

LIFE IS BETTER IN GROUPS



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TRAIL GUIDE

Your guide to
life-changing
Life Groups

What is the Altitude Church Life Groups Trail Guide and why should I use it?

We are on a journey together towards a summit of seeing our city transformed by Jesus. We exist to have a transformational impact on 1% of our city, 1 person at a time.

If we’re going to reach this summit together, we need to understand and agree on the paths we’re taking to reach our destination. This TRAIL GUIDE will help you to understand the path we’re heading out on, as well as the trail markers along the way.

When we take the journey together, we’re more likely to reach the destination... together. This TRAIL GUIDE outlines our path to seeing lives transformed through life-changing, life-giving, relational-discipleship focused Life Groups.

THIS IS OUR GUIDE TO TRANSFORM OUR CITY ONE PERSON AT A TIME!

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THE TRAIL HEAD

WHY ARE WE TAKING THIS JOURNEY?

We are absolutely convinced that God is ready to transform our lives - and the lives of those around us - so that together, we can transform our city. God is ready to equip us to be EPICENTERS OF HOPE so that as Jesus transforms our lives, that transformation ripples into the lives of others.

This is our destination together: To have a transformational impact on 1% of our city, 1 person at a time by equipping people to become more like Jesus.

We want to invite you to be a part of this journey, and Life Groups are a CENTRAL part of our shared mission. Life change happens best in life groups. While we tend to learn best in rows (Worship experiences and sermons), we tend to GROW best in circles.

Life Groups are the relational environments where we take what God is saying to us and what we are learning and apply it to our own lives, engaging with others who are also wrestling with and applying God's nudges to their lives.

If Life Groups really are THAT important, then it is worth taking some time to orient ourselves around a plan to reach this summit together. While we desire to equip each group leader/facilitator to lead their group in ways that make sense for those who are a part of the group, if we're going together, we best serve the spiritual lives of all involved if we agree on some paths that are based on our overall discipleship journey.

HOW DO WE REACH THE SUMMIT TOGETHER?

As outlined in **GROWTH TREK**, which we ask and encourage everyone to take part in at least once annually, Altitude Church is organized relationally around a shared plan to reach our destination together. Life Groups are a big part of that relational plan.

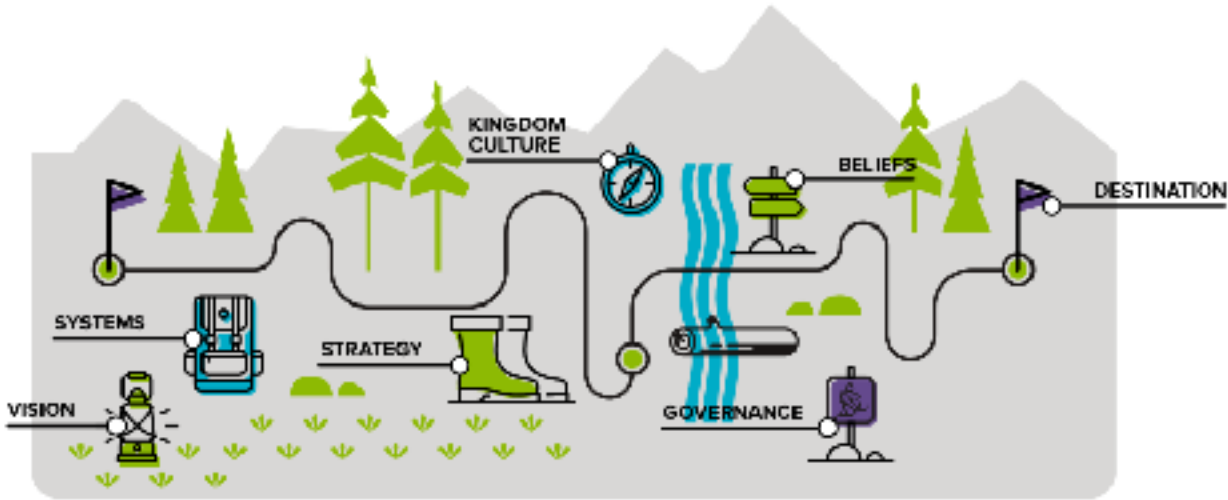
The heart of the ministry we do together as Altitude Church is expressed through four promises given by God since the beginning of time, and remembered annually in the Passover celebration. These four promises are that we can

KNOW GOD
FIND FREEDOM
DISCOVER PURPOSE
MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Worship Experiences
Life Groups
Growth Trek
Serving on a Team

Each of these promises become our relational systems and strategy to make disciples. The promise that we can **KNOW GOD** is best expressed in our *WORSHIP EXPERIENCES*. The promise that we can **FIND FREEDOM** is best expressed in our *LIFE GROUPS*. The promise that we can **DISCOVER PURPOSE** is best expressed through *GROWTH TREK*. And, the promise that we can **MAKE A DIFFERENCE** is best expressed through *Serving on a Team*.

By giving strategic action that lives into these four promises, we see lives transformed!



“We have found that the best place for sustained life change to occur is within intentional relationships... We feel that the best place for encouraging intentional relationships is in a small group.”

- Bill Willits



THE PATH: LIFE GROUPS 101

Church feels too big when you don't know anyone. Life groups make it possible for everyone to know and be known. It's where discipleship happens. It's where real growth and equipping takes place. But, what is the difference between a "Life Group" and a "class," "Bible Study," or "Sunday School?"

Our path for Life Groups can be broken down in one power-packed phrase:

BIBLICALLY RELATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS WHERE WE BECOME MORE LIKE JESUS TOGETHER

BIBLICALLY - The Bible is God's story and it is intended to reshape our story daily. Altitude Life Groups dig deeper into the primary Scriptures utilized in the weekend worship gathering so that everyone has a chance to move from information to transformation. *The focusing element of each Life Group gathering is digging into **The Bible**.*

RELATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS - A relational environment is a place where everyone has a voice, trust and community is fostered, and honest and open conversation happen. *Life groups are not about one-way conversation from a "teacher" to a "student." They are about **relational** life-transference.*

WHERE WE BECOME MORE LIKE JESUS TOGETHER - Life Groups are not just about sharing our problems or even merely hanging out. They are *highly* relational, but are guided by a purpose. We gather to become more like Jesus and we encourage each other toward that shared goal. *Life groups are a place for life-transformation to happen as we **apply** God's Word to our life in accountable relationships.*

LIFE GROUPS ARE:

SERMON-SUPPORTED:

Life Groups utilize the **WEEKLY GUIDE** in order to build upon what God has been prompting or even challenging us to wrestle with from the weekend worship experience. As we all journey together, this allows each of us to wrestle with the same Scriptural focus for the week, thus equipping us to share the insights God has been speaking into our lives through this text, while also knowing that it is the same/similar focus that others are also wrestling with and bringing to the group.

DISCIPLESHIP FOCUSED:

Life Groups play a key role in helping people walk their discipleship journey. Group time includes prayer, a transformational dive into God’s Word, a call to weekly rest, relational interaction, and a challenge to serve regularly in the church or in our community. In this way, we are intentionally focusing on personal and shared **GROWTH**.

