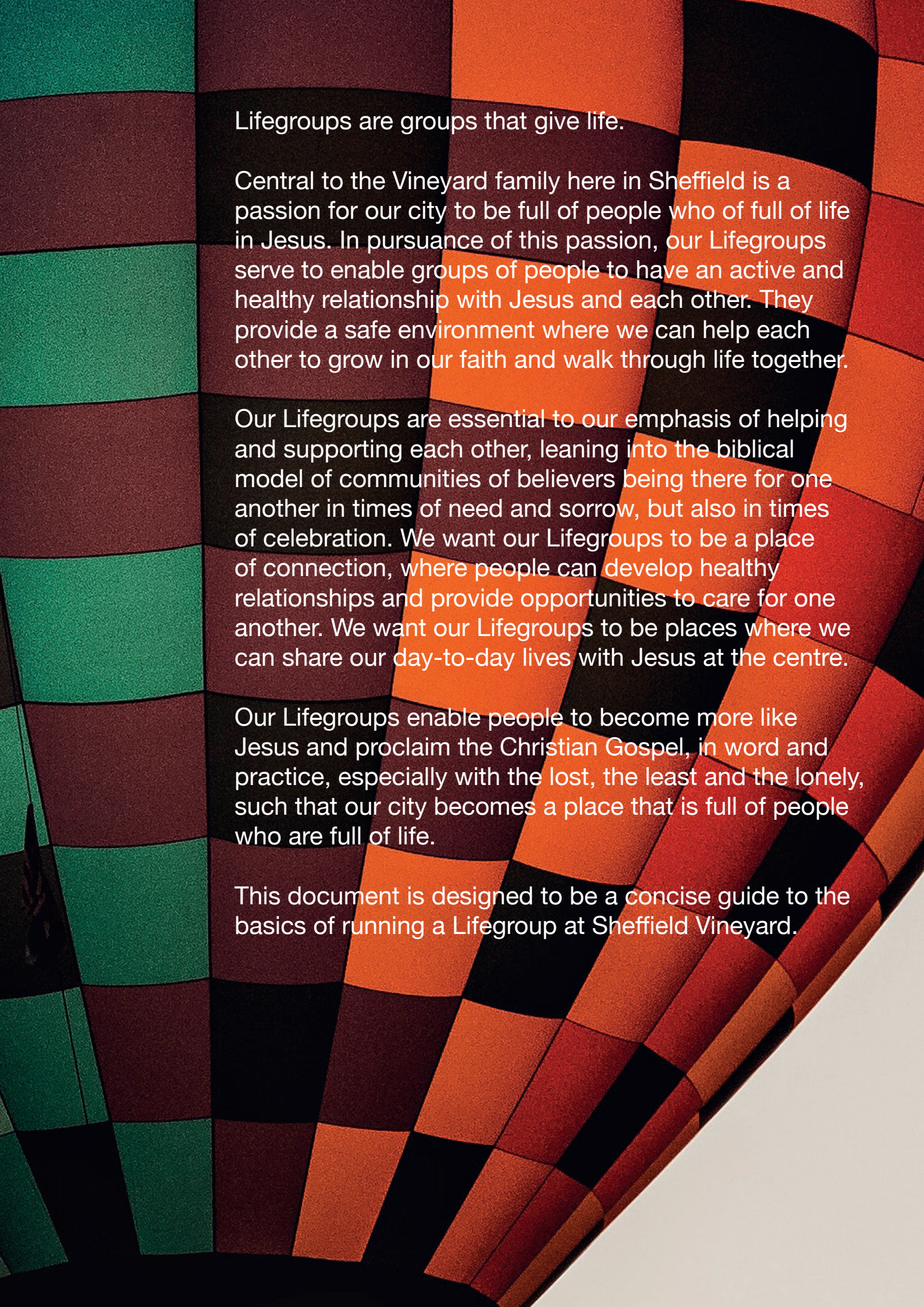


LIFEGROUP MANUAL

SHEFFIELD VINEYARD CHURCH





Lifegroups are groups that give life.

Central to the Vineyard family here in Sheffield is a passion for our city to be full of people who are full of life in Jesus. In pursuance of this passion, our Lifegroups serve to enable groups of people to have an active and healthy relationship with Jesus and each other. They provide a safe environment where we can help each other to grow in our faith and walk through life together.

