



"Doing life. Doing good."

## **Lifetree Café in Greeley**

**Excerpts from Lifetree Café Operations Guide Section 1**

**Sponsor: Redeemer Greeley**

**Location: 7263 W. 4<sup>th</sup> Street**

### **WHAT IS LIFETREE CAFÉ?**

Lifetree Café is a comfortable place and time for people to gather weekly to explore life and faith. It's the kind of place where you'd typically meet a friend for food and drink and fun. Where the atmosphere encourages conversations, questions, and personal stories. And the conversations about life somehow lead to a recognition of God's real presence and his genuine love.

Each week people gather in these cozy venues to explore life and faith. The hour-long Lifetree Café experiences feature real stories of real people, guided conversation, biblical insights, time to build relationships with new and old friends, laughter, fun, and opportunities to serve.

Lifetree Café offers a casual physical environment, warm hospitality, a safe place for questions and doubts, and an encouraging atmosphere for participants to share their own stories.

Lifetree stories dig into the big and little stuff that shapes our lives. Family. Friends. Fears. Busyness. Balance. Money. Materialism. Health. Heaven. Peace. Purpose. Through the exploration of these stories, Lifetree friends discover that God is active today and looking for a close relationship with them—through all that life has to throw at them.

The Lifetree Café experience unfolds in a carefully designed space. Furnishings include small round tables and comfortable chairs—in a cozy, café-like setting. Lifetree Café venues, like quality coffee cafés, are intentionally small, serving up to 50.

And the Lifetree Café experience also connects people to [LifetreeCafe.com](http://LifetreeCafe.com), where the weekly conversation continues online. Local Lifetree Cafés are part of a national and international system. Just as they recognize a chain of restaurants or shops, people recognize the Lifetree Café brand, regardless of where they live or may travel. And each week Lifetree Cafés everywhere offer the same nationally promoted program.

### **WHAT LIFETREE CAFÉ IS NOT**

Upon initially hearing about Lifetree Café, people often try to compare it to other established ministries. But really, Lifetree Café is unique.



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**It's not a church.** Lifetree Café is not a local church, as one would commonly think of a church. Lifetree Café does not offer worship services, administer sacraments, provide Christian education programs, or conduct weddings or funerals. Lifetree Café does not replace or replicate a church. But it is fair to say Lifetree Café is a part of the Church—the Body of Christ.

**It's not a worship service.** Lifetree Café does not engage in the typical elements of congregational worship. Churches already provide worship in a great variety of styles.

**It's not a Bible study or a class.** Lifetree Café is not designed to systematically teach Bible history or follow a structured academic model. Classes and Bible studies already exist in abundance for those seeking an educational regimen.

**It's not a small group.** Lifetree Café, though it encourages conversation at table groups, is not a church small group. Each weekly Lifetree Café event welcomes new people who interact at a table and within the larger café group. Though some people meet the same friends at the same table each week, new people are immediately integrated and sense the community of the café.

**It's not a membership club.** Lifetree Café friends gather for conversation, community, and a spiritual boost. There are no dues, secret handshakes, initiation ceremonies, or badges for perfect attendance. Rather, Lifetree Café is a comfortable place to hang out with friendly people who help you see God's presence in new ways. Some ask, "Where's the sermon? Where's the praise and worship? Where's the strong teaching time? When do people study their Bibles? When is the altar call?" All of those functions already exist in regular church ministries. Lifetree Café does not attempt to duplicate those functions. Lifetree fulfills a different and distinct role.

## **LIFETREE CAFÉ'S PURPOSE**

Ultimately, Lifetree Café is designed to help people grow in relationship with the Lord. Lifetree brings people together to explore life, experience God, grow in relationship with Christ, and serve the community.

Through the use of stories and guided conversation, Lifetree Café friends discover helpful direction for everyday-life issues. And they see how God connects with these everyday-life issues. Their relationships with Christ grow much the same as other relationships, through give-and-take conversation, time for questions, doing things together, and hearing others' stories of God's love.