SERVICE ORIENTED:

Each semester we ask our Life Groups to intentionally serve in our community and in our church. Serving others is a crucial element of our growth that cannot be learned in a discussion-based environment. As we serve, we grow and discover more and more of the passion and purpose that God has placed in our hearts. To find out more about discovering your unique purpose, be sure to engage **GROWTH TREK**.

OPEN TO HONEST QUESTIONS AND DOUBTS:

As outlined in an upcoming section (THE PATH: GROUP GUIDELINES), doubt is not the opposite of faith. When doubts are allowed to be expressed in a healthy manner, they can become a catalyst towards a deeper personal ownership of one’s faith. Life Groups are not about having it all figured out. They must be a safe place to explore doubts while seeking a deeper faith.

WEEKLY GATHERINGS...:

Life Groups are encouraged to meet weekly throughout the year. While some may think it better to meet less often, this does not work as well in practice. When your group meets weekly, people put it on their calendars. When a member misses, they are back in a short window of time. In groups that meet less often, people tend to struggle placing the gathering into their life’s rhythm. Similarly, when they miss a meeting, it is all too easy to get out of the habit and stop coming back due to the longer stretch between your times together.

...WITH STRATEGIC BREAKS:

We understand, however, that groups need to take strategic breaks. Altitude Church plans our Life Groups calendar with strategic breaks around the holidays and over the summer. This allows groups to take a rest here and there in times when people would likely be distracted with other life events anyway.

3-12 PEOPLE:

Our focus is on Biblically-**relational** groups. Once a group exceeds 12 (or so) people, personal transformative relationships are incredibly difficult to maintain. In any group of “N” people, the possible number of relationships (R) can be determined using the formula $[N \times (N-1) / 2]$. So, in a group of 12 people, there are 66 possible relationships to attempt to maintain. A group of 9, on the other hand, only has 36 relationships to maintain.

Smaller groups also allow for better care. The primary place people will go when life hits a bump is to those who are closest to them. This means that the Life Group will often be the first place people discuss their trials and struggles. A group of 3-12 people strikes just the right balance of community and personal care.

LIFE GROUPS ARE:

ONGOING TOGETHER...:

Growth, transparency, and trust all take time. It is often only after a season of life together that real, open, honest conversation and life-change begins to happen. As we get to know one another we learn what it means to help each other stay accountable and become more like Jesus together.

... BUT FOCUSED ON MULTIPLYING OUR IMPACT:

While it takes consistent stretches of stability for groups to gel and deepen together, we must also be aware of the dangers of having an inward focus. Groups who remain static for long periods of time often (unintentionally or not) close themselves off to others.

It was through a multiplication-minded group that Jesus transformed the world. He started with 12 men, one of which betrayed Him, and told them to make disciples who make disciples who make disciples. Those 11 went on to forever change the world!

Think of this: if your group were to encourage even one person to start a new group every 12-24 months (and that new group did the same), in a period of just six years your group would have reached 192 people! In ten years time, your groups would have reached 1,536 people! That's multiplying our impact!

Having a multiplication focus does **not** mean that everyone in the group is expected to start their own group. However, each group leader should always be actively identifying those who are becoming spiritual young adults and encourage them to take on an apprentice role. You will discover more about the apprentice concept in an upcoming section THE PATH: WHO DOES WHAT?

THE FRONT LINES OF MINISTRY FOR THE CHURCH:

The pastoral staff of Altitude Church are **not** the front lines of ministry for our church. The Bible tells us in Ephesians 4:11-12 that their role is to “equip the saints for the work of ministry.” In other words, our pastors are not the ones who do all of the ministry in the church, they are called to be those who **equip** others. As such, the front lines of our ministry as a church is **not** our pastoral staff. **You and your group are the front lines of ministry for the church.**

Because Altitude Church flows our ministry around our Biblically-relational life groups, this means that your group is the front line of ministry to our world. Welcome to the greatest calling anyone has ever been given. **God's got you, so you've got this.**

THE FRONT LINES OF CARE FOR THE CHURCH:

While every member of our pastoral staff has a heart to meet people in their moment of need, Scripture tells us (see Ephesians 4:11-12) that every person who calls Jesus their savior and Lord is a minister of the Gospel. As such, the front lines of care ministry in our church begins in Life Groups, as well.

Life Groups are our primary care environment in the church. It is in your Life Group that people will feel most naturally connected and so it is also the place they are most likely to be transparent and share the struggles and joys that life has brought them. Life Groups are the front lines of our ministry, so they are also the front lines of what it means to care for others in our midst.

While not every Life Group leader will feel called to be the Care Leader of the group (see THE PLAN: WHO DOES WHAT?), each group should empower someone(s) whom God has spiritually gifted towards care to ensure that care is a vital part of every group.

“I have never known anyone... who was isolated, lonely, unconnected, had no deep relationships - yet had a meaningful and joy-filled life.”

- John Ortberg



THE PATH: WHO DOES WHAT?

Moses, the appointed leader of the nation of Israel, was confronted by his father-in-law and told that it was “not good” for him to try to lead alone (see Exodus 18). In the same way, it is “not good” for our groups to be a one-person show.

Each group leader should be empowering others through their spiritual gifts (see THE PATH: EMPOWERING OTHERS) to take a vital role in the group. The following are a few of the roles each group leader should be looking to empower and what they are called to do. *This list is not meant to be exhaustive*, however, so be creative and empower people as God leads and guides.

FACILITATOR:

The primary role of the facilitator is to be a “chief among equals” who empowers his/her group to dive into God’s story for themselves to discover how it can reshape their story. This means that while the facilitator must nudge the conversation along, they are not the “teacher” of a “class.”

The facilitator facilitates discussion. This is done best by utilizing the WEEKLY GUIDE as a jumping off point and posing open-ended questions that are designed to draw people out and help them share, rather than providing them with information or pat answers.

FACILITATOR (CONTINUED):

In an ideal group, members would feel free to engage each other and the material directly, providing helpful questions and feedback. In this, you should speak no more than 30% of the time. You are not to be the giver of information, but the harvester of conversation in the group. The facilitator is responsible for keeping the conversation flowing without dominating it, nor allowing another to do so.

APPRENTICE:

As an apprentice, you will learn to take on a role directly from the one who is doing it. Often, this will be shadowing the facilitator to begin to lead a new group. This means that you will be taking on more responsibility as you grow into the role. An apprentice should be intentionally available to grow and develop, facilitating the group as they grow in their training. Eventually, their roles and responsibilities will be similar to the person they are shadowing. Once this is the case, it is time to start thinking about multiplying the group and eventually identifying an apprentice of their own. This is how disciples make disciples who make disciples.

HOST:

Oftentimes the facilitator (or their spouse) serve as a host to the group. However, this may not always be the case. The role of the host is to set the right atmosphere for the group, provide a welcoming smile, eliminate distractions, serve food or snacks, and more. If you are meeting at a shared location, this role might change slightly, but the basics remain the same. Ideally, this person should have the spiritual gift of hospitality.

CARE LEADER:

A care leader cares for the members of the group. It is best to find the person who is most spiritually gifted in this area and empower them to care. This is the person who can't stop themselves from caring for others, even if they tried. This person is often the logical choice to write down prayer concerns and/or take attendance, personally and non-invasively contacting those who were absent to better care for them.

