



MACARTHUR BLVD
BAPTIST CHURCH

COMMUNITY GROUP
BASIC TRAINING

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

The Community Group Basic Training guide is designed for small group study. However, it can work independently or in a larger group. The tone of the material assumes a small-group format because this is the setting we've found to be the most effective.

Each lesson is designed to take around an hour and a half to complete. If your group has more time available, you can simply spend a little longer in the discussion and exercise sections. Our experience has shown that this content often creates a deep and substantive conversation that can easily last longer than an hour and a half. So, plan accordingly, and be sure to honor the time commitment that your group has made.

There is no outside work required by group members to participate. Each person should simply receive a copy of the guide. The content will often stimulate further reflection over the following days, but no preparation is needed for subsequent lessons.

Likewise, it is not assumed that the group leader will be an expert theologian or longstanding Christian. Ample direction and content are provided in this guide to help the leader facilitate the group's time together. The material also provides the content for the study, so there is no need for the group leader to try and "teach" the group. Just relax and guide a good conversation.

Each of these lessons follows a similar format, including these elements...

BIBLE CONVERSATION - 10 MIN

We want to start by talking about the Bible together. As the name suggests, this section is designed to stimulate your thinking and prepare you and your group for the ideas presented in each lesson.

ARTICLE - 10 MIN

The written articles are the primary source of the teaching content for each lesson. They are short, clear teachings of the concepts being presented in the lesson. Each week, your group will take a few minutes and read the article out loud together, taking turns at the paragraph breaks.

DISCUSSION - 15 MIN

This section is where we communally process the concepts being taught in the article. Often the discussion will work in conjunction with the exercise section to help flesh out the teaching and apply it to our lives in concrete ways.

EXERCISE - 20 MIN

Each of the exercises in this study are designed to help you make practical applications of the concepts being taught or help you understand the content at a deeper heart level. Be sure you allow enough time for your group to adequately work through and discuss the exercises as directed.

SHARING LIFE STORIES - 35 MIN

We will conclude each lesson with an opportunity for one person from the group to share their life story. Here are a few guiding principles for engaging this time in a meaningful way:

- Identify who will share their story next week. In other words, don't ask people to share right on the spot. To tell their story well, people need time to reflect and pray.
- Write your story down to help you to reflect and share. You may even need to simply read what you have written when your turn comes. Sharing your story may take up to twenty minutes.
- If you have a story, you have never told anyone—or told very few people—and you are wrestling with what to share or how to share it in a way that will protect you and edify others, reach out to one (or both) of the group leaders and ask if you can process your story with them in private ahead of time. That way, when you tell the group your story, it will be the second time you share, and it will also allow you, with the help of your leader(s), to discern what to share or not share and how best to share it.
- As you prepare to tell your story, it's best to examine and talk about your life in three ways: 1) you are being sanctified (or being made holy), 2) you suffer, and 3) you sin. It's easy to fall into a "just the facts" format when sharing our life stories, but if you think of your story as just a list of dates, places, and names, you won't end up sharing the parts of your story that are most meaningful, and that help others begin to really know you. Instead, think about how you would answer the following questions: How has God used the good, bad, and really difficult things in your life to form you into the person you are today? Who were you before you met Jesus? How has Jesus changed you? Who are you becoming?
- After someone has shared, be sure to immediately and vocally thank the person who shared their story and affirm their courage and vulnerability, especially if it was a hard or painful story. If it moved you, blessed you, or broke your heart, respond and say those things out loud to that person.
- Finally, gather around the person who has shared and pray for them. If someone has shared something especially vulnerable, make sure multiple people of the same gender move towards them and pray vocal and compassionate prayers over them. Invite the Holy Spirit to minister to them at that moment. Pray prayers of encouragement and thanksgiving for their life.

WEEK ONE: THE “WHY” OF COMMUNITY

BIBLE DISCUSSION – 10 min

Read John 13:34-35.

- What is your initial reaction to this passage? What stands out to you?
- What does this passage say about God—and us?
- How does this passage apply to gospel community?

ARTICLE – 10 min

The short answer

Why community? The short answer is, *we were made for it*. Deep within us is the desire to belong to something bigger than ourselves. This desire is the driving motivation behind every club, team, social group, and even places we eat and buy groceries. But that desire is more than a mere social construct; it's in our very DNA.

The God who created us has eternally existed in community. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have dwelt together in perfect unity, love, and joy before and throughout time. This triune God created humanity as the chief of his creations for the display of this relationship. In short, the reason we instinctively long for community is that we have been created in the image of God.

The long answer

So, that's the short answer...but we haven't even made it to Genesis 3 yet. To be sure, prior to the fall of man (Gen 3:1-24), mankind dwelt in unity (Gen 1:27, 2:18), and God himself dwelt with man (Gen 3:8). All creation existed in a state of "shalom"—things were the way they were *supposed* to be (Gen 1:31). It wasn't until sin entered the world that isolation from community came into the picture, fracturing not only the relationship between man and God but the relationship between man and man as well.

Throughout the rest of the Biblical narrative, we see God at work pursuing, redeeming, and restoring. This work culminates in the book of Revelation as people from every tongue and tribe, and race gather to worship (Rev 7:9-10), feast (Rev 19:9), and, ultimately, experience the shalom of God once again as he makes his dwelling place with man (Rev 21:3). But here's the rub: even though that day is coming (and we long for it to come!), it's not here yet. Instead, we find ourselves in a culture characterized by the “unholy trinity” of individualism, materialism, and consumerism.

Unfortunately, the worldview of the culture has also pervaded the worldview of the local church. Many of the people who engage in our worship services and participate in our ministries are more formed by their unconscious desire to consume than what the Scriptures teach about what is true. We are systemically "discipled" by the culture we inhabit, and because of this, the church must have a systematic response to disciple its people in the way of Jesus.

The American church has often recognized the problem of individualism, presenting small groups as the typical solution for isolated people. Similarly, we recognize the problem of materialism and have presented opportunities for radical generosity. It is very rare, however, for the church to have a response to consumerism. We are still plagued by systems of thought that cater to consumers rather than encourage individuals to be self-feeding, self-leading, self-multiplying disciples of Jesus.

In order for the church to be effective in discipling the people whom God has entrusted to us, we need to have a systematic response to this pervasive worldview. We cannot expect to confront idolatry on a deep level if our systems are reinforcing consumerism. The "typical" small group is highly driven around the needs of the Christian, is often centered around teaching or Bible study from an outside source, and rarely asks for more than one meeting per week.

At MacArthur Blvd, we've chosen to pursue *life in community* and respond to the worldview of the culture through community groups as the primary context for discipleship, care, and mission. Together we learn to listen, love, and serve one another to grow in our affections for Jesus Christ. In these gospel-saturated gatherings all across our cities and towns, we live out our mission to multiply gospel communities and lead each other and their community to trust and follow Christ.

Community Groups

Community groups are small expressions of gospel truth; missional outposts, if you will. A community group is a diverse collection of individuals committed to the gospel and one another, meeting in homes around the city throughout the week. Having a lot of things in common, or even enjoying the same hobbies, does not define true community. True community is living life together, pointing each other to our hope in God, and pushing each other to grow as disciples of Jesus. Through these relationships, we receive and respond to grace, imaging our Creator and lifting up the name of Christ.

Community groups at MacArthur Blvd are groups of people together:

- *Because of Jesus.* We are a community of people gathered not because of the stage of life, affinity, race, or culture. Gospel community transcends those things. At MacArthur Blvd, we are united because of Jesus.
- *With Jesus.* We are a community of people who don't just sing or talk about him. Rather, we long to be with Jesus through the Holy Spirit, and we believe that Christ is present in our gatherings through his Spirit. We want the Spirit of Christ to empower us for ministry and mission. This is why we believe that ministry apart from Jesus is pointless, and we emphasize our need for the Holy Spirit.
- *Under Jesus.* We are a community of people that live under the authority of Jesus by his Word. The Bible stands over us as the supreme court of authority for all matters of faith and practice. You can see this at MacArthur Blvd in that everything we do, we want to come under Jesus in the Scriptures.
- *For Jesus.* We are a community that lives on mission in our city for Jesus. As a community group, we care for the good of our city, and we are passionate about people meeting Jesus.

Through community groups, we are brought back into the relationships we were made to experience with God and each other.

For the city

In order to embody the church in unique neighborhoods across our city, we must have gospel communities that are uniquely expressing the gospel all over our city. Most people in the DFW metro area, if asked to come to a worship gathering, would decline. However, the majority of those same people would study the Bible if a friend asked them to, and most of them would be willing to listen if someone wanted to tell them about their Christian beliefs. To sum up, if we want to engage the entire city with the gospel of Christ, we have to take the church to them.

This requires every single member of the body of Christ to live a missionary life, not simply some people doing ministry on Sundays. Community groups provide the vehicle by which the church scattered can engage every sphere of society. Hundreds of people gathered on a Sunday can make a small dent in reaching the lost in our city, but hundreds of missionaries living out the gospel together in our city has the power to radically change it for the sake of the gospel.

DISCUSSION - 15 min

- After reading the article, what did you learn about Jesus and community?
- Why is gospel community important to you? What are your hopes and/or apprehensions for this group?
- What are some goals we should have as a group?

EXERCISE - 20 min

Someone read the following quote, from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*, aloud:

Those who love their dream of a Christian community more than they love the Christian community itself become destroyers of that Christian community even though their personal intentions may be ever so honest, earnest, and sacrificial. God hates this wishful dreaming because it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. Those who dream of this idolized community demand that it be fulfilled by God, by others, and by themselves. They enter the community of Christians with their demands set up by their own law and judge one another and God accordingly. It is not we who build. Christ builds the church. Whoever is mindful to build the church is surely well on the way to destroying it, for he will build a temple to idols without wishing or knowing it. We must confess, he builds. We must proclaim, he builds. We must pray to him, and he will build. We do not know his plan. We cannot see whether he is building or pulling down. It may be that the times which by human standards are the times of collapse are, for him, the great times of construction. It may be that the times which from a human point are great times for the church are times when it's pulled down. It is a great comfort which Jesus gives to his church. You confess, preach, bear witness to me, and I alone will build where it pleases me. Do not meddle in what is not your providence. Do what is given to you, and do it well, and you will have done enough...

