
THE FOUNDATIONS OF LIFE

Immanuel Church



2019-2020

IMMANUEL CHURCH

9511 West Broadway Avenue, Forest Lake, MN 55025

Launch Curriculum
2019-2020

WELCOME

Life with Jesus is so much better together. We as a people were created to live in community with one another, not isolation. We were created to live in unity, not be confused with uniformity, with one another. It's a basic premise that stems back to the creation narrative in Genesis 2. It is not good for man to be alone. Here at Immanuel, we have a phrase that says we want to be a Church that is passionately pursuing God together because we believe community with one another cannot be taken lightly. It is an important and fundamental part of our walk with Jesus.

Maybe you're sitting in this group right now thinking what in the world did I just get myself into? Maybe you have a lot of questions like what is a Life Group? Think of it as the people of God continuing what was set before us in Acts 2. After a ton of people had their lives transformed by Jesus it says that these people were devoted to the teaching of the apostles, fellowship with other believers, and were filled with the Spirit. This happened not only at the temples, but also "...in their homes...and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." Now, I cannot say what will specifically happen in your group, but I'd like to believe it will be as powerful as the early Church. Not because they had the perfect model, but because it was a group of people who were sold out for Jesus.

Regardless the similarities, and differences, that your Life Group has there is no greater unifier than the Holy Spirit. Allow him to change your life, your group, and lead your discussion. If you're willing to do that, then not only will your life will be radically changed, but so will the lives of the people around you. The last thing I want to note before you get started is how that Acts 2 passage ends. "...and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." I'm not about to ask your group to meet daily, but I will ask that this group isn't privatized for you and your friends. Invite people into the life change that is taken place and share the good news of Jesus with the world! If you do that, then I believe the Lord will add to our Life Groups daily, weekly, and yearly.

Shea V. Cutshaw

Associate Pastor, Immanuel Church

Using this Guide

- (1) ***Before each meeting***, read the material for the current week and review the material from the previous week. Your guide is the same as the leaders, so everyone is on the same page...literally.
- (2) ***During each meeting***, read out loud the current material you are going over. Make sure each person over the next couple weeks gets a chance to interact and do this. Using the questions, allow a free-flowing conversation to take place. You don't have to get through all the questions. Discuss what you've read, and how you can apply it to your everyday life. Help others see ways they can apply it too. Your insight may be extremely helpful to others.
- (3) ***After each meeting***, pray for each member of the group and the material that was discussed. Allow it to take root into your life and apply it daily.

How Should the Structure Look?

There is not a stand-alone structure that works best so the following is just a suggestion to help your group get started.

Fellowship (30 minutes)

This could involve casual conversations about the week, an ice breaker game, or catching up on other people's weeks. It's unstructured, relaxed, and gives a chance for people to put down any walls that might have been up.

Study/Group Time (45 minutes-1 hour)

This is the time that is intentionally structured to go through the material you are going through as a group. For example, this study provides material to read through and discuss.

Prayer (15-30 minutes)

This is a great way to close and connect with God as a group over the material you discussed. Also, for people in the group who have prayer request, this is a great time to intercede on their behalf. Groups can choose what this time looks like whether it is individual, popcorn, ect.

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Ok, Now What?

Session One: The Importance of Community

One of the deepest desires of the human heart is companionship. I'm not talking about dating, or marriage, but just true companionship, or friendship. Sure, we love our secluded vacation time, but we can't live like that forever. Even the person who thinks "but I can" has a desire for community. That isn't by mistake or chance, but a product of being created in the image of God (Genesis 2.)

Over the next couple sessions, and really for as long as you choose to be a part of LifeGroups we want to make sure that community aspect is understood to be important. Not for us to grow as a Church, but for you to grow as a follower of Jesus.

As you begin each week will include an intro similar to what you just read, followed by our weekly reading which will be from scripture. Read this out loud and follow the guide through its statements and questions. At the end there will be a section for you to become challenged and take notes.

Weekly Reading

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts. ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:42-47 NIV.)

The concept of Life Group, small groups, discipleship groups, or whatever we call them is not a new thing. It's not a new "fad" or "trend." It's been around since the start of the New Testament church. This was how these believers experienced Church.