In its simplest terms, Lifetree Café follows the goals of Jesus' Great Commandments: love God, and love others (Matthew 22:37-39). Both commandments use the verb "love"—a prime relational word. Lifetree Café friends love God more and more as they experience his presence



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and hear the real stories of how he's working in the lives of those around them. And, like a good Samaritan, Lifetree Café loves others by providing practical help to people traveling life's roads.

So what is the evidence that shows progress toward Lifetree Café's goals? Because Lifetree works in a relationship model, results are less about numbers than they are about narratives. We look for the stories of how God is at work in people's everyday lives. We watch for the 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week effect. That's the way real love works. It's an everyday presence that influences how we think and behave.

## LIFETREE CAFÉ'S AUDIENCE

Lifetree Café is designed for the large proportion of the population that is spiritually curious, wants to talk and ask questions about life issues, and enjoys friends. Lifetree Café appeals to people of all ages, families, couples, singles, and students.

A typical Lifetree Café event may draw a mix of people with varying degrees of faith maturity. It's that very mix that makes the conversation rich. It allows skeptics to ask their questions and mature believers to tell their God stories.

In short, Lifetree Café attracts the unchurched, the de-churched (those who formerly attended a church), the churched who desire what Lifetree uniquely offers, and the churched who wish to share their faith stories with others, including pre-believers.

The people who come to Lifetree Café often describe it as a safe place. These are people who yearn for a sense of belonging. They want to participate in the process of finding meaning. The Mayo Clinic describes this yearning majority this way:

*"People want to feel respected, worthy, whole, and accepted.  
They need their closest relationships to be safe and comfortable.  
They need places where they are accepted and not judged."*

This is the Lifetree audience. The entire Lifetree experience—the physical environment, the atmosphere, the intentional hospitality, the content of the hour—is tailored for these regular people who, whether they know it or not, yearn for the "peace that surpasses all understanding." They yearn for God—and the people of God.

## HOW LIFETREE CAFÉ WORKS



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Lifetree Café depends on a number of foundational elements for its effectiveness. Among those are the physical environment, the volunteer teams, the national support system, and "Out-on-a-Limb" service projects. Let's look at each of these.

### **The Lifetree Café Physical Environment**

Operators of highly successful restaurants have learned they must excel in three ways to keep customers happy and coming back. If any one of the three falters, the entire restaurant suffers. Those three components are great food, great service, and a great environment. Lifetree Café's success and effectiveness depend on the same three—with a twist.

Lifetree Café must deliver great food—great spiritual food. (And the snacks and drinks need to be delicious, too.) Lifetree also must offer great service. The person-to-person interaction from Lifetree's volunteer staff will make or break the experience for guests.

And Lifetree Café must provide a great physical environment. The look and feel of the place must immediately exude warmth, friendliness, coziness, informality, intimacy, and peace. First-time guests often remark, "I felt so at home the moment I walked in the door. There's just something about this place." The Lifetree physical environment has been specially designed and tested to make people feel welcome, at ease, and at home. All Lifetree Cafés across the country communicate the same comfortable feel. This consistency helps people know that wherever they see a Lifetree Café, they can count on the inviting atmosphere they appreciate.

**Small size**—The Lifetree Café space accommodates a maximum of 50 people. That size helps to convey intimacy and makes conversation easy. Think of the size of a quality café or coffee house, such as Starbucks. Part of the reason those places work is their small size. The look and feel would be destroyed if those places held 500 people. And Lifetree Café's small size makes it conducive for individuals to share from the heart, not only at their tables, but also within hearing distance of the entire room.

When it comes to Lifetree's promise of exploring life in a spiritual context, people aren't looking for a crowd. They crave the closeness and sense of belonging that comes in a smaller room. After experiencing a recent Lifetree Café hour, a first-time guest asked, "Is it always this size? I loved it. I don't think I could have shared what I did in a larger group." Many in the American church assume big is better. The pastor of a California church said, "People like it small, but leaders like it big." The "big" for a Lifetree Café comes through hosting multiple episodes during the week, or by planting multiple Lifetree Cafés in a community.