What is your reaction or response to this?

We're often tempted to be nostalgic about the past or idealistic about the future. When you think about your "wishful dreaming" about community, what do you need to let go of to be able to celebrate and embrace the community you have here?

Pray that Jesus would build his church and that, as a community group, you would "do what is given to you, and do it well."

SHARING LIFE STORIES (See description above on how to do these) - 20 min

PRAY AS A GROUP - 15 min

WEEK TWO: THE MISSION

BIBLE DISCUSSION – 10 min

Read Matthew 28:16-20.

- What is your initial reaction to this passage? What stands out to you?
- What does this say about God—and us?
- How does this passage apply to gospel community?

ARTICLE – 10 min

MacArthur Blvd's mission

The whole reason we pursue community groups at MacArthur Blvd comes from our mission as a church: *leading people to trust and follow Christ*. This is the heart and soul of our church. It is why we exist. Every aspect of our church is driven by this mission. It brings us together with one goal and purpose. It centers us on why God has placed us here and sets our eyes on what we collectively strive for. At the end of the day, this is who we are. Gathered or scattered, this mission is what we are called to do. As a community group, our mission is to lead each other (discipleship) and our community (evangelism) to trust and follow Christ.

Multiplying gospel communities

Our mission begins with our aim to *multiply gospel communities*. In the previous lesson, we began learning about one kind of gospel community: community groups. Community groups, and gospel communities in general, are groups of people together (1) because of Jesus, (2) with Jesus, (3) under Jesus, and (4) for Jesus. There are three kinds of multiplication we would love to see!

- *Individuals making disciples*. All Christians are called to make disciples. This is the process that goes from evangelism to discipleship and ultimately deploying them to make disciples. How do we know when we have made a disciple? When the one you're discipling goes on to reach those far from Christ and imitates what you have done with them with this new convert. We cannot multiply anything below well if we do not start on an individual level.
- *Community groups*. Community groups are small, diverse groups that meet in homes around the city throughout the week. We eat together, disciple one another, and live on mission for Jesus.
- *Churches*. Churches should aim to start new churches; we call these "church plants." MacArthur Blvd desires to be a church-planting church because we want to build the Kingdom of Jesus, not the kingdom of MacArthur Blvd. Our church is just one community of a much larger community of believers. As a church, we have a desire to see churches planted all over the world to reach more people for Jesus.

Multiplication of a community group

There is no question that the church of God, both in seasons of great triumph and great struggle,

continues to make and multiply disciples through the power of the Spirit in accordance with the Word. As we make more disciples, it will naturally lead to multiplying community groups and ultimately multiplying churches. Growth through multiplication is the natural outcome of obedience to the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures. It is likely that your group has multiplied out of another community group or that some of your group members have walked through a group multiplication before. Multiplication may be a ways off for you, but to have a vision for the purpose of community groups, we need to understand the vision of multiplying.

Multiplying disciples

Every follower of Jesus is called to be both a disciple and a disciple-maker. Jesus commanded his people— even those who doubted (Matt 28:17)—to go and make disciples who make disciples (Matt 28:16-20). As we grow in the context of community, we go from consumer to contributor. This is gospel multiplication.

We multiply disciples in two ways. First, we tell people who don't know Jesus about Jesus. Second, we teach people who do know Jesus how to follow and obey him. This is the heart of the Great Commission. As a follower of Jesus, you are called to be a disciple-making disciple.

Multiplying leaders

We want to see leaders raised up and developed in our community groups to be leaders in the church and the city. Every leader in our church is thinking about how to disciple others into their calling. Our community groups are one significant way we build people up into their gifts and leadership.

Multiplying groups

As our community groups grow—to stay on mission and to serve and love each other and the city well— our groups must multiply. As more community groups spread throughout our cities, we can make an impact on more neighborhoods and more people who are far from God. We want to see these gospel communities flourishing in every dark corner of our city.

Leading each other and Our Community to Trust and Follow Christ

As we have said, our mission is to be a community of Christians who lead each other and our community to trust and follow Christ. As a result, these four things should mark all forms of gospel community in our church, especially community groups:

Community of Christians: In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God has redeemed not just individuals, but a people for Himself whom He empowers and sends to be His witnesses, as we see in John 20:21 and Matthew 28:16—20. Additionally, Jesus indicated in John 13 and John 17 that the community of God is sent for a purpose. We are called and sent to show a hurting, broken, and dying world that Jesus is who He says He is. The purpose of Christian community has always been to demonstrate God's character to the world. We do this as individuals and in community,

Leading Each Other: Our God is bringing about glory to His name and establishing his Kingdom in this world. God is saving people and conforming hearts to the image of Jesus through Christ's work on the cross. Living life in community is bound up in participating in God's mission in the world and making disciples of Jesus. God's Word tells us that a part of the mission of God is

making us more conformed to the image of Christ. A key way this happens is through community. Our groups want to actively live out this mission of God. Our aim is to pursue Christ-likeness, and as we grow into that image, we will disciple one another and reach others in our journey.

Leading our Community: One of the focuses of a community group is for the group to be active participants in the community for the sake of the gospel. We want to utilize our location, neighbors, friends, and coworkers for the advancement of the gospel. As groups, we will strive to use our group member's gifts and passions as a platform to reach others for Christ. Reaching the community will look different for every group, but the main thing we want to do as a group is to be faithful in declaring and demonstrating the gospel in our neighborhoods.

To Trust and Follow Christ: It is our aim to lead our group members to trust and follow Christ in a deeper way. As we walk through life together, we will shepherd and disciple each other in a way that spurs us to holiness, hence trusting and following Christ more intimately. It is also our aim to share our faith so that we can lead people to trust and follow Christ for the very first time. Let us walk together relationally as we seek to trust and follow Christ this side of glory.

DISCUSSION - 15 min

- What are some tangible ways that you see our church leading each other and our community to trust and follow Christ? What are ways we can grow in this, specifically in the context of community?

EXERCISE - 20 min

Part of being a good missionary is understanding the context in which God has placed you. As a group, spend some time brainstorming and identifying ways you can lead your community (neighbors, coworkers, friends) to Christ. As you do, think about actual people, not caricatures. What do they believe in? What are their idols? How do they spend their time? What are things important to them? As you discover new ways to live on mission in your community, write them down below.

Neighbors:

Workplace/Community:

Friends:

SHARING LIFE STORIES – 20 min

PRAY - 15 min

WEEK THREE: OUR CORE VALUES

BIBLE DISCUSSION – 10 min

Read Matthew 5:14-16.

- What is your initial reaction to this passage? What stands out to you?
- What does this say about God—and us?
- How does this passage apply to gospel community?

ARTICLE – 10 min

MacArthur Blvd's Core Values

Our core values set MacArthur Blvd apart as a uniquely beautiful church in our city. Not every church is the same, and these core values are what make us distinct from other churches. We are NOT saying that only “true Christians” have these values only. There are many values that we can have as individuals and as a church, but we see these as values of our body. These values are core to the church and drives everything we do. You can expect all of the elders at MacArthur Blvd to believe, preach, and embrace each of these five distinctives, and you can expect this community group to be marked by these distinctives as well.

Submit to God's Word

Submitting to God's word means allowing the Bible to shape our beliefs, lives, and ministry practices. There are many authorities and influences we may otherwise submit to, including tradition (the way we've always done it), pragmatics (whatever produces visible results), and culture (what the world around us accepts and appreciates). Christ is the Head of the church and thus is the supreme authority by which we order our lives and ministry.

We support this value by saying: “We will be biblically transformed, not merely informed.” Biblical instruction should be aimed at transforming lives rather than simply informing minds. Our aim is not simply to make people smarter but to lead people to become more like Christ. This is a particularly important point as you facilitate the ministry of the word in your group.

This value flows out of what we believe about the Bible.

- We believe the Bible is the revelation from God. In the Scriptures, God has revealed himself to us. We cannot come to truly know God apart from the Bible.
- The Bible is inspired by God. The Scriptures are the very Word of God, infallible and without error. They are God-breathed, and the message of God to us (2 Tim 3:16).
- The Bible has the highest authority for us as a church. It is the “Supreme Court” of authority for all matters of faith and practice.
- Jesus himself saw the Scriptures as revelation, inspired, and authoritative (Matt 5:18-19).

In the church today, a passion for the Bible and a passion for the Holy Spirit can seem at odds with one another. At MacArthur Blvd, we strive to be a Word *and* Spirit church. Reading our Bible is a way we draw near to God and hear his voice. The Spirit helps us and speaks to us through his Word. The Bible should not be a barrier to communion with God but a means of it. The whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is about the good news of the person and work of Jesus. We cannot read Scripture rightly without seeing Jesus in the passage.

This value helps us orient our lives to hearing and responding to God's Word. This takes form in many different venues, including personal devotion, Sunday morning sermon, equip classes, and community groups. Whenever we hear the Word of the Lord, we are called to respond. Sometimes it is an act of obedience; other times, it's killing sin, a changed mindset, an offering of praise for his character, and many other ways we may respond.

Depending on God's Spirit

We depend on the Holy Spirit for transformation, direction, and power. Well-organized systems and processes do not produce the kingdom of God. Dead orthodoxy does not produce the kingdom of God. Experiencing the life-transforming presence of God comes through the person of the Holy Spirit. We support this value by saying: "We will seek the Spirit's presence, not rely on our own power." Seeking the presence of God in the person of the Spirit for changed lives, direction, and power is a fundamental value of our church.

