



# Community Group

## LAUNCH CURRICULUM



Church Family,

At Lake Oconee Presbyterian Church we aspire to be a church that equips the church to be rooted in the Gospel and reach the community for the renewal of the world. We seek to accomplish this vision by living out the Gospel in word and deed with the hope that God will bring healing, renewal, and peace to Lake Oconee and to the nations for His glory. This means we seek to reach people with the Gospel, to root them in a Gospel foundation, to renew them through Gospel transformation, and to release them for Gospel multiplication. This type of comprehensive restoration happens when our community gathers, grows, and goes on mission together.

In this six-week curriculum<sup>1</sup>, we're going to focus on how we grow as a community on mission to reach our community. The six-week study that you are holding is rooted in the four core aspects of Community Group life:

- × The Word
- × Prayer
- × Demonstrating the gospel
- × Declaring the gospel

We hope this study will clarify the purpose of Community Groups: to become a community of disciples on mission with God who gather, grow, and go make disciples through gospel demonstration and conversation. Additionally, we hope this tool helps our church family develop intentional, everyday practices of spiritual renewal.

May the Lord of love compel us to abide deeply in His love and bear fruit for His glory as we gather, grow, and go together!

Blessings,



Mike Palombo  
Assistant Pastor  
Lake Oconee Presbyterian Church

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<sup>1</sup> This curriculum has been adapted from Todd Engstrom's *Missional Community Launch Curriculum*.

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## How to use this curriculum:

1. This curriculum was written so that anyone can facilitate it with little or no preparation.
2. **Start each study on time.** Otherwise, you'll run out of time right when it's getting good.
3. Each study should last around **45-60 minutes**. Don't get bogged down. Provide opportunities for several people to give various answers before moving on.
4. Each paragraph should be **read out loud** to the whole group. If there is confusion, read the paragraph again and discuss it.
5. Each question should be **asked out loud**. Follow up questions should be discussed one at a time, so don't read all the questions aloud all at once.
6. If you're having trouble getting responses to questions, it can be helpful to **break the group in half**. Then discuss the questions and reconvene to report the answers.
7. It's okay if someone disagrees with something or someone but **disagree without being disagreeable**. Keep in mind that this curriculum reflects the theology, vision, and mission of Lake Oconee Presbyterian Church.
8. There are many quotes from the book **Total Church** by Tim Chester and Steve Timmis. We've referenced this book often because we believe it is the best explanation of our vision for Community Groups. We recommend reading it and putting it into practice!

# 1 The Word

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## Introduction

The Bible is God's Word and is foundational and formative for God's people. It is the first aspect of Community Groups. In today's study, we'll look at Psalm 1, a chapter that reveals the joy and benefit of personally committing to the Word of God..

## Question

Why is it difficult to establish a habit of personal worship in the Word of God? What has helped you study, apply and worship God in His Word?

Let's look at what the Christian faith says about knowing God.

## Read the quote below:

*God reveals himself by his Spirit through his word. We do not meet God in the stillness: we meet him in his word. We are not nearer to God in a garden: we draw near to God through his word (Deut 30:14). It is Scripture breathed by the Spirit of God that is "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." This is what makes us "thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). And it is the word of God that brings hope and change to the human heart. It is the word of God that revives our souls.*  
Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church*, 142

The Bible is the only place where we know for sure we are hearing from God.

## Read the Word: Read Psalm 1 out loud to the group.

### The Blessed

<sup>1</sup> *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;*<sup>2</sup> *but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.*<sup>3</sup> *He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.*

### The Wicked

<sup>4</sup> *The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.*<sup>5</sup> *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;*

### Final Verdict

<sup>6</sup> *for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*

## Discuss the Text

1. How is the blessed (or happy) man described in vv. 1-3?



2. Verse 1 talks about three different things the blessed man avoids. What are they? How are they different? What are some specific examples of each?
3. Verse 2 is key in this psalm. What is the difference between delighting in God's word versus just reading God's word?
4. Describe the tree in v. 3. What are the benefits for a tree to be planted by streams of water? According to Psalm 1, how does a person become like this tree?
5. In vv. 4-5, how are the wicked described? What is chaff, and how does it characterize the life of a wicked person? How is it a contrast to the blessed man?
6. In v. 6, what is God's final verdict for each group? In which group do you place yourself? Look at 2 Corinthians 5:21, and describe how one goes from being wicked to being righteous?
7. What other things in this passage stuck out to you?