**Small round tables**—Lifetree Café tables invite conversation. They're designed for four people, which is the ideal size for personal interaction. Any larger and people are hesitant to share from the heart. Each Lifetree Café has four to 12 of these small tables. They're designed to feel



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comfortable for two, three, or four people. And their circular shape discourages people from pulling two tables together, which would form an uncomfortably large group for safe sharing.

**Snacks and drinks**—As soon as guests arrive, Lifetree Café volunteers offer complimentary light snacks and drinks. That's how you'd treat a guest in your home. So that's how Lifetree Café treats its guests. Hospitality experts know that food and drinks have a way of nurturing a sense of community. They help people feel instantly comfortable. And they encourage good conversation. It's even been said that few people can sit across a table and eat with their adversaries and remain enemies. That may be one of the reasons the wide variety of people, Christ-followers as well as non-believers, can gather at a Lifetree Café and talk about some difficult issues in an atmosphere of love and respect.

Jesus himself knew the value of eating and drinking with believers and non-believers alike. Many of his key ministry moments happened around a table.

**Inviting décor**—Everything—from the warm colors, to the comfortable seating, to the refreshment station, to the lighting, to the signage, to the background music—is carefully designed to create the welcoming atmosphere of Lifetree Café. It's all intentionally created to ooze hospitality.

Chip Arn, president of Church Growth Incorporated, conducted research on the critical factors for attracting and maintaining church attendees. The most important time? It's not the initial moments with the smiling greeters before the service. It's the 10 minutes after the service. That's when guests can determine the true friendliness of a congregation.

At Lifetree Café, all elements work together to say, "Stick around, have another cup of coffee, and enjoy the company of your friends." And that happens every week at Lifetree Café. At the end of the scheduled hour, most people don't move. They continue the conversation with their friends around the table.

## **The Lifetree Café Volunteers**

Lifetree Café is designed to be staffed by trained volunteers. In addition to not burdening paid staff with additional duties, Lifetree's volunteer concept provides strategic benefits. When Lifetree guests are welcomed by volunteers, and the Lifetree hour is actually led by a lay volunteer, the experience unfolds with true authenticity. Guests relate to the volunteers on a peer-to-peer relational level. Volunteers serve on Lifetree's Friendship Team, Communication Team, Out-on-a-Limb Team, and as the up-front leaders of the hour-long experience.

Friendship Team members come early, prepare the refreshments, and then welcome guests and help them get comfortable at a table. Typically, two to four Friendship Team members serve during each Lifetree episode.



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Communication Team members handle behind-the-scenes duties, such as compiling guest information and uploading it to the Lifetree home office.

Out-on-a-Limb Team members handle the logistics for Lifetree's acts of service and kindness.

We call the up-front leaders Hosts. These volunteers lead participants through the hour-long experience, using a printed leader guide (which we call a Recipe) and DVD supplied by the Lifetree home office.

In addition, approximately 10 to 12 "seed group" members typically come to Lifetree experiences—to simply enjoy the hour and "pollinate" the tables with their friendship and spiritual "salt and light." They're not identified as seeds. Guests simply view them as fellow participants.

All of these volunteers receive thorough Lifetree Café training before serving. They're equipped with the practical skills they need, as well as special training for relating with people who may not share a developed Christian faith. This training helps them build friendships, respect others, and "glow" their faith without repelling those who do not yet have a relationship with Christ. Sometimes church leaders wonder if these lay people can be trusted to handle interactions with those who have little or no faith in Christ. "What if they say the wrong thing?" they ask. It's kind of a funny question when you think about it. The volunteers are the very people the church has urged to go out and share their faith in the everyday world. Well, Lifetree Café simply brings in people from the everyday world to talk.