Remember, the Bible and the Spirit are not at odds with each other. We believe they come together as we seek to faithfully follow Jesus. When we trust in Jesus for salvation, the Holy Spirit comes and dwells in us. He guides us and leads us, and empowers us to follow and love Jesus (Eph 1:13). Additionally, the Bible encourages believers to be "filled" with the Holy Spirit. We are called to continuously pursue this filling throughout our lives.

The ministry of the Church is marked by the power of the Holy Spirit. He empowers the church for gospel proclamation and kingdom demonstration through spiritual gifts. These gifts are manifestations of the Spirit's presence, given for the good and building of the church. The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to every Christian. Each one is vital for the health and growth of the church (1 Cor 12:4-7). The Scriptures call us to pursue these gifts because they demonstrate the power and presence of the Spirit among his people.

In light of this value, we must be a church (and be groups) that prays. Prayer is a primary means of humbly seeking the presence of God. Prayer is not merely a time to list our handful of prayer requests (although we certainly do make requests in prayer); it is a time when the saints of God encounter God, communing with Him, praising His name, and hearing Him speak.

Pursue Kingdom Diversity

Kingdom diversity refers to the diversity displayed in the kingdom of God, including generational, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity. The kingdom of God is not homogenous because it has always been God's plan to give His Son a people from every nation, tongue, and tribe. A church that is living out the Great Commission (particularly a church in a diverse community like ours) and fighting to maintain Gospel unity (rather than a unity built around cultural or political commonalities) will be a church that reflects the diversity of God's kingdom.

We support this value by saying: “We will pursue gospel unity, not just diverse appearances.” We are not seeking diversity simply for diversity’s sake. We are not seeking diversity merely in a one-hour service once a week. We are pursuing a gospel unity that produces multiethnic and multigenerational relationships.

This pursuit of gospel unity fights against the way our flesh is hardwired and therefore requires intentionality. It requires the intentional pursuit of relationships with people different than us and the willingness to engage in conversations that are sometimes awkward in a Christ-like manner. Kingdom diversity in a church will not happen by accident (as evidenced by the reality that the vast majority of churches in our cultural context are homogenous—i.e., comprised of a single cultural background).

Extend Gospel Grace

We do not want to merely confess the gospel as something we believe; we want the gospel of God’s grace to shape the very culture of our church and our individual lives. A culture of gospel grace does not mean we tolerate sinful ideas, attitudes, or behaviors. The ‘tolerance’ of our modern world is far from the love we see displayed in the person of Jesus Christ. Instead, a culture of gospel grace is one where Christians are sacrificially and meaningfully engaged in one another’s lives for the sake of spiritual growth and protection. It is a culture where Christians feel they can be honest about their struggles with specific sins without the fear of condemnation and rejection so that the gospel can minister and strongholds can be conquered. A culture of gospel grace is one where hard questions can be asked, and we are quick to extend the same grace to others that God extended to us.

We support this value by saying: “We will strive for authentic gospel relationships, not superficial friendliness.” If you cannot be honest and transparent with your church family who can minister the gospel to our struggles, then with whom you can be honest? Extending gospel grace means our relationships are marked by honesty, sacrificial service, forgiveness, and compassion. When sin is confronted, it is confronted with the aim of restoration.

Deploy Every Member

We believe the mission of God to make disciples was not entrusted merely to a small handful of spiritual elite and professional missionaries. Instead, every Christian is called to make disciples, and thus, we want to deploy every member of our church to lead people to trust and follow Christ. This may take place overseas or in your office; it may happen in the inner-city or in your neighborhood, but we have all been called to live sent out by God to make disciples.

Our aim is to be a church that develops every member to live deployed. We also want to place a particular emphasis on being a church that multiplies itself by deploying out church planting teams that establish new churches in other locations for the sake of the kingdom. We want to be a sending church because our God is a sending God. Therefore, we support this value by saying: “We will judge success by our sending capacity, not our seating capacity.” We are not against adding people to our own numbers. But success in making disciples includes sending those disciples out to make disciples. Our Community Group is a primary venue for us to deploy our people to live on mission in various parts of the city together.

DISCUSSION - 15 min

There isn't really a formal discussion for this article because the concepts are worked out in the exercise below. However, it is a good idea to make sure everyone understands the concepts in the article.

- Does everyone understand the concepts of the five core values?

If anyone answers "No," go back and read that section of the article again.

EXERCISE - 20 min

For this week's exercise, let's think about how these core values have played out in our group and ways we could better demonstrate these values to one another and the church. Take a minute to write down your responses, then discuss them in the group.

Submit to God's Word _____

Depending on God's Spirit

Pursue Kingdom Diversity

Extend Gospel Grace

Deploy Every Member

SHARING LIFE STORIES - 20 min

PRAY - 15 min

WEEK FOUR: THE “HOW” OF COMMUNITY

BIBLE DISCUSSION – 10 min

Read Acts 2:42-47.

- What is your initial reaction to this passage? What stands out to you?
- What does this say about God—and us?
- How does this passage apply to gospel community?

ARTICLE – 10 min

The Four Goals of Community Groups

At MacArthur Blvd, community groups exist to *lead each other and our community to trust and follow Christ*. Subsequently, the four goals of community groups are *gospel-centered community, gospel transformation, fruitful mission, and multiplication*. We accomplish these goals in community through three practices: Gathering as a community, Growing as disciples, and Going as missionaries. This all means that a community group is more than just a bible study or a social club. Community groups exist for multiple purposes and attempt to achieve those purposes simultaneously.

This means a few things:

- Just like the early church devoted themselves to the Apostle’s teaching, community groups are devoted to the Word of God.
- Just like the early church was devoted to fellowship, the breaking of bread, prayer, and living sacrificially, community groups are devoted to caring for one another over meals through prayers and sacrificial living.
- Just like the early church experienced the work of the Lord adding to their number those who were being saved, community groups exist for the purpose of mission and will see outsiders coming to faith and being added to their group.
- Just like the early church multiplied for the sake of the gospel, community groups multiply for the sake of the gospel.

We, as a local church in DFW, are an expression of the new and glorious community that is described in the New Testament and, as we’ve already seen, exemplified in Acts 2. In this lesson, we’ll spend our time answering the question of “how.”

The three practices of community groups:

MacArthur Blvd community groups gather in three varied ways that we call “rhythms”—family meals, discipleship groups, and missional gatherings.

- *Gathering as Community*. Gathering as a community means that we are intentionally spending time together during our normal allotted time and also outside of our normal scheduled time. These gatherings often are facilitated in homes and are surrounded by a meal. These are casual gatherings where we can invite friends, family, co-workers, and

non-believers to meet our group and experience God's grace in a less intimidating setting. In the practice of gathering as a community, we learn to love people as we gather around the common table for the sake of community. We set aside an entire evening to exercise our four rhythms of group gatherings; fellowship, scripture, prayer, and hospitality. Consequently, slowly, over time, we become friends.

- ***Grow as Disciples.*** Discipleship is multifaceted. There is no one particular way to grow as a disciple in Christ. Within the context of community, we believe that we will grow as disciples in our gatherings, through our missional engagements, and through our Discipleship Groups (D-Groups). In our D-groups, we learn to love God as we gather in groups of three to four men or women to apply the Scripture to our lives, to share what's good, hard, and bad, and to pray—for each other and our lost friends. D-groups are best when they flow out of existing relationships in your community group. This allows for you to grow deeper in your relationship and allow for my time together throughout the week.
- ***Go as Missionaries.*** In the rhythm of missional gatherings, we learn to push back the darkness as we gather for the sake of people far from God. While there are a potentially infinite number of ways to gather missionally, MacArthur Blvd prioritizes four. We gather missionally: (1) by extending gospel hospitality at the gathering whenever we are privileged to be joined by people far from God, (2) by hosting missional engagements where our group members live. This could be through a cookout, games at the park, super bowl parties, a movie on the front lawn, etc. We want to create events that will give us the opportunity to engage with our community, (3) by locking arms with city partners thoughtfully chosen by our churches leaders to declare and display the gospel and (4) by regularly spending intentional time together in natural and neutral “third places” (coffee shops, gyms, parks, barbershops, neighborhood association meetings, etc.)

A community group schedule

We have already unpacked many practices of community group life. Some might ask, “How can we do all of this in our already busy lives?” That's a great question to ask! While we want to pursue a greater commitment to each other and to Christ, we also want to think practically about seasons and rhythms in our group life.

Group Meeting Rhythms

We suggest leaders think through the lens of a monthly rhythm in terms of gatherings. As your group develops and grows, consider your practices and create some variety to your group rhythms. Remember that every member of your group will not always be able to participate. Work-life, parenting, and travel can affect the attendance of those in your group, and that is okay and expected.

We recommend Community Groups gather in these rhythms.

Sunday morning worship gathering (together if possible)

Weekly or bi-weekly in D-Groups

2-3 times a month for Community Group in the home

Monthly missional engagement during group time

Monthly or bi-monthly third-place gathering

Community Group does not have to be overwhelming. Although this list may look like a lot, remember that the majority of these occur in the same setting, at the group's host home. Be creative with your group and think about how you might think outside the box to pursue these rhythms. Groups are free to mix up the practices so that they flow better with your group members and seasons of life. For example, in the summer, you may meet once or twice a month for fellowship since people in your group may be traveling more.

Semesters and breaks

God has created our world and bodies with rhythmic cycles of work and rest. Community groups take two breaks throughout the year in July and December. These are natural moments where people are scattered on vacations or celebrations. This is a healthy time for leaders to recuperate as well as gather a renewed vision for the next semester. Often during these breaks, the community group will still spend relaxed time together. These are also healthy moments for groups to consider multiplication.

