AN EQUIPPING GUIDE FOR LIFE GROUP LEADERS

Lead a Life Group *like a shepherd.*

Your group is not a Bible study you facilitate. **It is a small flock the elders have entrusted to you** *– to know, to disciple, and to move along the pathway. The difference between those two callings is the difference between a meeting that meets and a leader who multiplies. Here's how to do the second one.*

— FIRST, THE SHIFT

Most Life Group leaders inherit a quiet assumption: *my job is to facilitate the sermon discussion, get through the questions, and end on time.* None of that is wrong. But if that's the whole of it, your group will plateau the moment the curriculum runs out. The calling is bigger.

IT IS	IT ISN'T
Shepherding a small flock the elders have entrusted to you	Facilitating a weekly discussion
Knowing each person's pathway stage and naming their next step	Getting through the curriculum
Pursuing those who drift	Tracking attendance
Confessing your own sin and growth with them	Performing maturity
Multiplying the next leader	Holding the group as your turf
A season of intentional care	A forever role

— YOUR THREE JOBS

JOB ONE

Shepherd the people

Know their names, their lives, their kids, their work, their fights, their fears, their joys. Pray for them by name. Reach out between meetings. **When someone drifts, pursue them.** That is not optional — it is the job.

JOB TWO

Open the Word

Lead a meeting that doesn't just discuss Sunday's sermon — it opens the text together, draws out what God is saying, and pushes the group **to live it this week.**

JOB THREE

Move them along the pathway

Every person in your group is somewhere on the pathway. **Your job is to know where** — and to know and gently name their next step.

— KNOW YOUR SHEEP — THE PATHWAY LENS

The single best practice for a Life Group leader is this: for every person in your group, you can name three things. **Where they are on the pathway today. What their next step is. Who they are discipling, if anyone.** Print this roster, fill it in, and keep it in your Bible. Update it monthly.

NAME	PATHWAY STAGE TODAY	THEIR NEXT STEP	WHO THEY'RE DISCIPLING

This is your scoreboard. Not attendance. Not who answered well. Movement.

NAMING A NEXT STEP — BY STAGE

Believing	Have you had the gospel conversation? Are they ready for baptism or a membership conversation?
Belonging	Walk them toward membership — the class, the covenant, the elder interview.
Maturing	Are they in a daily B.I.O. rhythm? Is there a habit they need to start? Is someone discipling them personally?
Ministering	Have they taken a gifts assessment? Do they know their sweet spot? Are they serving anywhere yet?
Multiplying	Are they investing in someone specifically? Have they *named* that person?

— A GREAT LIFE GROUP MEETING

A simple, repeatable rhythm. **Same shape every time.** Seventy-five minutes, plus the fellowship around it.

01 Catch Up — 15 MIN

Where life actually is. Don't skip this – it's where the real work happens.

- Where have you seen God this week?
- Where are you struggling — temptation, sin, doubt?
- Where do you need help — prayer, wisdom, courage?

02 Open the Word — C.O.M.A. — 45 MIN

Sermon-based discussion – not a sermon recap. Take what was preached and let the group own it through four questions: ***Context, Observation, Meaning, Application.***

- **What's going on before and after this passage?** (Context)
- **What does the text actually say?** (Observation)
- **What does it mean — about God, about people, about us?** (Meaning)
- **How do we live this out this week?** (Application)

03 Send Out — 15 MIN

Apply, intercede, pray each other out the door.

- One specific thing each person will act on this week.
- One person on each member's heart who doesn't yet know Jesus.
- Pray for one another before you leave.

— LEADING THE DISCUSSION WELL

Sermon-based discussion is not a sermon recap. The Sunday gathering already did that. Your job is to take what was preached and help your people **do** something with it.

- **Ask open questions.** "What did you hear?" not "Did you hear…?"

- **Let silence breathe.** The first five seconds of silence feels like thirty. Wait it out. Someone will speak.
- **Draw out the quiet by name.** "John, what stood out to you?" — warm, not on-the-spot.
- **Gently rein in the dominant talker.** In the meeting: "That's a great thread — let's hear from someone who hasn't shared yet." Outside the meeting, kindly: "I've noticed you're really engaged. Can you help me by drawing Sarah and Jim in more?"
- **Redirect tangents kindly.** "Hold that thought — let's come back to it. Where were we?"
- **Don't have the answer ready for every question.** You're modeling that the Word teaches when we sit with it.

— THE HARD PARTS (AND HOW TO HANDLE THEM)

"Someone is drifting — three missed weeks and no reply to my texts."

Show up. Don't ask permission. A casual visit, a thoughtful note, a phone call from your wife or husband to theirs — **pursue.** People drift because they think no one notices. Notice loudly.

"Two members are in conflict with each other."

