

FAMILY GROUP STARTER PACK



Fritz Below

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FAMILY GROUP STARTER PACK

Welcome to Family Groups at Lighthouse Community! You're going to have a great experience studying the bible, praying with friends, and growing spiritually. It's our intention that every person who participates in a Family Group experiences spiritual transformation by the Holy Spirit through bible study in a discipleship community.

The next ten weeks have the potential to shape your life. The Family Group Starter Pack is designed to provide you with resources, tips, and best practices that will help you get the most out of your time in Family Groups.

This resource will take you through four key concepts:

- How Spiritual Growth Happens
- How To Study the Bible
- How To Pray
- How To Build Biblical Friendships

Take time to familiarize yourself with these concepts and tools – they will help you to take profound steps of growth in your personal life along with those who are in your Family Group.

As with most things in life, the effort and focus you put into this semester will be a direct correlation to what you experience, so... don't be afraid to stretch yourself! Let's jump in.

How Spiritual Growth Happens

HOW SPIRITUAL GROWTH BEGINS

Our spiritual growth begins with God. We are all spiritually dead in our sin. As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins... (Ephesians 2:5, NIV). Not just some of us, but all of us: ...for *all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God... (Romans 3:23, ESV, emphasis added). Even though we are living and breathing, when we are separated from God by our sin, we are actually dead.

Thankfully, God loves us so deeply that He did not leave us in this dead state. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23, ESV). Through Jesus, the wages of sin were paid. God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8, NLT).

Because Jesus lived a perfect life, died a perfect death, and was raised in a perfect resurrection on our behalf, we can find freedom from sin and death, living in fellowship with God. It begins simply by trusting in Jesus and putting your faith in him and his way

of life. If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved (Romans 10:9-10, NLT).

Because God has made the first move in bringing us back to life, we are able to respond in faith and walk with him.

HOW SPIRITUAL GROWTH CONTINUES

Spiritual growth always begins with God and, at the same time, we play an active role, too. Put simply, there are three parts to continuing spiritual growth: God's part, your part, our part.

God's part is bringing us to life through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. When we come to genuine faith, God gives his Holy Spirit to live inside of us. Then he continues to lead us into ever-increasing spiritual growth. He is the primary cause of why we are transformed. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:7, ESV). In some ways, spiritual transformation is a gift.

At the same time, spiritual transformation is a position you put yourself in. You have a part in your spiritual growth. There are habits you can practice (like bible study and prayer) and environments you can step into (like Sunday morning worship and Family Groups) that will open the door for God to continue changing your life. Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13, NRSV).

Our part as fellow disciples of Jesus is to help coach and guide you into the truth of Christ. We're here to encourage you as you grow; to give guidance in challenging situations, and; to help you walk in fellowship with God instead of the cultural values of the world. Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:1-2, NIV). Did you catch it? In order to know God's will for our lives, our minds have to be renewed – meaning we have to think differently. That leads us into transformation.

Spiritual growth and transformation do not happen only at the moment of salvation – it continues throughout all of life until we are in heaven with God, face to face. Your active role makes a difference in becoming more and more like Jesus Christ.

A HELPFUL TOOL

Jim Putman and the team at Real Life Ministries developed a spiritual growth wheel that helps us to identify where people are at in their spiritual growth as well as giving some clear next steps that can propel people forward in their transformation.

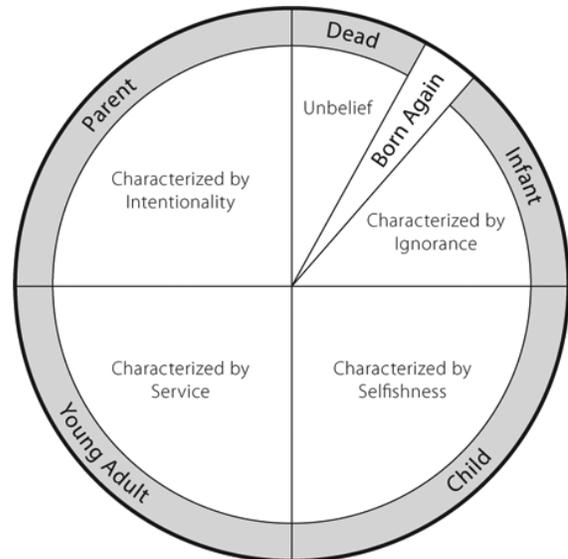
The ultimate goal is that every disciple of Jesus would grow to a place where she begins to intentionally disciple other people, helping them to grow, too. We would characterize that disciple as a spiritual parent.