Community group leadership

Community group leaders are a vital piece of our church. They are also living as examples of healthy disciples for the rest of the group and actively making disciples. For this reason, we have certain qualifications and expectations for our leaders that they would model well for others.

- *Qualifications of a leader.* The following expectations should be true of every community group leader:
 - Believing and baptized Christian
 - A member in good standing with the church
 - Completed the community group leader evaluation & assessment process. This process equips and assesses the potential leader in categories such as devotion to Jesus, character, theology, scenarios, and many others.
- *Responsibilities of a leader and the group.* Community groups are where 80% of discipleship, care, and mission occurs at MacArthur Blvd. Thus, being a community group leader is a serious commitment. A community group leader is accountable for the rhythms, discipleship, care, mission, administration, and reporting of their group. This does not mean, however, that they themselves will directly do each of these things. It is the leader's role to make sure that each area is covered and that what is being expected is inspected regularly. A leader exercises good discipleship by inviting each member of the group into carrying the load together and sharing these responsibilities. Although the leaders set the pace, it is always important to remember that each member of the group is responsible for others in the group, as well as group culture. If a leader does not have apprentices and leadership support, leading will be too much to bear.
- *Apprenticeship.* In Matthew 9:37, Jesus says, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." Leadership is a crucial resource in a church. The most important role behind the community group leader is the *apprentice*. One of a community group leader's major responsibilities is to identify, equip, develop, and deploy leaders. Therefore, we ask that

every leader be committed to replacing themselves by recruiting one or two apprentices. Every group should have an apprentice almost immediately upon conception. The apprentice, depending on skill and experience, would likely be the person to multiply into a new group. The leader disciplines an apprentice to do what they do just as their hub leader is ideally disciplining them. An apprentice helps shoulder the leadership load with the leaders.

Other Roles within a Community Group

Ideally, each community group will consist of the following three roles:

- * The Lead Shepherd
- * The Female Shepherd (for co-ed community groups)
- * The Apprentice Shepherd

Missional Leader

This leader in your group will help coordinate and plan missional engagements. They will also help people think creatively and make sure group members are connected to a third-place gathering.

Hospitality Leader

The hospitality leader is in charge of coordinating host homes, meals, and childcare (if needed). This leader can work together with the missional leader on events that will need food.

Prayer Leader

This role is for someone to help keep track of prayer requests, send out group prayer requests and check back on past requests.

Administrative

This can be someone who has the gift of administration or someone who is organized. This individual can help keep attendance, send out the information given to them by shepherd leader, missional leader, or hospitality leader.

The four roles above are not required, but some of them would be beneficial to both the group and leader's health.

Conclusion

Living life together in the way we have defined is a summary of what we believe is the New Testament vision of community. It is always important to have a vision for where you are going, but it's equally important to understand how to start pursuing that vision in small steps.

In the coming weeks, we will talk about practical details of leading a community of people to live out this vision over time.

DISCUSSION - 15 min

- How is this different from small groups you have been a part of in the past, and what excites you about what we just read?
- Why is it crucial for community groups to keep all three goals in focus rather than just

one? What could be lost if the group focused on only one of these goals?

EXERCISE - 20 min

Take a moment in silence individually to ask God to help you dream about what a true gospel community is like. Dream about awe coming upon every soul and people being saved and added to your community. Dream about the impact this kind of community could have on those you know who are far from God. Dream about the impact this kind of sacrificial community could have on your neighborhood and city. Take time as a group to pray aloud for the things you are thinking about.

SHARING LIFE STORIES – 20 min

PRAY - 15 min

WEEK FIVE: RHYTHM OF FELLOWSHIP

BIBLE DISCUSSION – 10 min

Read Matthew 9:35-10:4 and 25:17-29

- What is your initial reaction to these passages? What stands out to you?
- What does this say about God—and us?
- How does this passage apply to gospel community?

ARTICLE – 10 min

BIG IDEA

Discipleship—the process of growth in conformity to Christ—happens most naturally in relationships because we are relational beings. Created in the image of a triune God, all true growth and change happens in life-giving relationships.

Fellowship as Discipleship

Jesus’s earthly ministry was astonishing. He healed lepers, he welcomed children, he blessed sinners, he ate with tax collectors, and he rebuked religious leaders. Who was this Man?

The crowds marveled at the power of his teaching and his miracles. But he wasn’t seeking their approval and praise; he was simply restoring order to a broken creation.

As he cared for the “lost sheep” of Israel, he never traveled alone. His mission was not to reap the entire harvest himself but to send out laborers into the harvest. And so he called twelve followers—a diverse mix of Jewish zealots, tax collectors, and fishermen. It was an unlikely bunch, but these were his chosen co-laborers. He traveled with them, ate with them, explained his most complex teachings to them, and gave them authority to preach, heal the sick, and cast out demons.

Why didn’t Jesus just do it all himself?

Relational Beings

If you think about it, Jesus was never *not* in relationship. He eternally existed in the loving fellowship of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He came into this world not from the heavens but from the womb. He came into a normal family, spent his childhood and early adulthood in obscurity, and then started his ministry by inviting others to follow him. Even on the eve of his crucifixion, he gathered for a meal with his disciples, then led them out to pray with him at Gethsemane.

Occasionally, he left his disciples to pray in solitude, but in general, Jesus did everything with this ragtag bunch of guys. His life and mission remind us that even he refused to live life in

isolation. If relationships have always been essential to Jesus, shouldn't they be for us as well?

Like Jesus, we exist for relationships. We were created in the image of this triune God, so to be fully alive means to live-in relationships. If Jesus was the most “fully alive” human ever, it shouldn't surprise us that a person cannot become fully human without a community.

Contemporary life has confirmed this: More than any one need, like self-esteem or personal autonomy, *human beings most fundamentally need a place to belong*. A person without a family or small group of friends will struggle throughout life and never become whole. We are relational beings!

The Rhythm of Fellowship

As Christians, we should recognize that discipleship—ongoing growth in Christ—should happen in community.

If it is a fundamental need to have a place of belonging, then our Community Groups should be the primary place of Christian formation and maturation. *But it's not enough to just be in Community Group; we have to do life together.*

The rhythm of fellowship is the habit of gathering together, welcoming one another into our lives, and genuinely caring for each other. Before we even open the Scriptures or pray or evangelize, we should join ourselves in a like-minded, Christ-centered community—if we want to follow Jesus's pattern.

In our Community Groups, this can take many different forms. Often, group leaders ask, “What should we do when we gather?” This entire study is an answer to that question: There is freedom, but we (pastors) want you to embrace these four rhythms.

Learning from Jesus's Life

Consider the earthly life of Jesus again. What were his habits of fellowship?

Jesus identified his key people. He had twelve disciples—not thirteen, not eleven. And once he was in a relationship with these folks, he didn't kick some out or upgrade to better ones. These were his people, for better or worse. (Ahem, Judas.)

Jesus invited his people into every area of his life. Jesus is rarely found without his friends in the gospels. They accompany him on ministry trips, they stay together, and he brings them along to family gatherings, religious events, and holiday parties. He wasn't always teaching, but he was always *training*. His whole life was a lesson in holiness.

Jesus ate with his people. As Matthew 11:19 states simply, “The Son of Man came eating and drinking.” This was his favorite means of fellowship. He ate with everyone—Pharisees, tax collectors, strangers, and crowds—but he always seems to include his closest followers in these meals. For Jesus, meals are about the acceptance and celebration of the other—this is why the religious leaders were so enraged by them.

Jesus lived on mission with his people. Jesus began his public ministry, almost immediately after his baptism, with the calling of disciples. His mission is a mission-in-relationship. Even in teaching and healing, he was in community and training others. Preaching the Kingdom (evangelism) wasn't a solitary effort; Jesus lived on mission with his people.

In our Community Groups, we would do well to pattern our fellowship rhythms after the life and ministry of Christ. What would it look like to conform our fellowship habits to the life of Jesus?

DISCUSSION - 15 min

- Why do you think Jesus spent so much of his active ministry with his disciples?
- What was Jesus's model of training his disciples?
- What habits or rhythms of discipleship in community exist in these passages?
- How have you grown as a disciple of Christ as a result of this group?

EXERCISE - 20 min

Fellowship is an important aspect of discipleship. Let's take some time to reflect on the past and plan for the future. Answer the questions below and seek the Lord and praise Him for his work.

Who do you spend a lot of time with within this group?

How have you grown as a disciple in your times of fellowship?

Who in this group do you need to spend more time with?

How can our group enhance our fellowship together both as individuals together and as a

unit?



SHARING LIFE STORIES - 20 min

PRAY - 15 min

WEEK SIX: RHYTHM OF SCRIPTURE (APPLYING THE BIBLE)

BIBLE DISCUSSION – 10 min

Read Matthew 5:17-20 and 7:12-14, 28-29

- What is your initial reaction to this passage? What stands out to you?
- What does this say about God—and us?
- How does this passage apply to gospel community?

ARTICLE – 10 min

When Jesus spoke, people listened. He didn't come to put an end to the Old Testament law but instead to

“fulfill” it—to bring it to completion and fullness by rooting it in the hearts of his people.

God's Word is not meant simply to be read and studied, but to be absorbed, memorized, and meditated upon. The Scriptures are a primary means of growing like Christ. In community, we take in God's Word as a way of humbling ourselves under Christ's lordship and growing in righteousness, wisdom, and love for others.

There are two levels of Bible reading we want to encourage in our groups.

First Level: Content And Meaning

The first level is content and meaning. We come to God's Word asking, “What does it say?” and “What does it mean for us?” The goal is to understand both what the text meant to its original hearers and its primary meaning for us many years later.

