

# Shepherd Leader Field Guide

**MacArthur Blvd Baptist Church**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Vision & Theology	1
Shepherd Leader Expectations	7
Practical Guide for Community	17
Community Group Life Cycle	35
Member Pursuit	41

# Vision and Theology

*"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I with you always, to the end of the age.'"*

**Matthew 28:18-20**

We believe Jesus gave the Church its mission in Matthew 28: 18-20. Therefore, the mission is universal and unchanging for every local church. This mission is holistic, beginning with leading people to trust Christ initially through gospel proclamation and then leading them to follow Christ through biblical teaching and exhortation. Our own paraphrase of the Great Commission is the mission statement for our church.

## Our Mission

**Leading people to trust and follow Christ.**

Our *Discipleship Pathway* clarifies the method for how our church accomplishes the mission.

## The Discipleship Pathway



# Community Group Vision

**Community Groups exist to equip people to build gospel-centered relationships that result in spiritual growth and increased participation in the mission of God.**

**WHY OFF-CAMPUS GROUPS:** In addition to Community Groups naturally flowing from our vision as a church, there are other important reasons we pursue them at Macarthur Blvd. There are three reasons in particular that we want to highlight: a theological reason, a philosophical reason, and a practical reason.

Off-Campus Community Groups helps us see our identity in being a family of missionaries who are learning to trust and follow Christ together. We desire to grow one another in the Gospel but also lead our community to trust and follow Christ by creatively declaring and demonstrating the Gospel.

## THEOLOGICAL REASON

One of the key distinctive theological reasons we have chosen Off-Campus Community Groups resides in what some theologians call the “community apologetic”. Through passages like John 13 and John 17, we see a unique testimony that God’s people collectively give for the gospel.

John 13:34-35: *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

Jesus tells us that one of the most winsome ways that we can tell the world about Him is to love one another. In fact, one of the primary purposes of Christian community is to show a lost world what the love of Christ looks like. The shared life of Christians is an extremely compelling argument for the Christian faith! In fact, when you survey the course of Christian history, the majority of conversions have come through non—Christians having access to a loving, Christ—centered community where the grace of God is put on display through repenting, and forgiving relationships. Throughout the New Testament, believers were involved intimately with each other in all facets of life. They didn’t just come together once a week for ‘church’. Instead, they invested time with each other to encourage one another in the mission of God. Off Campus Community Groups give us this kind of opportunity!

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

This means that the church must not simply gather for worship on Sunday and scatter individually for mission throughout the week. Rather, we must gather for worship and gather for mission. Our non-Christian friends need to hear the gospel preached, but they also need to experience Christians living together in meaningful community. Also, throughout the New Testament, it seems that the community is involved in all facets of life, not simply a once a week gathering for mutual accountability and encouragement in the mission. Off-Campus Community Groups allow us to be incarnational in our relationships, gives us time to disciple and care for one another, and promotes missional engagement within the community.

To be faithful to the Bible and effective in mission, we have to pursue community and mission together

### PHILOSOPHICAL REASON

Philosophy of ministry is our application of theology in the cultural context in which our church has been placed. As a church our Values are to Submit to God’s Word, Depend on God’s Spirit, Pursue Kingdom Diversity, Extend Gospel Grace, and be Deployed on the mission of God to the Glory of the Father. But our world does not encourage these values. The American culture is one of individualism, materialism, and consumerism.

Oftentimes the culture of the world permeates the church. The culture in which we live typically will systematically “disciple” us into their core values, knowingly or unknowingly. It’s in these times that the church has to push back against the culture and create a biblical response to improper culture.

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.

The practice of Off-Campus Community Groups presents a compelling alternative that calls people from consumerism to the life of a missionary servant in community. Though it will take time to lead people toward this kind of life, there will be many bumps along the way, we want to aim for the rhythms and structures in Community Groups that help everyday people live out their God-given identity and calling.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**PRACTICAL REASON**

A final reason for pursuing off-campus community groups is practical. In order to embody the church in various neighborhoods and networks of people, we must have community groups gather all over the metroplex for the spread of the Gospel. Many non-Christians would decline an invitation to a church worship gathering as their first introduction to the church. However, those same individuals would be willing to study the Bible with a friend or attend a community group event with people they know.

***Here are some statistics from Lifeway Research.***

**87%** of people not in church have at least one close friend who is a Christian.

**80%** of unchurched people are open to the Gospel.

If we want to engage the entire metroplex with the Gospel of Christ, we must take the church to them. This requires every member of MacArthur Blvd. to live a life on mission, not simply relying on our Sunday morning worship gathering to reach people. Off -Campus Community Groups provide a vehicle by which we can properly deploy every member to live on mission where they live, work, and play. As groups who meet all over the city, we have a chance to saturate the metroplex with the gospel as we live out our faith and exhibit the mission.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Community Group Mission

**Mission:** A community of Christians who lead each other and their community to trust and follow Christ.

**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 communities.

**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 a 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 members gifts and passions as a platform to reach others for Christ. Reaching our 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.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Shepherd Leader

## LEADERSHIP PROFILE

**Responsibility:** Shepherd a Community Group toward Christ-likeness by **Shepherding the Flock** well and **Leading the Mission**.

### Becoming a Shepherd Leader

**READ:** Obtain a copy of the Shepherd Leader Field Guide from the Pastor of Spiritual Formation (PSF) and read through the field guide carefully.

**PRAY:** Ask God for wisdom and direction regarding involvement as a Shepherd Leader. Consider your own giftedness and the leadership expectations as you seek the Lord.

**APPLY:** Fill out the Adult Shepherd Leader questionnaire and submit it to the PSF or the church offices. To request a questionnaire, email Travis Bengé: [tbenge@mbbcirving.org](mailto:tbenge@mbbcirving.org)

**INTERVIEW:** Once the PSF receives your questionnaire, he will contact you to set up a time for a personal conversation.