No one is born a parent. They are developed and grown into parenthood. We all begin **spiritually dead**. No one is born a Christian or born saved. When we come to faith in Jesus, we call that being “born again” (from John 3:3). Being born again is a moment in time, not a phase.

After we’re born again, we become **spiritual infants**, characterized by ignorance about biblical truth and dependence on other disciples for help. Infants need other mature believers to help guide them early on. The Apostle Peter wrote, “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Peter 2:2-3, NIV). Infants need another believer to teach them biblical truths and habits like how spiritual growth happens, what it means to follow Jesus, who God is, and how to study the bible, pray, worship, and serve.

As we become more familiar with spiritual terms and reading the bible, we progress into a **spiritual child**, who tends to be characterized by self-centeredness and idealism. At this stage, help with clear thinking about what the bible says (rather what others say about the bible) and deeper understanding of issues like bible doctrine, spiritual battle, and building genuine friendships are key (Hebrews 5:13-6:3).

Over time, we find that our focus moves from self and instead toward others and God. **Spiritual young adults** are far from perfect, but they are energized by serving others and want to be a part of meaningful ministry. Don’t let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity (1 Timothy 4:12, NLT). The most effective way you can disciple a young adult is by helping them discover their spiritual gifts, train them for ministry, and teach them healthy boundaries to protect against burnout.



The ultimate destination for any disciple is to become a **spiritual parent**, one who is intentionally reproducing other disciples who walk with Jesus. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me (1 Corinthians 4:15-16, ESV). Spiritual parents will disciple others. They need a team who will help encourage, coach, and guide them.

No stage is more valuable than another. Rather, we work in partnership, helping each other to take intentional steps forward in spiritual growth.

To find out more about spiritual growth stages and how to take intentional steps of growth, order the book Real-Life Discipleship by Jim Putman or for an alternative reading, get Experiencing God by Henry Blackaby & Claude V.King.

How To Study the Bible

One of the most influential tools you will have available to your spiritual growth is the bible. The bible is not like any other book. It's unique and the effects it will have on your life are profound.

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires (Hebrews 4:12, NLT).

The bible is so precise in being able to reveal us to ourselves. It can discern a soul from a spirit, a bone from its marrow, and godly intentions from sinful desires. That's precision!

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NIV).

Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. (John 17:17, NKJV).

The word "sanctify" means to set apart for God's exclusive use. It can also be used in reference to spiritual growth. God's word is used to set us apart, help us grow, and equips us for serving others. Since the bible is so influential, it's important to understand how to use it.

THE INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY METHOD

While reading the bible is important, studying the bible is more than reading only. Here's a simple, yet effective, way to study the bible called Inductive Bible Study.

Observation

This part answers the question, “What does this passage say?” Here, you are looking at the plain meaning of the text, key words, phrases, and context (setting, who’s involved, etc.). Read through the passage and make some initial observations. Using the 5 W’s and 1 H is helpful - who, what, where, when, why, and how. If you encounter a word you don’t understand, look it up using a bible dictionary or a concordance.

Interpretation

Only after observation is it helpful to begin interpretation (some novice bible students move to this part too quickly or skip observation all together). Interpretation answers the question, “What does this passage mean?” This is discerning the principle or lesson that God wants us to know, irrespective of time, culture, or location. One question that can help get you to the principle is: what did this passage mean to the original writers and readers? It’s helpful to cross-reference other related scripture verses to get a broader understanding of the biblical topic.

Application

Following interpretation is application. This is where the proverbial rubber meets the road. If the truth of scripture does not affect your thinking or your living, you have not invited God to transform your life, but rather you have only collected information. Application answers the question, “What does God want me to do?” Too often, we settle for behavior modification, but let me encourage you to dig deeper. This is a great opportunity to compare your own values to the biblical values presented – are they in agreement or is this a good time to repent (change your way of thinking/living)?

When you use inductive bible study, you get a clearer picture of God’s truth revealed in the bible and practical ways to live in a transformed way.

TOOLS FOR BIBLE STUDY

To aid you in your bible study, there are a few key tools that can be especially helpful. They are listed below in order of effectiveness for the average bible student:

#1 - Study Bible

Every disciple should own a study bible. Study bibles include solid, scholarly introductions to every book as well as insightful footnotes to key verses. Some of the better study bible translations are: English Standard Version (ESV), New Living Translation (NLT), New King James Version (NKJV), and New International Version (NIV). If you don’t have one, get one. Now...

#2 - Bible Dictionary

A bible dictionary helps you to define people, places, words, and theological concepts. Since we are 2,000 years removed from the most recent bible events, there can be some cultural concepts lost and misunderstood. A bible dictionary helps to close that gap. One of the best bible dictionaries is the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary.

