

I Group Meeting Time I

The goal for our Community Groups is to walk through everyday, ordinary life together with gospel intentionality. Therefore, Community Groups have to be more than a once a week meeting or Bible study. The people in a Community Group *do* study the Bible and push each other toward Jesus, but they also eat together, play together, serve together, and become family with one another.

As part of growing together as a group, we do highly value our group meeting times. This section will focus on how this time together should be structured. A typical group time may involve 4 elements: **Catch up on Life, Discuss the Scripture, Engage the Heart, and Review the Mission.** While you might not see every one of these elements each time your group gets together, this will be a good gauge for overall health as you look over the course of several weeks in group life.

1) Catch up on Life

Life is busy. We can become so overwhelmed by the normal processes of life on a day to day basis that we forget to come up for air. *Catching up on life* allows us to both personally share what has been happening in our spheres of influence over the last week while also investing in others and giving them this same opportunity. Most group meeting times will begin in a casual, laid back manner with a time to hang out as people arrive and share a meal together. This is a great time to be intentional about checking in with the different people in your group. Simply put, this should be a fun time of building friendships.

Helpful tip: As the meal comes to an end, a helpful way to guide your group to dig deeper is by asking the question, “How have you seen Jesus at work in your life this week?” The goal of this question is to celebrate Jesus and his work in our lives. We also want everyone to tell their story in light of God’s story. Jesus is always at work in us and around us, and we want to train ourselves to be aware of the active presence of God in our everyday lives. It ensures that our friendships are also being built around Jesus, and not simply our own natural commonalities.

2) Discuss the Scripture

We believe that it is essential for Christians to grow together spiritually as a community by studying the Bible together. This allows us to move beyond just hearing a sermon on Sunday to practically applying everything we have learned. And much of that application will be in how we relate to one another as church family. We often read the scripture from the previous Sunday and use discussion guides to help generate helpful, guided conversation. The goal is to practically apply the sermon to our everyday lives.

Discussing the sermon is our way of letting the Gatherings work for our group. We get to take

advantage of the study that went into the sermon, instead of asking everyone to spend an extra hour or more in “Community Group homework” each week. Using the sermon as our main content also puts everyone on an even playing field, which is very comforting for any new people who are hanging out with your group. If they heard the sermon on Sunday (or through our website), then they know they can follow along with our study and discussion. Even if they have not heard the sermon, most discussion guides are intuitive enough for people to jump right in.

3) Engage the Heart

We want to see our groups having more than just theoretical discussions; We want genuine repentance and change brought about by the Holy Spirit. The gospel does not simply change our actions, but should first and foremost change our hearts. The main focus of this time is confession and repentance. We want to make sure we are open and honest with one another about the conditions of our heart. This means we confess our sinful actions, but we are always looking to dig further to discover and repent of where our hearts are failing to believe the gospel. Some weeks our Group Guides will focus solely on this section of group life, often we will have a section on our Group Guide entitled “Discuss and Engage” that will be some mixture of discussion and heart level engagement in believing the gospel. Our goal in all of our study of Scripture is that it would truly penetrate to our hearts so that we respond with faith filled obedience.

It is important in the “Discuss and Engage” section that you serve your group by pushing towards personal and heart level responses questions. It is easy for a group to get into the habit of answering discussion questions generically: “Well, we all sin and should constantly seek to ask for forgiveness.” Seek to model applying questions personally because specific confession, forgiveness, and openness are needed as we apply the gospel to our hearts.

4) Review the Mission

A goal of being a Community Group is not just to grow in relationship with each other, but to become a catalyst together to engage in the mission of God: to make disciples by helping people take their next step toward Jesus. Community Groups should take time on a regular basis to discuss where Jesus has given them opportunities to share the gospel, as well as where they are intentionally focusing their time as a group to serve our city. Each group should identify a particular group, organization, business, or part of the city as a people or place to specifically bless with the good news of the gospel. In particular, you can use this time to talk about upcoming rhythms.

Developing Group Rhythms

Rhythms are the intentional ways we are going to cross paths. These rhythms help us to live life

together and keep discipleship in the context of everyday relationships. We also use this time to talk about the relationships we have with nonbelievers and how we can involve them in our community. We pray for our non-believing friends by name, and we pray for boldness to engage them with the good news of Jesus. We then plan intentional rhythms so we can invite those we are building with into our community. We want them to see and experience the love of Jesus through our relationships with one another.

By taking the time to discuss our opportunities for mission, it helps us guard against the possibility of seeing our Community Group as only existing for our benefit, instead of as an avenue for mission.