**TRAIN:** If you and the PSF feel good about moving forward, you will work together to determine the details of your apprenticeship.



# Requirements for a Shepherd Leader

## 1. Be a Member of MacArthur Blvd

Church membership is a biblical practice of committing yourself to the community of believers at that particular local fellowship. In joining MacArthur Blvd, you are declaring that you want to be a part of this local assembly of believers and submit to the pastors and congregation. In order to lead and shepherd well, it is necessary to be a member to show your commitment to the flock.

## 2. Striving to Grow in the Values of MacArthur Blvd

Our Core Values clarify who we are as followers of Christ and members of MacArthur Blvd. As a community of believers seeking to be faithful to the mission God has called us to, we want to strive to display these values in all that we do. As a leader, our expectation is that you are striving to grow in these values as well as helping others pursue them.

SUBMIT TO GOD'S WORD  
DEPEND ON GOD'S SPIRIT  
PURSUE KINGDOM DIVERSITY  
EXTEND GOSPEL GRACE  
DEPLOY EVERY MEMBER

## 3. Apprentice a Shepherd Leader

Being a Shepherd Leader is a calling. We believe being a great Shepherd Leader is more caught than taught. It is imperative that you are a part of a healthy group for at least six months so you can see, and learn appropriate rhythms, as well as receive some experience leading a group as your mentor allows you to lead.

## 4. Attend Shepherd Huddles

Shepherd Huddles occur about 8 times a year. This is a time to be equipped by our pastors and also be sharpened by other Shepherd Leaders. We ask that you attend the majority of these huddles to ensure you are in step with the direction of groups. We also have a Discipleship Podcast that will help you grow in shepherding and leading.

**5. Lead Your Community Group Through Churchwide Activities**

During certain times of the year, our church might choose to emphasize a certain focus, and we aim to have our Community Groups drive the emphasis. It is important as a Shepherd Leader at Macarthur to partner with the pastors in order to shepherd well.

**6. Update our Staff and Directional Pastors Throughout the Year**

Your primary staff contact will be Travis Benge, Pastor of Spiritual Formation. He will be in regular contact with you and will lead the majority of the Shepherd Huddles. On occasion, our Directional Pastor team may ask for a self-assessment and want to hear stories of what God is doing in your community group.

**7. Meet Quarterly with Your Shepherd Leader Coach**

Regular touch points help us care for the overall well-being of others and help us stay aligned with the vision. Participating in this coaching time is an opportunity for your coach to invest in your ministry while also caring for you spiritually.

**8. Keep Up with Attendance**

Good shepherds know their sheep. Taking attendance helps you keep up with your sheep in the midst of busy schedules. This will help not only knowing how often people come but will also help when it comes to pursuing those who are straying.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

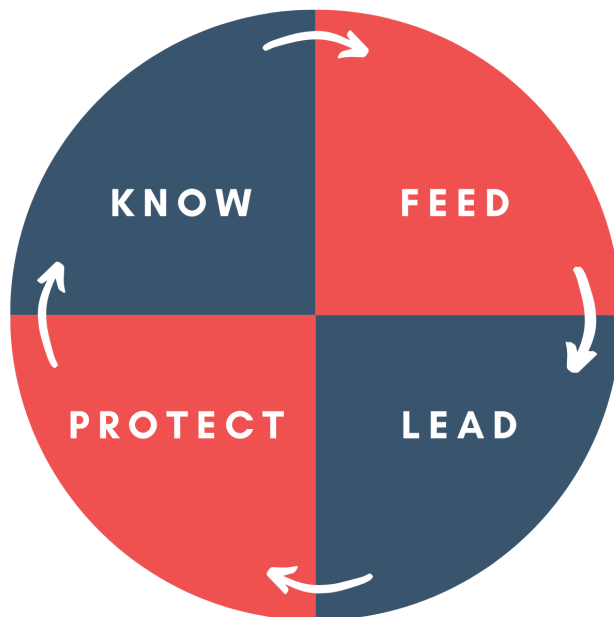
---

## Why “Shepherd Leaders”?

Why do we call you a Shepherd Leader instead of a “teacher,” “director,” or simply “Community Group Leader”? Many of our Bible heroes in the Old testament were shepherds. Jesus was called the good shepherd. Shepherding your group is a core responsibility that you hold, because you help the Pastors shepherd the flock. We want to shepherd every member of MacArthur Blvd well, which can be a challenge in a church our size. You help us shepherd by caring for the miniature flock in your group. You are our “spiritual first-responders.” You will likely see drift, discouragement, discontentment, and sin earlier than we will. We need you to respond to these spiritual issues like a good shepherd would. If you do not, it is very likely, that nobody will. By the time the Pastors become aware of problems within the life of a member, often, it is broken almost beyond repair (humanly speaking). Our adult Shepherd Leaders play a very significant role in the overall spiritual health and well-being of our church. This is an important leadership position. At the end of the day, your job is to ***Shepherd the Flock well and Lead the Mission!***

# Shepherd the Flock

*You must know, feed, lead, and protect the flock.*



## Know

A good shepherd knows his sheep. A good shepherd knows the past and present realities of his sheep. In regards to their past, get to know their testimony. Hearing someone's testimony allows you to be able to know what unique experiences they came from, because past experiences shape people into the people they are today. Stories allow people to connect at a deeper level with others who have had similar experiences.

Regarding their present, get to know their hopes, fears, and needs. Understand how they are doing in their marriage, with their children, neighbors, co-workers, and in their job. None of this can happen apart from time spent together. There is no substitute for a shepherd in regards to time. If you want to experience fruitfulness with those you shepherd, you cannot disregard the importance of togetherness and the discipline of being present in body and mind with those you lead.

