

Class overview

Content

- Week 1 – Why community groups?
- Week 2 – Know the Gospel: Bible study discussions
- Week 3 – Live the Gospel: Sharing our lives
- Week 4 – Advance the Gospel: Group on mission

Pre-work

Each week's pre-work gives you time to thoughtfully consider why and how you might lead a community group at Vintage Church. Each week's assignments should take you about 30 minutes, and please don't skip the reflection questions! Your time spent in this pre-work will build into our time together in class. Also, just so you know, weekly reading assignments are taken from books that would be helpful to you in the future.

What if I need to miss a week?

If you have a trip planned or end up getting sick one week and need to miss a meeting, that's totally fine! We have a couple options for making up the content you missed. You can either listen to the content recording or meet with Eric in the week following the Sunday you've missed.

If you know or suspect that you'll need to miss more than two meetings, then we'd recommend that you wait until the next time we offer the training.

What happens after the training?

Going through the training doesn't commit you to starting a community group. Following the training you can always opt to stay in your current community group and simply assist your current leader(s). However, if you go through the course and do decide to plant a group, or you want to think through that some more, then Eric will follow up with you about a tailored planting plan once the training is finished.



Session 1: Why community groups?

Intro: We're moving from why to how.

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

What does this passage say about our state before Jesus saved us vs. after Jesus saved us?

Before	After

Read Ephesians 2:11-22

What does this passage say about our state before Jesus saved us vs. after Jesus saved us?

Before	After



Big points:

- There is no context for individual salvation outside of corporate identity.
- Personal *and* corporate, not one or the other.
- Flow: Church > church > community group

The What/Why/How of the Church

What is the Church?

“The church is the community of all true believers for all time.” – Wayne Grudem¹

Why is the Church?

The church is most typically referred to as the called-out assembly. . the passive concept of “called out” underscores the fact that this community is formed by the Word. It does not come together as an aggregate of individuals who have determined to form such a society, but is summoned, gathered, and called out by God’s electing, redeeming, justifying, and renewing grace. Ecclesiology is not a topic that exists alongside the gospel, which needs to be related somehow to it. Rather, the gospel itself .. generates a community called the church. The attributes, marks, and mission of the church therefore form the threads of a single bolt of fabric that is woven by the Spirit through the gospel as it is delivered through Christ’s appointed means. – Michael Horton²

What is the church?

In the New Testament, the word “church” may be used to refer to a group of believers at any level, ranging from a very small group meeting in a private home (“the church in their house,” Rom. 16:5), to the church in an entire city (“the church of God that is in Corinth,” 1 Cor. 1:2), to the church in an entire region (“the church throughout all Judea,” Acts 9:31), to the church throughout the entire world (“Christ loves the church,” Eph. 5:25). “The community of God’s people considered at any level can rightly be called a church.”³

Despite the broad range, we typically use “church” to refer to a local congregation, a specific group of people who participate in the universal Church but who group up in a place based on shared belief, distinctives, and practices, and who are organized under pastors and other leaders (ex. deacons).

Aside: Church as organization or organism?

“The Church as an institution or organization. . is a means to an end, and this is found in the Church as an organism, the community of believers.” – Louis Berkhof⁴

› Example: tomato on a trellis

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 853.

² Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 828.

³ Grudem, 857-58.

⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 567.



How does the church be the church?

Three-fold, three-directional mission:⁵

1. Ministry to God: worship
2. Ministry to believers: nurture
3. Ministry to the world: evangelism and mercy

The mission of Vintage Church:

Vintage Church exists to make much of Jesus. We do that by making disciples who know the gospel, live the gospel, and advance the gospel.

Doubters, seekers, and followers are invited to become everything God designed them to be and see their city become everything God desires it to be.

Aside: Can a church be made up of doubters, seekers, and followers?

1. Church invisible vs. church visible: “The invisible church is the church as God sees it. . the visible church is the church as Christians on earth see it.”⁶
 - a. The church proper is only made up of those who profess faith in Christ.
 - b. However, the church always has nonbelieving members.
2. New Testament evidence: Acts 2:46–47; 10:33.
 - a. Conclusion: the church is true to her mission when nonbelievers are present

Part of the How: Community Groups

Community groups exist to help the people of our church carry out Christ’s mission for the church with a particular emphasis on the inter-relational aspects of that mission. Simply put, only so much of the church’s mission can occur on Sundays, so CGs exist to produce meaningful relationships that enable and nourish what happens the other six days of the week.

