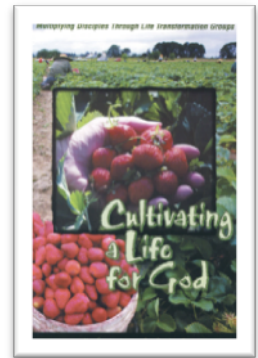


CULTIVATING A LIFE FOR GOD: MULTIPLYING DISCIPLES THROUGH LIFE TRANSFORMATION GROUPS

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CHAPTER EIGHT:

The Life Transformation Group System

The Life Transformation Group (LTG) system is a grassroots tool for growth. Through this simple system, the most essential elements of vital spiritual ministry are released to common Christians without the need for specialized training. It taps the disciple's internal motivation and provides the support needed to grow in the essentials of a spiritual life. The LTG empowers the common Christian to do the uncommon work of reproductive disciple making.

A Life Transformation Group is made up of two to three people, all of the same gender, who meet weekly for personal accountability in the areas of their spiritual growth and development. A group should not grow beyond three but multiply into two groups of two rather than a single group of four. If a fourth person is added to the group, it is recommended that the group consider itself "pregnant" and ready to give birth to a second group. After the fourth person has demonstrated sufficient faithfulness to the group for two to three weeks, the group should multiply into two groups of two.

There is no curriculum or training needed for the LTG. A simple bookmark that stays in the participant's Bible is all that is needed.

The LTG accountability consists of three essential disciplines for personal spiritual growth—a steady diet of Scripture, confession of sin, and prayer for others who need Christ.

1. Sin is Confessed

The first thing the members of the LTG do at a meeting is to ask one another the ten accountability questions found on one side of the LTG Bible bookmark. The meetings should always begin with this because it is easy to get lost in conversation and run out of time for the questions. Beginning each meeting with the confession of sin tends to sanctify the rest of the time together. The questions are straightforward. Each person in the group takes turn answering each question honestly. The group must be a safe place where the participants feel they can be honest and vulnerable because the questions are very personal. This is the reason why mixed gender groups do not work.

The ten questions are as follows:

1. Have you been a testimony this week to the greatness of Jesus Christ with both your words and actions?
2. Have you been exposed to sexually alluring material or allowed your mind to entertain inappropriate sexual thoughts about another person this week?
3. Have you lacked any integrity in your financial dealings this week, or coveted something that does not belong to you?
4. Have you been honoring, understanding, and generous in your important relationships this past week?
5. Have you damaged another person by your words, either behind his/her back or face-to-face?
6. Have you given in to an addictive behavior this week? Explain.
7. Have you continued to remain angry toward another?
8. Have you secretly wished for another's misfortune so that you might excel?
9. Did you finish your reading this week and hear from the Lord? What are you going to do about it?
10. Have you been completely honest with me?

The accountability questions are designed in such a way as to bring to remembrance any sin that may need to be confessed. The system is meant to be simple and transferable so that anyone can apply it. We have worked through many drafts of questions in order to find a simple list which covers a broad scope of behaviors that need regular confession.

I want to make clear, however, that there is a potential danger inherent with the questions. It is important for those who are involved in an LTG to submit to the *spirit* of the system more than the letter of the law. These ten questions are meant to stimulate discussion and open sharing, but they are not in themselves an exhaustive list of all that sin is; nor do they define what true righteousness is. Simply adhering to the behavior promoted in these questions does not necessarily guarantee one's righteousness. Certainly obedience and the confession of sin can lead to righteousness, but we dare not believe that this list of questions is the standard of all that is righteousness.

Jesus Himself is the standard of righteousness (Matt. 5:17-20; John 5:39-47). We must follow Jesus, not a list of ten questions, if we want to truly pursue righteousness. The questions we have given as samples are only tools to help you in your pursuit of Jesus—the *only* Savior of our sins.

Another reason why these questions alone are insufficient to establish righteousness in our lives is that most of us have enough creativity in our flesh to find ways to sin that are not covered by these ten questions.

These questions have proven very helpful in uncovering sinful *patterns* that need to be openly confessed in a safe and healing community. The LTG provides a wonderful place in which to be accountable to overcome patterns of sinful behavior.