Never is this more true than when a crisis strikes. Think about a time when you went through a tragedy or a difficult trial. You most likely remember those who were present with you, although you probably can't remember all the words that were said to you during that time. During crisis and other life events, it is more important to be physically present rather than having the right words to say. A good shepherd celebrates with those who celebrate and mourns with those who mourn.

## Feed

An aspect of being a good shepherd over the flock is feeding the sheep. The people to whom we minister to are in need of spiritual food. Feeding has two aspects to it. The first is reminding and demonstrating the gospel to each other. It is important to apply the gospel to a variety of aspects of their lives (marriage, parenting, singleness, particular sin struggles, work situations, etc.). It is a shepherd's responsibility to keep the sheep spiritually fed with the gospel and its importance.

The second aspect to feeding is helping the sheep to be self feeders. Self feeding is an early step in the sanctification process that must be taught and demonstrated. It equips them for future seasons of life when they don't have a leader investing in them. This is the idea that they will be able to do their Scripture readings and grow without someone having to 'hold their hand'.

Practically, read the Word of God together, challenge each other, apply it to your life and make this a regular rhythm of your community group. Talk about how you see God moving in your life, talk about how to obey and enjoy the commands of God. There are numerous ways to feed the sheep so be creative and thoughtful!

---

---

---

---

## Protect

Colossians 2 talks about false teachers and a variety of false teachings and philosophies penetrating the church. It is our duty to protect our sheep from these worldly teachings that demote who Jesus is and what he came to do. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep and we must be willing to do the same. Shepherd leaders are on the “front-line” of protecting and caring for the flock. Protecting involves not only protecting from poor doctrine, but it also involves restoring sheep who are going astray. Our aim is to see sheep restored back into the fold. Protecting the sheep requires courage, compassion, relational capital, and a strong connection with church leaders.

## Lead

The majority of this resource is to equip you to be a more effective leader for your group. As you already know, a Shepherd leader is an important leadership role without our church. When we talk about leadership in this section we are looking specifically at your role as a leader within the group. As a Shepherd leader, you are the lead initiator. Initiating is an effective way to serve the people and is central to shepherding your group.

Sheep follow, but Shepherds must lead. Shepherds don't only lead by exhortation, but also by example. The apostle Paul says it well, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” As a Shepherd Leader, you have a responsibility to lead by example in all things. Work diligently on your marriage, fighting sin, parenting, being transparent, engaging the lost, extending hospitality, discipling others, and spending quality time with people outside of ‘normal’ church hours.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

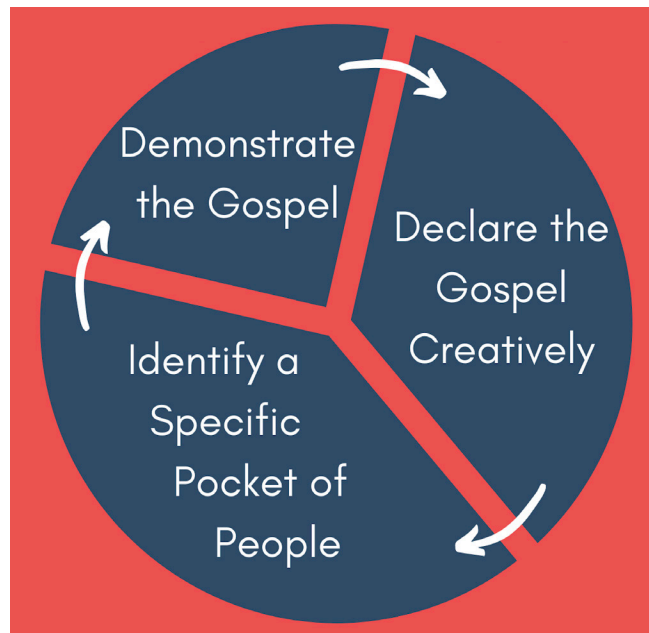
---

---

---

---

# Lead the Mission



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Demonstrate the Gospel

Jesus said on numerous occasions in the gospels that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. What did he mean by that? He was showing us what the kingdom looks like. He was modeling for us how the kingdom practically plays out. Some ways that Jesus demonstrated this were by self-less acts of service, helping people out physically, financially, and spiritually. A gospel-centered community has an opportunity to demonstrate and declare the gospel in a unique way that you wouldn't be able to do otherwise. This is called the community apologetic. The community apologetic appeals to two truths in Scripture that we work out together as a group: Loving one another and serving our neighbor.

### LOVING ONE ANOTHER

We demonstrate what the kingdom of God is like when we love one another, serve one another, and forgive one another. The way we live this out is fundamentally different than the way the world approaches things. When someone in the group has a baby and the group pitches in to deliver meals, the world sees our true love for each other. When practical needs arise like needing help in moving, searching for a new job, or much needed childcare, we demonstrate to the world that our love for one another is different. It is an overflow of our love for God.

### SERVING OUR NEIGHBOR

Another way we demonstrate to the world that we love God is by serving our neighbor. This can happen through tangible acts of service both to your city and your neighbors. A practical evangelism tool to reach our specific pockets of people is identifying a need that they have. Whether in a poverty-stricken neighborhood or an affluent part of town, we need to be asking the question, "What does it look like to serve my neighborhood?". This could look like coaching a sports team with the intentional purpose of reaching those parents, being a community leader in your neighborhood, serving on the PTA in the local schools, babysitting kids so couples can spend time together, watching pets when people go out of town, or caring for neighbors when they are in need. Community Groups empower us to be missional while giving us an opportunity to invite those neighbors we serve into our group. As Community Groups we want to display the kingdom tangibly in the community in which God has placed us!