Our Lifegroups are essential to our emphasis of helping and supporting each other, leaning into the biblical model of communities of believers being there for one another in times of need and sorrow, but also in times of celebration. We want our Lifegroups to be a place of connection, where people can develop healthy relationships and provide opportunities to care for one another. We want our Lifegroups to be places where we can share our day-to-day lives with Jesus at the centre.

Our Lifegroups enable people to become more like Jesus and proclaim the Christian Gospel, in word and practice, especially with the lost, the least and the lonely, such that our city becomes a place that is full of people who are full of life.

This document is designed to be a concise guide to the basics of running a Lifegroup at Sheffield Vineyard.

VISION, VIRTUES, BELIEFS, FORCES AND BELONGING

OUR VISION

As we (Karen and Alex) were planning to move to Sheffield, we spent a long time listening to God, trying to hear his plan and how he wanted us to get involved. What we heard was God's vision for this city and this church. We wrote down what we felt God was saying, and then over the years, refined it as his calling became clearer to us.

This is the Sheffield Vineyard vision:

God has called us to establish a growing, vibrant, biblically-based, regional Vineyard church rooted in Sheffield, which will, in the power of the Holy Spirit, worship God and communicate the gospel of Jesus in creative and relevant ways. We will make, train and equip disciples to be effective in extending God's kingdom, and we will show generosity and kindness, especially towards the least, the lonely and the lost.

We've taken to using a phrase that imbues this vision, it's this:

We want our city to be full of people who are full of life.

VINEYARD VALUES, VIRTUES AND BELIEFS

The website of Vineyard Churches UK and Ireland (vineyardchurches.org.uk) has numerous excellent articles and resources that cover Vineyard values (sometimes referred to as distinctives) and beliefs. In particular, you can find the Vineyard Statement of Faith, a link to which is on the 'Resources' page of the Sheffield Vineyard website. Additionally, John and Eleanor Mumford gave a talk in 2017 on the Vineyard Distinctives; again, a link to this is on the 'Resources' page of our website.

It is from these sources that we have written a summary of our Virtues (these are more than things we *value*, they are things that define who we are and who we want to be). You can listen to the latest Sheffield Vineyard talk on our vision, together with a series of talks on our virtues, by going to the 'Vision and virtues' page on sheffieldvineyard.org.

5 VIRTUES THAT KEEP SHEFFIELD VINEYARD IN SHAPE

Imagine a circular parachute laid out flat and held by many people around its perimeter. If everyone pulls with the same force the parachute will remain circular in shape; equally, if any one person pulls more (or less) than the others, the shape of the parachute would distort. Similarly, we have found that the church is held into its God intended shape when 5 aspects of church life are at work together. To ensure that Sheffield Vineyard thrives, we seek to hold the following 'virtues' in tension with each other. And to help remember them, the first letter of each of our virtues spell out the word '**AWAKE**'.

All-encompassing worshippers

Our highest priority is to worship God because we believe that above all else, God is to be glorified. In song, and in every area of our lives, we give praise and honour to God.

Wholehearted Disciples

To be a disciple of Jesus is to journey towards becoming more like Him. We want discipleship to captivate every part of us, all the time, wherever we are.

Authentic family

Jesus invites, gathers, accepts, embraces and welcomes everyone. We are rising to the challenge of being known as a church family by the way we love, serve, help and respect one another.

Kingdom carriers

We carry the authority of the King in order to engage in his supernatural movement with faith and expectancy (and without being weird) so that everyone can have faith in Him.

Extravagantly generous & kind

God loves the last, the lonely and the lost. We want to actively impact the people of Sheffield, and beyond, with bucket loads of generosity and kindness.

5 VIRTUES IN EQUILIBRIUM AT LIFEGROUPS

In the Bible, we see that these 5 'virtues' existing at the very beginning of the New Testament church. Our vision for Lifegroups at Sheffield Vineyard is that we would continue these ancient biblical practices in ways that are relevant to our current context.

It is expected that most Lifegroups will include the following:

- A time for informal discussion and eating (either a meal or a dessert, etc.),
- Worship
- Bible-centred discussion
- Prayer

It is not expected that all 5 virtues are practised every week; however, don't ignore anyone for prolonged periods of time.