IMPACT ORGANIZER:

Each group is asked to serve in our city or in the church at least once each semester. Often, the organization of this serving opportunity will require an organizer. This is a person or small grouping from within the overall group who loves to live in details and harmonize calendars. This person(s) will help the group plan and prepare for your serving opportunity or opportunities and make sure everyone is encouraged to take part in making a difference together.

OTHER ROLES:

The roles that are required to make a group happen are unique to each group, to an extent. *While your Life Group likely won't be as impactful as it could be should one of the above roles be missing*, other roles may develop organically.

Some things to consider: Who has a heart to care for others? Who is taking attendance to make sure no one goes missing or unnoticed? Is someone taking down prayer concerns? Is someone (or a rotation of people) set to bring snacks each week? Is someone planning the next Impact event? Is someone burdened to plan a hang-out night?

Be creative and attentive as you notice what roles are missing or developing in your group.

“A disciple is one who follows Jesus (head), is being changed by Jesus (heart), and is committed to the mission of Jesus (hands).”

- Jim Putman



THE PATH: HOW DISCIPLES GROW

We've been using the word "discipleship," but what is a disciple, really? Jesus' final earthly command was for His followers to go into all the world and make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). As Christ followers, this is what we are called to be all about.

Unfortunately, many people have no idea what discipleship looks like, nor have they been discipled by someone else in a personal and relational context. Because of this, most people have no idea what it looks like to help another person progress from being a "baby Christian" to living a fully Jesus-centered life.

HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT A DISCIPLE LOOKS LIKE?

Let's start where Jesus did. Fair enough? Jesus called His initial followers by saying,

"Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men."

Pastor and Author Jim Putman notes* that the very calling that Jesus made to His first disciples helps us to uncover what a disciple is.

“FOLLOW ME” implies that a disciple is actively following Jesus. Following, by nature, implies that someone other than ourselves is the leader. The disciple of Jesus is one who has given lordship of their life over to Him. He is the new center. Not only does this disciple begin to learn Jesus’ teachings and commands, they actively live by them. We might call this the **HEAD** element of discipleship.

“... AND I WILL MAKE YOU” implies that transformation will take place. Jesus meets each of us exactly where we are in life, imperfections and all. However, in His love, He does not leave us in the broken state in which we are found. Jesus begins a process of transformation to become more Christ-like, and Jesus-centered. We might call this the **HEART** element of discipleship.

“... FISHERS OF MEN.” Jesus not only called His potential disciples to become like Him, but also to get on mission with Him. Jesus’ calling shows that as we become more like Jesus, our heart breaks for what breaks His heart; a mission of relational reconciliation to the people God misses most. We might call this the “hands-on” or simply the **HANDS** element of discipleship

DISCIPLESHIP IS ABOUT
BECOMING MORE LIKE JESUS. IT
IS FOLLOWING JESUS HEAD,
HEART, AND HANDS THROUGH
THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Discipleship is **so much more** than sitting in a classroom and hearing about the Bible. Regularly reading the Bible is an indispensable part of becoming more like Jesus every day, however it must engage our whole person. We can’t just go through the Bible, it has to **go through us**. God’s story must change us, not just our thinking, but even the motives of our hearts and our actions.

This is why our **COMPASS** is such an important tool. Discipleship is a relational process. Jesus didn’t call His followers to simply attend lectures, He called them to share life with Him (see Mark 3:14). Jesus’ process for making disciples was a WHOLE LIFE approach that involved people holistically seeking Him.

We cannot simply teach platitudes to a room of people and expect that we are making disciples! Discipleship is a life-on-life process of relational life-transference. It involves prayerfully allowing Jesus to lead, digging into His love letter to us (the Bible), utilizing our time, talents, and treasures to further His kingdom instead of ours, creating love-powered community, and helping others walk their discipleship journey by equipping them.

Because following Jesus isn’t a linear process, we utilize a **COMPASS** to help us orient ourselves toward Kingdom Values. By nature, compasses don’t tell you where you need to go, they orient you to where you are in relation to your chosen destination.

Since ***our journey with Jesus is not about perfection, but direction with progression***, we know that we will spend the rest of our lives becoming more like Jesus and helping others become more like Him as we align and orient our journey around these character shaping values.





KINGDOM CULTURE (THE COMPASS)

As we travel our journey together towards the destination of having a transformational impact on 1% of our Denver-metro area, one person at a time, by equipping people to become more like Jesus, the tool that guides us is our compass.

The compass is comprised of six values that are core to the ministry and teaching of Jesus, and that grow in our lives as we **BECOME** more like Him.

As we grow in our discipleship, these six areas of our lives should be “bearing fruit” more and more.

This is what is “produced” in our lives as our head, heart, and hands are oriented around Jesus. Because we are all “in progress” there will often be seasons where God is working more in one area than in others. Because of this, you can think of these values as a compass that point to where God is working to grow your heart, deepen your thinking, and encourage your hands to take hold of what He has for you.

This is what it means to orient our lives around **B.E.C.O.M.E**-ing more like Jesus:

I Be Surrendered

We follow Jesus not our impulses, feelings, or best ideas

I Elevate Others

We treat others how Jesus would treat them

I Commit to Life-Giving Community

We make meaningful community a priority

I Open Your Bible Regularly

We don’t just go through the Bible, we let God’s Word go through us

I Make the Most of What Belongs to God

Unreasonable generosity is where we begin

I Expect Transformation

We live in expectation of God’s power to transform us and those around us

HOW WE GROW IN SEASONS AS DISCIPLES

It is important to know that everyone is at a different place in their discipleship journey. Jesus used a relational process, rather than a cookie-cutter message, that underscored the fact that each follower must be met where they are and helped to **BECOME** more like Him. In your group, you will encounter people at all stages of spiritual growth, and you must be understanding of where they are, while also helping them move forward in their journey.

Just as we cannot tell by simply looking at someone how emotionally mature they are, we often cannot gauge where someone is in their spiritual walk at a glance. Someone may “say all the right things” and still be spiritually immature. Jesus Himself addressed this when He said that we would know where people are in their walk by the spiritual fruit they bear (see Matthew 7:16).

The implication of this is that we must meet people, relationally and personally, where they are in their journey and help them move towards a Jesus-centered life. Even in a room full of “seasoned” Jesus-followers, you should not assume spiritual maturity.

Each disciple tends to go through a growth process that mirrors our own physical life-stages.

Prior to coming to know Jesus, we live in unbelief and are spiritually dead. Upon hearing the Gospel and experiencing the transforming love of Jesus, we become “reborn” as spiritual infants. Just as a physical infant does not understand how to feed themselves, so too a spiritual infant must be helped along by others, often making messes that their “parents” will have to clean up.