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## **Declare the Gospel Creatively**

There is no greater news in the universe than the message of Jesus Christ and his sinless life, death, burial, and resurrection! Despite this being the best news on the planet, we often find this message difficult to communicate. We are fearful of what others will think of us, we get nervous that we won't 'say it right', or that someone would ask us a question that we don't know how to respond to. Another reason we struggle to communicate this clearly is because we simply haven't practiced sharing the gospel enough to feel comfortable. Your community group can be a safe place to practice sharing the gospel in a clear and personal way. Make it a rhythm of the group to practice sharing the gospel with one another. Look for opportunities to celebrate what Jesus has done and what He is doing in the lives of group members!

As communities patterned after the life of Jesus, we want to declare the gospel creatively. Paul didn't have a rote gospel presentation. Instead, he listened to those around him and worked to share the hope of Christ in their context and situations. A Community Group listens to, and understands the stories of their neighbors, in order to individualize the gospel story in ways that are specific to their neighbors needs. We want our communities to wrestle with and understand how Jesus's perfect life, His sacrificial death, and His resurrection power are indeed good news to their neighbors.

## **Identify a Specific Pocket of People**

Who does this Community Group exist for? It exists for the growth of believers and the pocket of people that are in the group members reach. The gospel is good news for those inside the church and for those who are outside of Christ currently. It is our aim to show biblical hospitality by welcoming outsiders. One way we reach people is by deploying our members into gospel communities over the metroplex to reach our neighbors.

The Spirit led the apostle Paul from location to location and specifically prevented him from going to certain spots. God had specific spots that he wanted Paul to go to in order for the gospel to spread according to the will of the Father. So, the Spirit does with the church, sending us to specific groups of neighbors. A Community Group is seeking to integrate their lives with the people where God has placed them. A neighbor is anyone whom you live by, work with, or play around. Your neighbor could be next door, in your softball league, or your co-worker. Sometimes you will have a lot in common with your neighbor and others times you may not. But one thing we know is that we are called to demonstrate the kingdom tangibly and declare the gospel with those whom we live by, work with and play around.

As a leader, you will likely need to lead in clarifying the specific pocket of people that your group is actively pursuing. We want groups to know exactly whom they are trying to reach. It is not clear enough for groups to have a generalized mission to 'reach people' with the gospel. Pray that God would give you specific people so that your group can invest for the long-haul.



# Practical Guide for Community



In this section we are going to look at the practices of what Off-Campus Community Groups do each week. It is important to note that community groups are not expected to meet all three of these circles every week, but this is the direction in which we are aiming. Each group will look different but the aim of the group will be the same. The practices to follow will help us facilitate spiritual growth as we grow into gospel-centered communities that disciple one another well and work diligently to reach those around us. Here are some helpful practices for a group of believers who have a desire to grow spiritually and expand the kingdom of God in DFW.

## Roles within Community Groups

As part of the leadership of your flock, we ask that you encourage members within the group to help with different responsibilities. Community groups have a variety of people from differing backgrounds who have different spiritual and practical gifts. Below are the roles that we believe will help the group run smoothly. Also, if other members of the group have abilities that allow them to use their gifts, and want to add an additional role -do it! Be creative and use the group's gifts and passions for the glory of God.

### Shepherd Leader(s)

*Ideally each community group will consist of the following:*

- \* 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 on missional engagements. They will also help people think creatively and make sure group members are connected to a third-place gathering (this concept is explained later in the guide).

### 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 information given to them by shepherd leader, missional leader or hospitality leader.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## ***Four Rhythms of Community Groups***

The majority of the way we spend time together will happen as a group at someone's home. This gathering in homes will have a rhythm of fellowship, Scripture, prayer, and hospitality. We might not conquer every rhythm each week we gather, but at least a couple should be incorporated on a weekly basis. The idea of gathering in this format is to be a spiritual family. We desire gospel-centered relationships that aid us in our growth in Christ. Let's take a look at these 4 rhythms within our community group time.

### ***Fellowship***

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.

Jesus's earthly ministry was astonishing. He healed lepers, welcomed children, blessed sinners, ate with tax collectors, and rebuked religious leaders. 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.

If you think about it, Jesus was never not in a 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. If relationships have always been essential to Jesus, shouldn't they be for us as well?

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!

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, and then our Community Groups should be the primary place of Christian formation and maturation. But it's not enough to just be in a 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. Fellowship is partnering our lives together for the sake of encouragement and growth in Christ. That is why before we even open the Scriptures or pray or evangelize, we should join ourselves to a like minded, Christ-centered community if we want to follow Jesus's pattern.

## ***Scripture***

Jesus's primary means of teaching was applying the Scripture to his hearers' particular situations. For us too, knowing and doing God's Word is an essential aspect of conformity to Christ.

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.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Lower the Barriers for Engagement

Bible studies often make assumptions about the knowledge of those participating — that a person knows the basic storyline of the Bible, that a person knows how to study the Scriptures for themselves, and so on. Assumptions can actually create significant barriers for new people entering your community.

We humbly suggest you do two things in a discussion time. First, lower the barrier of entry into the conversation. We want to study the Bible in a way that doesn't require any minimum knowledge to meaningfully participate. Second, we want to create an environment where individuals are expected to contribute, not simply consume. We think this kind of approach will help people engage God's Word for themselves and cultivate an environment where we want to obey what God's Word tells us to do.

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?" 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. Questions such as: "Who is the author speaking to, What is the main purpose of this text, Where does this fit in the storyline of the Bible." 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. When you read the text a second time, 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?”

As we read through the text being preached—or as we read 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 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 reading should naturally lead us to a heart-level discussion and to honest prayer together.

## 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.

We encourage people in off-campus groups to use a sermon based curriculum. The aim of this curriculum is to stir up gospel centered questions to help us apply the Bible to our hearts and minds. If we want greater accountability and authenticity, we need to aim for environments where everyone in the group can share. This curriculum is sent out every Thursday by Pastor Travis Benge.