Everyone was amazed by the many miracles and wonders that the apostles worked. All the Lord's followers often met together, and they shared everything they had. They would sell their property and possessions and give the money to whoever needed it. Day after day they met together in the temple. They broke bread together in different homes and shared their food happily and freely, while praising God. Everyone liked them, and each day the Lord added to their group others who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

LIFEGROUPS THAT MAKE WHOLEHEARTED DISCIPLES

The last book John Stott wrote was *The Radical Disciple*, in which he answers to the question, What is God's purpose for his people? "*God wants his people to become like Christ, for Christlikeness is the will of God for the people of God.*" Jesus taught his disciples that 'Christlikeness' comprised 3 parts:

- Be with him
- Become like him
- Do what he is doing

Jesus started his ministry by inviting people to be with him, 'come and follow me'. He then trained and equipped his disciples to be like him - to imitate his character such that they became reflectors and reflections of him. And all the while, Jesus encouraged his disciples to engage in his miracles he wonders (e.g. they got to feed thousands of people with food Jesus miraculously produced). Later, he commissioned his disciples to continue his work, '

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20)

All our Lifegroups have at their core one or more of these Christlike aspects. All Lifegroups will either enable people to be with him, become like him, or do what he is currently doing.

HOW TO BELONG AT SHEFFIELD VINEYARD

Having outlined the above, we have 5 practical ways to 'belong' at Sheffield Vineyard. We don't practice a membership system, but the following 5 points are given to help people to get involved and belong:

- Regularly attend Sheffield Vineyard on Sundays
- Regularly attend a Sheffield Vineyard Lifegroup
- Serve in the life and ministry of the church
- Give a proportion of your finances to Sheffield Vineyard
- Actively seek to invite others into relationship with Jesus and the church family

These 5 ways to belong are discussed in more detail on the 'Belong' page of the Sheffield Vineyard website.

HOW TO CAST VISION

Andy Stanley, the founding pastor of North Point Community Church in Atlanta, Georgia, has written a very helpful book called *Making Vision Stick* (Zondervan, 2007). In it, he outlines 5 crucial steps for sharing a compelling vision that people will remember:

- **State the vision simply** A good vision must be short, concise and memorable.
- **Cast the vision convincingly** Define the problem in a way that creates Godly dissatisfaction with the present situation in the people you work with. Offer a solution to the problem that invites their response and involvement. Present a compelling reason why action needs to be taken, and taken immediately.
- **Repeat the vision regularly** If we want the vision to stick, we have to repeat it multiple times, in multiple ways, and in many different forms.
- **Celebrate the vision systematically** One of the best ways to reinforce the vision is to celebrate real-life examples of your vision being lived out in the real world. Find ways to celebrate even minor steps of progress towards the vision.
- **Embrace the vision personally** You can't ask people to do things that you aren't first committed to doing yourself.

RESPONSIBILITIES AND EXPECTATIONS

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A LIFEGROUP LEADER

Your role is to lead the Lifegroup and pastor the people therein. You should plan ahead and coordinate the group. You should ensure that the Lifegroup reflects Vineyard values and is aligned with the Vision for Sheffield Vineyard. You should attend Lifegroup Leaders meetings and events. You should commit to leading the group for a minimum of one year. You are accountable to the Church Leaders, who are committed to supporting you in your role to the best of their ability.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A LIFEGROUP WORSHIP LEADER

If a Lifegroup has a worship leader, the role of the worship leader is to lead people to engage in worship or ensure that the leading of worship is undertaken by a person of good musical ability and Godly character. You should attend the Heart and Skills events. You are accountable to the Lifegroup Leaders and should seek support from them as needs be.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A LIFEGROUP HOST

If a Lifegroup meets in a house, the role of a host is to ensure that the environment for the Lifegroup is clean and inviting, especially for newcomers. When a Lifegroup has a meal or refreshments you are to prepare or delegate the preparation of the meals and refreshments. If the group doesn't meet at your house, you should arrive early at the venue and help to prepare the place and help clean up afterwards. You are to support the Lifegroup Leader. You are accountable to the Lifegroup Leaders and should seek support from them as needs be.

COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

The following is a checklist of things to consider in the running of a Lifegroup:

Before

- Pray for the group.
- Remind people in the group of up and coming events/activities.
- Ensure the preparation for the group is complete and shared out such that no one is overburdened, or left with nothing to do.

During

- Are people feeling welcome?
- Is everyone being given an opportunity to contribute to discussions?
- Are we holding the '5 virtues' in tension?
- Are we starting and finishing on time?