After reading a portion of Scripture out loud (hearing the Word, not just reading it privately, has a long tradition in the church and is still helpful for us today), we ask simple questions together to understand who God is and what he is inviting us into. By reading a text slowly and intentionally, we can see themes stand out— how the Old Testament anticipates a coming Messiah; how Israel's leaders and Jesus's disciples were less than perfect; how God is redeeming all things to himself in his due time.

Before moving on to personal application, it's critical that we understand God's Word together. It's not enough for just half of the group to understand; we must take time to move slowly and even make obvious observations for the sake of others. Humbly, we come to each text with fresh eyes to see how it points us to Christ.

Second Level: Application And Meditation

With a basic understanding of a passage's content and meaning, we can now focus on application and meditation. Whether you read the text a second time (recommended), look back through the verses with an eye for personal impact. Ask, “What does it look like to obey this passage?” and “How can I savor and truly integrate these truths into my life?”

With the Scriptures listed for this week—or with a Psalm or any other passage—we take time to search our own hearts, confess sin, and seek the Lord’s forgiveness and comfort. Similarly, we let the text speak into our fears, pains, and desires and ask God to enable us to live as Christ lived—in complete and joyful conformity to God’s will.

This type of “second-level” reading should also lead us to meditate (or deeply reflect upon) the truths found there. We can ask, “How can I praise God as a result of these truths?” and give thanks to the Lord in prayer for his presence with us.

This can also be called devotional reading—the goal is not merely understanding but increased fellowship with God. Our second-level readings should naturally lead us to a heart-level discussion and to honest prayer together.

Here are some things to contemplate and ask when diving into a text.

- A promise to claim?
- A sin to confess?
- A command to obey?
- An example to follow?
- An error to avoid?
- A new thought about God?

Another simple way of feeding on the text is to ask:

- How does this passage help me adore God?
- How does it lead me to see and hate my sin?
- How does it lead me to ask for grace?

Once we have asked those questions, then we can ask:

- How is Jesus the best example of this attribute (character quality) of God that I adore?
- How is Jesus the ultimate solution to the sin that I am confessing?
- How is Jesus the ultimate source for the grace that I need?

Gospel Fluency

The more we understand and internalize God’s Word, the more freedom we have in sharing it with one another. Our desire is not to limit the “rhythm of Scripture” to a short portion of a group gathering once a week. Instead, we can encourage and love one another with the Word in everyday life.

As we gather in the backyard or go out for meals, we can speak words of life and encouragement and assurance to one another. This can initially feel awkward or like a foreign language, but the more we practice it, the more comfortable it becomes.

One author has called this “gospel fluency,” being so familiar with the good news of Christianity

that it permeates our language with one another in a natural way. Whether we are with believers or at work, we call to mind truths from God’s Word and speak them in a timely and wise way. When we find ourselves speaking encouragement and challenge and comfort to one another with biblical messages and truths, we become more fluent in God’s Word.

Let’s discuss now what our next steps are in practicing the rhythm of Scripture. How can we better apply the Bible together?

DISCUSSION - 15 min

Jesus says, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

- How have you struggled to abide in Jesus in the past?
- What barriers are keeping you from practicing spiritual disciplines? How could you adjust your priorities or even change your lifestyle in order to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Matt. 6:33)?
- How can we as a group promote a culture of practicing and obeying the commands without becoming legalistic or graceless?
- How can we grow in “gospel fluency” together? What are some practices we could adopt that would enable us to discuss God’s Word without having our Bibles open?

EXERCISE - 20 min

The maintaining of a daily discipline of time with God is perhaps the most consistently difficult duty of the Christian life, but it is a crucial part of knowing God and experiencing transformation. Take the next few minutes and decide on a time, place, and plan for how you will spend time alone with God each day, and record it below. Discuss your goals with the rest of the group and commit to following through and holding each other accountable. If you already have consistent time with God, take this opportunity to encourage your group by discussing the fruit that has come from your time alone with God.

Time:

Place:

Plan:

SHARING LIFE STORIES - 20 min

PRAY - 15 min

WEEK SEVEN: SPIRIT-FILLED COMMUNITY (PRAYER)

BIBLE DISCUSSION – 10 min

Read Matthew 6:5-15.

- What is your initial reaction to this passage? What stands out to you?
- What does this say about God—and us?
- How does this passage apply to gospel community?

ARTICLE – 10 min

For Jesus, learning to pray was a primary means of discipleship. Meeting with God in prayer together enables us to grow more like Christ, as we bring our hearts before him together to be changed by him.

When we open the gospels, we discover Jesus of Nazareth turning the world upside down.

Everything people thought they knew about God, religion, and everyday life—it all gets flipped upside down. In reality, what Jesus was doing was not flipping the world upside down, but for little bits of time through his miracles and his teaching, he was flipping it right side up.

There wasn't supposed to be sickness in our world, so Jesus healed the sick. There wasn't supposed to be blindness, so he gave sight to the blind. There wasn't supposed to be death, so he spoke into Lazarus's tomb, "Lazarus, come out!" And the dead man came out.

Matthew records an important scene: "One day, when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down, and his disciples came to him." With crowds filling in around them, he began to teach.

When he reached his section on prayer, Jesus wasn't just flipping the world upside down; he was teaching his own followers how to flip *their hearts* right side up. He was encouraging his disciples to come just as they are, without formality or pretense, to their God in heaven.

Child-Like Prayer

So how are we to pray? First, Jesus wants us to see how *not* to pray. He warns his followers about praying like super religious experts. He calls out those who pray in public to be seen by others—fancy, long-winded prayers designed to impress man, not connect with God.

Instead, Jesus says, "Pray then like this: Our Father...."

If we're familiar with the Lord's Prayer, we can miss how important this opening is to the prayer. Jesus doesn't tell us how to stand or whether to kneel, and he doesn't tell us to start with "O great God" or anything like that.

Jesus tells us to approach God as Father. He is inviting us to remember our status as children

of God and to step into that freedom by talking to God as a child talks to her parent.

Of course, we know what children are like when they want something. They aren't shy; they ask. If they don't get it, what do they do? They ask for it again. Little children *ask* and *ask* and *ask* their parents for what they want because that's all they know. Children think, "this is my dad, and he loves me, so he *must* give me what I want." And that's exactly how Jesus invites us to pray to God.

This is a beautiful teaching of Jesus: we are not God's children because we are religious enough; he says we become his children simply by believing in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. When we believe in Jesus, we become one with Christ, and God becomes our Father. This is the Good News of Christianity!

What this means for us is that we don't have to make sure we are "saying our prayers" in the right way. Instead, if we are God's children, prayer is simply talking with our heavenly Father!

Prayer Together

Lastly, it's important to note that Jesus seems to be instructing us in a prayer that we would/could offer together: "*Our* Father... Give *us*... Forgive *us*... Lead *us*..." Prayer certainly can and should be practiced in private, but it's instructive that the pattern our Lord gives us in his most famous prayer is a *shared* prayer.

Jesus encourages his followers to pray *together*.

In the same way, our heavenly Father wants us to come to him *together* with our needs and problems. We have the opportunity to pray for each other's needs and so intercede on their behalf. As we pray for others in their presence, they typically feel love and encouragement.

Similarly, we can pray together for God to do big things: We can pray Thy Kingdom Come! We can encourage and sustain one another in trials and challenges by praying for God to break through and spread his Kingdom in and among us. We can pray for God to continue his work of bringing about glorious renewal on earth as it is in heaven.

Discipleship and Prayer

There are many forms of prayer—from praying the Scriptures to "Thy Kingdom Come" prayers to praying for others to laments of pain. But in every form and gathering, we become more like Christ by accepting his invitation to approach God as Father together. We encourage and even equip one another in Christlikeness through our prayers.

Think about it: Where did you learn how to pray? Probably from watching another person praying for you or around you.

Praying together is an essential aspect of Community Group and, along with the other rhythms and practices, it enables a life of growth in Christ.

DISCUSSION - 15 min

- How can prayer be a means of discipleship? How have you learned to pray from others?
- Jesus tells us that God knows what our needs are before we ask. How should that affect the way we pray? What then is the purpose of prayer?
- Take the structure of the “Lord’s Prayer” as *the* model prayer Jesus. Put the prayer into your own words: How would you pray it out loud?
- What are barriers to praying together as a group? Does it seem awkward? How do we overcome the barriers to praying deeply together?

EXERCISE - 20 min

Healthy Discipleship has both learning components as well as practicing and applying what has been learned. Today, let’s take time to listen to the Lord in the quiet for 5 minutes. Ask the Lord to reveal unconfessed sin, areas of weakness, ways to encourage others and speak truth into their life.

After 5 minutes or so, take some time to pray out loud for one another. Use this as a time of transparency, openness, and encouragement for others in your group. Write out a prayer or things the Lord brings to your mind and heart in the blanks below.

SHARING LIFE STORIES - 20 min

PRAY - 15 min

WEEK EIGHT: HOSPITALITY

BIBLE DISCUSSION – 10 min

Read Luke 5:27-31

- What is your initial reaction to this passage? What stands out to you?
- What does this say about God—and us?
- How does this passage apply to gospel community?

ARTICLE – 10 min

Jesus was the most hospitable man to ever live; we see this especially in his practice of eating meals with outsiders. To become like Christ together, we must embrace his grace-filled habit of creating space for and eating with outsiders.

When we look at the gospels, we discover that Jesus was the model of hospitality. Jesus' public ministry began with his miracle at Cana—turning barrels of water into wine at a wedding. He spent his time eating with “sinners and tax collectors,” receiving gifts from marginalized women, encouraging widows, playing with children, and attending all major cultural events and parties.

Even though he didn't own a home, *Jesus was the most hospitable man to ever live.*

Meals with Jesus

In the gospel of Matthew, the author says, “The Son of Man came . . .” How would we finish that question?