---

---

---

---

---

# Prayer

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. 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." (Matthew 5:1) 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 were, without formality or pretense, to their God in heaven.

Jesus wants us to also 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. While Jesus doesn't tell us to stand or kneel or bow our heads, 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 his or her parents. 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 our Community Groups, 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 together.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## **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 equip one another in Christlikeness through our prayers.

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

We encourage your group to find a healthy rhythm for collecting prayer requests. We also encourage you to find creative ways for group members to pray for each other.

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.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



# Hospitality

Hospitality is the distinctly Christian practice of creating space for outsiders. We love this definition but the way we parse it is multidimensional. Hospitality involves gathering around a meal and opening our homes to those in our group, those outside of our group and those outside of Christ. 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.

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 Zaccheus (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**

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, and creating space in our souls for the Holy Spirit to move within us.

***OUR COMMUNITY GROUPS***

Practically, we encourage all Community Groups to share some sort of food. This could be meal time every week or even desserts and appetizers. The best conversations happen around the dinner table. Real life conversation happens in real-life situations! When this is the primary gathering, you will need to learn one another's names, stories, vocations, and passions.

Sharing a meal together — one that requires a recipe, not a microwave — is a symbol of your fellowship. We think it is a helpful practice for every community, because it is a regular practice of most families.

***How Hospitality Helps to Share the Gospel***

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 coworkers 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. Use hospitality as a way to create an evangelistic culture within your group. Open up your homes and lives to those inside of Christ for discipleship and outside of Christ for evangelism. Be creative and consider ways that the group can love one another and make room for the outsider—especially around the table.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



This section will cover additional ways that we encourage growth in Christ, specifically outside of community groups. The avenues below are designed distinctively for deeper growth and understanding of Scripture.

### **Discipleship Groups (D-Group)**

Who is the community group for? There is a tension that groups have between keeping a low-bar for guests, but yet being engaging and challenging for the believers in our church. We desire to have a place where people can come to belong and grow in their faith. Discipleship Groups (D-Groups) are the avenue in which we aim to 'dig deeper'. This is where we ask the hard questions, get into doctrine, hold each other accountable, and memorize scripture.

D-Groups are smaller groups of 2-5 believers of the same gender who commit to meeting outside the large group meeting time. This is the place to study the Bible and be known deeply by others.

Elements to D-Groups

- Highs and Lows of the week
- H.E.A.R. Journal
- Accountability
- Additional book discussion (if your group is reading a book together)
- Prayer

Ideas on Meeting

- Find a time during the week
- Rotate between virtual and face-to-face



As a community group, we are not only satisfied with building gospel-centered communities. We desire to help fulfill the Great Commission. We believe that as we grow in the Discipleship Pathway we will be motivated by God's Word and will be deployed into the mission field.

We can be intentionally deployed into our communities through monthly missional engagements and third-place gatherings.

### **MISSIONAL ENGAGEMENTS**

As a part of our regular monthly rhythm, our groups will intentionally plan some sort of outreach. 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
- Fire pit hangouts

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

## THIRD-PLACE GATHERINGS

The Community Group's mission is to lead your group and your community to trust and follow Christ. This mission includes two very important components, time with one another to disciple and time with outsiders to build relationships and evangelize. We have spent adequate time explaining the former and have also proposed a monthly rhythm for missional engagement. So what is a third-place gathering and how is it missional?

A third-place is another space you frequent besides your work and your home. This third place is somewhere to find refuge and a sense of place.

A third-place gathering includes gathering as a Community Group (or a smaller section of it) in a public setting with the aim of doing life together and engaging new people. A great third place is a place you can frequent (besides your work and your home) that people can find refuge and a sense of place. In a similar way, in the church, we need to create a third place.

Your first place is the Sunday worship gathering. Your second place is your weekly community group. And now we need a third place as a way to cultivate your mission together as a community group: a place to introduce your lost friends to your community outside of your monthly missional engagement in the home.

The reality is that unless we make time to go be with people outside of our community, we often don't do it. Very few Christians naturally float into missional engagement.

The purpose of this third place is to create some neutral ground. When we think about including our lost friends in our lives or getting them to meet our Christian community, we usually only have two places to invite them for our "first ask": our Sunday gathering or our community group. To many non-Christians, they would not be comfortable attending such a gathering. The third-place gathering is a time to invite your friends or neighbors who have children to the park as you go with others from your Community Group.

Remember, that if your group plans a third-place gathering at a local park and none of your lost friends come, it is not a failure! As long as we are actively encouraging our group members to invite those far from God we are removing heart obstacles. Also, this gives you more time to hang out with those inside your group for the purpose of discipleship. As we have said many times before, discipleship happens in the context of relationships.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

***What makes a good place to invite people?***

For the third-place gathering, ask the question, "Where do people already naturally spend their time? It might be meeting at parks, neighborhood restaurants, coffee shops, ice cream parlors, pool halls, sports venues, community pools, or the bowling alley. The possibilities are endless!

Remember, not everyone from your community group may be able to participate in the same third place. Schedules can get hectic so possible partners up with a couple other people from your group in order to create a rhythm of third-place gatherings. The aim is to have a few natural places in locations and times where a few people from the community group can regularly gather with a few people who don't know Jesus.

***It's a Marathon***

Talking about all of this missional engagement is exciting! Please know that it takes time to create a culture of missional activity. As a shepherd, lead your flock to see the commands of Jesus and celebrate times when lost friends do come to a game night or a third-place gathering. As a group, know that the missional life is like running a marathon. While the practices above are helpful, every community group is different and the Holy Spirit will give guidance to you as a leader and your group. Pray and ask God for clarity and vision for how to engage those without Christ around you.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Meeting Time Sample Structure

Some groups will have a strict 2-hour time frame while others will have more flexibility. Below is a sample schedule for how you can break up your time.

