others' motives (like pride, selfishness, favoritism, etc). **Read the following passages and point out these three judgmental ways where you see them:**

1 Samuel 1:12-17
Matthew 12:22-24
Acts 21:27-30

10. Read this description of a real friend from author Ken Sande. **After you read about Carl, what do you most appreciate about Carl that you'd like to have in a friend or see in yourself?**

“Carl is a living example of a man who has cultivated the habit of making charitable judgments. Although he is a long-time friend and we agree on most things, we have occasionally disagreed on significant issues. Yet, I have always felt completely free to speak frankly about my opinions, even when it is apparent that Carl holds a very different view. Why? I think it is because I have never once felt judged or condemned by Carl. Even when he thinks I hold a wrong view or am guilty of sin, he has never said a word, used a tone of voice, or given me a look that indicates he condemns me or thinks less of me. On the contrary, I always feel that he makes an earnest effort to understand my views, to find any legitimacy in them, and to reexamine his own beliefs in the light of our disagreement. Even when he has confronted me about my sin, I have felt a pervading sense of love and encouragement, not condemnation. And more than once I have heard that he gave me the benefit of the doubt when others spoke ill of me. Nor does he limit his charity to me. Even when I judge or speak critically of others to Carl, he refuses to play the game, even if that person has made his life difficult.

Life-giving Relationships (about 5-10 min)

Does anyone want healing prayer this week? Remember, this is praying for the heart of you, the person, not the circumstances you are going through or other people in your life. Is there anything churning in your heart that we can pray for?

Idea: Having reflected on judgmentalism, is there anything you want healing prayer for? Since God is always at work in our lives, do you think he is trying to teach you something through this trial? If a person shares something, anyone may pray for that person before the next person shares.

Life-giving Impact (about 10 min)

1. Does anyone have any Pray & Watch stories to share this week?
2. What is your plan to lean into someone on your Pray & Watch list this week?
3. Pray for the people on your Pray & Watch list.