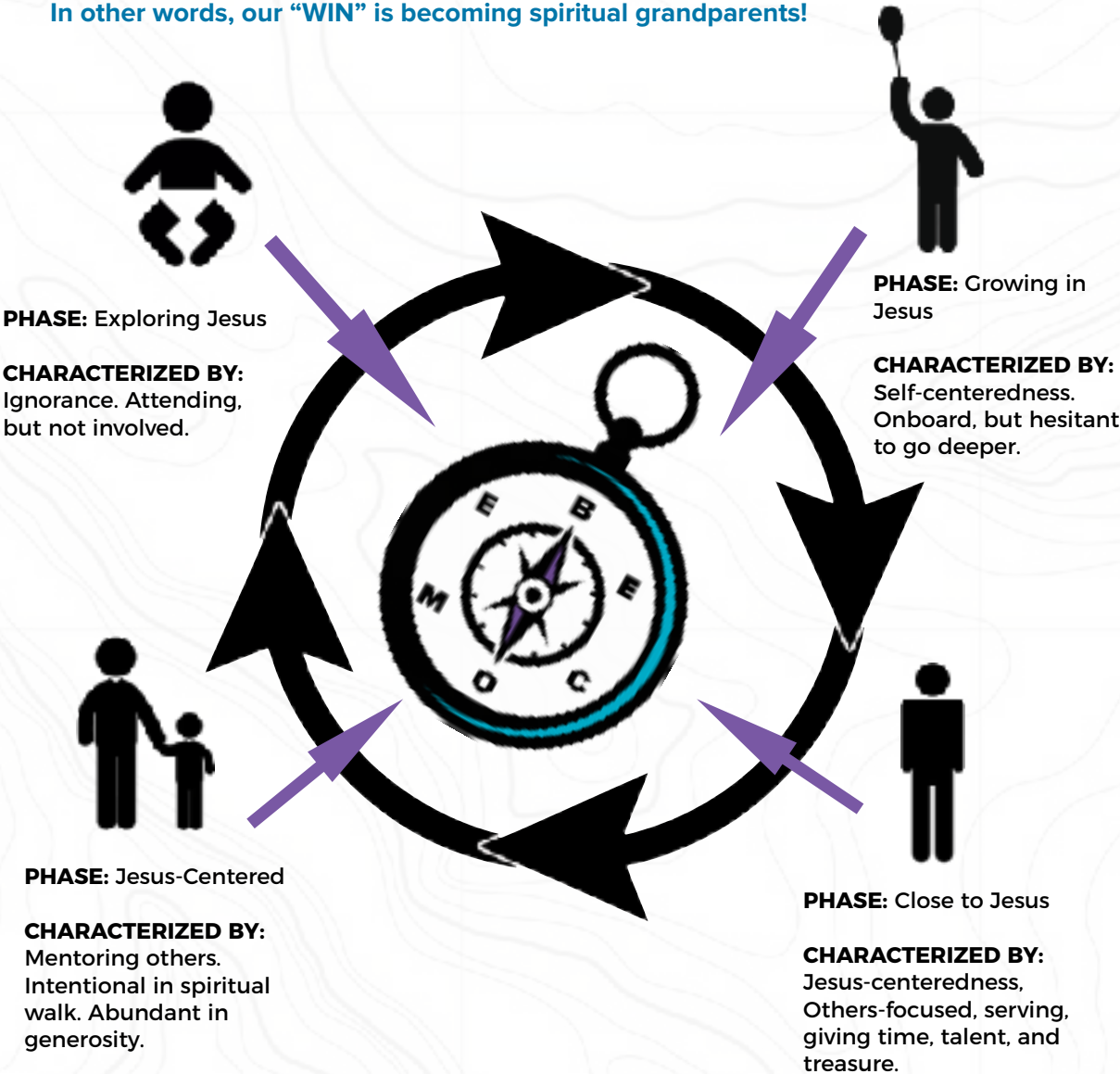
As we grow to become more like Jesus, we become spiritual children. We are still self-centered, but we are learning how to feed ourselves and beginning to orient our lives around becoming more like Jesus. We still need someone to help us along, but we are taking greater ownership of our own spiritual walk.

As we progress towards spiritual young adulthood, we increasingly become Jesus-centered and others-focused. We utilize our “spiritual parents” as a resource, but we are no longer dependent on them. Here, we take our **COMPASS** in hand and seek God and wise mentors to focus each area of our lives more and more on God’s purpose and great promises for us.

Our final stage of growth is not “spiritual adulthood,” but “spiritual parenthood.” Just as it is natural for a growing adult to reproduce, a Jesus-centered person must eventually become a “spiritual parent” who invests their life in others.

This Jesus-centered person understands the implication of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) is not a self-centered life, but to make disciples who make disciples who make disciples.

In other words, our “WIN” is becoming spiritual grandparents!



“Our relationship with each other is the criterion the world uses to judge whether our message is truthful - Christian community is the final apologetic.”

- Francis Schaeffer



THE PATH: GROUP GUIDELINES

While Biblically-relational Life Groups are without question the most life-altering environments we can engage in as those created in God's image, because they are comprised of people, they can also be very *messy*. We are not perfect people, so our journey together will not be a perfect experience, either.

As the one who sets the tone for your group, it is up to you to clarify that it is okay for things to get a little messy at times. People's lives will be messy. Group gatherings will get messy at times. We do well to expect a mess here and there.

As long as each person, and the group as a whole, is learning to center their lives on Jesus, we must set the proper tone that **it is direction with progression and not perfection that is expected**. Mistakes and messes should not be ignored, but when a person is once again aiming in the right direction, such mistakes should be moved past.

One of the most powerful ways you can help set the right environment for your Life Group is regularly reinforce the group guidelines. Perhaps THE secret of success for the various "anonymous" groups is how they establish and regularly repeat what is expected of the gathering. Our Group Guidelines provide a similar function, while also providing the leader a way to quickly correct behavior that is distracting or destructive to the group.

Setting the proper tone through the Group Guidelines can lead to deeper and more meaningful conversational environments, so **we ask that each group come to understand and agree to them by going through them at the start of each semester and as any new person visits or becomes a part of the group.**

Guidelines for a Safe Group Environment

Read this during your first week together and as needed when a new member joins or the group needs a refresher.

This group should be a place where we feel comfortable opening up and sharing with one another. In order to ensure this is a safe environment, we will agree together to the following guidelines:

Confidentiality - What is said in group stays in group.

Listen - Let's value one another during the discussions by really listening to what is being shared. Try to avoid thinking about how you are going to respond or what you are going to say next.

Pause - Allow a pause in conversation after someone shares. Give the person sharing the chance to finish and the group an opportunity to consider what was just said before responding.

Silence - It is important to allow silence in the group as it provides an opportunity for people to share and others to process the topic or question being considered.

No "Cross Talk" - Be considerate of others as they are sharing. No side conversations. No texting/playing games/ social media distractions. Using your phone/tablet for the Bible app is fine, though.

No Fixing - We are not here to fix each other. Jesus does that part. Give encouragement, speak truth, point to Jesus, but don't try to provide "the magic answer." Don't try to solve or fix each other.

No Rescuing - When people are sharing something deeply personal, there can be a tendency to try to make them feel better about themselves or the situation by providing immediate condolences or even simply placing a hand on them in comfort. This may, however, cause them to stop sharing or become uncomfortable. Resist the temptation to rescue people.

Sharing - Be sensitive about the amount of time you share.

Be Self-Aware - Be self-aware of how you are personally affecting the environment through your words, actions, and non-verbal communication.

"I" Statements - It's easy to talk about the issues of others, but for our purposes, we want you to put yourself on the table. Try to use "I" statements rather than "them," "the church," "us," "we," and etc.

Doubts Welcome - Doubt is not the opposite of faith. Biblically, the opposites of faith are disobedience and pride. It is important that our group is welcome to express honest doubts and wrestle through them without condemnation. This is a powerful way to take ownership of our faith.