Fellowship and meal: 1:15

Scripture (Applying Scripture through Sermon-Based Curriculum): 30 minutes

Prayer: 15 minutes

## ***How do we integrate our children during Community Groups in homes?***

The answer to this question recognizes the challenge and the blessing of family involvement for a gathering that has typically been separated by age groups. The practice of separating into age-graded or life-stage groups is practical and effective for biblical instruction and engagement when a large number of people are coming together into a single place for a relatively short period of time. However, when a relatively small group of people are gathering together for a longer period of time in a familial setting, parents and their Community Group family have the opportunity to effectively minister their faith to the next generation in deeply personal ways. We recognize that each home Community Group will have unique demographic characteristics generating unique strengths and challenges. Although there is a near endless number of possibilities on how each group could steward this experience, here are the options we are asking your Community Group to choose from as you navigate the challenge and blessing of having younger children, preschoolers, and/or babies in the gathering. Remember, let's stay flexible because there may be times that you are able to spend 30 minutes in prayer and other times you don't get around to the sermon-based discussion. The key is depending on the Spirit and growing together.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Full Integration:** Most of the in-home Community Groups will include a shared meal, the telling of Gospel stories, prayer, and discussion of biblical truths. The children in this setting would not only be present during all of these functions of the group but actively encouraged and supported in their participation. Children would also be engaged in the Community Groups missional service projects and recreational gatherings. This model creates the most opportunity for children to observe, learn, and participate with the other members of the group; however, it also requires parents and group members to divide their attention between the formal activities of the group and behavior management. Target: groups with predominantly older children and students.

**Family Meal and Childcare:** This option approaches Community Group gatherings in two primary parts-informal and formal. The informal activities being the shared meal along with the conversation and Gospel stories from the week that occur around the table. The formal activities being times of prayer and discussion of biblical truths. Groups following this method would include everyone in the informal activities and provide a childcare space during the formal ones. This model provides the opportunity for children to interact and build relationships with the other members of the group during the shared mealtime; however, it also limits learning through exposure to the group’s formal discussion of biblical truths and prayer. Target: groups with predominantly younger children and preschoolers.

**Create your Own:** Groups with children have the opportunity to create a plan that works well for your group. You are encouraged to think carefully about how to disciple and model a biblical community well. Have a group discussion with your group about how you would like to model this for the children. Feel free to reach out to our Next Gen team or Pastor Travis for guidance.

***What does this mean for my children on Sunday mornings during the adults’ equipping time?***

We want to continue equipping our children in the knowledge and understanding of God’s Word. The Gospel Project provides a comprehensive foundation for the development of children’s thinking, faith, and a Christian worldview. We will have Children’s Community Groups on Sunday mornings while adults are attending equipping class; because of the depth of instruction and the differences in developmental readiness for the wide range of children and preschoolers attending MacArthur Blvd, these gatherings will continue to be clustered in effective age ranges and group sizes.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## Seasons and Rhythms of Gathering

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 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 attendance of those in your group.

*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. As a leader, feel free to mix up the practices so that they flow better with your group and differing seasons. For example, in the summer, you may meet once or twice a month for fellowship since people in your group may be traveling more.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Community Group Life Cycle

## Phases of Community Group Development

In this section we will look at phases of community group development. We know that not all groups are starting 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 is one 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 in 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 begin 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.

---

---

---

---

# The Multiplication *of Community Groups*

One mark of healthy Community Groups is multiplication. This section will answer two key questions: (1) Why do we multiply groups? (2) How do we multiply groups?

## Why We Multiply Groups

If the goal of the Community Group ministry is to cultivate genuine Christian relationships and fellowship, why would we ever multiply a group, thus separating those relationships? This is a fair question. There are at least **four reasons** we want groups to pursue multiplication as a goal. They are listed here in descending order of importance.

### ***New groups engage unconnected members much more effectively than established groups.***

People always ask North American missionaries, why plant new churches, especially in the south? Aren't there enough half-empty churches here already? Their answer to this question is the statistical fact that new churches engage the unchurched far more effectively than established churches. Established churches (10-15 years of age) gain most of their growth (80-90%) from Christians transferring from other congregations. On the other hand, 60-80% of the growth of new church plants consists of unchurched people being engaged with the Gospel. We need to continue to plant new churches because (aside from the biblical call for church planting) they simply reach the unengaged more effectively.

The same reality is true of the effectiveness of new groups versus established groups in engaging the unconnected members of the church. Unconnected members are much more likely to connect with a new group than an established group where relationships have been developed and refined for years.

This is important because over 80% of members who do not connect with a small group will leave the church twelve months after joining. Apart from the danger of drifting from the church, no Christian can grow apart from Christian community. We must connect those who are unconnected, and starting new groups is the most effective way to do this.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

***New groups provide others in the church, who have the gifts of leadership, an opportunity to steward those gifts.***

As more people join our church, we have new members each year who are gifted in the area of shepherd leadership. We want and need to give these new members an opportunity to steward those God-given gifts. If new groups are never started, only a small number of members will have the opportunity to serve Christ and His church in the area of shepherd leadership. This is neither healthy for our church nor for those who have these gifts but no place to use them. Multiplying groups enables us to multiply leaders.

***Multiplication allows groups to stay small enough for meaningful community, leaving space for outsiders, and intentional shepherding to occur.***

Our goal for Community Groups and for shepherd leadership requires us to get smaller as our church and groups grow larger. While great Bible study can occur in a large group, it is challenging for meaningful community to occur in larger groups. Further, one of the primary objectives of shepherd leadership is to be the 'spiritual first responders' for those under his or her care. As the size of a group increases, the level of intentional care a shepherd leader can provide for each member of the group decreases.