The trained volunteers do a wonderful job naturally talking about how God is a part of their lives. They're regular people, chosen to serve God in a very fulfilling way. Our experience shows that after serving their committed Lifetree Café term, the vast majority of volunteers choose to renew their commitment and keep on serving. "I love the chance to meet people, make new friends, talk about important things, and share what God does for me," said one volunteer.

## **The Lifetree Café National System**

Local Lifetree Café branches receive all content and support services through a special license from the Lifetree Café national home office. Lifetree Café is a national system that provides tested weekly programming materials, national promotion, and LifetreeCafe.com marketing and social networking.

Each week all Lifetree Cafés offer the same nationally promoted episode. The home office sends weekly, colorful e-mails to Lifetree attendees in each area, alerting them to upcoming topics and stories. And LifetreeCafe.com promotes the weekly episodes and engages online followers in the conversation throughout the week in lively discussion forums.



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Creative teams at the home office research, produce, and test all content. Then local branches receive Lifetree Experience Kits that include leader guide (Recipes), media components, participant takeaway items, and other program tools. Lifetree utilizes writers and filmmakers from Group Publishing, the nation's largest independent resource provider to churches.

The Lifetree Café license agreement requires all branches to present the nationally distributed programs during their scheduled weeks. This makes national marketing work for the local branches, akin to motion picture releases: "Now showing at a Lifetree Café near you." It is not practical for local branches to deviate from the scheduled lineup of programming. If people at a Lifetree Café across town were to start inventing their own programming, perhaps exploiting their own particular perspectives, it could damage the Lifetree Café name and ultimately harm all Lifetree Cafés in the area.

Lifetree Café films and other programming are produced exclusively for use in Lifetree Cafés. This exclusive use helps to build a loyal following to each local Lifetree Café. Licensees may not use the programming for other purposes without written permission from the home office.

### **Out-on-a-Limb Service Projects**

Lifetree Café uses the tagline "Doing life. Doing good." The "doing good" part offers Lifetree friends the opportunity to serve their community and world in a variety of ways. Lifetree Café organizes occasional Out-on-a-Limb service projects that address real needs.

Some Out-on-a-Limb projects invite Lifetree Café attendees to donate items, such as children's books for Lifetree's "Libraries Around the World" outreach to remote villages. Other projects direct aid toward community causes, such as collecting and distributing supplies and clothing for the homeless.

Out-on-a-Limb projects provide additional opportunities for Lifetree people to form friendships, work together, live out their faith, and serve the community.

## **WHY LIFETREE CAFÉ WORKS**

Lifetree Café connects with a wide variety of people—in different ways, and for different reasons. Some are quite apparent. Others may not be noticed at first glance. It's kind of like a new car; you can't miss the look of the exterior, but some of the real distinctives lie just out of view. So let's take a good look at this Lifetree Café vehicle, pop the hood, and find out what makes this thing run.



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Upon entering a Lifetree Café, everyone sees a prominent sign displaying some of Lifetree's values. And the Host at each week's Lifetree experience reads the sign's words aloud:

*You're welcome just as you are.  
Your thoughts are welcome. Your doubts are welcome.  
We're all in this together.  
God is here, ready to connect with you in a fresh way.*

From this, participants sense Lifetree's hospitality. They realize that what they think and say is respected and valued. They know it's OK to grapple with issues. They don't have to know all the answers. None of us do. We're on this life and faith journey in relationship with one another. And we're transparent about welcoming God into the conversation.

These values display some of the obvious construction of the Lifetree Café vehicle. Then as we "lift the hood," we find what we might call the "three R's." Not the ones you learned in school. But three roots of Lifetree that give it life. These are Relationship, Relevance, and Reality.

## **Relationship**

Speaking of the "three R's" as a familiar term from the schoolroom, it's interesting to note that the contemporary church traces much of its methodology to an academic setting. We've tended to view the propagation of faith much like the propagation of other subjects, such as history or math. The thought goes something like this: If we have this great stuff to get across to people, we need to teach it, as they do in schools. So our church rooms tend to mirror schoolrooms. The people sit in rows. Those who teach stand at the front and deliver the information. Education is a good thing. And churches that educate people about the Bible and theology bear fruit. Biblical knowledge helps to develop well-grounded Christ-followers.