Three-fold mission of community groups:

1. Know the Gospel: study scripture together
2. Live the Gospel: share our lives together
3. Advance the Gospel: love and serve our surrounding communities together

⁵ Grudem, 867-68.

⁶ Grudem, 855-56.



Community Group Structure

Vintage Community Groups are small groups of people who study the Bible together, share their lives together, and love and serve their surrounding communities together.

- Structure
 - Led by Vintage member(s)
 - 5-20 people
 - Hosted in homes
 - Not grouped by affinity, age, life stage, or location
 - Grow organically and through the Connections Process
 - Multiply by planting other Community Groups
- Priorities
 - Make disciples (Matthew 28:16-20):
 - Know the Gospel: Learning from the Bible together
 - Live the Gospel: Sharing our lives together
 - Advance the Gospel: Loving and serving our surrounding communities together
 - Doubter, seeker, and follower friendly
- Accountability
 - Organizational:
Leaders > Coaches > Community Groups Pastor > Local Pastor > Board of Elders
 - Spiritual: Members > Deacons > Elders > Jesus

Coaching

Community Group Coaches are put in place to assist, care for, and help shepherd community group leaders. They're there to help you be supported you in your role, connected with church leadership, and growing in faithfulness and fellowship with the church.

Expect monthly meetings with your coach initially to establish a coaching relationship, followed by regular but less frequent check ins (you and your coach can work out the frequency that is most helpful for you). Your coach is available to assist or connect you to resources as needed.



Pre-work for Session 2

1. Read over the Community Group Leader Role Description on page 7. Any questions? Jot those down here and we'll address them during Session 2.
2. Read chapter 5, "Not Just Bible Study," from *Small Group Leaders' Handbook*.
3. What did you find most helpful in the chapter?
4. After reading this chapter, how would you like to develop as a leader in Bible study settings?
5. What questions did this chapter raise for you? Write those down so you can bring them up during session 3.
6. Read over the "Know the Gospel: Discussion skills" section, starting on page 8.



Community Group Leader Role Description

Qualifications

- Be a member actively fulfilling the duties as outlined in the Vintage Church membership covenant.
- Fulfill the character qualifications of a deacon as taught in Scripture. (1 Tim. 3:8-13)
- Have a personal commitment to seeing Jesus' mission for the local church, specifically the making of disciples, take place in community groups. (Matt. 28:18-20, John 20:21, Acts 1:8)
- Have a personal commitment to the wellbeing of the church and of community group members.
- Complete Community Group Leader Training
- Recommended: Be an active member of a community group for 6 months or more prior to leading.

Expectations & Responsibilities

- Lead your community group to:
 - **Know the Gospel:** Be a primary leader for your group's regularly occurring community group gatherings (see Know the Gospel).
 - **Live the Gospel:** Champion the sharing of each other's lives in community group (see Live the Gospel).
 - **Advance the Gospel:** Lead your group in loving and serving our surrounding communities (see Advance the Gospel).
- Equip members of your group to accomplish group functions and priorities.
- Report attendance for every normal community group gathering.
- Meet with your community group coach at least once a quarter.
- Attend twice annual Community Group Leader Gatherings.
- When necessary, represent (or delegate representation of) your community group at new visitor events (e.g. Connections Sundays).

Desired Outcomes

- That you would be supported in your role, connected with church leadership, and thriving in your faith and the fellowship of the church.
- That your community group members would thrive in their faith and the fellowship of the church as well.
- That you would feel sufficiently prepared to navigate changes, challenges, and growth in your group.