We have found that the ideal size of a Community Group is for the average attendance to be between eight and fourteen adults. Fewer than eight, and the groups lack continuity and momentum; as the size surpasses fourteen, the ability to cultivate intentional relationships is hindered. This is not to say that community is impossible in groups of fifteen or more. But generally speaking, fifteen is the top of the bell curve, and the further a group goes beyond fourteen, the more challenging cultivating community becomes. Remember, not all groups are ready to multiply at that number and can exceed as long as the group has a plan for multiplication in the future.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## ***Multiply for the Mission***

If there is a clear opportunity to engage a new group of people in an area where some members live, you should really consider multiplying. Perhaps a few people in your group have developed a passion for a certain neighborhood or apartment complex in which they live. Empower these individuals to reach this group of people with a clear strategy. We believe in submitting to the work of the Holy Spirit as he moves us and convicts our hearts to reach a group of people.

## **How We Multiply Groups**

There are three basic strategies we use to multiply groups.

**50-50 LAUNCH:** A new group is formed by half the original group launching out under new leadership, meaning the “mother” group and new group are the same size on day one.

**LAUNCHING A CORE-GROUP:** The original group commissions two Shepherd Leaders along with two-three key members of the group to go out and begin a new group. The new group has leadership and a strong core, but begins smaller than the “mother” group on day one.

**STARTING FROM SCRATCH:** The original group sends out a new or existing Shepherd Leader (or leadership team), to build a new group from the ground up. The Shepherd Leaders pursue unconnected members of the church to form a new group from scratch.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Outcomes of Off-Campus Groups

As you process the vision for Off-Campus Community Groups, the requirements for leadership, practical group structure, and group formation times, it can be easy to forget the larger goals of our gatherings. Within a community group, success will be shown in several different ways at many different times. As we make disciples, here are some outcomes that we hope to see in your group.

## **Gospel-Centered Community**

Relationships are foundational in discipleship relationships. There is no discipleship without gospel-centered relationships! Good Shepherd Leaders will work to create environments where people feel they can belong and thrive. As groups spend more time together they offer stories of hope, encouragement, care, and support will rise as we live life alongside each other. Our group gatherings are an avenue in which we can grow in our relationship with one another.

## **Gospel Transformation**

As we grow into deeper relationships with each other, apply the Scriptures together, pray for one another, and hold each other accountable, we will be transformed. Our Community Groups are a prime avenue for people to grow. D-groups that stem from our Community Groups will be the foundational spot in which we dive deeper into God's Word and produce fruit.

## **Fruitful Mission**

Faithful leadership not only helps group members stay accountable to Jesus and His mission, but also resources them to demonstrate and declare Christ in each sphere of influence. Although we cannot control who comes to Christ and who doesn't, it is our responsibility to be faithful in our sharing of the gospel. Monthly missional engagements and third place gathering will be a prime avenue in which we aim to reach those far from Christ. We want to be leaders who are equipping and deploying the flock into where they live, work, and play.

## **Multiplication**

As we build gospel-centered relationships, are being transformed by the gospel, and reaching those far from Christ, we will need to multiply our efforts. Healthy groups will strive for multiplication when the time is right. We aim for multiplication so that we can continue to invest in our flock in a meaningful way and create space for those outside of Christ. As groups grow, new leaders will be identified and trained to lead the group that multiplies. This leader will be coached, trained and sent.

# Member Pursuit

GUIDELINES & PROGRESSION



## Member Pursuit Report

Please go through your Community Group "Committed" roster and categorize everybody into one of the following categories:

**(E) "Engaged"** = Attends the weekly Community Group gathering 3-4 times per month

**(F) "Fringe"** = Attends the weekly Community Group gathering once every 4-6 weeks

**(DE) "Disengaged"** = Rarely (if ever) attends the weekly Community Group gathering

**(T) "Transferred to a Different Community Group"** = Switched groups; please provide the name of new group if you know it

**(M) "Moved Away or Attending Another Church"** = Moved out of the area or is attending a different church; please provide any info you have on location and/or name of new church

Simply write the code for the appropriate category code next to the individual's/family's name.

Please complete this report and bring it with you to the next Shepherd Huddle. Please be prepared to speak to how you will pursue those whom you categorize as "Fringe" and "Disengaged" over the course of the next few months.

# Pursuing Sheep Who Stray

When a member of your Community Group begins walking in unrepentant sin through immoral behavior or ongoing lack of church attendance, the Shepherd Leader should follow these guidelines and steps when pursuing their straying brother or sister. Remember, as the Community Group Shepherd Leader, you must be the spiritual 'first-responder' when a member of your flock begins walking in sin.

What is the basis of our pursuit for straying church members? The guidelines and progression for member pursuit (as explained in this document) come directly out of our Lord's command for His churches found in Matthew 18:12-20.

## Matthew 18: 12-20

*"12 What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? 13 And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. 14 So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.*

*15 "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."*

# The Motivation, Goal & Tone *of Member Pursuit*

THE MOTIVATION behind our pursuit is a deep love for Christ's name, Christ's church, and our straying brother or sister who is walking down a dangerous path. Since all who confess Christ as Lord represent His name before the world, our pursuit is fueled by a love for Christ's own reputation. Since the sin of one part of the body affects the entire body, our pursuit is fueled by our love for the local body of Christ. And since the way of rebellion always ends in destruction, our pursuit is fueled by love for our straying brother or sister.

THE ULTIMATE GOAL of our pursuit is that the straying brother or sister would be fully restored to a right walk with God and to fellowship within the MacArthur Blvd community. We always pursue one another with a spirit and aim of restoration. The goal is never to kick somebody out of the church but rather is always to see him or her fully restored.

