

If I'm the one listening...

- I listen.
Seems obvious, right? But we all know there's a difference between hearing words and really understanding because we've listened well. I can't pray for someone in a meaningful way if I've made no real connection with her concern.
- I fight the urge to give advice.
Tips for managing behavior are a sad replacement for God's healing power. When someone chooses to be honest and vulnerable about brokenness in his heart, the most loving thing I can do is keep my advice to myself and pray.
- I fight the urge to identify with their situation.
When someone shares, I may relate, and want to express it out loud. The reality is that no two situations are the same. My good intentions will usually fall short and feel selfish. Good listening is better than any kind of talking.
- I refuse to minimize their struggle.
Sometimes I will feel like what is being shared is not that big of a deal. I will want to encourage my friend to stop being so hard on her self. Instead, I choose to accept that she has expressed a desire for healing, not encouragement. I don't have to understand in order to care about what matters to her.
- I help identify the heart issue if needed.
We tend to be the most concerned about how to stop unwanted behavior, but God is always focused on our hearts. I can "do better" about yelling at my kids, for example, but if the anger in my heart remains, no real change has occurred. When the person sharing seems only to speak of behaviors, I can ask, "What do you think is going on in your heart that is driving this behavior?" God is inviting us to experience true freedom!

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?

Pray for the people on your Pray & Watch list.



For the week starting Sunday, February 14th, 2016

The Way is hard that leads to eternal life.

Matthew 7:12-20

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. Consider focusing on prayers of thanks. When we thank God, we are recognizing that he is the giver of all good gifts. Whether it's something he did for us that we know of from the Bible, or it's something he is doing for us right now, we thank him. Try starting with these sentences:
 - Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son to earth.
 - God, thank you for making so many birds.
 - God, thanks for hearing us when we pray.
 - Lord Jesus, thank you for living the sinless life that I could never do.
 - Jesus, thank you that you have made a way for us to heaven.
 - Father God, thank you for providing for our daily needs.
 - Lord, thank you for making a place in heaven for us.
 - Father in heaven, thank you for your mercy toward us when we sin.

Now, everybody try to fill in this blank: *Father, thank you for* _____.

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 *God hears me when I pray*? **Was there a situation in your life this week when this Life-giving Truth was (or could have been) applicable?**
2. **When you think of a “false prophet” what kind of people come to your mind?**
3. Read Matthew 7:15-20 and compare it with Acts 20:29-31. **What are the similarities you notice between these passages?**
4. Jesus says the way is “hard” and “narrow” that leads to eternal life (Matthew 7:14). He is summarizing the way of life he's described so far in the Sermon on the Mount for followers of Jesus as they try to be faithful to him and to the values of God's kingdom in a world that is still messed up (Matthew 5:2-7:12). **As you look over this Sermon on the Mount, what sticks out to you personally as “hard” and “narrow”?**
5. “Beware of false prophets” in 7:15 is a call to discernment. Yet Jesus has warned us not to be judgmental in the sense of having a critical spirit, of not looking down upon others (7:1-5). **What are the ways we might talk about false teachers that would indicate a judgmental attitude in us?**
6. Your neighbor Chuck and you are talking on day when he says, “I saw this bumper sticker that said, 'Enter by the narrow gate'. The guy had a fish on his car, so I think it must be a Christian thing. What does it mean?” **How would you answer him?**
7. As you think about the Life-giving Truth “The way is hard that leads to eternal life”, **what has been the most hard part of following Jesus on your journey so far? Or, looking to the future, what are you most concerned about facing in the future?**

8. Jesus said there are few who find the way that leads to eternal life (7:14). **What are the concerns you have had in the past or are having now that you yourself might not have found this narrow path?**

9. Your friend Erin says, “I'm really having a tough time seeing that Jesus is the only way. I get that he's God and all, but it seems so restrictive to have the only way to be him. I mean, doesn't God count people's sincerity and ignorance for something? If people are doing the best they can, why wouldn't God accept them?” **Do you see where Erin is coming from? In what other ways do you find yourself resisting the truth “The way is hard that leads to eternal life”?**

Life-giving Relationships (about 5-10 min)

Since the practice of Life-giving Relationships is a new concept, consider reading through these guidelines taken from the booklet *Discover the Life* as to how we go about praying for each other:

“Perhaps we've battled anger, insecurity, loneliness, lust, greed, judgmentalism, racism, unforgiveness, hate, anxiety, fear, jealousy or addiction. Sharing our reality, and inviting friends to come around us in prayer, is God's plan for healing us from the inside out. In order for us to experience this together, we need to agree on a few practical guidelines:

If I'm the one sharing...

- I keep it simple.
I don't need to share the details. I share only what is necessary for the group to understand how to pray for me.
- I speak only about myself.
Though the group cares about the people in my life, at the moment, they are here for me. It's my brokenness that needs healing so I refrain from talking about others.
- I keep the focus on my heart.
The practice of Life-giving Relationships invites me to look beneath behavior to the heart. This is a challenge simply because we are conditioned to focus on external actions. Changed behavior will be the *result* of being changed from the inside out.
- I keep it real.
If and when I choose to share, I will have to set aside my image and take the risk of being real. I will also need to refrain from asking for prayer to please someone else. I will never experience the power of this practice unless I put all of my other desires below the desire for healing.