Know the Gospel: Discussion skills

What skills do you think it takes to facilitate a discussion about a passage of the Bible? There's probably a solid dozen you could list out without much reflection—that's because a lot of the skills you use when leading a discussion are things called soft skills or people skills, which are scores of tiny little skills like not talking too loudly, using body language effectively, monitoring the tone of a room, relating to different people differently, etc. There's really a lot going on when people talk in a group setting. In addition to those soft skills, we could list out skills that are unique to studying the Bible, like knowing how to cross-reference texts, proper exegesis of a passage, what to do when someone misinterprets the Bible, etc.

Thankfully, you're a person, so God has already given you people skills. You use them every day, both consciously and subconsciously, and those skills are far more powerful and trained than you're probably aware of. Leading a community group discussion gives you a chance to employ those skills in ways that lead people to God's word. Similarly, as a follower of Christ, God has already given you everything you need for life and godliness in his word (2 Pet. 1:3). Bringing others to God's word starts with you going to it yourself. God equips us to help others value him through his word when we take time ourselves to value God through his word.

Out of the dozens of skills we could focus on as community group leaders, here are five that I think are worth highlighting:

1. **Prepare.**

Preparing for your group discussion involves a prayerful heart and a preparatory mind. Before you meet, pray that the Lord would use your time together to the benefit of his people and to the advancement of his Kingdom, that simple things like circling up in a living room would have an eternal impact. Prepare by understanding the passage and thinking through the discussion questions. Read over the passage a couple of times before meeting, trying to gain a firm grasp of what the passage is saying, looking out for difficult concepts or phrases that people might get hung up on, and thinking through the implications the passage has on our lives. Take a look over the discussion questions that are provided each week and consider how they would work with



the people in your group. Edit, reword, or add to the questions in order to help the discussion fit your people best.

2. Lead people to the word.

The goal of community groups isn't to come and listen to the leader's thoughts, ideas, and insights on life. The goal is to go to God's word together, hear from it, and be changed. It's the leader's job to make sure that's what the group sets out to do every week.

3. Ask good questions.

Asking a good question is harder than it seems. A paragraph long explanation before asking a question will make people wonder where the question was. A question with big, Christian-y words could ostracize folks who don't have much background in the church. A yes or no question doesn't give any room for thoughtful discourse. Your group will learn over time how to handle the flow of conversation, but good questions early on in a group's life will teach your people how to go about a Bible study discussion. As your group ages, good questions will keep folks engaged and challenged, rather than serving up t-ball level answers. We'll go into more detail about questions and using the discussion guides effectively during Session 3.

4. Exercise humility (and be quiet).

The goal of community groups isn't for the leader to teach. That's a sermon and those happen on Sundays. We gather in groups to go to God's word and leaders help take people there by prioritizing the ideas, stories, and responses of group members. Being a CG leader doesn't make what you have to say more important than what others have to say. That doesn't mean you shouldn't ever contribute to the conversation with your own responses; in fact, doing this can help group members know that you're seeking to learn from the text just like they are. That also doesn't mean you shouldn't speak up when people make off comments. Taking all of that into account, one aspect of good leadership is prioritizing others over yourself, particularly by being quick to listen and slow to speak (James 1:19).



5. Facilitate discussion.

“Facilitate” is a good catchall bucket for many of those soft skills we mentioned earlier. This includes everything that it takes to hold a thoughtful discussion as a group, like what to do when one person talks too much, how to draw out a quiet person, and how to wade into difficult topics. We can talk about theoretical situations like those, but most of the time you employ these skills on a case-by-case basis, and you develop these skills through experience. Generally speaking, it’s best to lead your group in being extra gracious towards one another, to help people feel welcome and heard (even when they say weird things), and to think before you speak.

A Normal Group Meeting

Different groups run their gatherings differently. Some meet in the afternoon on weekends because they have kids, others meet on weekdays after work. Some groups eat dinner together every week; others don’t. However you structure your gathering, here are the important points:

1. **Gather everyone together** – Food works great for this, either a meal or just snacks/dessert, but that’s impractical for some groups. Anything that helps put people at ease, hangout, and talk to one another before discussion will get your gathering off on the right foot.
2. **Discuss scripture** – The goal here isn’t to check a box and “complete” discussion, but to meaningfully deal with scripture and talk about what it means for your life.
3. **Pray together** – Again, don’t make this a box to check. Look through the book of Acts and you’ll see believers praying together as if God himself was with them. That’s the goal.
4. **Leave space to hangout more afterwards** – This is especially helpful for folks who have questions or comments they weren’t comfortable mentioning during discussion.

