

Introduction to the LIFE Vision

Why LIFE Groups?

New Hope's vision is to *become an authentic community who passionately follows Jesus Christ and prepares people to impact the world.* We believe that much of this vision becomes a reality as the church meets in homes out in the community. We call these home groups "LIFE Groups." LIFE stands for:

Learning biblical truth

Intercession

Fellowship

Extending **LIFE** to others

LIFE Groups are truly "**more than a meeting.**" In order to pursue these four functions, LIFE Groups engage in a variety of activities as a community and out in the community.

How are LIFE Groups different than Bible studies or care groups?

The Dead Sea is a helpful illustration on this point. The Dead Sea is "dead and smelly" because it has lots of water pumping into it, but has no meaningful outlet. Thus, its "life" evaporates in the heat and no living thing can survive in its toxic waters for the long haul.

We believe that the classic Bible study or care group model runs the risk of becoming toxic as well. We definitely value Bible study and caring for one another. However, if there is no meaningful "outlet" or common mission beyond the group, then we believe that the group will eventually become toxic. At that point, more Bible study and more caring simply add to the group's toxicity. In other words, we want to avoid the "holy huddle" syndrome that plagues much of American Christianity. As a result, LIFE Groups seek to intentionally engage the non-believing world all around them.

Why focus so much on LIFE Group planting?

The primary way that we seek to avoid the "holy huddle"/"Dead Sea" syndrome is by moving toward a *LIFE Group planting movement.* Every LIFE Group is expected to move towards planting a new LIFE Group at the proper time (*note: this usually takes a couple of years*). For this to become a reality, the group's leaders must inject the vision for multiplication into the very DNA of their group. We believe that progress towards LIFE Group multiplication is typically the best measure of whether or not a LIFE

Group is healthy. Multiplication will not occur unless authentic community is created, people are being reached with the gospel, disciples are being made, and new leaders are being equipped.

How do LIFE Groups “prepare people to impact the world”?

Jesus has called us to “go and make disciples of all nations.” He intended for this discipling of the nations to occur primarily through healthy, missional communities of people. Since “they will know we are Christians by our love for one another”, it is really important to expose people to biblical truth in the context of a loving community. People need to see us loving one another! As a result, we believe that LIFE Groups are the best way to “prepare people to impact the world” together. The following reasons support our emphasis:

- *LIFE Groups are reproducible in most cultures and environments.* They are not curriculum or facility dependent, and are not mere products of an American variety of Christianity. LIFE Groups (a.k.a. “the church house to house”) started in New Testament times, and history has shown them to be effective worldwide.
- *LIFE Groups take advantage of our ongoing need for biblical community.* Rather than sending out individual laborers in the worldwide harvest, we hope to increasingly send out teams of people who have had time to develop a common history together.
- *Local LIFE Group participation is great training for cross-cultural or domestic marketplace missions.* As individuals unite together to experience LIFE and extend LIFE to others here, we believe they will develop a heart and practical skills that can easily transfer to other locations and people-groups.
- *The dynamic nature of LIFE Groups gives us a great opportunity to send out teams of people united in a common mission.* The transient nature of the Manhattan community dictates that we think through how best to send out laborers into the worldwide harvest. It is very conceivable that some LIFE Groups will multiply by sending out a few of their members to plant a LIFE Group in another domestic or international location.

I am convinced that God will use us to advance His kingdom as we unwaveringly pursue becoming a network of missional communities. I am also convinced that “everything rises and falls on leadership.” Therefore, you (the leader) play a crucial role in leading people to embrace the LIFE vision. I am praying that God will make us all like “the Issacharites, *who understood the times and knew what Israel should do*: 200 chiefs with all their relatives under their command” (1 Chronicles 12:32).

Together for the advance of the kingdom,

Todd Stewart