After

- Review – How did it go? What went well? What could be done even better? What was God saying/doing?
- Record prayer requests to remind you to pray afterwards and be reminded to follow up next week if appropriate.
- Record who attended on ChurchSuite.
- If there are any questions or concerns that arose, chat about it with each other in a kind and compassionate manner (avoid gossip and maintain confidentiality). If significant matters arise, discuss with the Church Leaders.

Generally

- Is there anyone who has not come along for more than 3 consecutive weeks? Perhaps give them a call to make sure they are ok (a call be better than a text in these instances – they are more personal).
- Are people getting to understand and associate themselves with our Vision and Values?
- Encourage your people to 'belong'.
- Who in the group is looking like they could play a role in future groups?

GENERAL EXPECTATIONS

It is expected that Lifegroup Leaders and Worship Leaders should 'belong' (see how to belong above).

All leaders are expected to maintain a healthy relationship with God. The key to maintaining a healthy and effective personal relationship with God is spending daily time in prayer and reflecting on biblical truth. Spiritually mature people know that if they make the effort to care for their insides (their heart, their emotions, their faith) then their outward actions will be right too (Matthew 23:25-26). A great follower of God is someone who regularly seeks God:

- independently (without prompting from others)
- corporately (as part of a church family)
- regularly (at least daily)
- only (God gets jealous when our allegiances are divided)

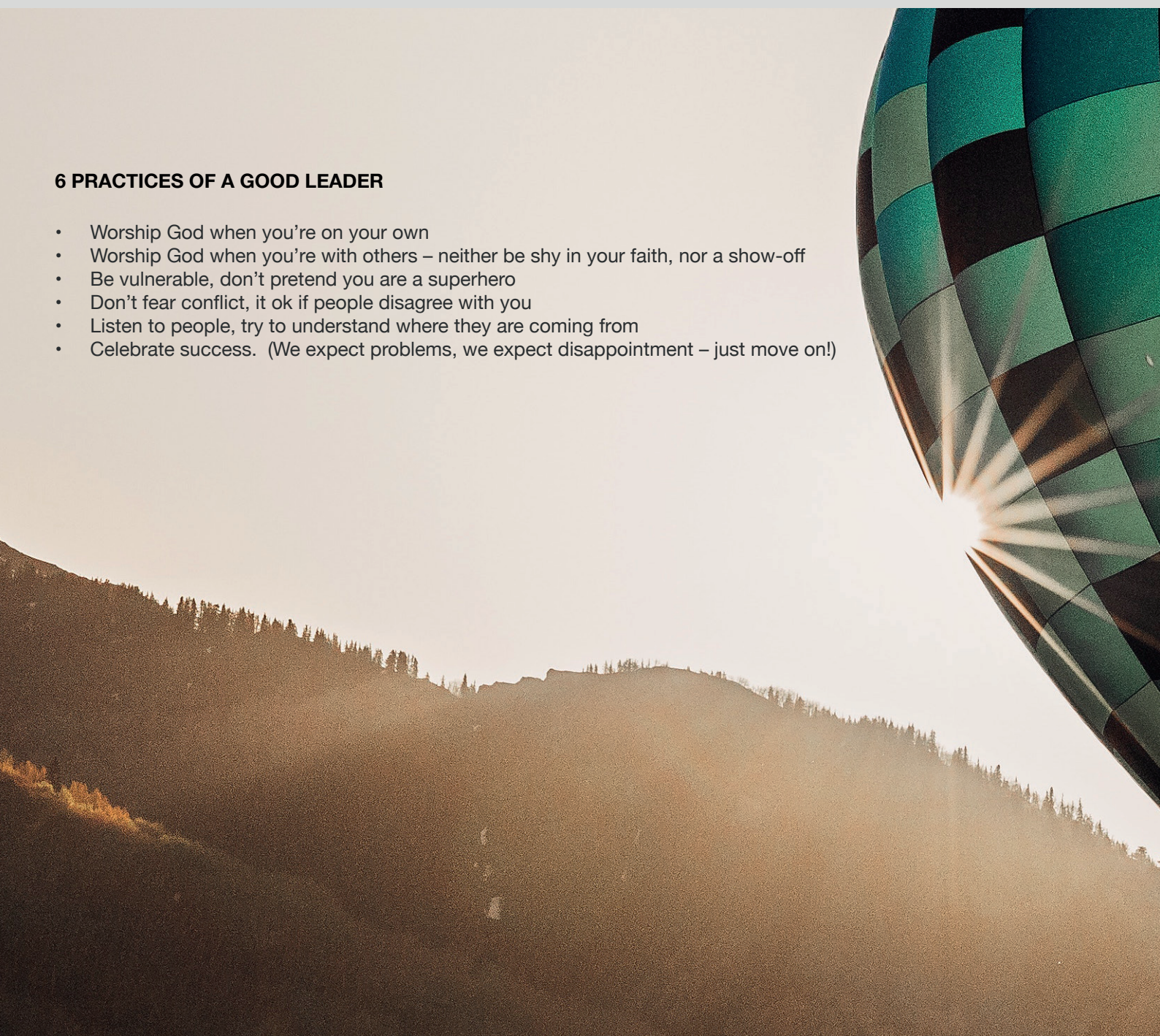
See the Following Jesus Every DAY resource at sheffieldvineyard.org.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

