

The Goal of Groups: Friendship

Big Idea: Life Groups are for friendship.
Acts 2:44-47

Small Group Video- “Small Groups Bad Teacher”

I'm sorry for my warped sense of humor, but I love that video clip. It's stereotypical enough to find some truth; but facetious enough to see some sarcasm. And it's irreverent enough to laugh at.

Good morning, my name is Patrick Gibbs and I am one of the pastors here at Moon Valley. If you're visiting today, hoping to see what MVBC is like, you might want to visit again; Pastor Bob is taking a couple weeks off.

But that gives me the chance to talk about something I care a lot about.

For the last 3 weeks, Pastor Bob has mapped out some goals and direction for Moon Valley.

► Some things to shoot for; some things we think God might want to do with us; some goals; some areas to focus. And there were 8 big things to help us be a place for people to belong, believe and become. And one of those things was something we are calling vibrant groups. By 2015, we want to be a church of vibrant groups. We want to be a church characterized by lots of small, energizing groups. By small, we mean groups of approx 12-15 people. By energizing, we mean groups that fuel the other big things. ► So, with that in mind, we have 2 very simple, albeit not always easy, goals for Life Groups.

First, we want to create an environment for people to ► learn and apply the Bible. An environment that is accessible to lots of different kinds of people in lots of different places on their spiritual journey. A safe place to learn about God and the Bible and ourselves. We'll talk more about that next week.

Secondly, we want to create an environment for people to ► make friends. An environment small enough where people can meet and befriend other people. No matter how hard we try, it is difficult for most people to get to know other people at Sunday services. And that's what I want to talk about today: using Life Groups to make friends. In fact, I'm going to give my big idea right up front. So if you zone out as I talk you can at least leave knowing the most important thing. So,

here it is, ► the big idea this morning is: Life Groups foster friendship. That's what I want you to leave this morning knowing. Life Groups foster friendship.

Meeting people and making friends today is getting complicated. Social scientists are telling us that the places for people to meet and get to know each other are diminishing.

Front porches have been replaced with back porches. Our front yards are filled with gravel while we spend most of our money creating a backyard oasis. When we have spare time, we spend it on our backyards, not our front yards. In fact, some of us would have to sit on the curb if we wanted to congregate in the front yard.

Short chain-link fences between yards have been replaced with tall brick walls.

Carports have been replaced with garages and automatic doors. You literally can live your life and never see your neighbors. You don't know what they look like unless you see them from the knees down because that's all you see as the garage door closes. I have lived on my street for 10 years and I barely know the people on my street. Guess who I do know. The neighbors who park in their driveway instead of their garage. Guess where most of our conversations occur. In the front yard. A couple of years ago, my neighbor cleaned out his garage so he could park in it. I didn't see him for weeks.

Neighborhood Little Leagues and Pop Warner football have been replaced with clubs.

Our new definition of friend comes from knowing they left for the store already because they updated their status on Twitter or Facebook. Those are our friends. From day to day, our greatest social achievement is adding more friends to our Facebook or followers to Twitter.

And please don't take this the wrong way. I'm not condemning our culture or even suggesting we stand against this trend of privacy and individualism. I have Facebook friends too. I'm just suggesting it's getting harder and harder to meet people and make friends. And the church can help.

► So, one of the primary goals of Life Groups is to address this social need to meet people. Life Groups provide a safe place- a safe environment- to meet new people. That's one of the reasons we have transitioned to a format where groups begin and end, instead of being continuous groups. It gives people the opportunity to change groups and meet new people without the awkwardness of

having to say, “I don’t want to be in your group anymore.” It gives you a chance to step in to new groups, instead of forcing you to jump into existing groups.

It’s like speed dating but for friendships. You won’t connect with every person in your Life Group every time. But what if you connected with one? Just one person who became your friend. Most people don’t need the church to tell them what to do once they have a friend. All we’re trying to do is provide a place where you can find one. Life Groups foster friendship.

One of my best friends is someone I met in Life Group. We clicked. But our friendship didn’t grow because we were in Life Groups. It grew because we did things together and so did our families. We haven’t gone to church together now for a few years, but I still consider him one of my best friends. We get together regularly for lunch and to hang out. You see, Life Groups gave me a safe place to meet some people I could get to know. And then I chose who I wanted to deepen a friendship with. Life Groups aren’t really designed to deepen the friendship. They are designed to start one. They meet a social need; they provide a social space to get to know people.

But there is also a spiritual reason to foster friendships. And let’s face it, the Christian church as a whole and MV specifically, is not any better at fostering friendships. In fact, it may be worse. Because sometimes people come to church specifically looking for friendships and connection and community. And they visit a few Sundays and are treated well by our great hospitality team out front. So, they keep coming back. And several week or a few months go by and they realize they still don’t know people and people still don’t know them. They haven’t made any friends.

Look at what one person wrote after last term’s Life Groups.

► “I have been attending Moon Valley for about 6 or 7 years, but have never been able to connect on a personal level with anyone. I would come on Sundays, say a few hello’s and leave knowing that that was it for the week. I take responsibility for a lot of it, as I was waiting to be invited. Invited to lunch, to a group, to someone’s house for a bar-b-que, anything that would have been a sign that I was being welcomed.”

As a pastor, that’s sad to hear. And unfortunately, this is reality for many people. And maybe it’s reality for you. I hear things like this all the time. I talk to other pastors and they hear this all the time. People don’t feel good about their church when they feel alone or isolated. And even in a room this size, people can feel alone if this room is full of strangers.