Community group gatherings typically last anywhere from 1.5–3 hours, depending on the group. You’ll notice the above schedule allows for hangout time before and after discussion. This is crucial in helping your group get to know one another and feel comfortable sharing with each other. Like we’ll talk about in Sessions 4 and 5, the more time you spend growing closer in your friendships, the richer your discussion will become.



Session 2: Know the Gospel

Bible Study Discussions

Recap

- Why CGs? -> Vine and trellis.

Pre-work question 1

- Any questions about the CG Leader role description?

Why study scripture?

Discussion: Why do you personally read the Bible?

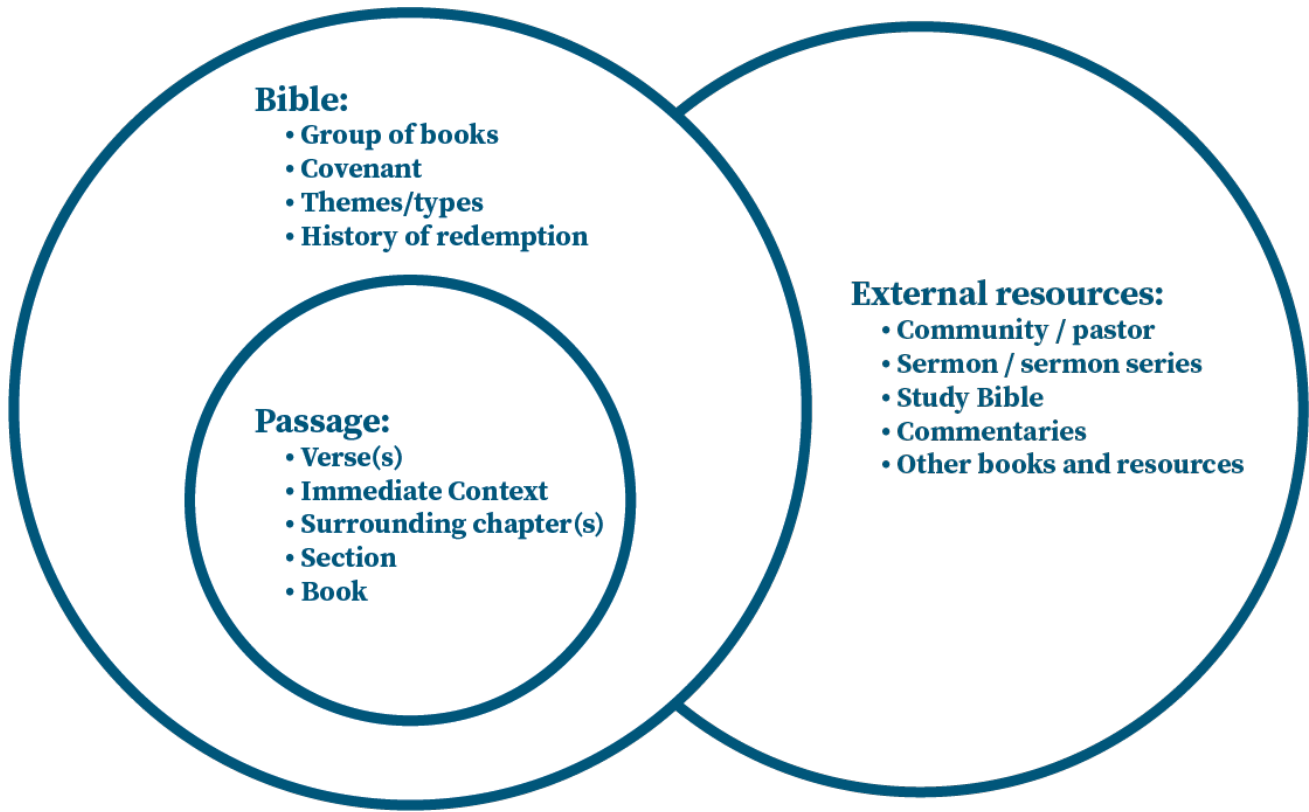
How to make sense of the Bible

Passage:

How would you start to make sense of this passage?