No one is perfect all the time – if we were then we would not need Jesus. It's therefore important that we admit our wrong to God and others as appropriate, seek forgiveness, and sometimes assistance. If at any stage you feel that your ongoing behaviour doesn't echo your beliefs, or your practices don't echo your principles, then talk to the Church Leaders.

6 PRACTICES OF A GOOD LEADER

- Worship God when you're on your own
- Worship God when you're with others – neither be shy in your faith, nor a show-off
- Be vulnerable, don't pretend you are a superhero
- Don't fear conflict, it ok if people disagree with you
- Listen to people, try to understand where they are coming from
- Celebrate success. (We expect problems, we expect disappointment – just move on!)



PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

HOW TO PREPARE FOR A BIBLE FOCUSED DISCUSSION

- Pray.
- Read a Bible passage.
- Choose a single point of interest that relates to the passage and focus on that. Consider a question people want to know the answer to or explain a relevant topic that people would wish to know more about.
- Read the passage again and ask yourself: What does it mean? What did it mean to the first audience? What did the author intend to affirm/condemn/promise/command? What does it say to us today? What can we learn from it and what can we apply?
- Pray that God reveals himself and his message as you proceed.
- Consider how to present the topic in a manner that impacts people's lives. Disregard irrelevant material. Organise material to maximise the primary topic message. Consider appropriate and expressive illustrations – consider personal accounts without attracting undue attention to you rather than God (remember to avoid inappropriately degrading or elevating yourself or others).
- Consider who is in the group and aim your talk at their level. Be aware of any issues that may need to be addressed with caution/sensitivity.
- **Don't spend more than 30 minutes preparing for Lifegroup discussion, especially if you are a theological superhero. If you spend more time than this, then you will be setting the bar so high that others will never wish to lead in the future.**
- Aim to talk for around 5 minutes (it's not a sermon) and aim to encourage/facilitate group discussion.
- If only one person comes along – still do it. Your thoughts and wisdom may significantly affect that one person.

HOW TO LEAD INCLUSIVE DISCUSSIONS

- Pray for the discussion as part of your preparation.
- Perhaps start with reading the Bible passage.
- Explain what the Bible passage means. Consider explaining what the passage means to you. Maybe tell a story to explain your point. If you include others in your story, make sure you get their permission to talk about them.
- Ask open-ended questions that require more than a 'yes' or a 'no'.
- Ask follow up questions, i.e. what makes you say that? How do you feel about that? How would you explain your answer to a non-Christian friend or neighbour?
- Be willing to participate in the discussion, but try not to dominate the discussion. The aim is to keep the people in your group talking. It is a discussion, not a lecture. Try to avoid being the arbitrator of wisdom, your group won't thank you for taking the attitude of a school teacher where the object is to second guess what *your* answer is.
- Try and keep the discussion on track.
- Don't push your point of view, be ready to be challenged and to be wrong.
- Put questions in your own words, or restate them in a simpler form if they fall flat.
- Communicate love, not judgement, look for ways to show you care about the person, not just the right answer.
- Have an eye out for the quieter members of the group; do what you can to enable them to engage in discussion without making them feel uncomfortable. If they see you respond positively towards others, that will give them more confidence to contribute.
- Make sure you ask the 'what does that mean for our life now?' question. The aim of the discussion is not intellectual stimulation but life transformation.
- Lead into a time of prayer and response that helps them integrate what God's been saying into their life.
- If you feel that the Lifegroup discussion is going on a bit, just say something like *'we could talk all night about this one...'*

The end goal of a group discussion is a life change, not perfect discussions or getting through all the material. Therefore, stay open to the Holy Spirit during each group meeting and follow where He leads. Some of the most memorable group meetings occur when the Leader is willing to scrap the plan for the night and address a specific need or do something fun and spontaneous.