**Apply the Truth:** Someone read the following paragraphs out loud:

Psalm 1 is teaching us how a man or woman of God relates to God's Word. Obeying Psalm 1 requires more than agreeing to attend a Bible study. It calls us to deeply delight in the Word of God through meditation that we may experience transformation.

*Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself, the various things one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God. It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communion with God.*

*Its purpose is to clear one's mental and spiritual vision of God, and to let his truth make its full and proper impact on one's mind and heart.*

J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 23

This type of deep meditation in the presence of God leading to transformation in the likeness of God can happen whenever we open God's Word. We want to begin with seeing God's glory and His gracious work to save and help. We discover God's design and ways we rebel against His design. We reflect on the resulting brokenness we experience when we rebel and the deceptive reasons we keep rebelling. Finally, we consider what the text tells us about our identity and the action steps we take in response to His gracious Word.

We can meditate and apply each text by asking four summary questions after reading it:

1. Who is God and what has He done?
2. What is God's design and how do we rebel?
3. What is broken and how am I deceived?
4. Who am I and what must I do in response?

If you find yourself pressed for time, then simply ask the first and fourth question. Let us worship God through His Word, behold God's glory, and become like Him. <sup>18</sup>And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit," (2 Corinthians 3:18).

### **Becoming a Community Group**

Therefore, as a Community Group, we will commit to regularly delighting in God's Word. We will seek the Lord individually in personal meditation throughout the week. Whenever we gather around the Word of God, we will practice deep meditation leading to transformation. We commit to abiding with God in the Bible together in a way that flows from God's grace and is motivated by God's grace.

### **Follow-up Exercise**

This next week read Psalm 62:5-8 and answer the four summary questions listed above.

## Reaction/Response

What is your reaction/response to the “Word” aspect of Community Group?

# 2 Prayer

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## Introduction

Prayer is communication to God. God is a person, not an impersonal force. He wants us to relate to Him like a person. He speaks to us specifically through His word and we speak to Him when we pray, asking Him for all things. Because nothing that lasts can be done apart from Him, prayer is another aspect of Community Group.

## Question

If you pray, what is the content of most of your prayers? What do you think would be the ingredients of a good prayer life?

## Have someone read the quote below:

*Biblical spirituality is not a spirituality of silence; it is a spirituality of passionate petition. If we are engaged with the world around us, we will care about that world. We will be passionate about people's needs, our holiness, and God's glory. We will not be still in prayer.*  
Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church*, 147-148

## Discuss the Text: Lord's Prayer Exercise (Matthew 6:5-13)<sup>2</sup>

The Lord Jesus has given us a model to pray that weaves together God's honor, God's kingdom, God's provision, God's forgiveness, and God's Power. The Lord's prayer is not just a fixed prayer we can pray together but a framework to help us to pray together. In this exercise we will breakdown the Lord's prayer and pray the Lord's prayer as a framework.

1. In Matthew 6:5-8 what are two cautions and corrections Jesus mentions about prayer?

## Access to Prayer: Drawing near to our Father, the King

*"Our Father in heaven"*

2. How does God's fatherly love encourage us to pray and assure us God *will* answer our prayers?
3. How does God's kingly rule in heaven encourage us to pray and assure us God *can* answer our prayers (see Psalm 115:1-3 and 2 Chronicles 20:5-6)?

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<sup>2</sup> This practice is adapted from *INSourcing* by Randy Pope.



**God's Honor:** acknowledging His worth, glory and majesty

*"hallowed be Your name."*

4. Before asking request of God, we revel in God's character, asking His name to be exalted and lifted up in our hearts and among our people. How might beholding God's greatness shape our prayers?