Conflict - We will commit to resolve conflict in a Biblical manner. When conflict or sin issues between group members arise, we want to make sure that we are honoring God and each other in the way we deal with these issues. The following are a few key Scriptures that speak into this. You may want to take a moment to read through these if time allows.

- If someone sins against you: Matthew 18:15-20
- Restoring someone in sin: Galatians 6:1-5
- Forgive a sinner: Colossians 3:12-13
- Reconciling differences: Matthew 5:23-24, Matthew 7:1-5

NOTES ON THE GROUP GUIDELINES FOR LEADERS

RE:CONFIDENTIALITY | What is said in group, stays in group. The members of your group should feel free to speak openly and understand that they will not hear their words coming back to them from someone else who is not in the group.

HOWEVER, there are certain things a person might say that **must** be legally reported. If a group member admits to or shares that they plan to commit suicide (with a plan or path of action), homicide, or sexual abuse (especially of a minor), you are required to report this to the church staff and then together to the proper authorities.

If you suspect that a person might be ready to share something of this nature, the best path forward is to lovingly have them pause and inform them that, “while we want this to be a place for everyone to share openly in complete confidence, if you share about child abuse or child pornography, homicidal or suicidal thoughts with intent, or similar, I am legally required to report that to the leadership of the church and to the authorities.”

While we never want to stop what God is doing, this allows everyone to know how it is, without having to go back later and have them feel betrayed that what they shared is now being used against them.

RE:RESCUING | While it may feel weird, an important role you have is to discourage people from rescuing when someone else is sharing. What does that look like? Perhaps someone is sharing and they say something negative about themselves. Then, someone else interrupts them with a “oh, you’re not that...” or “No one thinks that about you.”

While the *intent* is to encourage the person with positive reinforcement, what often actually happens is the person sharing begins to go back into their shell and the possible breakthrough of what God was working on in them is not achieved.

Rescuing can be anything from interrupting words, to even a hand on the person who is processing. Again, the *intent* is to help this person... but the *effect* is that it can short-circuit the progress they are making and may discourage them from sharing or opening up again.

RE:CONFLICT | We are called to glorious unity through our wonderful diversity. It is not that we must all agree or conform, however, most people are not taught how to handle conflict as the Bible prescribes. Rather than engaging in healthy discussion of our differences in opinion or belief, we simply “unfollow others” and live in disunity.

The Bible has some important things to say about handling conflict well:

1. We understand that gossip is as simple as speaking destructively about ANY living person who is not present and active in the conversation we are having. The Bible lists gossip as a sin against both God and those created in His image (Romans 1:29-32).
2. We understand that if I have conflict with someone, I am called to go directly to that person first. While I may seek wisdom before confronting someone, it is sinful to talk to others about a problem I have with someone before/without talking to that person directly.
3. We understand that if a person feels unable to confront another personally, they should seek to meet with that person and the group leader or a pastor, rather than talking about that person to others.
4. We understand that people make mistakes. There is no one who is without sin (Romans 3:23). Therefore, when someone makes a mistake and/or hurts us (intentionally or unintentionally), the proper response is to seek to understand their position first and attempt to love them sacrificially, without excusing the wrongful action or encouraging destructive behavior to continue.
5. We understand that a part of confronting someone who is in error is reminding them who they really are (a person in whom Christ dwells) and Whose they are. We should seek to inspire them towards godliness and encourage them as brothers and sisters in Christ.

If your group members live by these simply principles, a lot could be done towards repairing the image of what the Church is supposed be...

“As our lungs require air,
so our souls require what
only community provides.
We were designed... to
live in relationship.
Without it we die. It's that
simple.”

- Larry Crab



THE PATH: EQUIPPING YOU TO EQUIP OTHERS

Scripture is clear that stepping into a role of leadership is a big deal. 1 Timothy 4:16 says, “Keep a close eye on how you live and on your teaching. Stay true to what is right for the sake of your own salvation and the salvation of those who hear you” (NLT).

Read that verse twice. Study it for hours. Think about the implications of what is being said!

We do not take this lightly. Our role is to be an equipping ministry. This path is all about how the church will intentionally equip you to equip and mentor others!

As a part of the team, there are a lot of important things you could do. You are, after all, the frontlines of ministry for the church! However, there is one role that everyone on the team has that is elevated above all others.

WE ARE HERE TO BE EQUIPPED SO WE CAN EQUIP OTHERS.

EQUIPPING TO BE EQUIPPED

This booklet is one of many resources we use to equip you, and others like you. Likely, you had a leader walk you through this resource and speak personally with you about what it means to lead a group. *Hopefully*, you were able to take some time as an *apprentice* and experience “on-the-job-training” from another leader. And, you’ve likely been through **GROWTH TREK** at least once, where you got to experience the systems and structure of the church, discover your redemptive purpose through tools like the **ENNEAGRAM** and **SPIRITUAL GIFTS TEST**, encounter the intentional and aspirational life-giving **CULTURE** that we are shaping together, and seen how your passions and purpose can be sharpened through a role on the team.

IF YOU HAVE NOT HAD THIS EXPERIENCE, BE SURE TO ENGAGE OUR NEXT GROWTH TREK GATHERING! (You can find out more about GROWTH TREK at www.altitude.church/grow)

God has wired each of us with specific passions, Spiritual gifts, and strengths. When we come together as His Church, we each bring something to the mix that is missing without us. CHURCH DOESN’T JUST HAPPEN, it comes together as each of us utilizes the gifts God has given us. Beyond that, God calls us to help each other develop these gifts through mentoring.

How do you mentor someone else and pour into them? It is remarkably similar to how you teach a person to drive a car. First, you sit with them and talk about driving. Later, you sit them in the car with you and talk to them about what you’re doing, as you’re doing it. Down the road, you allow them to sit in the driver’s seat while you sit in the passenger’s seat and give helpful guidance while they drive.

Eventually, you turn over the keys and let them drive their friends around. You’re not in the car with them, but they know they can call you if they get lost, turned around, or forget how to do something.

This is a great metaphor for what it looks like to mentor someone else. No matter which role you serve in your group (or in the church in other areas), the single best way to ensure that everyone on the team is equipped, empowered, and are able to fight against burnout and overwork is for each of us to be empowering others to do what we do!

Some leaders phrase this process like this:

I DO, YOU WATCH, WE TALK

I DO, YOU HELP, WE TALK

YOU DO, I WATCH, WE TALK

YOU DO, I CHEER, WE TALK

This is a highly transferrable way to grow leaders and make a lasting kingdom impact. Remember, our “win” is disciples making disciples who make disciples. That means that it is our highest win when we replace ourselves and help someone else do what we do so they can help someone else to do what they do. Our win is becoming spiritual grandparents (no matter what age we are)!

The greatest moment any of us can have is when we have poured into someone else and they discover the purpose and passion God has for them in life. It’s in that moment when we get to smile and say:

“I was made for this.”

“We must constantly evaluate whether we are modeling the kind of disciples we want the learners to become. This is the most powerful form of discipling.”

- Avery Willis



THE PATH: SETTING THE EXAMPLE

Spiritual leadership is a big deal. 1 Timothy 4:16 tells us to “keep a close watch on how you live and on your teaching. Stay true to what is right for the sake of your own salvation and the salvation of those who hear you” (NLT).