Would we say, “The Son of Man came preaching and teaching”? Or perhaps, “Healing and casting out demons”? Or maybe, “Establishing his kingdom”?

Matthew writes, “The Son of Man came *eating and drinking*” (Matthew 11:19).

Jesus seems to be eating throughout all four gospel narratives. Consider examples from Luke alone: Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners at Levi's house (Luke 5).

Jesus is anointed at the home of a Pharisee during a meal (Luke 7).

Jesus feeds five thousand people (Luke 9).

Jesus eats in the home of Mary and Martha (Luke 10).

Jesus condemns the Pharisees and religious leaders over a meal (Luke 11).

Jesus urges people to invite the poor to their meals, not just their friends (Luke 14). Jesus invites himself to dinner with Zacchaeus (Luke 19).

Jesus gathers his disciples in the upper room for the Last Supper (Luke 22).

Jesus, risen from the grave, asks for a plate of fish (Luke 24).

One commentator notes, “Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal or coming from a meal.” Another scholar jokes that Jesus “eats his way through the gospels.”

Meals are full of significance. Few acts are more expressive of friendship and acceptance than a shared meal. In every culture, meals are a form of hospitality—regardless of whose house you’re at. In fact, our English word “companion” comes from two Latin words meaning “bread” and “together.”

Why are Jesus’s meals, then, so significant? *Jesus’s meals are physical demonstrations of the grace he offers to the outsider.* Jesus creates space for outsiders and identifies with them by sharing a meal with them.

Hospitality: Creating Space for Outsiders

What is hospitality? *It’s the distinctly Christian practice of creating space for outsiders.* True hospitality goes far beyond entertaining people in our homes. Hospitality, in a biblical sense, includes:

- Creating space in our homes for our brothers and sisters in Christ
- Creating space in our schedules and hearts for those who don’t know the Lord
- Creating space in our groups for our neighbors and co-workers
- Creating space in our lives for the poor and marginalized
- Creating space in our city for people to be broken, vulnerable and genuine
- Creating space in our souls for the Holy Spirit to move within us

Just as Christ came to us who were once outsiders, so the Church can open its heart and doors to those who don’t know him. As one Christian author put it:

“In our world full of strangers, estranged from their own past, culture, and country, from their neighbors, friends, and family, from their deepest self and their God, we witness a painful search for a hospitable place where life can be lived without fear and where community can be found... That is our vocation [as Christians]: to convert the enemy into the guest and to create the free and fearless space where brotherhood and sisterhood can be formed and fully experienced.”

Our Community Group

Let’s pause now and consider our own stories. At one point, we were all visitors to MacArthur Blvd Baptist Church and didn’t know more than a person or two. How might our lives be different at this point if no one had invited us in and given us a “place at the table”?

Every one of us has been the recipient of the hospitality of others, and now we extend that same hospitable spirit to the next generation of MacArthur Blvd Baptist Church guests—and to our own neighbors, co-workers, and friends.

The Eternal Feast

The meals of Jesus give us a beautiful picture into the Christian life. When we invite our neighbors over for dinner, when we take time to join our co-workers for lunch or dinner, or when we offer a snack or drink to a stranger, *we are demonstrating the grace of God to one another.*

But to think of it another way: Jesus's meals weren't just *for* something else. Everything else—life, work, family, suffering, everything—was *for* a meal with Jesus. In other words, all of human history, from creation to the cross to the new creation, happened so that we might have eternal communion with Christ.

Let's consider ways that we can love one another and make room for the outsider—especially around the table.

DISCUSSION - 15 min

- Who was it that first invited you to this Community Group—or to your first MacArthur Blvd Baptist group?
- How have you specifically seen God invite us into and fulfill the Great Commission through this group over the months or years?
- What outsiders has God placed in your life recently? What are ways that you can create space for them in your life and in this group?

EXERCISE - 20 min

No formal exercise for this section. Take time to think about ways we, as a group, can facilitate life-on-life discipleship/hospitality amongst each other.

On a scale of 1-10, 1 being the worst and 10 being the best....

Rate your group's hospitality outside of regular group time.

Rate your group's hospitality with outsiders during group time.

Rate your own hospitality with your neighbors.

Rate your own hospitality with your co-workers.

SHARING LIFE STORIES - 20 min

PRAY - 15 min

WEEK NINE: DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS

BIBLE DISCUSSION – 10 min

Read 2 Timothy 1:13-14 and 2:1-2.

- What is your initial reaction to this passage? What stands out to you?
- What does this say about God—and us?
- How does this passage apply to gospel community?

ARTICLE – 10 min

Discipleship groups

Discipleship groups of three to four men or women meet regularly to share the “fine china” of their lives. With a strong commitment to confidentiality, trust and safety are built over time as the members grow in friendship and discipleship. A discipleship group is ideally formed from within a community group and serves as one of the three rhythms of a healthy community group. At the end of this 12-week Basic Training curriculum, you will form your discipleship groups, and they will follow what you will learn about in this session.

Three kinds of discipleship groups

There are three kinds of discipleship groups: gospel-centered, religious, and irreligious. According to Tim Keller, “the power of [a gospel-centered discipleship group] comes in two movements. It first says, ‘I am more sinful and flawed than I ever dared believe,’ but then quickly follows with, ‘I am more accepted and loved than I ever dared to hope.’” The first statement fends off irreligion, and the second fends off religion. The primary challenge for us is staying alert to the need to fend off both at the same time—to stay on the gospel road without driving into either ditch.

Religious discipleship groups traffic in “cuss jar accountability,” where the members can only offer their fellow confessors shame and punishment. Instead of trusting by faith that Jesus took our punishment on the cross and atoned for our sin, we try and atone for our sins through mutual punishment. As a result, religious discipleship groups tempt people to start lying or stop coming. These groups don’t last long because eventually, everyone gets bled to death.

Irreligious discipleship groups traffic in “confession booth” accountability, where we confess our sins, pat each other on the back, and, in the words of Jonathan Dodson, “depart absolved of any guilt, fearing merely the passing frown of our fellow confessor.” Instead of passionately pursuing “the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14), irreligious discipleship groups devolve into what Dodson calls “circles of cheap grace, through which we obtain cheap peace from a troubled conscience.” Our confession stops short of real repentance as we confess the same sins over and over and refuse to take violent action against them. Irreligious discipleship groups don’t last long because eventually, everyone gets bored to death.

Four movements

As we strive to establish healthy, gospel-centered discipleship groups, here are four movements to work toward. Starting out, you may need to take baby steps by adding one movement at a time for four weeks until your discipleship groups have incorporated all four movements. Even then, you may not have time to get to all of these every time you gather, but if you aim to practice these four movements regularly, your group can hopefully become more balanced, biblical, and fruitful.

1. **Scripture.** Come prepared to share what you have read in Scripture this past week, yes, but more particularly, make it a goal to bring one bit of Scripture that applies to one bit of your life. This will be the most difficult of the four rhythms to practice outside of your group, but it will be the single greatest determiner of the quality of what happens in your group.

In Colossians 3:16, Paul urges all Christians to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom....” How can we teach and admonish each other with “all wisdom” if the Word of Christ is not dwelling in us richly? It is likely that most members of any given group may not know how to meditate on Scripture or pray in a meaningful way. Even if they do, they are probably doing it no more than one or two days a week. In light of this normative cultural reality, expect to spend the first six to twelve months of a newly-formed discipleship group patiently, repeatedly returning to the discipline of spending time alone with God and patiently, practically equipping each other to read, meditate on, memorize, and pray Scripture.

2. **Sharing.** There are three things to “share” in this movement: sanctification, suffering, and sin—in that order. Or “good fruit,” “what’s hard,” and “bad fruit.” Some groups dive deep into the good fruit and what’s hard and neglect honest and specific confession of sin. Other groups dive deep into confession of sin but neglect to encourage each other by pointing out growth they see in each other— however small—as well as neglecting to join each other on the mourning bench. It is important to remember that all three are necessary for health. Additionally, this is a group effort. One person may be sharing at a time, but the other group members have a role to play. For example, when someone confesses sin, we shouldn’t simply commiserate. Instead, those in the group should aim for the heart, work to develop a plan, recognize the messy nature of growth and change, and lead in saying “thank you” to God for any good fruit we can spot.
3. **Spreading the gospel.** You should have three non-Christians within your sphere of influence for whom you will commit to pray and engage in intentional gospel relationships. These people could be your children, family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, or others. Identify and write down three people in each of your lives and then pray together, right on the spot, for God to give you the opportunity to:
 - (1) build a deeper relationship with them, (2) introduce them to Christian community, and (3) share the gospel with them. Pray together that God would save them by opening their eyes to the beauty of Jesus (2 Cor 4:6). Naming and praying for your three every time you gather will guard your discipleship group against spiritual naval-gazing and self-obsession.
4. **Spirit-filled prayer.** Far too often, when Christians gather, prayer is tacked on at the end and rushed through hurriedly in five minutes or less, after the “real work” of talk therapy and unasked for advice-giving has dragged on for hours. Instead, strive to put heart-centered,

Spirit-filled, Scripture-infused prayer at the center of your gathering, and you will never leave with a sense of having wasted your time. This will be the most difficult of the four rhythms to practice in the group, but it will be the single greatest determiner of the quality of what happens outside of the group.

Possible signs we are inviting the Spirit into our prayers are when (1) our prayers comfortably move in and out of silence, (2) when we find ourselves praying more than once, and (3) when we pray Scripture, thoughts, pictures, and even gut impressions, spontaneously brought to mind by God— always filtering them by Scripture and weighing them in wise community. Further, do we know how to pray beyond the sick list? We should pray for (1a) physical healing for ourselves and others, and we can ask God (1b) to change our circumstances when they're hard. But we also need to pray for (2) hearts devoted to him right in the middle of our circumstances and (3) for his kingdom to come. We need to pray for each other that we would bear fruit in the year of drought (Jer 17:5–8). We must remember that our circumstances are significant but not determinative, and praying for changed hearts in the midst of our (possibly) unchanging circumstances is always praying according to God's will.