3 circles for understanding a passage:



Key things to look for:

- Passage: Look for vitals: author, genre, time period, audience, history of redemption
- Bible: every passage has some gospel aspect
- External resources: insight is great, novelty is not

Some helpful resources when studying scripture:

- cg.vintagenc.com
- Your CG coach, Eric, and Vintage pastors
- A study Bible (ESV Study Bible or another non-topical study Bible are good options)
- biblehub.com – multiple translations in a comparison format
- studylight.org – multiple translations, commentaries, and original languages
- Commentaries – *Christ Centered Exposition* Series and John Stott's *The Bible Speaks Today* series are two good options



How to do Bible study discussion

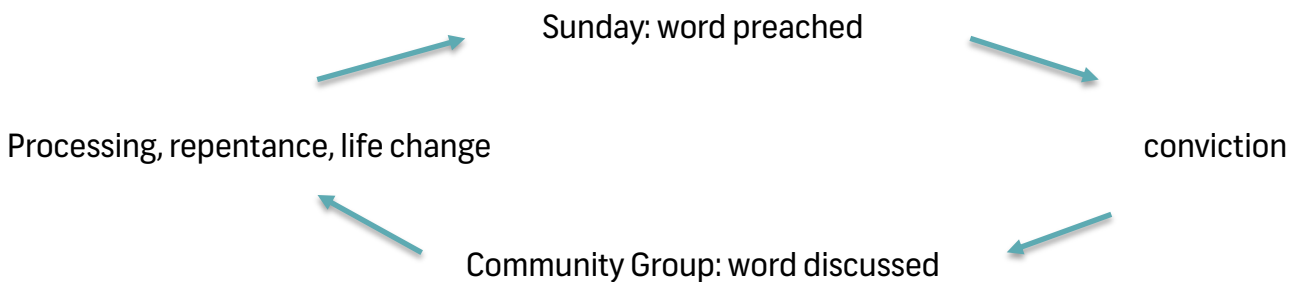
Expectations for discussion prep

1. Each week you would spend time preparing for discussion, both in study and in prayer. The goal isn't that you would know everything about the passage but that you feel confident facilitating discussion about it.
2. You would work from the weekly discussion guides as your starting point, both for study and for discussion questions. This means you are **not** expected to write a discussion each week.
3. As needed, you would edit, reword, and/or add to the questions in order to help the discussion fit your people best.

Discussion objectives

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Sunday → CG cycle



How to do Bible study discussion, cont'd

***Small Group Leader's Handbook* – OIA**

Thoughts? Questions?

How did reading this chapter make you want to develop as a leader?

Doubters, Seekers, and Followers

How do you think having doubters, seekers, and followers in a community group affects the way that we study scripture together?

“Know the Gospel: Discussion skills” – Practicals

When it comes to actually leading discussion, what questions do you have?

What are you worried about? What problems do you foresee encountering?



Pre-work for Session 3

1. Read “Rhythms” from *Community* by Brad House.
2. What stood out to you from the chapter?
3. How did this chapter help you think about the time a CG spends together outside formal discussion time?
4. After reading this chapter, what are some ways you want to grow in sharing your life with others?
5. What questions did this chapter leave you with?



Session 3: Live the Gospel

Sharing our lives

Recap

Any questions about how to run discussion?

Why Biblical community?

“It is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren.” – Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 20

Recap Ephesians 2:1-22: the Gospel produces not just Christians but the Church.

Turn to Acts 2:42-47.

How does this passage describe Christian community?

Turn to Romans 12:1-21.

How does this passage describe Christian community?

Take everything we’ve mentioned about Christian community thus far and compare it to cultural assumptions about community in the world around us. What’s similar, and what’s different?