**God's Kingdom:** acknowledging His priority in the world and in your life

*"Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*

5. God the Creator King sent Jesus to transfer us from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of His beloved son through His redemption (Col. 1:13-14). King Jesus is right now "making all things new" and rebuilding God's ruined kingdom on earth like the perfect kingdom in heaven. Read Isaiah 11:1-10. What will life be like in God's perfected kingdom and how should we pray and live on mission now to see God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven?

**God's Provision:** acknowledging His trustworthiness to provide all we need.

*"Give us this day daily bread."*

6. After reveling in God's character and being redirected by God's kingdom, we make request consistent with His character and kingdom. Read Proverbs 30:7-9. What does it mean to ask God for our daily bread and what effect will this have on our daily lives?

**God's Forgiveness:** acknowledging your repentance and need of mercy.

*"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."*

7. When the Lord calls us to ask for His provision before forgiving our sin, He reminds us that He is a gracious God who loves to bless unworthy people. Read Colossians 2:13-15. How does acknowledging our indebtedness to God humble us and why can we be sure that our debt will be forgiven?

**God's Power:** acknowledging your dependence and need of grace.

*"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."*

8. In this last petition we ask that the Lord whose kingdom, power, and glory endure forever would help us to overcome temptation. According to Ephesians 2:1-2, what three enemies keep us from living out God's kingdom way and why do we need God to deliver us from evil?

## Apply the Truth

Prayer should not be limited to one certain place or time. Community Groups pray at all kinds of different times and places. We are always wanting to see God save somebody, always wrestling with one sin or another, always hoping for God to deliver us from some trouble, always eager to give Him glory and adore Him.

One rut we can get into is spending far too long collecting prayer requests at the end of each Community Group meeting. If something needs to be prayed for, it needs to be brought up and prayed for immediately in the group. Needs will surface as people become more open and vulnerable through more time together.

## Becoming a Community Group

Therefore, as a Community Group, we will commit to knowing and praying for one another as we meet together. You could even use the Lord's prayer as a framework for praying at each meeting. Simply adore God for who He is and what He has done, pray for the advancement of God's kingdom mission in the world and through your community, ask for the regular needs of your community, and seek the Lord's forgiveness through confession and help in temptation.

Let's pray this framework now.

Our Father in Heaven, Hallowed be Your name:

Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven:

Give us this day our daily bread:

Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors:

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen

Keep in mind that God doesn't save us and promise us eternal life because we have a good prayer life. We have the promise of eternal life because of faith in the perfect Savior. Jesus earned all of God's favor by doing all things perfectly. So, let's remind each other of the grace of Jesus, that He died like a criminal to pay for our sins and our failures. Then He rose again, securing our place in God's love. If we are in Christ by faith, we will be made like Him when He returns for us. Now we pray, with the full knowledge that God hears us and loves us.

### Follow-Up Exercise: Praying while W.A.L.K.I.N.G

When the Lord called Israel to conquer the land of Jericho, he called them to walk, to pray, to blow the trumpet, and watch God work. In a similar manner, we also walk, pray, proclaim the Gospel, and watch God work. We do not seek the destruction of a people, but the restoration of a people alienated from God. As we seek to live on mission, we must realize that there are walls built up in our hearts that keep us from living on mission. There are also walls in the hearts of the people we are reaching that create barriers of belief. These walls are too great for us to overcome. As we live on mission, we must regularly pray that God would break down these walls and build up true faith as we build up laborers to grow and go on mission.

Sometime this month, gather your team in pairs and pray while walking. Begin by reading one of these mission psalms to focus your heart on God's glory. Then use this acronym W.A.L.K.I.N.G. to pray for people in the place where you are living on mission while walking throughout that place.

Psalms 2, 67, 96, 22:22-32, 71:12-24, 78:1-8, 96, 145

Pray for...