However, if all our efforts are academic, we may miss the bigger picture. Even when we competently and creatively teach the subject with passion, we may overlook one simple thing:

*Faith is not a subject.  
It's a relationship.*

Simply put, our Christian faith is defined as a loving, trusting relationship with God. Scripture sometimes describes that relationship in a family relationship metaphor—we are God's "children." Jesus used the metaphor of a marriage when describing his relationship to us: "Someday the groom will be taken away from them" (Matthew 9:15). He also described his relationship with his followers in terms of a friendship: "You are my friends" (John 15:14).

We often use language such as "a personal relationship with Christ." It's a good way to speak of faith.



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So if we want a relationship, how does that work? How does that happen? How does it grow? Lifetree Café operates under the assumption that a relationship with Christ usually develops in a way similar to a relationship with another person. When you think about a relationship with a friend, spouse, or family member, how has that relationship emerged and grown? It's probably bloomed through lots of conversation, give-and-take, question-asking, doing things together, looking for examples of genuine love, listening to what others say about your friend, and building trust.

Chances are, your love for this other person grew through these normal relationship processes—rather than a typical academic process. Your love for the person can't be described or pursued as a subject. It's a relationship.

So Lifetree Café creates an environment to grow relationships—among people and with God. Lifetree weekly experiences, as in good relationships, devote plenty of time to conversation, give-and-take, question-asking, doing things together, and hearing stories of God's genuine love from peers in the room. Rather than sitting in rows, people at Lifetree Café sit at small tables—to encourage comfortable, natural conversation. That's how relationships often start and grow.

The Lifetree Café Host helps to guide the table conversations with insights, Scripture, and thought-provoking questions. The response? Well, let's see what some Lifetree Café attendees said when asked what they like most about Lifetree:

*"Sharing stories."*

*"Being able to express myself."*

*"Personal and intimate communication with others."*

*"Conversation with my family about God."*

*"My tablemates reminded me of God's active comfort and providing."*

We describe Lifetree as a conversation café. It's a place to sit, talk, listen, relax, eat, drink, and enjoy the company of interesting people. Good conversations welcome everyone's thoughts and questions. That ambience of respect allows Lifetree Café to tackle hard questions and voice differing perspectives and at the same time nurture relationships.

And the most important relationship, the relationship with Jesus, grows when we treat it as a relationship. Jesus modeled his relationship approach as he spent his flesh-and-blood years on earth. He engaged people in interesting conversations. He asked thought-provoking questions. He listened. He enjoyed sharing food and drink with friends. He encouraged others to tell their stories. Can you picture him sitting at a Lifetree Café table with his friends today? He's there every week.



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Lifetree Café provides the opportunity to be in relationship, and grow in relationship, with Jesus. And with others. Lifetree's personal sharing through conversation becomes addictive. Each Lifetree experience begins with an ice-breaking get-acquainted activity or question at the tables. Even when close friends or family members sit at the same table, they always learn something new about one another during this time. These conversations loosen people up and create a safe environment to share more deeply as the hour progresses.

At the end of every Lifetree Café experience, everyone is invited to stay as long as they'd like. Most people don't get out of their chairs. They continue to talk at their tables, enjoying bonds of friendship and continuing to talk about the hour they just experienced together.

## **Relevance**

A lot of buzz surrounds this word today. Critics inside and outside the church warn against the church becoming irrelevant in our rapidly changing times. It's a danger. Some have addressed this by carefully tracking and adapting to cultural trends. Some clergy have jettisoned their old suits (or robes) in favor of fashionable jeans and untucked shirts. Some churches have replaced old technology with high-definition projectors. Many preachers select contemporary illustrations to help people connect with the Bible. Some use clips from contemporary movies to make a point. Those things can be helpful. They can help a church be contextual in today's culture. They can help a church seem familiar to the masses of society.