No, I'm not about to tell you to sell your house, car, and give away everything you own. That would make for a poor interpretation of what's actually going on here. While this could very well become a small group, what is happening above is the not the rules of being a Christian in a Life Group. What's actually happening is because of the community taking place, these people decided to give up everything to push further into that community.

In the image of God, we were created to have a relationship with him and other people. Those relationships, if we're ready to embrace, cause us to live in such a different and radical way. So, while I'm not saying go out and sell everything you have to really experience a Life Group, I am going to say that a true-Life Group experience will take devotion and sacrifice. A true community doesn't have to set rules like this up because this is just an aspect of who they are.

Let's Talk!

1. What motivated you to join a Life Group?
2. What needs to happen to create a true and deep Life Group experience?
3. What are you hoping God does through Life Groups?
4. Are there any relationships you have in life where you feel like you can be vulnerable? What makes it that way?
5. What about Life Groups is easy, and hard, for you?

On the Way!

As you head home today, find one way you can start to devote a deeper experience to Life Groups.

Session Two: The Heart of LifeGroups

How often do we wish that we could just be a super Christian that is devoted and following God perfectly every single day? For example, have you ever had such a spiritual high experience that you vowed you would follow God until the end of your days? Like you had such a spiritual experience with God that there is no way you could ever fall back into sin; yet, a couple days, weeks, or months later you find that feeling has faded away. Wow, that's such a human thing to experience. That's the ebb and flow of the Christian life. Just read through the book of Judges and you'll start to feel better about yourself. You'll see Israel doing a lot worse than you're probably doing right now. If you're a follower of Jesus I know you have to be following me. So how do we turn our lives, and really have a life that is devoted to Jesus? You live in a community, and you love your community. I know that word love has really lost its meaning, but let's read our text and I'll show you what I'm talking about.

Weekly Reading

³⁴Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together.³⁵One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question:³⁶"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"³⁷Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment.³⁹And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.⁴⁰All the Law and Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:34-40 NIV.)

That's a powerful passage. Just take a moment if you need to and read it again. Now, it might be easy for us to lose sight of this passage because of the word "love" but here is what that word means, as described by John Piper. "Love is delighting in and being with God." We've taken love and let it become a pen cup word. We all have that cup full of different types of, and colors of, pens. Sometimes there are markers, pencils, and other things. While we call it a pen cup it covers a wide variety of things. Same thing as love. We use the word love for everything, but when you really define the word love used in the text above it is life changing!

Jesus answers this question above with such a great answer. Jesus says that we are to delight being in, and with God. Not just God but he says that same thing about others. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love your neighbor like you would love and take care of yourself. We are willing to make a sacrifice if we know that it's going to benefit us. Sometimes it's hard to make those decisions but we make them because for the most part we want to experience life to the fullest. Jesus says, in the same way you do that for yourself, do that for other people. He doesn't give examples when he says this because every day, and every situation, is unique and different. Sometimes we sacrifice money for people, but money isn't always the answer. Sometimes you sacrifice time, resources, and the list could go on and on. The emphasis is not on the thing you are giving up, but the heart that is behind it. You're not giving it up casually either, because you are giving it up as you would for yourself. That's what real and authentic LifeGroups look like. Sacrificing for others as you would for yourself. You are looking at others, like they are you. When we look at the world through that lens it changes the way we live in community with one another.

Let's Talk!

- 1. What's the hardest part about loving other people.**
- 2. Do you currently look at others like Jesus describes?**
- 3. We've all sacrificed something for someone at some point in our lives. Why did you do that?**
- 4. How can we give to each other practically in this group?**
- 5. What about Life Groups is easy, and hard, for you?**

On the Way!

As you head home today, how can you start to look at relationships through the lens of a gospel centered heart.