**W-alls** to be broken down for Gospel proclamation and reception.

**A-ffections** to be awakened and stirred for the glory of God, the Gospel, and people.

**L-aborers** to be raised up and sent to the harvest.

**K-ingdom** advancement among broken people and broken places.

**I-dols** to be replaced with true worship of God.

**N-eeds** to be met in people's lives.

**G-rowth** in God's Word and prayer.

Come back together and debrief:

What walls came to mind?

What did you notice about people and places as you walked?

What people and concerns were on your heart?

## Reaction/Response

What is your reaction/response to the “Prayer” aspect of Community Group?

# 3 Demonstrating the Gospel

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## Introduction

This is the gospel: Jesus lived, died, and rose again for us. He did this to save His desperately needy people from their sins when they couldn't save themselves.

We demonstrate this gospel – this “good news” – when we know and meet needs. Yes, every person has needs, but we're especially talking about people who are living in some kind of poverty, experiencing serious lack, isolation, or powerlessness. Remember that poverty doesn't just mean financial poverty. You can have physical, emotional, social, and spiritual poverty. We care about meeting these needs because this brings attention to Jesus. Demonstrating the gospel is an aspect of Community Groups.

## Question

When have you received help from somebody? What was that like? What makes it hard to receive help? What makes it hard to help others?

## Read the quote below:

*Jesus' eating with sinners is a wonderful declaration of the riches of God's grace. But notice how this grace plays out in practice. It results in Jesus spending time with the despised and marginalized. It means Jesus has time for the needy. They are his priority. He does not focus on the professional classes, the lawyers, the doctors, the respectable middle classes. Such people are welcomed if they will associate with the ragtag group who make up the community of Jesus – after all, Luke himself is a doctor. But Jesus goes out of his way to welcome the poor, the marginalized, and the needy. And Jesus expects us to do the same.*  
Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church*, 73

Let's see how Jesus explains this concept.

## Read the Word Have someone read aloud this passage

### Luke 10:25-37

<sup>25</sup> And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>26</sup> He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” <sup>27</sup> And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>28</sup> And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

<sup>29</sup> But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” <sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite,

when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.<sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.<sup>34</sup> He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.<sup>35</sup> And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'<sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"<sup>37</sup> He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

### Discuss the Text

1. Why do you think the lawyer asked Jesus who his neighbor really is? How might self-justification affect the way we love people or keep us from loving people?
2. According to this passage, what does God want from those who seek to please Him?
3. List all the needs of the man who was beaten and robbed. List everything it cost the Samaritan to meet the man's needs.
4. How would you define a neighbor and what it means to love as a neighbor according to this story? How is this different from how we normally define a neighbor?
5. What might be some dangers of trying to help people without accurately knowing their needs? How do you accurately know somebody's needs?

### Apply the Truth Someone read the following paragraphs out loud.

Jesus cares about meeting every need. In Luke 7, John the Baptist wasn't quite sure what to make of Jesus, so he sent his disciples to ask Him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"



Jesus answered, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.” Jesus is basically saying, “Wherever the Messiah is reigning, you will see people being restored like this.” Even today, when we know and meet other peoples’ needs – their physical, social, material, and emotional needs – we are telling the world, “The King is reigning here among God’s people!”

This BLESS acronym clarifies how we can serve our community:

**B-efriend:** Build a relationship with someone where needs can be expressed.

**L-isten** to where they came from (past hurt) & where they are going (future goals).

**E-ncourage** them about personal dignity, present help/responsibility, & future possibilities.

**S-hare the Gospel:** Share forgiveness for the past, help in the present, & hope for the future.

**S-erve:** Work together with them to address their needs and accomplish their goals.

So, because Community Groups want to bring attention to Jesus, we care about truly knowing and meeting peoples’ needs. Being a neighbor has more to do with your actions than your address.

### Becoming a Community Group

Therefore, as a Community Group, we will commit to knowing and meeting needs. You can’t help someone as you drive by them. You can help someone by getting to know them. The best way to do this is to meet needs right in your own neighborhood and immediate circles (coworkers, teammates, etc.).

What are some specific needs in your own neighborhood and circles?