#3 - Bible Commentary

A bible commentary is the collection of bible scholars' study, explanations, and thoughts on scripture. They combine their training in history, Hebrew/Greek language, and culture to analyze verse, chapters, and entire books of the bible. The New Bible Commentary (one-volume) by InterVarsity Press is a great commentary.

#4 - Bible Concordance with Lexicon

A bible concordance is an organized list of every word used in the bible along with each reference. Most include a Hebrew and Greek lexicon that will help you define the original word as well as gain a fuller understanding of the word you're investigating. The best bible concordance is the one that matches your study bible translation (i.e. NLT, NIV, ESV, etc.)

BIBLE STUDY IN FAMILY GROUPS

The primary purpose of Family Groups is to experience spiritual transformation in our lives. Studying the bible with other believers is a great way to set yourself up for spiritual growth. To get the most from studying scripture with others...

- Read and study the passages on your own before you attend Family Group (use the bible study method and tools described above)
- Make notes of truths you discover and write down questions you have
- Be ready to share some of what you learned (you may even be able to answer other people's questions!)

The more you prepare ahead of time as a member of a Family Group, the more you will be equipped to help others in your group to encounter biblical truth.

FOR FURTHER READING ON BIBLE STUDY: [How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth](#) by Fee & Stuart

How to Pray

We can speak to God! And... God can speak to us! We call that prayer: talking with God and listening as God talks to us. There's no code to punch in. There's no key to unlocking prayer. Simply talk to God and he hears you.

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7, NLT).

In this passage, the apostle Paul wrote that disciples don't have to worry about any situation in life. Instead, we can take those worries, turn them into prayers, and we will

receive God's peace as a gift. This gift is so powerful that it "exceeds anything we can understand." The peace that God gives to us actually ends up guarding our hearts and minds in Christ. Prayer is powerful!

A dynamic aspect to prayer is that you can pray when you are by yourself and you can pray when you're with other people, too.

PRAYING ALONE

Having a plan for prayer can help you keep praying when you feel stuck. Sometimes, tools, like acronyms, can help us remember a model for prayer – not that we need a model or words to repeat. One model you can use is CHAT:

Confess – Sin always creates a barrier between us and God. Confession is not a bad thing; it's actually really good! Especially when you know that you're already forgiven. Starting out prayer with confession helps to clear the air of anything between you and God. The apostle John wrote: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9, NIV).

Honor – Honoring God through worship is a great way to enter into God's presence. Did you know the Bible has over one hundred names and characteristics of God? Names like Yahweh, Author of Peace, and King. Characteristics like love, powerful, and just. In prayer, use a name or characteristic to celebrate God. "God, I worship you as the Author of Peace. You bring peace to chaos and confusion. When I trust you in prayer, you give me the gift of your peace that guards my heart and mind in Christ. You are a peace giver." That's clear worship of who God is!

Ask – This is typically what people think of when they think of prayer: asking. It's good to ask. Ask for yourself. Ask for your family. Ask for friends and co-workers. Ask that God's glory would be on display through your life for everyone to see. Don't be afraid to ask – God's answers to our prayers are always the best answers.

Thank – Psalm 34 is a great reminder that we can never thank God enough. He provides everything for us: air, light, the ability to work and earn, food, not to even mention the greatest gift – salvation in Christ! Take time to thank God for what he has given you. Gratitude is a life-changing act.

PRAYING IN A FAMILY GROUP

Many people are comfortable praying alone, but when you get them with other people, all of a sudden, they become mute. That's understandable because the number one fear among Americans today is public speaking. Do you know what the number two fear is?

Death. Like Jerry Seinfeld points out, that means for the average person who goes to a funeral, he'd rather be the guy in the box than the one doing the eulogy!

Thankfully, praying in a Family group is not public speaking. Praying in a Family Group is simply talking to God in the presence of your friends. One idea to be aware of when you're praying in a group is the vertical and horizontal nature of prayer.

The vertical nature of prayer is focused on God. You can celebrate his unique greatness and pray for the requests of others, asking God to provide guidance or meet needs in their lives.

The horizontal nature of prayer is listening to the prayers of others in the room. Moments of comfort and unity take place when we agree with others in prayer, affirming what they have prayed or laboring with them in asking for God's provision.

Sometimes, people can be overly-focused vertically or horizontally in prayer. Those who focus on the vertical nature of prayer tend to think so much about what they're going to say when it's their turn that they miss out on hearing what others are praying for. Those who focus on the horizontal nature of prayer tend to develop anxiousness over what others will think of them when they pray and end up praying for nothing.

