

Why Community Groups?

Community groups are essential to the Christian life because we were created for community. God exists in community; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in perfect unity. So it is not surprising that from the beginning, God created us to be in community with Him, and one another. Community is deeply grounded in the very nature of God and as such, is foundational to the Christian's pursuit of and mission of Jesus. We are able to do so through the grace and reconciliation made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Community, therefore, is an expression of who God is in Trinitarian relationship and a testimony to His love in redeeming us as a people through Jesus.

The purpose of such a community is to display the love of God for the world. In Ephesians 2:7 Paul explains why we have been saved; so that we would express the gospel of Jesus Christ. Living together in community, reconciled and united by the cross, is a physical demonstration of the grace of God. *Community is for us, a declaration of the overwhelming love of God, a tangible proclamation of the reconciling work of the cross.* Community groups are a living illustration of the gospel and the power to save.

Community is central to our identity as Christians and crucial for the mission of the church. Community is not a peripheral ministry. Our communities should be the most palpable expression of the gospel within the church. In Acts we see the early church demonstrating this by regularly meeting together 'publicly,' and 'from house to house' (Acts 2:46; 5:42).

Vision of Reality Community Groups

To see lives transformed through authentic gospel centered community in small gatherings of people meeting weekly in homes that is inspired by the power and wonder of God.

The three pillars supporting this vision can be best understood through the paradigm of Theological, Missional, Relational - which is the DNA of who we are and what we do as Reality.

1. **Theological (DEVOTED WORSHIPERS):** We want to be people who are devoted to worshiping Jesus by making time to join with others to grow in His Word and pray. These are not obligations we try to squeeze in, but cravings we can't live without. The goal is Jesus must be the Object of our worship that makes worshipping exciting to us; even in the most basic settings.
2. **Missional (DISCIPLE-MAKERS):** We want to be a people committed and called to be disciple-makers. The Holy Spirit has given each of us a gift that is to be used for the building up of the body. The goal is that each one of us becomes like Christ, develops the ability to lead others to Him and make disciples by sharing our lives and the gospel regularly.
3. **Relational (LOVING FAMILIES):** We want to be a people who love each other deeply and show this by our sacrifice as we seek to obey all the "one another" commands in scripture. The goal is not merely to get along, but to love each other to the extent that Christ loved us, and to be united to the extent that the Father is one with the son.

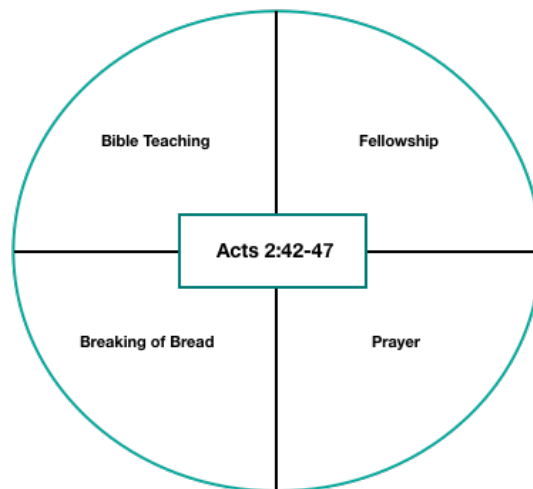
In summary, we want to be a community of people who submit to and worship Jesus through prayer, devotion to Scripture, and praise. We want to be groups who are joyfully obligated to one another for the sanctification of the church, while fully committed to the mission of going and making disciples for the glory of Christ because we have been reconciled through the cross.

Mission of Reality Community Groups

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

How They Lived it Out

God commands the Church to be devoted to His Word, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Why? Because God desires His people to experience Him. He who is infinitely greater than anything we could ever imagine - the Creator of the universe- desires intimacy with us. He has given us a road map for seeking and finding Him and we believe this can happen by living out the four major quadrants seen in Acts 2:42-47. As we meet in small gatherings, our goal is not merely informational, but whole-life transformation.



And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47

Apostles' Teaching

The early church devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching (God's Word). We believe as Hebrews 4:12 says, that the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword and has the power to change and transform lives (John 6:63).

Breaking of Bread

The first disciples devoted themselves to the breaking of bread, which in the New Testament refers to a shared meal in which they celebrated the Lord's Supper. Sharing a meal together in remembrance of Jesus' broken body and His shed blood on the cross is a sacred practice when done intentionally. We see in the Gospel accounts that Jesus himself shared meals regularly with others - both believers and unbelievers.

Fellowship

As the Spirit of God empowered the Church, they devoted themselves to the fellowship. They had a dedication to love one another deeply and sacrificially that would be impossible unless God was in their midst. This is not something to take lightly - living sacrificially and supernaturally in love and unity as a family of believers who had all things in common.