HOW TO LEAD MINISTRY

Ministry is a time when we place ourselves in a position of trusting Jesus to do what he wants to do with us, and moving in harmony with him.

- Invite people to get ready to receive from God (perhaps stand).
- Invite the Holy Spirit to come.
- Expect the Holy Spirit to come
- Wait.
- Carry on waiting.
- Wait a bit more and listen to the very quiet voice of God.
- Wait and look to see what God is doing.
- Ask God (in silence) “what are you doing?”
- Avoid the temptation to fill the silence and wait until God moves.
- When you see God move, then explain that God is moving (sometimes God moves in ways that cause us to become emotional, and sometimes people respond to God’s presence causes people to shout or fall down or laugh, etc. If others are around, just explain in simple terms that God is working on that person – others don’t need to know all the details, they just need to know that God is on the move).
- Dial down any hype.
- Prayer for more and partner with what the Father is doing. Jesus said, “I only do what I see my Father doing”.

We sometimes tell God our ideas and ask him to bless them when we should be asking God what he’s doing and choosing to bless that.

HOW TO DEAL WITH ‘CHALLENGING PEOPLE’

Here are some of the common “challenging people” that you may encounter, and some tips on approaching them with grace. It’s important to be willing to have these awkward conversations for the health of the group. You will always have the support of your overseers if you feel it’s necessary.

The Over-Talker

This person always has plenty to say and loves to be the first person to say it. At the beginning of the discussion remind everyone in the group that we want everyone to have a chance to speak and participate equally. If the problem continues, talk to the person outside of the group. Affirm them in what they do contribute, and tell them you need their help in getting some of the other people in the group to open up and share. Sometimes you can go as far as to ask them to commit to not being the first person to answer a question, or to only answer when you call on them—or to even work out a subtle signal you can give them when they are talking too much.

The Non-Talker

This is the quiet person in the group who never wants to share. If you think that doing so won’t scare them off even more (that they just need a little prompting) try calling on

them periodically to share an answer. Also, be sure to affirm them big-time when they do respond. If that doesn’t work, talk to the person outside of the group.

Again, affirm them in what they do contribute, and let them know that you want more people to get to hear their perspective. Remind them how valuable all of the different perspectives are to the entire group.

The Tangent-Starter

This person loves to get the group way off track by starting random tangents and rabbit trails. First of all, don’t get upset at the tangents, and feel free to go off on them once in a while. When the time comes, firmly bring the group back on track. If the problem becomes excessive, again, talk to the person outside of the group. Affirm them in what they do contribute, and let them know about the challenge you have in trying to facilitate a good group and bring across certain points each week, and how the tangents make your job harder. Ask them how they can help you.

The Spiritually Intense Person

This person is perfectly normal until it comes to the prayer and response time. This could look like a variety of things, but essentially if someone ministers in a way that you or the person receiving it feel uncomfortable it is worth having a discussion. We want to recognise that we are a church with diverse spiritual and cultural heritage whilst also holding to our value of being naturally supernatural. As soon as possible talk to the person on the receiving end about how they experienced it and reassure them that you will be talking to the other person. Have a one-on-one conversation with that person, help them to see why what they did was unhelpful, and that spiritual authority is something that can be carried in a natural way.

The Insensitive Person

This individual gives advice, makes fun of answers and people, cuts people off, or does a variety of other things to offend members within the group. This person is dangerous to the health of your group! They can keep it from being a safe group more quickly than anything else. Therefore, remind everyone of the type of atmosphere we want in the group, and definitely have the one-on-one conversation outside of the group to let the person know how important a safe group is, and what they can do to help make that happen. If you are having problems with anyone in your Lifegroup, don’t hesitate to get some advice from other Leaders.

HOW TO DEAL WITH PASTORAL ISSUES

We expect that Lifegroup Leaders would be pastorally aware and interested in how the members of your Lifegroup are doing. However, we do not expect you to deliver all the care for them. Our general stance is that people are responsible for their own growth and development. Your job is to signpost people to the places that they can get the help they need. If you encounter any pastoral issue that you are uncomfortable handling, no matter how big or small, then you should contact your Overseer. They can point you to any resources that you may find helpful or intervene if necessary.