Session Three: Think Bigger than the Group

One truth that I don't think we hear enough is that you, the person reading this or hearing this, are God's workmanship created for the things that He has already pre-planned. You are unique and created for a specific purpose within the will of God. We all share a similar testimony in that we were once dead in our sin, but now we are alive in Jesus because of his death and resurrection. As the great hymn "Amazing Grace" put it we were blind but now we see! And that, combined with our specific story and giftedness, is unique to you and we have to share that. We have to make sure we are not just keeping that to ourselves, and those in the Church. God doesn't want to just change and transform you, but he wants to do that our community, our state, our nation, and our entire world.

In one of Jesus most famous sermons, the sermon on the mount, Jesus gives us a great teaching regarding this very thing:

Weekly Reading

"¹³You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. ¹⁴You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:13-16 NIV.)

DL Moody says it great when he says *"a holy life will make the deepest impression. Lighthouses blow no horns, they just shine."* We live in a culture that is dying. A better way to say it, for this passage, is that we live in a culture that is decaying and we need preservation. The Jewish people would have understood this salt reference because salt was used to help preserve their meat and other things. Jesus is calling us to do that same thing. Our salt should be used to help preserve a decaying culture. That salt is Jesus and people need to know about Jesus. We'll end this section with this thought. Jesus did not call us to be the honey of the world. Helmut Thielicke says it best way he says that *"one would think that their ambition is to be the honeypot of the world. They sweeten and sugar the bitterness of life with an all too easy conception of a loving God..."*

If you're anything like me, you ask for less salt. I hate putting more salt on things because it has a bite. It has to kick you first before you really can understand the taste it has. That's the same thing Jesus calls us to. Our speech should always include love, but the complete message of the cross includes the understanding of judgement and as much as it does grace. Does your life match this? Are you sharing your faith with those around you?

We are never too young, or in the b-league of our faith that looks to tomorrow. We are never too busy to think we'll eventually get to that. We never retire from our faith, that looks to accomplishments and blessings from the past. We are called to serve for the here, the now, and everyday going forward.

Let's Talk!

1. When was the last time you shared your faith?
2. As Jesus teaches on salt and light, is this you?
3. How would you share the Gospel, while also using the unique story God gave you? Share that.
4. Why is it hard to share your faith?
5. Who is one person you can share your faith with today?

On the Way!

As you head home today, is there someone in your life whether that is a friend, family member, or neighbor that needs to hear who Jesus is? Even if it's for the millionth time?

Session Four: Take that Step

It's my hope that this study has been a blessing to you so far, and that is has been challenging to you as well. This session is going to be no different and I want to challenge you to get into the game, if you are not already; and if you, I want you to take this session to evaluate that. I want to dive into a two-verse story about Jesus healing a man with leprosy.

Weekly Reading

“While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, ‘Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.’ Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ And immediately the leprosy left him” (Luke 5:12-13 NIV.)

Before you jump into this text, there are some key things to note. In Biblical times, leprosy was a disease that meant death if you had it. There was almost no hope for you. You couldn't see your friends, family, or anyone. You would be banished from the town, or city, and you would have to live in isolation from the rest of the world. This was a serious thing to have happen you. Just writing this, and reading this, doesn't really do the justice of the hopelessness that would be felt. People would avoid you at all cost, and it would even be hard for people to look at you. Everything you would have worked for, or had, would be gone. These people suffered physically, emotionally, and socially.

One day though, this guy had enough of the isolation and hopelessness. He heard that Jesus was in a town, and he decided I'm going to see this Jesus. In order for him to get to Jesus he would have to endure the pain that traveling would have on him. He would have to somehow enter the city gates. He would have to get through the large crowd that would always follow Jesus. See, if someone with leprosy entered a town they would be stoned. This guy makes his way in, and I'm sure as he entered the crowd people would be stepping back and doing everything, they could to avoid this guy. In the midst of everyone stepping back though, in the midst of what would have looked like a horrifying individual Jesus stepped toward him. Jesus is able to heal people by just speaking. He could have just

thought, and this man could have been healed. But this passage says Jesus touched the man with leprosy and healed him. Do you seem what's happening here? A guy is willing to risk everything because he believes Jesus can change his situation, his outcome, and his entire life.