► Wouldn’t it be better if we were all more outgoing and more comfortable with people we don’t know? Yes! Should we all work on reaching out to people we don’t know. Of course! But I don’t think the primary problem is people. Sure, we could blame each other for not talking to one

another. You can leave the church angry and personally offended that no one tried to befriend you. I could preach that you need to talk to strangers more. But blaming, leaving and preaching don't seem to work very well. The primary problem isn't people; it's structure. A group of 200 people gathering to worship is not a good place to try and make friends. For most people, whether you are new here or been here a while, 200 people is too many choices. The people doing research on America's growing isolation say anything more than 20-30 people is probably too large a group to really connect with people. The group size is just not conducive to getting to know people. It's not because people don't care about each other.

So Sunday morning church is great and important- it helps us to bond and belong- it can even help us feel like we are a part of a community. We can even create a sense of friendliness and acceptance. But it not a good place to make and develop friends.

So, we do Life Groups; Life Groups that foster friendships. And this isn't a new concept.

Let's look at what the Bible says in ► Acts 2:44-47

44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. 45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people.

Even for the very first church, there were some things better done in a smaller groups in homes. For the first church, they had communion in smaller groups; they shared meals together, and enjoyed each other and were generous to each other; may I suggest they got to know each other. And I'm not suggesting we have to do things the exact same way they did. They did what worked in their culture. And so must we. That's why we do Life Groups that foster friendship. Because in our culture we need to.

You see, the Bible lists more than 40 things we are to do with and for one another. Things like love and honor each other. ► Look at Romans 12:10.

10 Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.

How do we consistently and genuinely love and honor each other on Sunday morning?

► Romans 12:16 (NLT) 16 Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy

the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!

► Galatians 6:2 (NLT) 2 Share each other's burdens...

It is impossible to even know every person's burdens. Most times, people share their burdens with their friends, not the whole church.

► 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NLT) 11 So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

Again, this requires knowledge of what is going on in a person's life. It requires friendships.

► Hebrews 10:24 (NLT) 24 Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.

And we have thought of a way to motivate each other to love and good works. It's in Life Groups. We care for each other and serve together. We've had Life Groups provide food for people in their group who didn't have any. Pay bills, replace appliances, go to court, cry through tragedy, invite to holidays, rejoice in jobs or promotions, celebrate births, mourn deaths, feed the homeless. Those things happen in Life Groups all the time. It's how we motivate each other at MVBC. It's how we provide good works for one another. Life Groups foster friendship.

► And this participation in taking care of one another doesn't seem optional. Look again at Acts 2. How many participated? All of them.

44 And all the believers...

I don't mean to imply that you have to be in a Life Group to be a Christian. That's silly. But look at what Paul said to the church in Corinth.

► 1 Corinthians 12:19-27 (NLT) 19 How strange a body would be if it had only one part! 20 Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. 21 The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you." 26 If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. 27 All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

You see, this participation as an active part of the church is something God designed. You can't say, "I don't need you." And you also can assume, "Well, they don't need me." This idea of doing things in small groups and caring for each other is not something we made up. We are seeking to

be a church of vibrant groups because Life Groups foster friendship where most of these one anothers are accomplished. It's friendship that meets a basic human need but also accomplishes a very important spiritual mandate.

► But there's a danger in all small groups: a small groups of friends or coworkers or basketball players or family members or church groups or Life Groups. The danger is this: we can lose our focus. The small group that once met needs and created a space to make friends can quickly become a clique. For those in the inside, it is a great experience. For those on the outside, it looks like a barrier. So, we've tried to address that. When Life Groups begin in February, everyone starts together. You don't have to feel like you're breaking up a group or invading a group or inviting yourself. You're not. Because groups aren't designed to carry over; they are designed to start over. To create a new place to make some new friends. Life Groups are a social tool, not a social club. Everyone gets a fresh start every time Life Groups begin. Life Groups foster friendships.

CONCLUSION: I haven't really tried to hide the fact that I think Life Groups are a necessary part of our ministry here at MVBC. But more importantly, I think Life Groups are a necessary part of your spiritual journey. And yours, and yours and yours and yours and yours. I'd like you to make friends with other people at MV. I'd like to know you are being cared for because you are connected with some other people from MV. I'd like to know if you got cancer tomorrow, you know people here in your church family that would walk that road with you. If you were praying for an ailing parent, that you could call some friends to pray with you.

I coordinate Life Groups because I believe they are that important to your spiritual journey. But only you can sign up and go. And so this morning, that's what I would like you to do. Sign up and go.

If you find yourself new to MV, the next best thing for you to do is join a Life Group and make some friends.

Maybe you've been here a while and still don't feel connected or have friends. Let me encourage you to try a Life Group. It might seem a little scary, but I know every one of our leaders, and they really are generally pretty normal people.

Maybe you find yourself saying, "I don't really need a life group." Let me encourage you with this; maybe somebody needs *you* in their Life Group. Maybe you don't need a social space to make friends. But at MVBC, this is the best way to carry out the "one anothers" in the Bible. I know people need you to do that.

Finally, maybe your one of those who has been around awhile. You've been in and out of groups and you find yourself hanging out with the same people. Maybe your challenge is to join a group that can expand who you know. Maybe your challenge is to make yourself knowable to more people.

But regardless of where you find yourself, sign up and go. We've tried to make signing up as easy as possible. You should see some of these brochures on the chairs around you, showing all the different groups. You can sign up on your connection card by simply writing then group number. You can sign up online at moonvalleybible.org. There is a table in the lobby with some leaders at it if you want to ask some questions or see the material or sign up in person.

But sign up and go. Because Life Groups foster friendship.

PRAY