

Devon Park Baptist Church

Life Group

Covenant Members
Handbook 2017



DPBC LIFE GROUP COVENANT MEMBERS HANDBOOK 2017

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Explanation of Covenant Member's Handbook

This handbook is to help give guidance for current and potential DPBC Life Group Covenant Members. The contents of this handbook have been compiled by the DPBC Life Group Committee and approved by the Pastors and Deacons of DPBC. Our aim is to be clear on our expectations for Life Group members and to provide biblical, beneficial, and clear direction for the Life Group ministry at DPBC. Please direct any questions or comments to Pastor Micah, DPBC Life Group Facilitator.

The “5 W’s” of DPBC Life Groups

The following “5 W’s” define what life groups at DPBC are to be and define the goals, expectations and vision for this ministry.

Who?

Life Groups are for anyone, age 18+, including members, non-members and members of the communities in which our life groups meet.

What?

Life Groups are a place to grow deeper in our relationship with God and others. They are an environment to provide fellowship, accountability, and a place for us to live out the “One Another’s” of the New Testament. Life Groups are to be serving the church, each other, their community and doing outreach in the neighbourhood they meet in. We are calling them “Life Groups” instead of “Small Groups” to help communicate the permanency of the groups. These groups will not be changing every 6-8 weeks. Members are to commit to a group and stick with that group for the foreseeable future, or until the group reaches maximum capacity (14-16 members). When the group reaches capacity, the apprentice leader is to start another group with some of those members as well as new members looking for a Life Group to join. Our desire is to see Life Groups be multigenerational, mixing older with younger, to provide an opportunity for “**Titus 2**” type discipleship relationships within the group. Multigenerational Life Groups are our goal, but we are also open to other group dynamics, such as a “You Marrieds with Kids” groups, as we are seeking to be accommodating to all.

When?

Any night of the week that works best for the members in a particular Life Group, even if it means having to meet on a Sunday or Wednesday night. Weekly meetings are ideal, and groups will likely meet in the evening. We encourage groups to meet for 1.5 to 2 hours. Leaders and apprentice leaders should work out details on whether a meeting should be cancelled or not if it falls on a holiday. We suggest a 2-3 week break over Christmas and New Year’s. Some Life Groups may wish to meet year round, while others may choose to take a break for a month or two over the summer, perhaps July and August.

Where?

Life Groups are to meet in homes of willing and able hosts who will be gracious and generous in their hospitality. Life Groups should be spread out around our city, even on the outskirts of our city if need be, so we can accommodate all those at DPBC and effectively reach out into all the communities around Fredericton. Determining which Life Group someone attends should be based on both the proximity to where a Life Group meets and its meeting schedule.

Why?

The following are our 4 core purposes for Life Groups, as well as verses for biblical support.

Community/Fellowship

Life Groups are to be an environment in which to share life with one another, be encouraging, find a true sense of community (imaging the Trinity), form deep and lasting friendships and live and act out the “One Another’s” of the New Testament. They are a place where we look out for the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of each other.

Heb.10:24&25, *“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”*

Rom.12:4&5, *“ For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”*

Acts 2:42, *“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”*

1 Peter 3:8, *“Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, & a humble mind.”*

Bible study/Spiritual growth

Life Groups are a place where we can continue to grow in the knowledge of the LORD and His Word through study of the Scriptures and Bible-centered, Gospel saturated material. They are a time to go deeper into Sunday’s messages, learn from each other, have interactive discussion and dialog, and a chance to ask questions. Leaders are to help shepherd the souls of their members and be used of the LORD to help members grow deeper in their knowledge and love for God. These groups are to help members endeavour to grow closer to God through Bible study and practical application of Scripture.

Titus 1:9, *“holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.”*

1 Timothy 4:13, *“Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.”*

2 Timothy 2:2, “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

Ephesians 4:14&15, “that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head-Christ.”

2 Peter 3:18, “but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.”

Prayer/Accountability

Time should be taken during each meeting to go before God in prayer, with thanksgiving and praise. We should pray for one another, our church and community. We should put into practice what we’ve been taught on Sunday, working it out, wrestling with it, being practical and being doers of the Word while holding each other accountable. Life Groups are a safe place to share personal struggles in a grace-filled group of men/women.