Some conclusions about community life:

- The truth of the gospel radically changes our corporate life. (Acts 2:42-47; Romans 12:1-2)
- God is highly interested in how we treat each other, not merely avoiding treating each other poorly but encouraging us to treat one another radically well. (Romans 12:9-21)
- Mutual service is inseparable from Christian community. (Acts 2:45 ; Romans 12:6-8)
- True authenticity is a high value in Jesus' family. (Romans 12:9)
- Christian community can, and should, involve doubters, seekers, and followers. (Acts 2:47)
- Christian community is more like family than friends – it is given, not chosen.
- Every culture has basic assumptions or values that undermine Christian community (ex. American convenience).
- Some of the goals:
 - Shared worship – Acts 2:43
 - Mutual love and service – Romans 12:9-13
 - Holiness / resisting worldliness – Romans 12:2
 - Witness – Acts 2:47

How do we build Biblical community?

Reading: "Rhythms" from Brad House's *Community*

Thoughts?

Questions? Concerns?



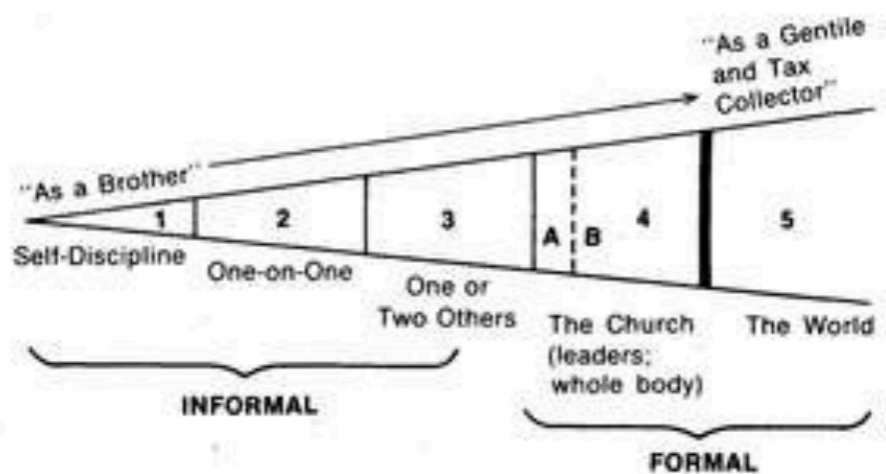
How do we do this in a way that welcomes doubters, seekers, and followers?

Stewarding Conflict

Turn to Matthew 18:15-17

What are some principles for dealing with conflict here?

Progression of church discipline



Optional reading: *Peacemaking*, chapter 1, by Ken Sande

Because God has already laid the foundation of our fellowship, because God has bound us together in one body with other Christians in Jesus Christ, long before we entered into common life with them, we enter into that common life not as demanders but as thankful recipients. We thank God for what he has done for us. We thank God for giving us brethren who live by His call, by His forgiveness, and His promise. We do not complain of what God does not give us; we rather thank God for what He does give us daily. – Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 28

Tips for opening discussion:

- “What’s something in the sermon series right now that has stood out to you?”
- “What’s something God has taught you in the last few weeks?”
- “What’s something you would like prayer for this week?” Then you can either pray before discussion or save those things for after discussion.
- Share life updates, something like, “What’s new with you?” Warning: this can go long in big groups.
- Stories of God’s grace: “Where have you seen God’s goodness, kindness, and grace at work in your life in the last week?”
- Love One updates – you likely wouldn’t do this every week, but share updates on how things are going with your Love One. This connects to prayer as well, as you pray for the Love One relationships represented in your group.
- The actually good Ice Breaker question: Ice breaker questions like “what’s your favorite flavor of ice cream?” or “if you were a kitchen utensil, what would you be?” can make it feel too much like your first day at school, and they can begin to feel out of step in a group where folks know each other pretty well. But there are defensibly good ice breaker questions that can get people sharing in non-superficial ways, things like, “If you could take someone to your hometown, where would you take them to eat?”



Pre-work for Session 4

1. Read “Missional Church” by Tim Keller.
2. What’s one thing you found really helpful in this article for understanding mission?
3. How can “Missional Church” help us think through how to make community group environments welcoming for doubters and seekers?
4. What do you think are some of the primary barriers to a community group being on mission together?
5. Think about a specific group of people to which you’re in relative proximity. This could be your friend group, neighborhood, workplace, a hobby or interest group, or something else. List that group below. Now, how can the material in “Missional Church” help you think through how to approach that group with the hope of the gospel?