\*If you don’t know, it’s time to meet some neighbors and find out! \*

If your group is spread throughout the city, it might be easier to connect with larger organizations in your area like Atlas, Boys and Girls Club, Habitat for Humanity, etc. and find some places to serve. It’s helpful for Community Groups to serve and meet needs together, but not every person in the group has to meet needs in the same place.

### Follow-up Exercise

Choose one of the specific needs in your neighborhood and do one thing to address it.

## Reaction/Response

What is your reaction/response to the “Demonstrate” aspect of Community Group?

# 4 Declaring the Gospel

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## Introduction

The message about Jesus is the gospel, which means good news! Good news is fundamentally different from good advice. Good advice declares what you should do to help yourself. Good news declares what someone has done for you. Helpless sinners don't need good advice; they need good news. Because Christianity has the best news, declaring this news together is another aspect of Community Groups.

## Question

Besides Jesus, what topic(s) do you genuinely want people to care about and consider? Think of topics you normally get excited to talk about and give your opinion about. Why is it important? How do you try to bring it up?

## Read the quote below:

*Francis of Assisi is alleged to have said, "Preach the gospel always; if necessary, use words." That may be a great medieval sound bite, but it falls short of what the Bible teaches about evangelism...There is a tendency in some quarters today to promote a kind of evangelism without proclamation. Acts of service are done or people are invited to experience Christian worship. But without words of explanation these are like signposts pointing nowhere or, worse still, signposts pointing to our good works. The gospel is good news – a message to be proclaimed, a truth to be taught, a word to be spoken, and a story to be told.*

Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church*, 54

Communicating the actual message of the gospel is crucial! Let's see how the Bible makes this clear.

## Read the Word & Discuss the Text: Read the passages out loud and discuss them

### Colossians 1:13-25

*<sup>13</sup> He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

*<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

*<sup>21</sup> And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, <sup>23</sup> if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.*

1. What do these verses reveal about the identity, work, and worth of Jesus?
2. According to these verses, what has Jesus saved us from and what does He save us to?
3. According to Colossians 1:21-23, what does it mean that Jesus reconciles us and how do we receive this? How does this reconciliation work change our status and relationship with God and each other?
4. Jesus has not just come to reconcile us to God, but to reconcile all things in heaven and on earth. What do you think it means that this peace-making blood of Jesus reconciles all things in heaven and on earth? How should this impact the way we relate to all things on earth now?

All those who have been reconciled to God become ministers and messengers of reconciliation.

### **Romans 10:13-14**

*<sup>13</sup> "...everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." <sup>14</sup> How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?*

5. According to Paul how must we spread the Gospel for people to be saved and how must they respond to be saved? Why is it necessary that we use words to spread the Gospel?

### **Context for Acts 4:19-20**

When Peter and John were dragged before the highest Jewish court, they demanded they "not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus."

## **Acts 4:19-20**

*<sup>19</sup> But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, <sup>20</sup> for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.*

6. What reasons, external and internal, might have intimidated the apostles into silence about Jesus? What intimidates you into silence about Jesus?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. What motives overcome these fears of intimidation, encouraging us to speak?

### **Apply the Truth** Someone read the following paragraphs

Jesus began His ministry by calling His disciples with the words, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men," (Matt. 4:19). Jesus' final words as He left His disciples were, "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," (Matt. 28:19-20). Jesus cares about declaring the gospel!

This is why Charles Spurgeon said, "If Jesus is precious to you, you will not be able to keep your good news to yourself. Every Christian here is either a missionary or an impostor." To love Jesus means that we think often about Him and talk about Him with people. Making disciples, declaring the gospel, and teaching the commands of Jesus are not an optional part of being a Christian.