There are, however, other alternatives that do the same thing. I have always said people should feel free to adjust the questions to be of the most personal benefit. Some use questions that are more open ended and less specific. For example, one pastor I know uses questions similar to the following in his LTGs:

1. How has God made His presence known to you this week?
2. What is God teaching you?
3. How are you responding to His prompting?
4. Is there someone you need to share Christ with this next week?
5. Do you have a need to confess any sin?

These questions are simple and transferable, yet they allow for a much broader application and openness to the leading of the Spirit in a person's life. The advantage of the ten accountability questions listed above is that they bring to light more specific behaviors which may need to be confessed but may otherwise go forgotten. They are a more thorough inventory with which to process your life. Both sets of questions have advantages and disadvantages, and either will accomplish the goal if applied in the proper spirit.

I have included a variety of lists of questions used for accountability in Appendix B. Use whatever works best for you. I only have three suggestions in this regard. 1) First, somehow include in your list of questions one that holds the group members accountable to openly sharing a testimony of Christ's goodness with others. It should be something that goes beyond living as an example; it should encourage giving a verbal witness. 2) I would also suggest that you have at least one question that asks each person in the group if they are listening to the Lord and responding in obedience to Him. 3) Finally, I suggest that confession of sin be a part of the accountability process.

The goal of having accountability is not just to manage sin, but rather to foster honest relationships that are transparent, caring, and in which healing can come through the confession of sin.

The confession of sin cleanses and prepares the soul for every good work God has for each group member. While confession cleanses us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9); it alone does not produce righteousness in us. That is why the second discipline of the LTG is so important—the intake of God's Word.

2. Scripture is Planted

The power of the LTG system lies in the unleashing of God's Word into the lives of people. The Lord made it clear that the Word of God is the seed of new life. He said, "Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God....But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance" (Luke 8:11, 15).

Each LTG agrees on the portion of the Bible to be read. Sometimes an introductory reading schedule is used to help get things started. The goal is to have the people reading large volumes of Scripture repetitively and in context.

For a steady diet, I *strongly* recommend reading 25 to 30 chapters each week. If the book agreed upon is a shorter book, such as Ephesians or Jonah, it is read five to seven times in a week. If the book is a moderate size, such as 1 Corinthians or Romans, it is read twice in a week. If the book is longer than that, such as Proverbs, Revelation, or Acts, the book is read once during the week.

Books that are even longer, such as Genesis, Psalms, or Isaiah can be broken up. Use natural breaks if possible. Each section can be read as you would the shorter books mentioned above. For example, Genesis can be broken into three sections: chapters 1-12; chapters 13-35; and chapters 36-50. Each section can be read twice in a week. Another example is to break Genesis down into two groups of 25 chapters and read each section once in a week.

There is no set pattern, only the goal of reading twenty-five to thirty chapters of Scripture per week. Some books have shorter chapters, which can mean an increased number read in a week. Psalms, for example, can be read in two parts of 75 chapters per week.

Sometimes sections of books can be read repetitively. We have read Matt. 5-7 (the Sermon on the Mount) seven times in a week and found it to be very powerful. Psalm 119 can be approached that way, as can Jesus' letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor in Revelation 2:1-3:22. The key is to choose a section that forms a natural unit and read it enough times so that you are reading approximately thirty chapters in a week.

When the LTG meets the following week, the members ask each other if the entire reading was completed in time (Number 9 of the accountability questions). If anyone was unable to complete the reading portion, then the same reading assignment is to be taken up again. The LTG will continue reading the same portion of Scripture repeatedly until the group finishes it together in the same week. Once all group members finish the reading in the same week, then a new book is agreed upon for the next week. Group members can rotate the privilege of choosing the next book to read, if so desired.

It is important to note that it is *not a failure* for someone to be unable to complete the reading in a given week. In fact, it is often advantageous if that happens. It is best if it takes a few weeks to get through a book because the repetition helps in the understanding and application of the truth. For this reason, we suggest that the amount of Scripture chosen be a stretch for the group to finish. If a group easily finishes the designated amount each week, then they are probably not reading enough and need to increase the volume. If the group is reading over thirty chapters every week, and they still manage to finish the assigned reading every week, it is not enough and the group needs to increase the amount of reading. Ideally, it should average about three to four weeks for the group to complete the assignment.

In my own experience, during the weeks where any one of us failed to complete the reading, we felt that the Lord was not done teaching us something in that particular book. We then go into the next week with anticipation, believing that the Holy Spirit has a special lesson in store for us. We are never disappointed.

