

Lakewood Youth Ministries

L.I.F.E. Groups Handbook

Practical Ways to Help Youth & Families
Live In Faith Every Day

A Word on Doing These Practices in a Group

As you look through these ideas, you will notice that many of them seem to be good for solitude, personal devotion, quiet times, JAM (Jesus And Me) times, morning/evening watch times or any number of things youth and adults may call one-on-one time spent with God.

This is by design. Imagine what happens as youth try these practices a few times each month during L.I.F.E. Groups. They may begin to realize (a) the benefit of spending time with God and (b) they can try some of these things on their own. We hope and pray they would spend daily time with God and begin to treasure this time.

At the very least, they are having time with God and trying out these practices a few times a month during L.I.F.E. Groups!

There is also a beauty to being “alone with God together” in the same space. Some would argue that if you could only do one or the other—personal devotion or being with a community of faith—that a communal faith is the better option. Not to suggest that it even is either/or or to downplay the importance of personal devotions, but we were never meant to live out our faith alone or outside the context of community.

So just keep the following tips in mind as you help youth through some of these highly personal experiences and discoveries in the context of a community of faith.

- “Everyone write down...” This helps everyone think for a minute, and it is sometimes easier to share if you’re reading what you wrote.
- “Share with a partner...” This helps quieter youth to get a chance to share and helps more talkative youth not monopolize the conversation.
- “Share with the group...” These first three tips can build on each other. “Everyone write down something you notice... Now share what you wrote with a partner... A few of you share with the group.”
- “Share something you heard...” This variation on sharing with the group helps youth to listen because you are asking them to either share what they heard from others or God.
- “In what ways can we...” This is just a great way to begin a question. For example, in what ways can we use this to help us grow in our faith? Etc.
- “What will you start doing, stop doing, or do differently?” Based on what has been experienced or talked about, this is an important application question.

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is Latin for “divine reading,” an ancient practice that helps us slow down, listen, and pray, looking for God to reveal God’s self through God’s Word. The goal is to become aware of God’s presence and release all expectations. Clear your mind before you begin reading.

Take some deep breaths and pray, inviting the Holy Spirit to speak to you and help you focus. You may want to light a candle as a reminder that you are entering a sacred space and time with God.

Begin with silence, and then allow these steps to guide your time...

1. **LECTIO** – Select a passage to read slowly several times, once to get oriented and then a second and third time, noticing something—a word or phrase—that seems to stand out.
2. **MEDITATIO** – Reflect: What word or phrase stands out? What from this passage speaks to you directly? Repeat the word or phrase several times allowing the rest to fall away.
3. **ORATIO** – Open your palms as you pray. Let God know your heart, mind, and soul are open to hearing from God now. Offer prayers of gratitude and petition as they arise.
4. **CONTEMPLATIO** – Listen for God to speak or give guidance. Repeat the word or phrase if your mind wanders; refocus by praying and asking God to help you sense God is near.

Centering Prayer

Centering Prayer begins with choosing a sacred word as a symbol of your intention to be in God’s presence and yield to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Close your eyes and settle yourself before God. Allow a spirit of rest and hospitality to come over you. Silently introduce your sacred word as your desire and intention to be with God.

As you pray, you will become aware of thoughts, memories, commentaries, and images. When you notice your mind wandering, gently return to the sacred word to re-center yourself on God.

Remain in silence with your eyes closed for a few minutes. You may want to close with “the Lord’s Prayer” or some other formal prayer as a way of drawing the prayer to a close.

Awareness Examen – Basic

- For what moment in this past week am I most grateful?
- For what moment in this past week am I least grateful?

In its most basic form, the Awareness Examen is something youth are used to. They may call it highs and lows, peaks and valleys, or happies and crappies. The idea is that each person gets to share based on their day or their week and become aware of how God is present in and through it all.

Awareness Examen – “Advanced”

Thanksgiving

- Try to become aware of the reality of God’s presence and action in your life.
- Reflect on the reality that all of your life is a gift.
- Thank God for those specific gifts you have been given this day.
- Ask for the abiding of grace and an attitude of gratitude.

Pray for the Guidance of the Holy Spirit

- Ask the Holy Spirit to come and give you the grace to see your life honestly and to become more open to God’s working within you and your life.

Look Back Over the Day

- As you review the events of your day, ask yourself: “Where was God in all this?”
- Try to notice the places where joy, sadness, anxiety, peacefulness, and other strong feelings emerge.
- How did you feel God calling you through your experiences?
- How did I respond to God’s call?
- Do not judge yourself, but face your experiences as they are.
- How do these look in the light of God’s love for you?

Sorrow

- Where do you need help and healing? Where do you need a greater awareness?
- Ask God for the specific grace needed in any particular situation.

Look Towards Tomorrow with Hope & Trust

- Where is God leading you?
- What will happen to you tomorrow that you need to talk to God about?
- Ask for a sense of God’s power. God will provide all I need.