God **is** calling you to lead. You **are** setting an example, therefore, God is also calling you to recognize that leadership comes with a higher standard. Similarly, Altitude Church expects that those who step into roles of leadership will covenant (make a spiritual agreement with God and the church) to live by a standard that is full of both **truth** and **grace**...

This covenantal relationship is **not about perfection, but direction with progression**. As you covenant with God and the church you agree to hold yourself accountable and continually make your aim becoming more like Jesus every day.

This decision to enter into a covenant relationship is not a legalistic game of black-out bingo, nor a list of requirements that determine acceptance. It is simply about living out your discipleship pathway and growing your obedience to Jesus while you crucify your sinful nature.

The Bible is full of instances where it calls the people of God to a higher standard. It is also clear that, rightly or wrongly, as leaders, others will be watching. Therefore it encourages leaders to hold themselves to a standard not just for their sake, but also for the sake of others.

Our governing documents (Constitution, Article VI) also list qualifications for consideration of a leadership role. While this may primarily be speaking to pastors, elders, and directors, this should be considered by anyone seeking a leadership role in the church.

Again, this is not meant to be legalistic, but to help each of us understand that there is a standard to be upheld. ***This is not about a list of requirements, but the growing of character.*** As we grow to become more like Jesus every day, we unlock His character in our lives. The more we are like Jesus, exuding His character, the less “rules” matter, as we will more authentically and more naturally seek to do what is right in God’s eyes in spite of what is regulated.

When you covenant with the church to live by a standard, you are not doing anything beyond what Jesus asks us to do in our walk with Him. You are simply recognizing that being a leader, by its nature, makes this walk more public. As such, choosing to live counter to the character of Jesus has the ability to deeply impact and hinder the faith journey of others. None of us is an island. All of our choices effect others. Leaders choices *more visibly* impact others. That’s just the nature of leadership.

As such, we ask you to lovingly consider how you can challenge yourself on your discipleship journey and continually use the **COMPASS** to see where God is ready to reshape you in this season. As you grow in your discipleship as a leader, you are setting the example for others.

A NOTE ON SEXUAL INTEGRITY

Sexual integrity was a significant focus for the early church. In fact, when coming up with what Jewish persons would need to consider when converting to Jesus, a Biblical sexual ethic was one of the few things that was highlighted.

In this, followers of Jesus in all generations (and culture situations) have been called to abstain from any and all forms of sexual expression unless they are with one’s spouse. Understanding Jesus’ statements on adultery, this would include the use of pornography, as well.

This is a high standard, for certain, but it is one that recurs throughout Scripture. Sex is meant for our enjoyment, but the Bible is clear that there is a proper context to our sexual expressions. As more and more headlines roll into our news feeds on this topic, we should understand the weight of this greater than ever.

A NOTE ON ACCOUNTABILITY

As your group’s facilitating leader, you have a “headship” for your group. However, you are under the headship of the pastors and ministry leaders of the church. You are responsible, as such, to stay accountable to the mission and vision of the church and its leadership.

If a group or leader gets out of line with the mission and vision, engages in overtly political agendas, becomes unwilling to submit to church leadership on problematic issues, is repeatedly out of order, and/or becomes unhealthy or destructive, the sacred right is reserved to step in and take action. This may include further training, a time of restoration, disbanding of the group, or even removal from leadership.

Restoration is ALWAYS the expressed goal, and will always be sought, fought for, and worked towards. However, decisive action will be taken following prayer and wise counsel.

While there is **always** a commitment to grace and forgiveness. Leaders set the example. Plain and simple!

“Authentic community is
what an unbelieving world
is DYING to see.”
- Andy Stanley



THE PATH: AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

What does it mean to go the extra mile when it comes to leading your group?

It's all about attitude.

Zig Ziglar taught that it is not your aptitude, but your attitude that will determine your altitude. No one wants to be around Mr. or Mrs. Grumpypants for too long. As the leader, you set the tone. Whatever your attitude looks like, your group will eventually reflect it back to you like a mirror. Attitudes are infectious. So how can you get an attitude of gratitude?

IT STARTS IN PRAYER!

It simply can't be overstated how much praying for your group members personally by name will connect you with them. It also has spiritual, emotional, and even physical healing effects for you, as well.

As humans, we're scientifically wired for prayer. We have an inner desire to connect to the Eternal that can't long be ignored. Prayer makes a difference. So, pray for yourself, for your family, and even lift your attitude up in prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to make you more like Jesus in His attitude, every day.

HANDWRITTEN THANK YOU NOTES AND LETTERS GO A LONG WAY!

You will likely have moments where you feel overwhelmingly grateful for the members of your group. However, these feelings will not automatically transfer to those persons or be known by them. You don't just need to be thankful, you need to say thanks. There is an important distinction there.

One of the simplest and most effective ways to show this thankfulness is to send a handwritten note. We delete e-mails, but we save personal notes. We ignore Facebook messages, but keep scraps of paper. Old fashioned, handwritten thank you notes or notes of encouragement really go a long way. There really is power in this, as in our oversaturated social media culture, handwritten notes sent with a stamp REALLY STAND OUT.

Handwritten notes are so powerful because:

THEY'RE MEMORABLE.

THEY'RE PERSONAL.

THEY COMMUNICATE VALE.

THEY HAVE THE ABILITY TO MAKE SOMEONE'S DAY, WEEK, OR YEAR!

WHAT GETS CELEBRATED GETS REPEATED!

There is an old leadership adage that people don't do what's expected, they do what is inspected. Accountability goes a long way. But, the true secret sauce is found in another leadership quip: "What gets celebrated is what gets repeated!"

Because God is continually at work in our lives and in the lives of those lovely people who are a part of our group, we need to be aware of when God is moving in an exciting and/or new way and celebrate that!

Any time something important happens in your group - someone takes another step on their discipleship pathway, someone gets married, someone has a child, someone gets a new job, someone gets a promotion, someone has a good day after a difficult season - whatever it is, **CELEBRATE IT!**

THE GROUP THAT CELEBRATES TOGETHER, STAYS TOGETHER.

People are drawn towards what is celebrated. This is a powerful way to reinforce what your group (and our church) truly values. Every time you celebrate when someone becomes more like Jesus, you are sending a message to your group that **this is what we're all about.**

Find both little and big things you can celebrate throughout the semester and then celebrate well.

This will mark the difference between "that group I signed up for" and "my loving, caring church family, who I couldn't imagine doing life without... seriously, you have GOT to come and experience this!"

Get it? Awesome! You ROCK!

Now, let's help each other do it!

PRAYER, EXPRESSED GRATITUDE, AND CELEBRATION SHOULD BE AN UNMOVABLE PART OF YOUR GROUP'S DNA!

Jesus *was in a* **SMALL** **GROUP.**

I'm just sayin'!



EQUIPMENT CHECK:

THE TOOLS AND RESOURCES YOU NEED TO SUCCEED

WHAT TO DO ABOUT CHILDCARE

At Altitude Church, we value families growing in Jesus together. Your kids **NEED** to see mom/dad living out their faith in a context other than church. They need to see it is real and be invited into your spiritual journey as you model and share your faith with your children. We believe one of the most powerful environments for this is your Life Group.

Basically, what we're saying is that our preference is that your kids are a part of your Life Group!