THE TONE of our pursuit is always one of urgency, humility, and patience. We go in a spirit of urgency since we recognize the serious nature of sin. We do not procrastinate engaging in conversations that are needed since we understand the destructive force sin can have in a life, family, church, and community. We go in a spirit of humility, knowing that it is only by the grace of God that we are not the ones walking down the path of rebellion.

We do not go with an attitude of superiority or judgmentalism as if we could never be in the same situation as our brother or sister. We understand that we too are only sinners saved by the grace of God. Finally, we go in a spirit of patience, willing to take the time and effort that is often needed for the process of restoration to run its course. While there may be scenarios when swift action is needed, as a loving shepherd we plod the long and difficult trail of repentance alongside our brother or sister. We forgive, forbear, and recognize that the process of restoration often takes several weeks or months.

## **A Word of Caution**

Throughout this entire process, be careful not to fall into the sin of gossip. Gossip is a significant temptation throughout these types of situations. Prayer requests become a very easy time to discuss matters that should not be discussed in a group setting. Be very careful that you only discuss the matter in which you are engaged with the people involved in the process of working toward restoration.

Ephesians 4:29 "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."

Proverbs 16:28 "A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends."

# The Progression

## *for Member Pursuit*

### Stage 1

Matthew 18:15 "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother."

**PROBLEM:** The Shepherd Leader discovers a group member is walking in unrepentant sin through immoral behavior or ongoing lack of church attendance.

**PURSUIT:** The Shepherd Leader (and their spouse if the straying member is of the opposite sex) should meet with the straying member in person to discuss the reason for concern. There may be scenarios when a mature group member other than the Shepherd Leader who has a closer relationship with the straying member should be the one who engages in this first meeting. *More than one meeting by the Shepherd Leader and/or group member will likely be necessary before proceeding to stage 2.*

#### ***Counsel for Stage 1 Meetings:***

- Be sure you read the beginning of this section entitled, "The Motivation, Goal, and Tone of Member Pursuit" and "A Word of Caution" before you meet with your brother or sister.
- Make the primary thrust of your conversation one of concern for the individual rather than accusation.
- Be gentle but direct about the specific actions in their life that are concerning you. Be ready to demonstrate biblically why these actions are sinful. In conversations such as these it is tempting to speak with vague language regarding the sin in their life. Fight this urge. The more specific and concrete you can be regarding the sin you see in their life the more likely the conversation will result in redemptive resolution. Be gentle and loving, but be direct.
- Be careful to avoid making assumptions and jumping to conclusions. Communicate what you are seeing in their life that is concerning you and allow them to talk about their situation. Listen more than you speak.
- Remember that the goal is always restoration. Be ready to extend grace when confession and repentance occurs.
- Spend ample time praying for the interaction and the straying member before and after you meet with them.

When it becomes clear from your conversation(s) with your sinning brother or sister that there is no intent to genuinely repent from their sin, proceed to stage 2.

---

---

## Stage 2

Matthew 18:16 "But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses."

**PROBLEM:** The straying member has not responded with biblical repentance from the stage 1 conversation(s).

**PURSUIT:** The Shepherd Leader takes another member of their Community Group and the two meet with the straying member together.

### ***Counsel for Stage 2 Meetings:***

- Much of the same counsel from the stage 1 meetings will apply in this stage as well. Take time to review those guidelines prior to this meeting.
- The tone of this conversation should still be one of concern for the individual but, given their lack of repentance from the stage 1 conversation(s), a higher sense of urgency should be conveyed. During this stage, it should be communicated to the sinning brother or sister that as a church, we have a God-given responsibility to hold them accountable for their lack of repentance. Take them to Matthew 18:15-17 in order to demonstrate why the church body is responding to their sin in this manner.
- Make it abundantly clear that the motivation behind our reproof is a genuine love for them and desire to see them come off a path that leads to destruction. Also make it clear that the goal of this effort is **NOT** to remove people from the church but to see them fully restored to a healthy walk with the Lord and into fellowship with our church family. Make sure they know that we are ready to bestow the same abundant grace on them that was bestowed on us by God upon repentance.
- Continue to allow the Bible to drive the accountability. Continually take them back to the Scriptures to demonstrate biblically why their action is sin. Make every effort to lead them to interact directly with the Scriptures rather than merely discussing their and your own opinions, thoughts, and/or cultural trends. Establish the Bible as our supreme authority.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

- Try to determine whether they are simply rebelling against the teaching of the Bible or if they genuinely disagree with the way you are interpreting or applying the biblical teaching to their own situation. If it is the latter, make sure your understanding of the relevant passages is accurate. Commit this to prayer; ask God for discernment; seek the counsel of the pastors or other mature Christians. When doing so, you do not need to discuss with others the details of the situation you are in with your sinning brother or sister, just discuss the proper understanding of the biblical passages.
- By the conclusion of this meeting, the sinning brother or sister should have a clear understanding that: (1) according to God’s word their action is sinful, (2) our genuine desire is for them to have the full blessing of God on their lives, (3) if they continue down the path of repentance, we will continue down the path of discipline given by Christ in Matthew 18:15-17, and (4) that the way back into a right relationship with God and with the church is through repentance.

If the straying member does not respond with biblical repentance from this meeting(s), proceed to stage 3.

### Stage 3

*Matthew 18: 17 “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.”*

**PROBLEM:** The straying member has not responded with repentance after multiple meetings that have included multiple members of the Community Group.

**PURSUIT:** The Shepherd Leader should make the situation known to the Pastor of Spiritual Development. The pastoral staff will then determine if additional meetings are needed by a pastor and/or the Shepherd Leader and will advise the Community Group leaders how to move forward.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

MACARTHUR BLVD BAPTIST CHURCH

macarthur**blvd**.org