James 5:16, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”

Galatians 6:1&2, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. 2 Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

Ecclesiastes 4:9&10, “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. 10 For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up.”

Service/Outreach

Life groups are a place to plan ways to serve other DPBC members, as well as plan to serve/reach others in our neighbourhoods with the Gospel. Groups may also choose to serve together in an area of need at DPBC, an existing or new ministry at DPBC, or with another like-minded ministry in the city.

Romans 12:6-8, “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; 7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; 8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”

Galatians 5:13, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

Col.3:23&24, “And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.”

Expectations of a DPBC Life Group Members

The leadership of DPBC would like people who are joining a group to see themselves as a “covenant” member of that group. “Covenant” means “a binding agreement”. The goal for members is to commit to a group and stick with that group as long as possible. The longevity of a group which contains the same members breeds trust, transparency, and helps to form deep friendships. The longer members of a particular group stay together, the more likely they’ll sense a close-knit, open and honest community that they feel comfortable in.

Life Group members are to respect the leadership of their group, namely the leader and apprentice leader. Leaders of these groups have been carefully and prayerfully chosen, and have met the expectations laid out in the Leader’s Handbook. These leaders are to help shepherd members, provide spiritual guidance, aid in members’ growth in their relationship with the LORD, as well as help with members’ physical and emotional needs. Member are to look out for the interests of their fellow members by being used of God to help meet spiritual, physical and emotional needs of other members. Having a deep-rooted, grace-filled, open, honest, and close-knit community is a primary goal of DPBC Life Groups. We want members to be a part of living out the “One Another’s” of the New Testament:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Members one of another | 10. Bear with (put up with) |
| 2. Devoted (Family) | 11. Submit |
| 3. Honour | 12. Encourage |
| 4. Be of Same Mind (unity) | 13. Love (most freq. used 58x) |
| 5. Accept | 14. Be hospitable |
| 6. Admonish (counsel) | 15. Seek Peace with |
| 7. Greet | 16. Pray for & Confess your sin |
| 8. Serve | 17. Be kind & tender-hearted |
| 9. Bear one another’s burdens (help) | 18. not Provoke |

Life Group members are to try their best to make it out each week to their Life Group meetings. Faithfulness to the group is key to developing grace-filled, deep and lasting friendships that will translate into a close community within the group. Each week the Life Group will have elements of fellowship, spiritual growth, prayer, accountability, and planning for service. Members are to seek to participate in all of these aspects of the group

Forming & Multiplication of DPBC Life Groups

Each DPBC Life Group is to start with a qualified leader and apprentice leader. These leaders are to partner with the host couple, if one of the leaders isn't hosting, to provide a welcoming, comfortable, grace-filled environment to meet in. Pastor Micah and the Life Group committee are to help direct members to the Life Group nearest them that also meets on a day and time that works with their schedule. The groups are to strive for permanency - to meet together for the foreseeable future. Members are to commit to a group and stick with that group. Life Groups are to have at least 6 members, including a leader and apprentice leader, and groups are to have up to a maximum of 16 members.

Our desire is to see Life Groups grow to reach maximum capacity and then to start multiplying. When a group becomes too large the apprentice leader is to start another group with some of the existing members as well as new members looking for a Life Group to join. When a new Life Group forms, the leader of the initial group is to find a replacement for his apprentice leader. The former apprentice leader, who is now leading a group, is also to find himself an apprentice leader. Right from the start, Life Group leaders and apprentice leaders should be taking note of the men in their group and considering who may stick out to them as a potential future apprentice leader.

Every new member of DPBC should be directed to a Life Group, and each existing member is to be highly encouraged to join a Life Group near them. Pastor Woodcock and Pastor Micah will strongly encourage members and non-members to commit to a Life Group. Deacons should have a conversation with each person on their Shepherd's List about Life Groups and encourage them to join one near them.