We completely understand that kids are messy and loud. We understand that some people don't want them there (those meanie-heads). We **FEEL** the need to have time away from the kids. We get it. But, you have a much greater chance of shaping your kids' faith than anyone else in the church. You are your kids' spiritual **ROLE MODEL**. We encourage you not to give that up for a few minutes of much needed sanity and time with other adults.

Your kids don't have to be a part of the group. Even having them in an adjacent room where they might just overhear mom or dad talking about Jesus is a huge step. If this just **DOESN'T** appeal to you, the group could consider rotating who watches the kids, everyone chip in for a sitter, or etc.

IDEAS ON HOW TO GET THE GROUP TO EFFECTIVELY PRAY:

- Try dividing your group into smaller sub-groups and pray for one another. Ask those sub-groups to keep praying for each other, communicate, and stay accountable throughout the week.
- Pick a person to be in charge of writing down prayer requests, e-mailing them to everyone in the group (with permission, of course). Make sure everyone knows you're writing them down and e-mailing them so they can opt out if they want.
- Focus on the A.C.T.S. method of prayer: **A**dore God for Who He Is, **C**onfess your need and dependence on Him, **T**hank Him for current, past, and expected blessings and provision, and **S**upplicate (ask) Him for your needs.
- Take time to celebrate answered prayers. Keep a journal of group prayers that have been answered, including dates and times.
- Write down prayer requests on a note card and put them in a hat. Have each person draw a card to pray for that week.

PRAYER HAS TO BE A PART OF YOUR GROUP. IT IS NOT OPTIONAL. WE CANNOT BE EFFECTIVE IF WE DO NOT PRAY.

HOW TO BEST LEAD YOUR GROUP

1. **PRAY FOR THEM:** Prayer is essential to any leader's life. Set a reminder on your phone or tape a sticky note somewhere and pray for your group, by name, regularly.
2. **THINK LIFE CHANGE:** Our goal is to create environments where people encounter Jesus and are changed by Him. What can you do to remove distractions and help people walk their discipleship pathway?

3. **CULTIVATE RELATIONSHIPS:** Relationships are like a bank account; they don't just happen. You are either putting in "change" or making a "withdrawal" from someone else's relational account. Both are needed, at times, but make sure you are investing more than you are withdrawing. Some ideas for growth: have a group get-together (pool party, cookout, movie night, sportsball event) and make sure you are serving in the church and in the community together.
4. **PROMOTE PARTICIPATION:** Shared participation creates a broader ownership of the group. More than just sharing right answers, we want people sharing their lives and how God's story is reshaping their story.
5. **REPLACE YOURSELF:** You need an apprentice. As apprentice is someone who has the potential to do what you do, not just assist you. As you replace yourself, you are making disciples who make disciples who make disciples.
6. **PROVIDE CARE:** The key to a successful Life Group community is establishing a safe and caring environment where each person feels welcomed and accepted. You create a safe environment as you model authenticity and helpful transparency. As people in your group begin to feel safe and connected, the relational atmosphere of your group will deepen. Make sure someone is staying in touch with members outside of group time and ensure your group is proactive in helping or arranging care for group members during a time of crisis or need.
7. **MULTIPLY INFLUENCE:** Multiplying your group opens the door for new people to participate in what God is doing. While your group should be "stable" for a season, perhaps up to 18 months, you should also be looking for someone in the group to apprentice and begin leading their own group in each possible season.
8. **DON'T FORGET ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRAINING:** Relational groups should include solid Biblical training and personal accountability. You are together for the purpose of becoming more like Jesus, not just to hang out. The facilitator must navigate the challenging waters of experiencing both fellowship and life-transference.

9. **ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO CONSIDER THEIR NEXT STEP:** As Christians, we are often informed far beyond our level of obedience. This has to change. We should always be considering our NEXT STEP with Jesus. This isn't about completing homework, it is about becoming more like Jesus every day. Be sure to encourage your group to pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal what **practical action** they can take based on the challenge or conviction they are feeling. If needed, workshop a practical next step together.
10. **BE SURE TO PRAY TOGETHER:** The first item in this list was to pray for your group, but don't forget to take time to pray together. Your prayers for your group will go before them, waging spiritual warfare against the enemy. When you pray together, however, the Holy Spirit is further unleashed. It is also harder to be angry with or hold a grudge against someone you are praying for, so your prayer time will engender emotional and relational cohesion on a deeper level.

FURTHER TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

1. **BE COMFORTABLE WITH SILENCE:** It is important to realize that it takes 5-8 seconds for people to hear a question, comprehend the meaning, and formulate a response, AT MINIMUM. Deal with the crickets in the room. Wait. Make eye contact. If no one has responded after 4-5 more "mississippis" restate or rephrase the same question and wait again. Do not change the question. If no one answers the second time around, the question may be too complicated or irrelevant. In this case, move on to another question.
2. **ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS:** Don't feel bound by the questions given in the WEEKLY GUIDE. Feel free to come up with your own. Be sure to ask questions that cannot be answered with "yes" or "no," and that don't necessarily have "right" or "wrong" answers. Open-ended questions invite openness, sharing opinions, evaluating, and etc. Close-ended questions make the group feel you are trying to point them towards your agenda and feel like school time.
3. **PRACTICE PROMPTING AND PROBING:** Once a person is talking, use quick prompts and probes to encourage them to go into greater detail. "And, then what happened?" "Why do you say that?" "Tell us more about how this made you feel..."

4. HOW TO REDIRECT THE CONVERSATION WHEN NECESSARY:

- Use "different" to redirect. "Who has a different perspective on that?" "Does anyone have a different experience?"
- Summarize and segue to move on. "So, we all had some powerful experience in that area. Let's look at the next question/idea..."

5. DEALING WITH OVER-TALKERS AND CONVERSATION DOMINATORS

- Direct CLOSED-ended questions their way (questions that do have simple answers).
- Prompt with a summary, rather than a question. "So, you're saying you agree."
- Direct to the opposite side of the room or a different demographic. "Let's hear from someone on this side of the room." "Let's hear from one of our men on this one."
- Break eye contact when they are over-talking - shuffle your papers, look at your Bible, etc.
- Interrupt (when they take a breath) and redirect or summarize. Be kind.
- Use a "mix-it-up" idea: Take a poll, do a round-robin, have the group talk in pairs, use a wad of paper that is thrown around to pick the next responder. Be creative, and change it up.
- Stay on topic. "For the sake of time, we need to move on."
- Prompt for relevance. "So you saw God working in that circumstance?"
- Use lines such as: "That's really interesting, we'll have to dive into that deeper next time," or "I'd love to hear more about that when we have some time after the discussion."

REMEMBER YOUR ROLE

Your role is to respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit for the benefit of the group as a whole. Always be asking the Holy Spirit whether the current vein of conversation is beneficial. It's not your job to control your group. Don't move conversation along too quickly. Allow it to develop. However, if you notice a pattern emerging in your conversation that revolves around a dominator or arguer, or their issues, kindly and firmly move the group forward. The group will appreciate your leadership as you ensure there is a greater benefit to all.

DON'T FORGET OUR WHY, WHAT, AND HOW:

Just as we started this TRAIL GUIDE, so we must close it out with a reminder. Our why, what, and how are the true north for each of our paths. They shape everything we do as a ministry.