Take Matthew 18 seriously. Ask each whether they've gone to the other privately. If they haven't, walk them through that step. If it's escalated, bring in an elder. **Don't try to settle it inside a meeting.**

"A doctrinal question came up and I don't know the answer."

Say so. Tell the group you don't know — then go find out. Ask a pastor, an elder, or a trusted resource. Report back next week. **Shepherds aren't soloists.**

"Someone shared a serious crisis — abuse, mental health, marital breakdown."

Listen. Pray. Then, after the meeting, **get them to an elder or a qualified counselor.** Don't try to handle it alone. For anything safety-related, loop in pastoral care immediately.

"One person dominates every meeting."

Two moves. **In-group**: "Let's hear from someone else." **Out-of-group**: a private, warm conversation enlisting them as your helper rather than calling them out.

"Our group has plateaued — same conversations, no movement."

This is usually a sign you stopped naming next steps. Pull out the roster, look at each name, and ask: **when was the last time I named their next step out loud to them?** Movement starts when you start moving.

— YOUR OWN FORMATION — NON-NEGOTIABLES

You cannot give what you do not have. The Life Group leader who is not himself being discipled, in the Word daily, and walking out his own next step will run dry. Fast.

ONE

You are being discipled

Name the person (or two) who is discipling you — a Paul-Timothy, or a triad with two peers one step ahead (AAC's default). If you can't, fix that this month. **Even your pastor needs a discipler.**

TWO

You live B.I.O.

Before God daily. **In community** weekly — in a discipling relationship that is not the group you lead. **On mission** twenty-four-seven.

THREE

You confess to a peer

Someone outside the group hears your real life. The leader who only confesses to those he leads creates an awkward dynamic. **Get a brother or sister outside the group.**

— MULTIPLY YOURSELF — RAISE AN APPRENTICE

The biggest single failure of Life Group ministry is the leader holding the group too long. **A great leader is replaced by a great leader within eighteen to twenty-four months.** That is not a punishment — it is the design. Spot your apprentice in the first six months. They look like: faithful attender, hungry, growing, asks good questions, shows up early or stays late, the group already half-listens to them anyway.

MONTHS 1–3	**Invite them in** "I want to invest in you. I want to give you a year of growing into leading a group of your own." Begin meeting one-on-one outside the group.
MONTHS 3–6	**Hand them small things** Lead an opening prayer. Take one of the four C.O.M.A. questions. Reach out to a member on your behalf. Take a quiet member to coffee.
MONTHS 6–12	**Hand them big things** Lead a whole meeting. Pursue a drifting member. Open Scripture themselves and lead the discussion. Sit in on your roster review.
MONTHS 12–18	**Hand them the keys** They co-lead. Then lead alone with you in the room. Then lead alone, with you available.
MONTHS 18–24	**Commission them** Commission them publicly. They start a new group; half of your group goes with them. **You start raising the next apprentice.**

THE MATH OF MULTIPLICATION

This is how four Life Groups become eight, and eight become sixteen, in three years — without a building campaign or a hiring spree.

GO DEEPER · THE MULTIPLYING TOOLKIT

Raising an apprentice is one shape of the broader multiplying call. For the full play-by-play — the triad as default, C.O.M.A. inside the meeting, the five-stage gradual release, and the Marks of a Disciple-Maker you self-assess at year-end — see the **Multiplying Playbook**.

— YOUR RHYTHM — A YEAR AT A GLANCE

WEEKLY

- Prep the discussion (30–45 min)
- Lead the meeting (75 min)
- Reach out to one member between meetings — a text, a call, a coffee
- Pray through the roster (10 min)

MONTHLY

- **Roster review** — where is each person on the pathway? Who is drifting? Who needs a next-step conversation?
- Meet with your apprentice — invest, hand over more responsibility, encourage.

QUARTERLY

- Meet with another Life Group leader or a pastor — *your* own check-in. Tired? Discouraged? Growing?
- Roster recalibration — name the wins, name the stalls.

YEARLY

- Evaluate with an elder. What moved? What didn't?
- Should this group multiply this year? Is your apprentice ready to be sent?

Starter pack — *your first ninety days*

- [ ] **Memorize every member's name** and one specific detail about each (kids, work, what they're wrestling with).
- [ ] **Pray through the roster** every day for the first month.
- [ ] **Have coffee or call each member individually** in the first thirty days — outside the meeting.
- [ ] **Re-read this guide** at day forty-five.
- [ ] **Identify your apprentice candidate** by day sixty.
- [ ] **First check-in with an elder** by day ninety.
- [ ] **Name each member's pathway stage** by day ninety.
- [ ] **Name each member's next step out loud to them** by day ninety.

"Shepherd God's flock among you ... not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock." 1 PETER 5 : 2–3