But here's the thing about relevance. When people say, "Make it relevant to me," they really do mean "me." They thirst for relevancy for their own, personal, individual, particular, unique situation. What's relevant to Susan right now will not be relevant to Mark sitting next to her. And what's relevant to Susan today may not be relevant to her next week. No mass-produced approach can be truly relevant, because it's designed for the masses.

What's most relevant is what's most personalized. That's why Lifetree Café is designed to accommodate each individual's thoughts, questions, stories, and situations. Each Lifetree Café experience utilizes true customization, so each individual plugs into what's relevant for him or her at that moment.

Let's see how this works. A typical Lifetree Café episode includes a story on film of a real person or situation. These are akin to Jesus' parables—real-life vignettes that make an emotional connection, lend perspective, and get people thinking. People love stories. They relate to stories. They put themselves in the stories. "That's just what I would have done," they may think. Or, "I would have done something else." Already here we can see a form of customization emerging. They're looking for relevance to their individual situations. They're personally relating to the story and making it their own.



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Jesus knew his friends would internally customize his parables. Different individuals found different meaning in the same stories. To this very day, each of us finds nuanced perspectives in Jesus' stories that have individual, personalized meaning just for us.

Storytelling allows the Holy Spirit to work in each individual's life in a customized way. Lifetree Café is designed to open times for the Holy Spirit to work individually with each person. We fully trust the Holy Spirit to do that.

After Lifetree friends talk about the story on film, they launch into their own real stories. More often than not, the stories they bring to Lifetree are even more compelling than the dramatic ones on film. Their stories of real-life challenges and God's grace are riveting to all at their tables. And often the Lifetree Café Host asks willing storytellers to share their stories with everyone in the room.

Each story brings new opportunities for each person to find personalized meaning. The Host guides the conversations to involve each person, to help each individual make personal application of the stories and the other parts of the Lifetree experience. Everyone's thoughts are welcome. Their questions are welcome. Through all the individual interaction, each table has a unique conversation during a Lifetree hour. Each person has a unique experience. That's the idea. That's relevance.

## **Reality**

The third "R" stands for reality. Now, more than ever it seems, people crave authenticity. The fake, the pumped up, the over-hyped, the too-pretty—all are suspect, and rightly so. People would rather experience an imperfect real than a too-perfect façade.

Movies that can say they're based on a true story get an extra lift. Reality television shows rank among the most-watched. Some of the most popular sites on the Internet, such as Facebook and YouTube, deliver daily doses of reality. Lifetree Café delivers a weekly dose of real people, real life, real stories, and real experiences. Every week people bring their real lives to Lifetree Café. And because their involvement makes up a significant part of the hour, every Lifetree Café experience in every location becomes a unique—and real—experience. People find themselves opening up in surprising ways, becoming vulnerable, becoming real.

Bonnie, a young mom, entered into a Lifetree conversation with a commonly heard introduction: "I've never shared this before. My sister told me years ago I should just keep this to myself. But I want to tell you what happened to me." She proceeded to tell those at her table about her palpable encounter with God during a near-death experience in a hospital. The people at her table sat spellbound. One of them later said, *"There's nothing more powerful than hearing from real people that God works."*



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And for Bonnie herself, the process of being real that day brought her an unexpected benefit. "I went home that night and told my husband the story. I'd never even told him before! He was so understanding. We talked for hours," she said. "And that night, for the first time in a long time, I was able to sleep peacefully."

People crave authenticity. And when it comes to spiritual things, people hunger to know the real God. Many of them have heard the Bible stories. They've heard about the miracles. They've heard the doctrines. But they crave to know that God is truly real, that God is still alive and active today. These are the people who come to Lifetree to experience God. When they hear real people beside them tell how God reached in and demonstrated his love for them, they see that God's story didn't end 2,000 years ago. It continues today. It is real.