Prayer

The early church devoted themselves to prayer knowing they couldn't exist without it. For there to be transformation, reformation and mission in and through the lives of God's people we must be devoted to prayer (Acts 4:31).

Multiply

The last thing we see as a product (the supernatural overflow and fruit) of this community gathering together in Acts 2:42-47 is that "the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." Also, in Luke 10:2, Jesus told His disciples to pray that God would send more workers out into the world.

For this reason, we pray and desire to develop and equip new leaders (shepherds) to be sent out to start new Community Groups. It's our hope and desire that each Community Group has two shepherds (leader & co-leader); in whom a co-leader is being trained and equipped to launch out and start another Community Group.

If you lead a Community Group, keep the goal of creating more Community Groups at the front of your mind. Identify who in your group could lead in the future and begin to disciple them. Co-leading with them and encouraging them to lead in your absence is one of the ways of training and equipping someone to lead and shepherd a Community Group in the future.

Ownership:

Community groups provide a vehicle for worship, care, and discipleship (mission) toward the purpose of displaying the gospel to the world and in order for this mandate to be fruitful and enduring *it has to be owned*.

The technical definition of ownership is to take possession of or to possess something. To own an ideology, vision, or mission is to take possession of it, to make it your own. It is to internalize it to the point where not only can you reiterate it, but also you can teach it, defend it, and live it out.

Ownership is marked by joy-filled sacrifice that sees kingdom work as a "get to" because of what Christ has done, rather than a "got to" out of Christian duty. Ownership looks like people serving the church and the city with a passion for the gospel.

Agreement does not equal ownership: *"I like what you are doing"* is different than, *"I believe in what we are doing."*

Leadership: What Does it Mean to Shepherd a Community Group?

Community Group leaders are not facilitators and not Bible teachers; they are primarily shepherds and expected to care for and protect the flock in their charge by leading them toward worship of Jesus and maturity as disciples of Christ. Leaders should have a heart to see people grow and the patience to lead them. Remember: The end goal is disciple making but leading sheep requires patience, love, active listening and knowing where you are going. It is a slow process... we must look to Jesus for our model.

Structure

Community is a gift from God. God wants us to experience and enjoy the love and unity of the Father, Son and Spirit. Structure is something that is required but not something to be experienced. We don't want a structure that is so small it can't support the growth, or so large it encumbers growth.

A healthy uninhibited vine cannot grow without the proper structure. The goal of our structure in Community Groups is to create just enough structure to support the work the Lord is doing.

I am advocating for community that has enough structure to support the healthy expression of the gospel without stifling creativity and authenticity. This means the structure is to support the biblical convictions, vision and mission while providing a platform for unique expression.

Logistics

Q. What does a 'Season' look like? How long? We will basically follow the school year rhythm with a winter, spring and summer break that will be determined by each of the Community Group leaders.

Suggested rhythms would be 8-12 weeks such as:

- Mid September to Mid November
- Beginning of February to Mid April
- End of April to end of June

Q. How will sign ups work?

We will be using Planning Center as a platform to keep administration and communication streamlined for Community Groups.

Community Groups will be listed on our website along an interactive map which will allow people to select a Community based on the general location where the groups meet. Pictures of Group Leaders will be on our website along with a short bio that describes any specifics about the group (kids?, household pets, etc.)

As people sign up for groups online, an email will be sent to the Community Group's leader, which they then respond to inviting and welcoming them to the group.

Maximums will be set on the groups and will automatically show as "FULL" when the max is reached (Groups will be 8-15 people with a maximum of 15).

Q. What will be taught & discussed?

We want to have a holistic approach to the way we "do" church. We want to create a connection between the gathered church on Sunday and the scattered church during the week. It's our desire to see and identify the life of the church as two primary components (Sunday and community) that work in rhythm together to produce transformation.

The first component is the gathering or Sunday experience. During the gathering we proclaim the Word through preaching and respond in worship of Jesus. What this produces in the believer and nonbeliever alike is conviction through the Holy Spirit.

We need a place for conviction to lead to repentance, and that is where community groups come in. This is why they are so essential to the healthy functioning of the church and this is why we will be discussing Sunday's sermon with a couple discussion questions that are designed to go below the surface.

Support:

- Leaders will have access to the sermon notes along with potential discussion questions to help you shepherd your Community Group.
- Community Group Coaches for care and encouragement.
- Quarterly training meetings for equipping.

Quarterly Training Dates:

We will have four training meetings per year for the purpose of equipping leaders and co-leaders. It is imperative that leaders make every effort to attend these meetings.

- January
- April
- August
- November

Launch Date:

Launch dates for groups will be determined by the overseeing pastor who will be in communication with potential group leaders during the initial equipping process.

Required Reading: Community - Taking Your Small Group Off Life Support by Brad House