DISCUSSION - 15 min

There isn't really a formal discussion for this article because the concepts are worked out in the exercise below. However, it is a good idea to make sure everyone understands the concepts in the article.

- Does everyone understand the concepts of the four movements of discipleship groups?

If anyone answers "No," go back and read that section of the article again.

EXERCISE - 20 min

Which of the three kinds of discipleship groups have you experienced? It's very likely that most of us have been in groups that have fallen into one of the two ditches of religion or irreligion, if not both. As a result, you may be coming in with all the fears and hopelessness and wounds and twitches that come from having been a part of one of those groups. Without getting into too much detail about the group, church, ministry, etc., and descending into gossip, talk about your personal experience and what you've learned.

As you think about the two ditches of religion and irreligion, which one are you more afraid of falling into? Think about that for a minute and be honest in your heart. Share your answer with the rest of the group, then know the sobering truth that whichever ditch you're most afraid of—whichever ditch you've said, "Our group will never do that"—you're in the greatest danger of falling into the opposite ditch. What is your reaction to this?

Pray. To have gospel-centered discipleship groups means that we'll always be fighting to stay on the gospel road, regularly checking our blind spots, and constantly recalibrating our hearts. As a group, spend some time praying for God's help to reject guilt, punishment, and shame on the one hand and cheap peace from a troubled conscience on the other, as we endeavor to have gospel-centered discipleship groups.

SHARING LIFE STORIES - 20 min

PRAY - 15 min

WEEK TEN: MISSIONAL GATHERINGS, PART 1

BIBLE DISCUSSION – 10 min

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:8.

- What is your initial reaction to this passage? What stands out to you?
- What does this say about God—and us?
- How does this passage apply to gospel community?

ARTICLE – 10 min

Pushing back darkness together

In response to God’s love, we care about people who live in darkness without God. We push back the darkness in our city because God first pushed back the darkness in us. “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son...” (Col 1:13). At MacArthur Blvd, we are committed to pushing back darkness through *declaring and displaying the Gospel*.

- *Declaring the Gospel*: We push back the darkness by proclaiming the good news about Jesus. This means we should move towards unbelievers and look for opportunities to tell them about the one who rescued us.
- *Demonstrating the Gospel*: We also push back the darkness by demonstrating the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. This means that we care about the spiritual and physical needs of those in the darkness around us, and we seek to right injustices and serve our city with the light of Christ.

Notice the use of the word “we” here. Pushing back darkness is not a call to Lone Ranger Christianity. We tend to remember that we won’t *grow* alone, but we frequently forget that we shouldn’t *go* alone. We gather because we’re a spiritual family (Community Group), and we gather to become more like Jesus (discipleship groups). But we also need to gather for the sake of people who are far from God—what we call “missional gatherings.”

In this rhythm, we learn to push the back darkness as we gather for the sake of the lost. While there are many ways to gather missionally, MacArthur Blvd prioritizes three. (1) Around the community group gathering whenever we are privileged to be joined by people far from God, (2) in natural, neutral, and regular “third places,” and (3) by hosting specific missional gatherings. This could be front yard BBQ, movie on the lawns, engaging people at the park, super bowl parties, etc. Let’s dig deeper into the mechanics of each type of missional gathering in the next section, but before we do, let’s take a step back.

Not only the gospel

Recalling his time living among and ministering to the believers in Thessalonica, Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 2:8, “...being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.”

According to this passage, a biblical pattern for Christians is to share not only the gospel but also our own selves because people far from God are becoming very dear to us. Pushing back darkness through declaring and displaying the gospel is a beautifully balanced “both-and” that fends off activism on the one hand (the tendency to only perform acts of service for our neighbors in hopes that the gospel will be caught rather than taught) and pietism on the other (the tendency to only share the gospel abruptly with strangers—answering questions they may not even be asking—while at the same time never bothering to learn the names of one’s own next-door neighbors).

Finding your three

The mission of God is global in sweep and scope but unavoidably local in how it unfolds. God is omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent and is sovereignly saving people from every tribe, tongue, and nation, but we are embodied souls bound by time and space. Wisdom recommends and notices small steps, so we pick three. Who are three people far from God, within your sphere of influence, for whom you will commit to pray and engage in intentional gospel relationships? These people could be your family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, etc. As one author put it, whom would you most love to see become a disciple of Jesus? Commit to pray regularly and pursue these people. We will often refer to these people as “your three.”

Motivation before methods

If we only discuss strategies and techniques for reaching people far from God and skip right over the motivation required to sustain that mission, we will never overcome the inconvenience and sacrifice required to gather for the sake of the lost. Identity precedes action. If we don’t have a settled sense that we are adopted sons and daughters of the Father who are also called and commissioned as missionaries, we will never be able to keep our hand to the gospel plow. Writer Wendell Berry famously asked, “What are people for?” In Galatians 5, Paul gently reminds us that we have not been called to live as individualistic, autonomous, spiritual consumers. He writes, “You were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love, serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

The Father’s invitation—through the work of Christ and the power of the Spirit—is to slowly begin to “walk by the Spirit, and . . . not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Gal 5:16). The call to join the mission of God is not a masochistic call to spiritual duty divorced from spiritual delight. Instead, God is giving us new desires and inviting us to increasingly find our fulfillment and satisfaction in the interests of others. As the Spirit of God leads us outside of ourselves, we are freed more and more to love God, love people, and push back darkness. What are the people of God for? Paul says, “we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.” We have been called and commissioned to “implore” our friends and neighbors “on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” because of the great good news that “for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (1 Cor 5:20–21).

In short, as we “look not only to [our] own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil 2:4), we will find fulfillment, and we will increasingly serve as a sign, instrument, and foretaste of the in-breaking kingdom of God. As we demonstrate the kingdom of God, what the watching world sees will surprise them. As we proclaim the gospel of God, what the listening world hears will sound like good news.

DISCUSSION - 15 min

- How does the call to “share not only the gospel but also [your] own selves” with those who are far from God impact your understanding of mission?
- Are you more inclined to engage in activism (the tendency to only perform acts of service for our neighbors in hopes that the gospel will be caught rather than taught) or pietism (the tendency to only share the gospel abruptly with strangers—answering questions they may not even be asking—while at the same time never bothering to learn the names of one’s own next-door neighbors)? How does the one-two punch of gospel proclamation and kingdom demonstration correct this inclination?

EXERCISE - 20 min

Take five minutes and prayerfully and thoughtfully select and write down the names of three unbelievers you feel particularly called to pursue. Then, for each person, in turn, answer the following questions posed by missiologist Alan Hirsch:

- Am I in close proximity with this person to whom I feel called?
- Am I spending regular time with this person? If not, why not?
- Am I too busy to develop a meaningful relationship with this person? If so, how could I create margin for mission?

Go around in order and briefly share at least one of the people you selected and why you chose them. If any of you are struggling to identify someone in your life, invite the group to process with you whom you might identify.

Conclude your time by praying out loud for the people you have named—especially for your relationships to grow and deepen with them, for God to give you all creativity in how to spend regular time with them, and for God to give your community group opportunities to collectively love them, serve them, and share the gospel with them.

SHARING LIFE STORIES - 20 min

PRAY - 15 min

WEEK ELEVEN: MISSIONAL GATHERINGS, PART 2

BIBLE DISCUSSION – 10 min

Read Matthew 28:19-20.

- What is your initial reaction to this passage? What stands out to you?
- What does this say about God—and us?
- How does this passage apply to gospel community?

ARTICLE – 10 min

Missional gatherings

In our last session, we discussed the aim and motivation behind our missional gathering rhythm. Today we will spend time identifying the proverbial arrows in our quiver as we learn to push back the darkness by gathering for the sake of people who are far from God: (1) by extending gospel hospitality at the community group gathering whenever we are privileged to be joined by people far from God, (2) by regularly spending intentional time together in natural and neutral “third places” which are part of the fabric of knowing and being known in our city (coffee shops, gyms, parks, barbershops, neighborhood association meetings, etc.) and (3) by hosting specific missional engagement events.

Push back darkness together... during our community group time

Confusing as it may seem, notice that the community group gathering serves as one of MacArthur Blvd’s steps in the pathway—alongside a life of worship and living life on mission—while at the same time also serving as the core for all three areas of the pathway. The group gathering serves to strengthen spiritual family ties, but whenever someone far from God pulls up a chair, the gathering instantly shifts and unfolds in order to embrace the outsider. In this way—through the warmth and hospitality of table fellowship—an appetite for the spiritual family is awakened and sharpened in those far from God.

In short, the gathering affords us unique opportunities to proclaim the gospel. Natural conversations unfold at the dinner table and on the sofa. Hospitality builds trust. Conversations go deeper. Acquaintances become friends. Before we know it, we’re naturally sharing the good news about Jesus over a meal. Maybe, to you, that sounds too simple. But in the words of Eugene Cho, “What brings credibility to the gospel is not more hour-long sermons. What brings credibility, passion, and, ultimately, belief is seeing the gospel at work...the incarnate gospel. What will move skeptics, cynics, and critics are Christians who love God and love their neighbors...by willingly and humbly serving their needs.”

Push back darkness together...in a third-place

We gather in community (have a family meal and sharpen one another) and discipleship (discipleship groups), but Todd Engstrom suggests there is a third way we need to gather—as missionaries in a third place. Engstrom writes that a third-place is where a healthy group becomes intentionally oriented around those who don't know Jesus. The truth is, unless we intentionally make time for people outside our community group, we often won't do it. Few of

us naturally drift into mission. This means we must think through ways we can integrate people into our communities by inviting them into spaces that are: (1) natural, (2) neutral, and (3) regular.