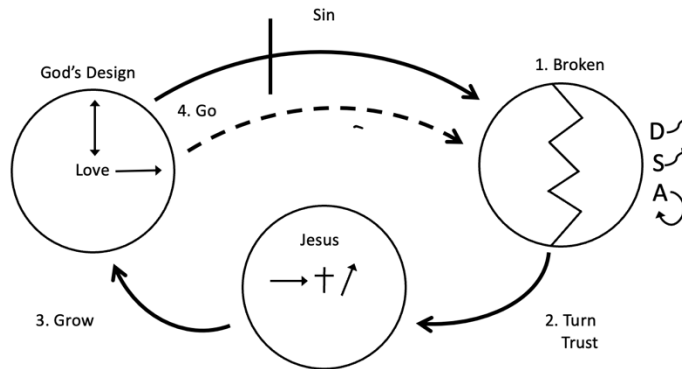
### **Becoming a Community Group**

Therefore, as a Community Group, we will commit to obeying Jesus by declaring the good news about Him together. Now, don't worry; there are practices to help you grow in this that we will explore in the next two lessons. But a Community Group is compelled by the love of God to declare the gospel to the people around them.

If you were going to start telling one person about Jesus, who would it be? What is the next step to make that happen?

## Follow-up Exercise: Sharing the Gospel with Three Circles

Check out the illustration of the Three Circles Gospel Tract:



Scan the QR Code below to watch a Three Circles Gospel Presentation:



## Reaction/Response

What is your reaction/response to the “Declare” aspect of Community Group?’



# 5 Defining Community Group

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## Introduction

The Word, prayer, demonstrating the gospel, and declaring the gospel all play a vital role in Community Groups. Since we're aiming at obeying God, it helps to practice these things together. But we haven't yet put the whole Community Group picture together.

So, What is a Community Group? Here is a simple definition:

1. A community of disciples on mission with God
2. who gather, grow, and go make disciples
3. through Gospel demonstration and conversation

We grow as a loving community and go love the community

We seek to reach a people in a place (where we live, work, learn, or play) with purpose.

## Question

What small community has had the greatest impact on your life, for good or for ill? What are some reasons that it was so powerful?

## Read the quote below:

*Before they are preachers, leaders or church planters, the disciples are to be lovers! This is the test of whether or not they have known Jesus. This remains the case today: this cross-love is the primary, dynamic test of whether or not we have understood the gospel word and experienced its power...It is our cross-love for each other that proclaims the truth of the gospel to a watching and skeptical world. Our love for one another, to the extent that it imitates and conforms to the cross-love of Jesus for us, is evangelistic.*

Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church*, 56-7

Knowing, accepting, loving, and serving folks in our Community Group plays a major role in our mission to demonstrate and declare the gospel. Let's see how this all works together.

## Read the Word and Discuss the Texts

### Acts 2:41-47

<sup>41</sup> So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. <sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all who believed were together and had all things in common. <sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> And day by day, attending

*the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,<sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

1. What words would you use to describe this community's love and commitment to each other?
2. How does the community in this text specifically live out each aspect of Community Group spelled out in the definition above?
3. List the things you think you'd love about this kind of community.
4. List the things you think would be hard about living in community like this.
5. In v.47, what are the results of this community's life together? How is this different from most church small groups you've attended or heard about before?

### **John 13:34-35**

<sup>34</sup> *A new commandment I [Jesus] give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.* <sup>35</sup> *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*

6. According to this verse, what happens when Christians love each other? How do you think this works?

*Mission must involve not only contact between unbelievers and individual Christians, but between unbelievers and the Christian community. We want to build relationships with unbelievers. But we also need to introduce people to the network of relationships that make up that believing community so that they see Christian community in action.*

Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church*, 59

## Ephesians 4:31-32

<sup>31</sup> *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.* <sup>32</sup> *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

7. This short excerpt comes from a longer section of Ephesians 4 where Paul is teaching the Ephesian church how to live in community. How will obeying these verses benefit a community?
8. Why is it so important to think about how Jesus forgave us when we're trying to forgive and accept others in our community? Why would a whole community with this mindset be a powerful witness?

### Apply the Truth Someone read the following paragraphs

A Community Group is, first and foremost, a community of people. It's not a weekly event any more than your family is. You have family meetings, but your family is the people. Your Community Group is your community of people, not your meetings. This community exists to love God and love people.