This form of accountability is a breath of fresh air in our highly segregated and “me-focused” society. A major weakness of the Western church is the independent and individualistic approach to spiritual development. In the Eastern world, the ideas of family and community are stronger. It is interesting to note how cell-based ministry and multiplication is occurring more easily in cultures that naturally understand community, as opposed to the Western world that prizes the individual over community. This affects all areas of the church.

The LTGs, in biblical fashion, operate naturally in community. We stay together. We learn together. We move forward together. Our individual spiritual growth is tied to others in a natural bond (Eph. 4:11-16). We care about one another’s progress. In a sense, we learn to love one another as ourselves. My progress is tied to my brother’s, and vice versa. This sanctified peer pressure works to stimulate growth in one another. Like a team, as each player improves, the ability of the entire team is raised to another level, far beyond any individual effort.

God has always intended for His people to work as a team. We read in Hebrews 10:24-25:

And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

The LTG can be a first step for the Westerner to learn what community really is. Groups can then be built on transformed lives that have discovered the true value of community in an LTG.

3. Souls are Strategically Prayed For

The Accountability Questions are printed on a card to be used as a bookmark in the Bible (provided on the back cover of this book). On the reverse side of the card is the Strategic Prayer Focus. This is designed to be a reminder to pray strategically for lost people every time the Bible is opened (which is frequently in this system).

Each member of the LTG is to identify the two or three people who are the highest evangelistic priorities God has laid on their hearts. They share the names of these people at a group meeting, and each member writes the names down on the card in the spaces provided. Each person should have listed all the names represented in the group, totaling six names. Each time one of us does our Bible reading; we select one of the names and pray for that person using the suggested prayer guide. With this system, the person who is listed for strategic prayer is prayed for two to three times by two or three different people every week. The prayers (listed below) offered are specific, progressive, and extensive. They are also in accordance with biblical principles of prayer and the salvation of lost souls.

1. I pray, Lord, that You draw ____ to Yourself (John 6:44).
2. I pray that ____ seeks to know You (Acts 17:27).
3. I pray that ____ hears and believes the Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13).
4. I ask You to prevent Satan from blinding ____ to the truth (2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Tim. 2:25-26).
5. Holy Spirit, I ask You to convict ____ of his/her sin and reveal his/her need for Christ's redemption.
6. I ask You to send someone who will share the Gospel with ____ (Matt. 9:37-38).
7. I also ask that You give me (and/or my fellow disciple) the opportunity, the courage, and the right words to share the truth with ____ (Col. 4:3-6; Eph. 6:19-20).
8. Lord, I pray that ____ turns from his/her sin (Acts 17:30-31; 1 Thess. 1:9-10).
9. Lord, I pray that ____ would put all of his/her trust in Christ (John 1:12; 5:24).
10. Lord, I pray that ____ will confess Christ as Lord of his/her life, take root and grow in his/her faith, and bear much fruit for Your glory (Rom. 10:9-10; Col. 2:6-7; Luke 8:15).

It is a group effort in bringing these souls before the throne of grace. When we see a new soul born into the Kingdom we all rejoice, having played a significant role in the process. Those who come to faith in Christ as a result of these prayers can form the next group, and multiplication can occur naturally, spontaneously, and in a manner that causes the whole group to rejoice.

Summary of the System

The LTG system is simple, yet powerful. It incorporates the values of community, life transformation, and reproduction of disciples. At our church there is a place for anyone who wants to grow in Christ. There is no need for a new Christian to wait for a class to

open. There is no ceiling to the amount of care we can offer because the groups can multiply quickly and easily to accommodate any number of people the Lord grants us. The usual barriers do not limit us. We truly have a sense that we can provide help to any person that has a need, whenever that person has a need. If the Lord chose to bless us with a large number of new conversions, we would be able to easily be responsible for their spiritual growth and development.

Let's summarize:

- a. LTGs meet once a week for approximately an hour.
- b. LTGs are groups of two or three (adding a fourth person is the beginning of the second group, and multiplication is imminent).
- c. The groups are not mixed gender.
- d. There is no curriculum, workbook, or training involved.
- e. There is no leader needed in the group.
- f. Only three tasks are to be accomplished:
 - 1) Sin is confessed to one another in mutual accountability.
 - 2) Scripture is read repetitively, in context, and in community.
 - 3) Souls are prayed for strategically, specifically, and continuously.