Engstrom concludes that an effective third place is a neutral ground that is informal and non-committal, naturally fitting into the rhythms of your lost friends' lives.

If you grew up in church, you probably heard a lot about the need to (1) build relationships with people far from God and (2) look for opportunities to share the gospel with them. However, you probably didn't hear much about the need to (3) introduce them to the Christian community. Your non-Christian friends need to be invited to hang out with Christians who are hanging out with other Christians in a third place. That is one of the primary ways in which they will experience Jesus' vision for melting their hearts. "By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

Push back darkness together...by hosting intentional events

As a part of our regular monthly rhythm, our groups will intentionally plan some sort of missional engagement. These outreaches do not have to be extravagant! The aim of these events is to create an environment to be able to have your group members invite their friends, neighbors, coworkers, or unbelieving family.

Some event ideas are as follows...

- Game night
- Movie on the lawn
- Watch a sporting event together
- Firepit hangouts
- Cookouts

The key in these events is to be creative, be thoughtful and encourage your group members to invite those who are far from the Lord.

Start slowly and plan wisely

Your community group will not be able to magically begin pulling off all three types of missional gatherings (family meal, third place, and missional events) right out of the gate. Start slow. Be prayerful and patient in walking it out together. Slowly start pushing back darkness together!

DISCUSSION - 15 min

There isn't really a formal discussion for this article because the concepts are worked out in the exercises below. However, it is a good idea to make sure everyone understands the concepts in the article.

- Does everyone understand the concepts of the three types of missional gatherings?

If anyone answers “No,” go back and read that section of the article again.

EXERCISE - 20 min

Missional Events

Brainstorm. What kind of events could you all host for your lost neighbors/friends?

Gather in a third-place

Where should community groups on mission gather in a third place? It depends on the people you’re trying to reach! Spend some time brainstorming as a group. Ask questions like (1) “Where do the people we want to reach already spend time and naturally go?” (2) “How can we gather there?” and (3) “Does it make sense for us to invite our three into this kind of space?” Discuss and throw out ideas as a group.

When you come up with something that seems like it would be a fun, effective, third place gathering, pick a date, make a plan, and invite some friends!

SHARING LIFE STORIES - 20 min

PRAY - 15 min

WEEK TWELVE: NEXT STEPS

BIBLE DISCUSSION – 10 min

Read Hebrews 10:23-25.

- What is your initial reaction to this passage? What stands out to you?
- What does this say about God—and us?
- How does this passage apply to gospel community?

ARTICLE – 10 min

What now?

The time has come for your group to leave the nest, spread your wings, and fly! By now, you should have a clear understanding of the ins and outs of community groups as well as the practices employed to execute the mission: Community group gathering, discipleship groups, and missional gatherings. Executing all three gatherings can be challenging and takes time to cultivate.

Group Phases

We know that not all groups start from square one, but here is a general description of how each group transforms. Overall, our aim is for groups to multiply between 12-24 months. Here is a sample of how your group could progress.

Connection (2-3 months in this phase)

This stage of group life is generally at the beginning for most groups. Normally this phase takes about two to three months and is all about getting to know each other. There is early on excitement about being together in a different setting. Take some time to hear each other's testimony, spend quality time together, and have fun. Quality time and developing relationships are some of the foundations for a healthy group in the future. People will be asking questions such as, "Do I belong? Do others like me? Am I accepted in this group?" As the leader, do your best to build relationships with each individual and also encourage other group members to connect.

Partnership (2-4 months in this phase)

After a season of connecting with one another and developing gospel-centered relationships, we move forward to partnering together as a group. As the group becomes more cohesive, we will work to mobilize the group to disciple one another and move into missional engagement. This all begins with a heart change for the group. The honeymoon of connecting is over, and the group is ready to begin the growth process. During this season, we will take small strides toward discipling and missional activity. This is the beginning step of where we want to be in the future. Continue to point the flock to the mission of the group.

Growth and Development (6-9 months in this phase)

This phase will have plenty of overlap with the partnership phase. At this point, the group is hitting a stride. The purpose of the group is becoming more clear, to grow in their discipleship and to reach those far from Christ. The group should be aspiring toward the practice and sustainability of each of the primary rhythms of a community group. This includes the 4 rhythms of your group gathering (Fellowship, Scripture, Prayer, Hospitality) and monthly rhythms. As the group grows in their discipleship and begins to reach those far from Christ, we want to be sure we are developing future leaders. Leadership development is a key component that will help us transition to the next phase.

Multiplication (2-4 months in this phase)

At this point, our group is strong in leadership and in attendance. As we are deployed into the world, and those far from Christ come to know Christ, it is time to multiply our group.

Multiplication is a beautiful gift from God that we should celebrate! Once other leaders have been developed and are ready to lead out, we begin preparing the group for multiplication. Below is a section on how we multiply our groups.

Seasons and rhythms

Let's discuss two important concepts that shape our approach to community: seasons and rhythms. We are often asked, "How can we do all of this in our already busy lives?" And it's a great question to ask!

While we want to pursue greater commitment and devotion to one another and God's mission, we also need to think practically about cultivating seasons and rhythms in our group life.

- *Seasons.* Consider what season of life and ministry you and your group members are in before defining how you will gather together.

There are always seasons in the life of a community. Some seasons are full of fun and laughter, some are full of heartache and sadness, and some are naturally busier than others. Before you try to fit together the practices we lined out, make sure you consider what season of life you are in, and adjust expectations accordingly.

If you are just starting out and your group members are incredibly busy with small children, consider that demand of life and feel free to adjust the ways you gather. If you are in a season of getting to know each other, take the time to focus on cultivating healthy relationships before you ask people to sacrificially go on mission. If it is the summertime and people are in and out of town, adapt to the rhythms of the community and try different approaches.

Think through Summer and Winter breaks. Don't force group gatherings that can't or won't happen. That could ultimately create a negative culture within the group. Instead, meet a couple of times during the summer when most or everyone can make it. Think in the same vein for December!

- *Rhythms.* After determining the season of the group, think through applicable rhythms

and how frequently you might gather. For groups with more free time available, consider gathering more often. For community groups that are spread out and stretched thin, once a week may be all you can manage in that season.

We suggest leaders think through the lens of a month rather than a single week. As you think through the practices of your group, consider they don't have to happen the same way all the time, and every member of your community will not always be able to participate. In the same way, a nuclear family has different seasons of life with unique needs at different times, so too do community groups.

We recommend community groups, at minimum, gather in these rhythms:

1. Sundays to worship corporately (together if possible)
2. 2-3 times a month for Community group gatherings in homes
3. Weekly or bi-weekly D-groups (virtual or in-person)
4. Monthly missional engagements
5. Monthly or bi-monthly third-place gatherings

Community does not have to be overwhelmingly complex. Think outside the box of a week and ask, "How might we creatively pursue these practices over time?" Feel free to mix up the practices, so they flow with different rhythms during different seasons.

Outcomes of community groups

After spending time in the mechanics of groups, it can be easy to forget what you hope will happen. When we think about the success of a community group, it looks different in different seasons. Yet over time, as we labor together, there are four consistent outcomes we hope to see.

- *Gospel Transformation.* God uses life in community for the discipleship and growth of everyone involved. As we center our efforts on the gospel of Christ and the Word of God, we believe leaders and participants will grow in Christ-likeness. Discipleship groups are designed toward this end, but there are many other ways that God will accomplish this outcome.
- *Biblical Community.* A community group led by capable leaders will facilitate an environment where Christ-centered relationships grow and gospel hospitality is possible. Rich relationships are the fruit of intentional time spent together. Stories of friendship, encouragement, support and care will all arise as we live alongside each other in authentic relationships. The family meal is designed to facilitate this kind of community, but the providential circumstances of each person's life, along with many other factors, will contribute to deep, Christ-centered relationships.
- *Fruitful Mission.* Faithful leadership not only helps participants stay accountable to Jesus and His mission but also resources them to demonstrate the kingdom and proclaim the gospel in each sphere of influence. By the grace of God, we hope to see new Christians enter the kingdom and immature disciples grow in maturity, flourish, and multiply. Missional gatherings are designed to help us interact with people who are far from God, but individuals are going to need to share Christ and disciple those who are interested to see new disciples made, baptized, equipped, and sent.

- *Multiplication.* Healthy gospel-centered living tends to lead toward multiplication. Community groups are at their best when they continue reinvesting all of what they know into the lives of others. As leaders serve faithfully, we believe new community group leaders and new community groups will be identified, called, and sent to the front lines of mission. Your hub leaders are here to help you identify, recruit, train, and send new leaders and to help shepherd your group toward multiplication.

DISCUSSION - 15 min

- Share something that you learned in the past 12 weeks from our times together.
- What is one fun memory you have from the past 12 weeks?

EXERCISE - 20 min

Next steps

At this point, you need to talk about what’s next. For this group to continue as a healthy community group, you will need to form a plan for how you will gather going forward. For now, let’s start with the next 90 days. Below are some elements to consider as you plan.

- Discipleship groups - How will we form these groups? Who’s responsible for facilitating?
- Missional gatherings - When do we execute our plan from the last session?
- Third place gatherings- How often and where should we plan these?

Discuss the elements you will include in your plan. Have one person record the plan below and make a copy to give to the group leaders as well as the hub leaders.

Time of blessing

As we celebrate what God has done in our time together over the last few months, let’s end with a time of blessing for one another. In 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Paul exhorts believers to “encourage one another and build one another up.” Dallas Willard defines blessing as “the projection of good into the life of another.” Take this opportunity to make space for those in the group to share how somebody else’s story has impacted them, affirm the spiritual gifts of someone in the group,

or share a prophetic word that might build up another group member.

SHARING LIFE STORIES - 20 min

PRAY - 15 min