A Community Group gathers in two ways:

**Family Gatherings** are where Community Groups gather to grow and encourage one another to go on mission. Just like families have focused meetings to encourage, coordinate, and connect, so these groups meet at least bi-weekly and devote time to growing in Scripture, praying for the needs of the community/mission, and strategizing their mission.

**Missional Gatherings** are where members of a Community Group gather to make Gospel connections leading to Gospel conversations. We gather initially on their turf, meeting non-Christians where they feel most comfortable, doing what they love. If our church is our first place, and our Community Group is our second place, we are meeting them in a neutral third place in the community (at a neighborhood function, a cookout, at a park, watching a game, etc.).

Eventually we welcome them on our turf, into our homes and around our community. This will often start individually as people make one to one connection with non-Christians in their community. Soon after making individual connections, we want to intentionally connect these people to others in our Community Group. When trust is built and connections established, we host larger Community Group Missional Gatherings with our whole group and those we seek to reach with the Gospel.

In Scripture, God has commanded us to “not neglect meeting together” (Heb 10:23-25). We need to help each other endure and thrive in the faith. That means we need communities that value the Word, prayer, demonstrating and declaring the gospel. That’s what we’re aiming at!

### **Becoming a Community Group**

Therefore, as a Community Group, we will commit to meeting together as a family, serving neighbors, praying for each other, welcoming each other’s non-Christian friends individually and as a group outside of our regular family meetings.

### **Follow-up Exercise**

Pair up with a member from your Community Group and spend time with someone you are trying to reach in a neutral third place doing something they may enjoy.

### **Reaction/Response**

What is your reaction/response to this picture of Community Group?

# 6 Small Steps in Community and Mission

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## Introduction

As we bring our time to a close for this launch of Community Groups, we have set the table with some pretty lofty goals. We want to love as a family of disciples, welcoming one another and caring for one another as we would our own families. We want to grow daily and as a group in the Word of God and prayer. We want to go out in our community together and demonstrate the Gospel through tangible expressions of love and acts of service. We want to declare the Gospel in regular conversations with non-Christians. We want to sprint ahead, but often all of this happens one step at a time. The important thing is we begin the journey together.

## Question

What are some fears you experience when you consider entering into a new community of disciples and what fears do you experience when connecting with a community of non-Christians?

## Read the quote below:

*Friendship arises out of mere companionship when two or more of the companions discover that they have in common some insight or interest or even taste which the others do not share and which, till that moment, each believed to be his own unique treasure (or burden). The typical expression of opening friendship would be something like, "What? You too? I thought I was the only one."*

C.S. Lewis, *Four Loves*, 244-248

As we enter a Community Group among Christians, we have more in common than different. But even among estranged image bearers of God we share common longings and groanings. The challenge is to move slowly and steadily from casual connections to Gospel conversations through the common road of our fallen yet created selves. As sinners saved by grace, we have plenty in common with fellow sinners to begin these conversations if we simply notice, listen, and engage with compassion.

## Read the Word and Discuss the Text

### Ephesians 4:1-7

*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—<sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. <sup>7</sup> But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.*

1. According to Paul, what are the various things which we have in common with Christians that should be the foundation for our connection?
2. How does humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another help us to maintain unity as a community? Which one of these do you find most challenging to practice?
3. Though we have much in common, each of us has been given unique gracious gifts by Christ to build up his body and assist us in walking “in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called.” Why is it important that we understand our unique design, gifts, talents, and interest? How do these differences strengthen our community?

#### **Colossians 4:2-6**

*<sup>2</sup> Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. <sup>3</sup> At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— <sup>4</sup> that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.*

*<sup>5</sup> Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. <sup>6</sup> Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*

4. As we take small steps in mission, it is crucial that we begin and continue steadfastly in prayer. How are we to pray for the mission according to Colossians 4:2-4 and why is being watchful and thankful an important part of this process?
5. What are some foolish and wise ways that we could walk toward outsiders and how does our walk around outsiders affect our witness toward outsiders?
6. What does it mean for us to have gracious speech toward outsiders? How might gracious words pave the way for shifting a conversation toward the grace of Christ’s saving work?