While praying in your Family Group, engage both vertically and horizontally. While others are praying, listen to their prayers and even encourage them with words like "I agree with that prayer" or even a simple "Amen." When it's your opportunity to pray, don't worry about what you will say. The Holy Spirit will bring people and situations to your mind. Even Jesus said, "When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don't be like them..." (Matthew 6:7-8, NLT).

Throughout the semester of Family Group, be sure to pray for three people:

- 1) **Your Family Group Co-Leaders:** Pray for them everyday. They have taken on the task of leading a group of believers in spiritual growth. Satan would love to distract, discourage, and demean them if he can. Pray for their personal walks with Jesus as well as their leadership of your Family Group.
- 2) **Your Family Group Members:** Pray for them every week. These are people who are committed to growing spiritually, just like you. Pray for their needs and for their spiritual transformation.
- 3) **Your Family & Friends Who Aren't Saved:** Pray for them every time the Holy Spirit brings them to mind. They are spiritually dead and if Jesus returns or if they die, they will be eternally separated from God and you. Ask God for the open doors to open hearts for you to open your mouth about the gospel.

FOR FURTHER READING ON PRAYER: [Prayer Coach](#) by James Nicodem

How To Build Biblical Friendships

As you read through Genesis 1, you discover that God was intimately involved in creating the universe, our world, and people. At each point in creation, God declared what he had made was good. But there was one moment when God said, “This is not good.” He said it was not good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18). It wasn’t good at the beginning of creation and it’s not good for Christ followers today.

So much of the New Testament is written in the plural. Many uses of the word “you” are not a singular “you,” but rather, it’s a plural “you” – like “y’all” or “you-ins” or “all y’all.” There are almost 60 “one another” verses that give instructions on how to serve, love, bear with, or pray for one another. Can you see that God is big on friendships?

All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer (Acts 2:42, NLT). “All the believers” together “devoted themselves.” One area they devoted themselves to was fellowship.

Fellowship is a bond of common purpose and devotion to one another and to Christ. This word “fellowship” lends its self toward a nautical theme. It speaks of two or more ships who choose to journey together to the same destination, helping one another along the way. As disciples of Jesus, we are all journeying, helping one another, to the same place – or better yet – the same person: God.

Do you know what’s unique about Christians journeying to God? First, Jesus has already shown us the way. It’s through faith and trust in him. Second, the Holy Spirit lives inside of every believer, helping us to become more like Jesus. Here’s where it gets pretty cool: God the Father wants us to be with him, so he sent God the Son to show us the way and, when we come to faith, God the Holy Spirit lives inside of us helping us along the journey. God helps us walk with God on our way to God! Wow!

And on top of that, we have a family, the church of God, encouraging us as we grow, too. It’s as if God really loves us and is making every way possible for us to know him and be with him. He is awesome!

BIBLICAL FRIENDSHIPS IN FAMILY GROUPS

While you’re in your Family Group this semester, give yourself away in friendship to the people in your group. Commit to helping them along the journey of being with God.

A couple of practical ways you can commit to friendship in your Family Group are:

- **Teach one another.** Share biblical truth with one another. If someone has questions about God or even thoughts that are not biblical, respond to them gently and help them discover truth. There was a time when someone had to correct your weird thinking, too.

- **Greet one another.** Be sure to say hi to everyone at your Family Group each meeting. Spend time getting to know each person throughout the semester. Ask them questions like, “Where did you grow up? How many siblings do you have? Where do you work? How did you come to faith in Jesus?”
- **Encourage one another.** Life can be challenging sometimes. Receiving words of encouragement and being prayed for can be a game changer in how you face difficult situations.
- **Serve one another.** If someone shares a need during prayer requests or in passing, consider this: God might want you to be the answer to their prayers! Does someone need help coaching their soccer team? Help them. Is someone praying for a new job? Give them a few leads. Did someone mention that their elderly neighbor is looking for someone to tackle some home projects? Ask your Family Group if they are up for the challenge.

FOR FURTHER READING ON BIBLICAL FRIENDSHIPS: “8 Principles of Biblical Friendship” by Brian Hedges (<https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/8-principles-of-biblical-friendship.html>)

Get Started!

Well... that’s it!

We hope you’re as excited about this semester of Family Groups as we are. Over the next ten weeks, you’ll encounter moments that have the potential to change your life for God’s glory and purposes. We’re praying that you’ll recognize those moments and choose to take intentional steps of growth closer to God. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you (James 4:8, NKJV).

Who knows? As you grow closer and closer to God, maybe he will invite you help others grow closer to him by serving as a Family Group Co-Leader, too. That would be cool!

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