Have we taken that step towards Jesus today? Have we ever? Are we willing to, in front of the whole world, say I follow Jesus? Often times we want to do the Nicodemus route of appearing at times to be interested in Jesus, instead of throwing ourselves at the feet of Jesus. We love Jesus, we believe in Jesus, we get saved by Jesus, but we don't want to walk daily with Jesus because that'll make me look odd. Maybe it's the opposite, and you need to be like Jesus and take the stepped towards those who have nothing that everyone else wants to avoid.

Let's Talk!

1. Is there anything in the text you can relate to?
2. What could it look like for this group to take a risk, like the man with leprosy did?
3. What does it look like to DAILY pursue Christ?
4. What's the hardest part about this text?
5. Have you been taking steps TOWARD people in our community like Jesus walk towards us?

On the Way!

As you head home today, do you need to fall at the feet of Jesus, or do you need to step towards those that others avoid?

Session Five: Gospel-Centered Service

Often times, we will take at this word service and tie it to a set of actions. Nothing wrong with that, but as believers we don't just participate in service, but we model a lifestyle of service. We ARE servants. If you would call yourself a Christian than you are called to a lifestyle of constant, and consistent, service to God and others. Often times in the Bible we see this word of slave being brought up. We are called either a slave to sin, or a slave to God. Don't get too hung up on that word. All that word means is the Greek is that you belong to someone.

See we all belong to something. We either belong to sin, or we belong to God and I hope you are belonging to the latter. I think Paul illustrates this perfectly for us towards the end of Romans 6.

Weekly Reading

¹⁵What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. ¹⁸You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness” (Romans 6:15-18 NIV.)

Wow, if those few verses don't impact you just go through and really read that again. You do not choose if you serve, or not, you are serving and that's by way of reading that text. You serve towards either a means of death, or by a means of righteousness! The question that begs, who is your master? Who, or what, are you serving? See that question is actually easier to answer than we like to think. When you look back at the calendar of your day, the past week, and the past month, what have you spent most of your time doing? When you look back at your financial history where have you spent most of your money? See, those things are often times indicators of where our heart is at. Those things often times show us who, or what, is first in our life. Do you catch where I'm going with this?

See when Jesus becomes master of our life, he becomes master of all of it. Not just some of it, but all of it. Maybe you read this title and had expectations that it was going to tell you where to serve, or what to do for service. No. In fact, this idea of service is just begging you to look at your life and compare it with who is the master of your life. If it's Jesus, then knowing what to do in service is the easy part. Share the Gospel, love other people, and other things we've addressed in earlier sessions. But true Gospel Centered Service has you look back on who the master of your life is, because we don't get to play the middle ground. As Romans 6 tells us, we are either a slave to sin, or we're a slave to God.

Let's Talk!

- 1. Have you ever thought about service as a lifestyle, or have you seen it as just a set of actions?**
- 2. In our context, what are common things people let become masters of their lives if it's not Jesus? Why do you think that is?**
- 3. Is there an area of your life that seems to fall short here?**
- 4. What's the hardest part about making Jesus the MASTER of your life?**
- 5. Have can you help lead others to living this lifestyle?**

On the Way!

As you head home today, how can you start to live by Paul's example of making Jesus the master of your life?

Session Six: Ok, What's Next?

We're going to mix things up a bit here. Instead of the traditional Bible Study we've been doing in this past couple sessions let's just focus on celebration for a moment. Celebrate Jesus, and what he's done for us. Celebrate the growth people in the group have made. Celebrate the journey you've have been on for the past few weeks, and let's share that with one another.

Let's share the things God has been doing in your life whether it was through the study or through other outlets outside of this group. It's easy for us to get caught up in the rhythm of just doing a study, answering a few questions, praying, and coming back for the next session. Let's truly for this time though just walk with one another, cry with one another, laugh with one another, and do life together. Look forward to the next study, or group, or whatever God has next for the people in your circle.

Weekly Reading

"¹ When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion; we were like those who dreamed. ² Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.' ³ The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy" (Psalm 126:1-3 NIV.)

Let's Talk!

- 1. What has been your favorite part of this study?**
- 2. What has been the most challenging part of this study?**
- 3. How can the group be praying for as we move forward?**