HOW TO GROW AND MULTIPLY

HOW TO INVITE PEOPLE TO YOUR LIFEGROUP

When newcomers fill in a 'Keeping in Touch' card, they will be sent a welcome email inviting them to a Lifegroup. On a Sunday, be proactively looking out for new people. Even if you are not geographically the nearest Lifegroup, people will travel for a relationship. If you do meet someone new on a Sunday and they live on the other side of the city, try and introduce them to a Lifegroup team member close to them. If you do this then other Lifegroup team members will reciprocate and introduce newcomers to you.

HOW TO CREATE A MISSIONAL CULTURE

- Model this in your life, if you are not sharing your faith neither will they?
- Ask about each other's friends who don't know Jesus yet.
- Discuss how sharing your faith is going.
- Pray for each other's friends and for each other's ability to share their faith.
- When a church social or Alpha is coming up discuss as a group who you will invite and then ask the next week how it went.
- If you have a Lifegroup social, make it clear that friends are welcome and encourage each other to invite someone.

HOW TO RAISE UP LEADERS - IRTDMN

IRTDMM is a series of letters that provides a memorable way to think about a process of developing leaders. Each letter represents a vital step in the process of helping a disciple become a leader of others, and then become a developer of other leaders.

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|-----------------|---|
| Identify | Look for those God is highlighting for specific leadership roles. |
| Recruit | Clearly call them into a process of discipleship that will prepare them for that leadership role. |
| Train | Give them the necessary experiences and tools to be a success in the leadership role. |
| Deploy | Release them to lead their ministry and, most importantly, to disciple other leaders. |
| Monitor | Keep track of their effectiveness as a leader and continue to support their growth and learning. |
| Nurture | Continue to care for their hurts, needs, and desires while encouraging them to continue learning and growing. |

IDENTIFY FAST PEOPLE

When seeking to identify if someone could be ready to lead, consider if they are **FAST**.

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| Faithful | Do they live a lifestyle of obedience to Jesus? |
| Available | Do they have the time in their schedule to give the role the time it requires? |
| Servant | Is their desire to lead motivated by a love for people, rather than position or power? |
| Teachable | Are they hungry to learn and able to receive feedback well? |

HOW TO MULTIPLY A LIFEGROUP

Lay the foundation for multiplication from the beginning by talking about it as an essential part of Lifegroup from the beginning. When your group is approaching 10-12 people you should begin to actively plan towards multiplication.

It is easier to multiply a Lifegroup during a season of growth where the group is not yet settled. Once the group is settled you will encounter more resistance as the relational cost of multiplication is higher. When your group is ripe for reproduction, consider the following:

Identify, recruit and train a potential leader

Read 'IRTDMM (launching leaders)' in the Resources section of the Sheffield Vineyard website. Discuss your ideas with the Church Leaders.

Share the vision with your Lifegroup

Once a clear plan has been agreed with the Church Leaders as to who the next leaders will be, inform the rest of the group. Let the group know that you have reached the size where you need to begin thinking about multiplying. Let them know you're not in a hurry, but you believe God has a plan for growth and multiplication.

Be inclusive

In the multiplication, you don't want people to feel they have been left behind or are just going to 'make up the numbers'. Make sure everyone is personally invited; whether it is to renew their commitment to the sending Lifegroup or to go as part of the multiplication. In those conversations be specific about the skills and characteristics that you see in them, and what that brings to the group. This way it is an affirming moment for everyone involved.

Have a taster night

Be creative with ways to allow the potential leaders and the Lifegroup to experience what Lifegroup will be like after the multiplication. It could be that they lead the whole Lifegroup for a season, the Lifegroup splits up with the multiplication in another room. Discuss possibilities with Karen and Alex. Ask the potential leaders to lead the group and host it for a trial period, then meet with them afterwards.

Plan a launch party


Have a Lifegroup night with a party feel, as part of that night “pray out” the new Leaders. Celebrate the successes of your time with the group and the potential for ministry that exists going forward.

Deploy, Monitor and Nurture

In discussion with the Lifegroup leaders, find a date which works best for everyone and announce a start date.

Start your new group

Make the first Lifegroup meeting really fun and relational with a time of sharing the vision for the new group and praying into it together.



Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ... for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.
2 Peter 1:5-10



Our thanks go to Vineyard UK&I, Vineyard USA, and in particular Birmingham Vineyard (UK).

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