Bible Study Guide

God, show me! Here, we strive to observe and investigate like a reporter or a detective. We can do this in various ways including asking questions that answer who, what, when, where, why, and how; making lists; drawing symbols, underlining, circling, highlighting the text, etc.

God, teach me! Here, we strive to learn from what we have observed in God’s Word.

Ask God. We look to God first to guide us in our study of God’s Word.

Ask Scripture. Scripture interprets Scripture; i.e. use cross references, concordances, etc.

Ask others. Lastly, we look to what others have said in commentaries, devotionals, etc.

God, change me! Here, we seek God in order to come up with a specific application. For example, while studying Ephesians 4, you are convicted to “not let the sun go down while you are still angry (v. 26).” It is too vague to just “try to do better.” Instead, what if you set an alarm to go off 30 minutes before bed as a reminder to think through your day? Did any anger arise? Do you have someone with which to seek forgiveness? You now have time to talk to them!

Practical Ways to Read the Bible

Journal – Recopy Scripture word-for-word. Okay to use bulleted lists, different colors, etc.

1. Use the facing page or bottom of the page to interact with Scripture: do a close reading, meditate, parse; write what you think, make an info graphic; mark anything and everything you see in brackets and make "footnotes."
2. If journaling communally, share with someone else. Some share with whole group.

Doodle – Take a short passage and doodle (does not have to be art) a visual representation.

1. Ideas: visual data, info graphic, fun font, etc. No right or wrong way.
2. If doodling in a group, share with someone and/or the whole group.

Detail – Rewrite and organize information in a different way.

1. Ideas: keep stats, categorize, parallel, compare and contrast, make lists, do detailed descriptions of, for example, people who follow Christ, imperatives (do's and don'ts), who are we supposed to be, what are we supposed to do.
2. More cerebral, and therefore needs more guidance and advanced planning with a group.

Rewrite – While keeping a reverent love of Scripture, write a paraphrase based on two options:

1. Invert - turn it inside out. i.e. a list of questions becomes a list of statements; vice versa.
2. Rephrase - Take a role you know about, and if they are at their best, show how it reflects God's character based on a passage. i.e. "The Lords is my piano teacher..."
3. If rewriting communally, share with each other or the group.

Practical Ways to Interpret Scripture

This way of Jewish interpretation of Scriptures helps us look at a passage in deeper and deeper levels in terms of the Jewish Temple. PaRDeS is related to the Hebrew word for a garden or "paradise," the ultimate Temple of God.

1. Peshat – "plain" or "simple" or direct meaning of the words.
 - a. Outer courts of the Temple.
 - b. Questions: What is the plain meaning of the text? What is the most basic thing the text says? What does it mean grammatically?
 - c. Notes: not literalism (not a Hebrew concept) or relativism. No interpretation usurps plain meaning. i.e. Adams & Eve story is not about elephants.
2. Remez – "hints" or the deep meaning beyond the literal words.
 - a. Inner courts of the Temple.
 - b. Questions: is there an allegory or metaphor? Is there a hint or a wink of something else? Where else have I seen this? Is there a reference or inference?
 - c. Example: numbers in Scripture – 40 days; 12 tribes, 12 disciples; etc.
3. Derash – "inquire" or "seek" or comparative meaning, as given through similar passages.
 - a. Sanctuary of the Temple
 - b. Questions: how many different things can be said about this? What is in each word? What is the sign or symbol? Is there a parable to be seen?
 - c. Notes: Like Bible commentaries, but Rabbinical scholars go beyond most of them! Sometimes hundreds of pages on a single passage.
4. Sod – "secret" or "mystical" meaning, as given through inspiration or revelation.
 - a. Holy of Holies in the Temple
 - b. Questions: How does this passage point to a reality beyond itself? Something beyond words? How does it point to the sacred?
 - c. Examples: Can we ever really explain the Trinity, Communion, or the Holy Spirit?

A Word About the H.A.B.I.T.S. Toolkit

Many of our youth understand the importance of our drivers and campers for the Ozark Mission Project to have the right tools in their toolkits. What is that we should all have in our “spiritual toolkits” for developing lifelong spiritual habits? In this case, H.A.B.I.T.S. we would like to develop and see youth develop (and among the items in the toolkit) are:

- Having a daily Jesus And Me (JAM) time Bibles, journals, “One Minute Bibles,” etc
- Accountability with another believer Back 2 Back contracts and cards
- Bible Study Booklets for deeper Bible study
- Involvement in ministry and mission
- Tithing commitment Material to help youth learn to save & give
- Scripture memorization Scripture key tags

Many items will be “on sale” in the toolkit for just \$1. Bibles and “One Minute Bibles” will be \$10. The money is not really the important thing, but the commitment is. Sometimes when we purchase something, it has more value and we are more likely to put it to good use.