## **Apply the Truth: Mini-steps and mini-decisions in mission**

*In this book I have developed the thesis that evangelism is a process including planting and cultivating as well as reaping...*

*Usually, what people are looking for is a one-step launch question—something that will carry them gracefully from a dead stop into an effective discussion about Christ in a single motion...*

*Rather than looking for a single step, it is better to think in terms of mini-decisions. If evangelism is a process, then our function is to accompany our acquaintances on the road to Christ, showing them the way. We must walk the road with them, a step at a time. So we think in terms of steps, or mini-decisions.*

Jim Peterson, *Living Proof*, 148-150

### **Read the Mini-steps and Mini-Decisions below:**

#### **Mini-steps in Mission**

- I. Gospel Cultivation: Prepare the heart
  - a. Pray for the lost.
  - b. Learn reasons/Bible convictions for mission.
  - c. Notice the beauty and brokenness of people.
- II. Gospel Connection: Make initial contact
  - a. Be regularly visible and accessible.
  - b. Greet people kindly.
  - c. Engage small talk.
  - d. Create shared experiences.
  - e. Do what they love.
- III. Gospel Demonstration: Modeling Christ
  - a. Model Christlike character.
  - b. Model Christlike serving.
- IV. Gospel Conversation: Engage deeper dialogue
  - a. Ask open-ended questions.
  - b. Listen actively.
  - c. Identify as a Christian.
  - d. Discuss beauty and brokenness of world.
  - e. Discuss worldview topics.
    - i. What is the design of the world?
    - ii. What is broken in the world?
    - iii. What solutions are possible?
  - f. Ask to pray for them.
  - g. Discuss God topics.
    - i. How did God design the world?
    - ii. How did brokenness enter?
    - iii. What is Christ's solution?
  - h. Share the Gospel
- V. Gospel Exploration: Discover the Bible
  - a. Discuss Bible based on barriers to belief.
  - b. Discover the Gospel in the storyline of Scripture.
- VI. Gospel Conversion: Call to repentance/faith.

#### **Mini-Decisions by non-Christian**

- I. About the relationship.
  - I bet all Christians are judgmental, narrowminded, boring, and mean spirited.
  - He's okay.
  - I'd like to get to know him better.
  - I feel comfortable with him. He accepts me.
  - I'm going to find out why he's so different.
  - It seems that he gets his outlook on things from the Bible.
  - He's a Christian, but not like the rest I know.
  - Being a Christian sure has its advantages.
  - I like his friends. I envy their confidence.
  - I would like to belong to this community and believe what they believe.
- II. About the Bible
  - The Bible is an ancient book of myths and mistaken morals which are outdated and harmful.
  - The Bible might not be as bad as I thought.
  - It might be interesting to look at the Bible someday.
  - The Bible isn't impossible to understand after all!
  - The Bible does have some insights that make sense of the world.
  - What the Bible says about life fits my experience.
  - Jesus seems to be the key. I wonder who He really was?
  - Jesus is God.
  - Jesus is the only one who can forgive my sins by His life, death, and resurrection.
  - I will believe in Him.
  - I need to do what He says.

## Becoming a Community Group

Therefore, as a Community Group we will unite in our common connection in Christ and delight in the diversity of our group. We will learn to love and collaborate with the different people the Lord brings to our group. We will commit to learn together these missional practices and take the small steps together on mission. As we commit to these practices, we patiently trust the Lord to bring the fruit.

## Reaction/Response to Launch Curriculum

After learning more about Community Groups, how would you sum up the purpose and practices of these groups?

## Follow-up Exercise

How do you see yourself contributing to this group?

- ☐ **Regular attendee:** gathers, grows, and goes on mission with the group
- ☐ **Host/meal planner:** creates a welcoming space for growth & connection
- ☐ **Discussion facilitator:** guides the group in discussion of Bible & curriculum
- ☐ **Prayer leader:** coordinates prayer time & encourages prayer regularly
- ☐ **Mission mobilizer:** encourages & equips people to share the Gospel & serve