Suggested Weekly Format for DPBC Life Groups

Each Life Group meeting should aim to be 1.5-2 hours long and contain the following:

- **Fellowship Time:** Informal conversations, a time for getting to know each other and sharing about your week. Light refreshments will be served during this time.
- **Discussion of Sunday Morning's Sermon:** This block of time serves to provide the members time to discuss Sunday's message, ask questions, and keep each other accountable for putting the message into practice in their daily lives.
- **Study:** Whether it is the leader speaking verse by verse through a book of the Bible, having a discussion on a book they've chosen to go through, or watching a video with a discussion time following, Life Groups should strive to study.
- **Prayer and Accountability:** This is a good way to end the meeting. Share about your life, ask for prayer for people and situations you or someone you know may be going through, or even feel free to humbly share personal struggles, asking for prayer, support and accountability to get through the struggle.

- **Planning Service/Outreach:** This doesn't have to be weekly, but at least once a month, plan ways to reach out into the community, to the lost, as to DPBC members who may live in your community but don't attend your Life Group. Plan opportunities to serve each other in your group and think of ways you could come together to serve at DPBC.

Choosing Studies for DPBC Life Groups

Leaders and apprentice leaders are to choose a book of the Bible to study through, a Christian book to read through/discuss, or a video series to go through. The book or video series can be chosen from the *Life Group Studies Handbook* which contains studies that have been approved by Pastor Micah and the Life Group committee. If there's a study not in that handbook you believe would be beneficial to your Life Group, it must be approved by Pastor Micah and the Life Group committee. Upon approval, it will be added to the next year's version of the *Life Group Studies Handbook*. We have set up this screening process to ensure that solid, biblical material is being used to help form and grow our members into spiritual maturity. It's important for us to practice good, biblical discernment in all areas of our Christian walk.

Once you have finished a book study or series with your group, we would encourage you to take a one meeting break before heading into the next study. During that meeting, we suggest that you provide an opportunity for the members to talk about the study the group just completed, to get feedback on the study, have a time of testimony on how the LORD may have used that study, and to fill out a small questionnaire about the study. During this night, take the opportunity to introduce the study you'll all be starting at the next meeting.

Requirements & Expectations of Life Group Hosts

Life Groups are to be a place to grow deeper in our relationship with God and others. Life Group hosts are to strive to provide a safe, comfortable, friendly, welcoming and grace-filled environment that will help aid in fellowship, accountability, and give the members a place to live out the, "One Another's" of the New Testament. Hosts are to be gifted in the area of hospitality, willing to accommodate the group members, and be excited to open up their homes to them. What's expected of the hosts is fairly simple: Hosts are to provide light refreshments, e.g.: coffee, tea, juice, water, cookies, finger foods, veggie tray, etc. Hosts could at times ask someone in the Life Group if they'd be willing to provide the refreshments/snack for the following week. If, now and then, hosts wish to invite their group over earlier one particular week for a supper meal, that would be encouraged. The hosts are to provide a space in their home where the whole group can sit comfortably around a circle for group discussion, study and prayer time, ideally in a living room setting or in a rec room. If the regular hosts are unable to host their Life Group on a particular night, they are responsible to make arrangements for the group to meet in someone else's home, preferably in the home of another member in their Life Group. Pastor Micah and the Life Group committee will be finding some

resources for hosts to help train and develop them as they seek to be accommodating, grace-filled hosts. This is a key element to the health and growth of DPBC Life Groups.

Final Thoughts on DPBC Life Groups

Communicating the importance and vision of Life Groups must come from the top down. Pastor Woodcock and Pastor Micah should speak of Life Groups from the pulpit. Deacons and the Life Group committee will also talk about the importance of Life Groups as well as the biblical support for them.

It would be nice to have a yearly Life Group fellowship meal at the church for all those involved in Life Groups. This meal would likely be best to have at some point in June when some groups are about to take a break for the summer. This would also serve as a time for praise reports and testimonies of how God has been using these groups in the lives of those involved. This would also give the Life Group committee an opportunity to continue to cast vision and purpose for DPBC Life Groups.

Not yet a Member of a DPBC Life Group?

If you are not yet a member of a DPBC Life Group and would like to join, please contact Pastor Micah right away. You can reach him through:

Facebook

micahiltz@yahoo.com

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