EQUIPPING PEOPLE TO BECOME MORE LIKE JESUS

This is the reason we do what we do. Life works best when Jesus is at the center. Until we allow God to take priority in our lives, we will constantly find ourselves going back to false sources of hope and lesser loves. As we become more like Jesus, the impact He is making in our lives should spill out to others so that we become EPICENTERS OF HOPE.

TO HAVE A TRANSFORMATIONAL IMPACT ON 1% OF OUR CITY, 1 PERSON AT A TIME

We simply can't keep the hope that is found in a Jesus-centered life to ourselves. We are here to make disciples who make disciples who make disciples. This is our God-given calling. We are called to **be transformed people who help others find transformation in Jesus**. We are not here to build our own kingdoms, we are here to bring peace on earth, to help people rediscover hope, to uncover the real power of TRUE love in Jesus.

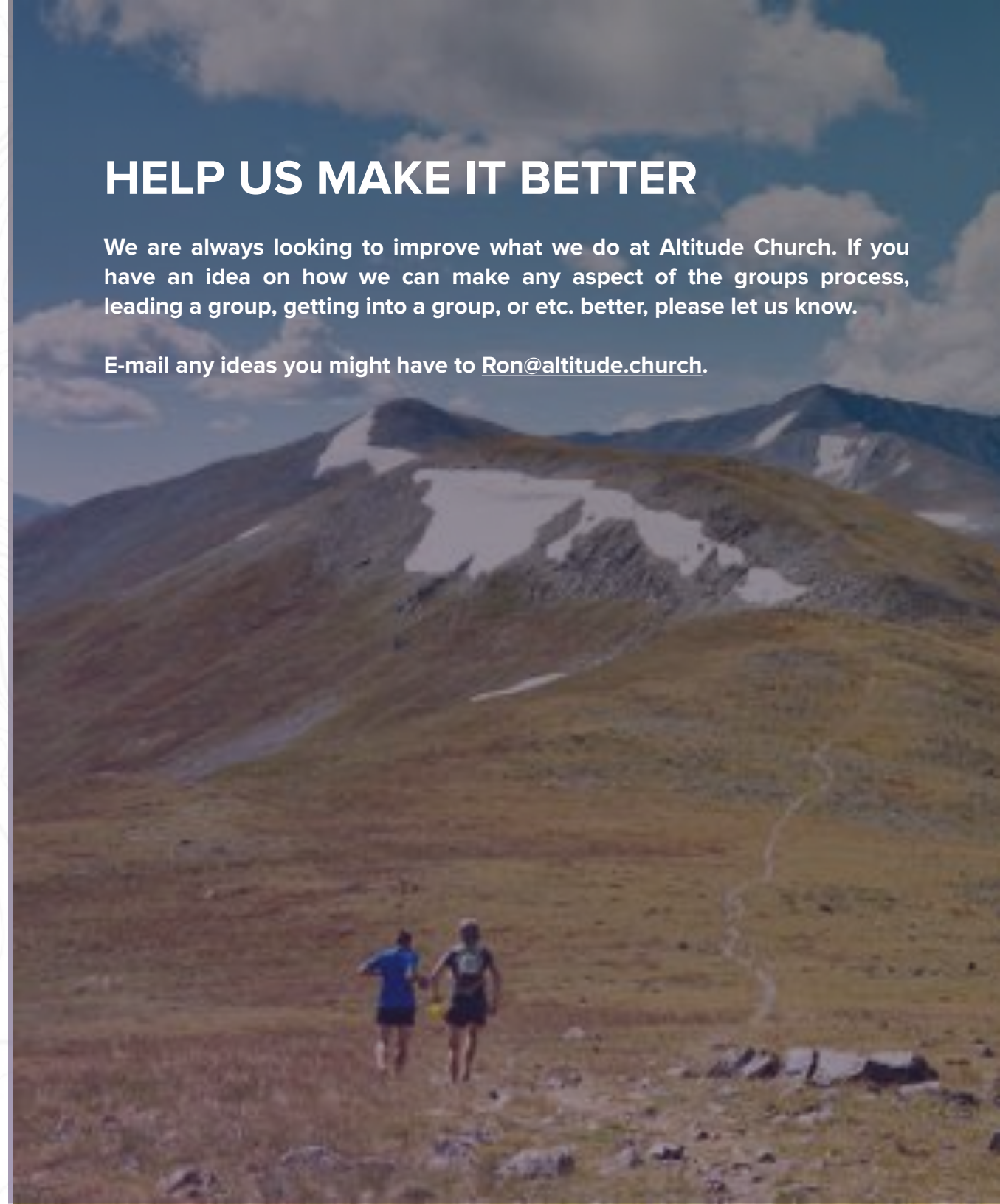
SO THAT EACH PERSON CAN KNOW GOD, FIND FREEDOM, DISCOVER PURPOSE, AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE

As we get to KNOW GOD through encounters such as our weekend worship services, FIND FREEDOM in Biblically-relational Life Groups, DISCOVER PURPOSE through Growth Trek, and MAKE A DIFFERENCE by using our God-given passions and purpose on a team in the church and into our community... our story changes... and as our stories change together... we see the story of our city change. This is HOW we partner with God to have a transformational impact on 1% of the Denver-metro area... one person at a time.

HELP US MAKE IT BETTER

We are always looking to improve what we do at Altitude Church. If you have an idea on how we can make any aspect of the groups process, leading a group, getting into a group, or etc. better, please let us know.

E-mail any ideas you might have to Ron@altitude.church.





WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW TO EFFECTIVELY LAUNCH YOUR GROUP

Facilitator’s name: _____

Day/Time of Meeting: _____

Closest intersection of where the group will meet (if at a home), or address of
shared location:_____

E-mail to be listed for contact: _____

Childcare (circle one): Children are welcome Childcare not provided

Contact leader for more info

Because we are convinced that Life Groups are the best environment for relational discipleship to take place, we will do all that we can to let people know about your group. That said, no matter how many ways we could (and will) communicate about your group to others, **the ONLY way to ensure people know about your group is for you, or someone you empower, to PERSONALLY INVITE PEOPLE TO JOIN.**

Your approach can be as simple as asking people what they are doing on the day/time your group meets and then opening up an invitation to them. If this is a little out of your comfort zone, be sure to empower someone who is a real “people person” to help you get the word out and invite people.

No matter how much we, as a church, do to promote your group, people simply aren’t guaranteed to “know about it” unless you make the personal ask.

With this in mind, who are up to ten people you could personally invite to join your group before it launches?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

LAST THING: Don’t forget to grab some **WEEKLY GUIDES** for your group. This contains the weekly group material you need to lead. Let us know if you have any questions: Ron@altitude.church.

DISCOVER YOUR PURPOSE WITH GROWTH TREK

Growth Trek guides you through a journey of discovering your redemptive purpose so you can live the life that God created you to live!

Growth Trek is made up of four steps that equip you to 1) Explore and Engage the mission and vision of Altitude Church, 2) discover your purposeful design, 3) help shape the life-giving culture of your Church, and 4) use your God given gifts to make a difference in our city and the lives of others.

Let's join together for a Growth Trek experience the first Sunday of every month.

Find out more about Growth Trek at www.altitude.church/grow.



STEP ONE | ENGAGE YOUR
CHURCH



STEP TWO | DISCOVER YOUR
DESIGN



STEP THREE | SHAPE OUR
CULTURE



STEP FOUR | JOIN THE TEAM