Session 4: Advance the Gospel

Group on mission

Loving Strangers

Hebrews 13:1-2

Thinking Missionally – “Missional Church” by Keller

What’s one thing you found really helpful in this article for understanding mission?

Think about a specific group of people to which you’re in relative proximity. . how can “Missional Church” help you think through how to approach that group with the hope of the gospel?

Look for Gospel Opportunities

Gospel opportunities are any bridge or access point where the truth of the gospel can intersect with others’ lives. This can take the form of **gospel truth**, where the claims of Christianity can be explained briefly or at length, or **gospel work**, where the truth of the gospel mobilizes us to act and serve the communities around us in ways that point back to the gospel. Recognizing gospel opportunities takes being a student of the Bible, surrounding cultures, and the people you interact with.

Practicals

Group scattered

- Love Ones
- Story sharing
- Intentionality in and outside discussion



Group gathered

- Keep watch for Gospel Opportunities
 - Gospel truth
 - Gospel work
- Where to start? ACT
 - A: Anticipate (John 5:17)
 - Prayer – consider prayer walks.
 - Meet your neighbors/co-workers (if you haven’t).
 - Involve your existing community.
 - Keep watch
 - C: Commit (Psalm 37:5)
 - Find a Gospel bridge and cross it.
 - Ask for God’s blessing and clear direction.
 - See a need, fill a need – see “Meeting a Need Matrix” handout.
 - T: Take Heart (John 16:33)
 - Celebrate easily.
 - Hold fast to God in prayer.
 - Navigate challenges with your community.
 - Stay present and faithful.

Leadership development

- Empowerment/delegation – utilize unique gifts
- Inquiring, inviting, respecting
- CG Leader Training
- Training up a new leader

Training Quadrants



Multiplying: How to plant a group

- Format:
 - Plant out of an existing group (Leader(s) + core team)
 - Spontaneous plant (Leader(s) + core team)
- Existing group
 - Pray and consider
 - If you feel the Lord's leading, bring it up with current leaders, invite them to pray and consider with you.
 - If it seems like the Lord is leading you, allow for 2-3 months before planting.
 - Set a start date, determine your host home, bring it up to the group for prayer
 - $20 = 15 + 5$ vs. $20 = 10 + 10$
 - Start meeting with your core team, spend first four meetings going through the Plant Discussions.
 - Start meeting like normal and start inviting people.
- Spontaneous plant
 - Pray and consider
 - If you feel the Lord's leading, work on gathering people from the target location or context.
 - Best case scenario: find someone who will host it.
 - Start meeting with whomever you gather (now your core team), spend first four meetings going through the Plant Discussions.
 - Start meeting like normal and start inviting people.



Renewal

- Regularly refresh why you are in community together.
 - Ex. Going over CG priorities 1–2 times a year
- Changes in meeting location, structure, leadership, format, etc.—not change for the sake of change but for the sake of growth. Also, the Lord will likely send some.
- Install rhythms of rest. Examples:
 - Summer downtime
 - Time off around the holidays
 - Hangouts / cookouts / game nights
 - Vacation
 - Let someone else lead
 - Prayer gatherings
 - Any you don't see here?

Open Q&A



Live the Gospel: Life Together

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a pastor in Germany at the height of Nazi power. The Regime had taken control of the state-run church to help support their ideology with religious rhetoric, and most faithful Christians had fled the country or gone into hiding. However, Bonhoeffer and some of his contemporaries stayed in Germany (or in Bonhoeffer's case, returned to Germany) to set up secret seminaries in order to train pastors for ministry in the midst of a war-torn society. While running these seminaries Bonhoeffer wrote a summary text of how to accomplish the same kind of seminary elsewhere, published under the title *Life Together*.

This brief background should help us understand a crucial underpinning of Bonhoeffer's work; for him, Christian community was utterly vital to living a faithful Christian life. He was hiding out with fellow believers confronted with the real risk of losing their lives for the sake of staying faithful to Christ. This threat made precious to him what many of us take for granted; "It is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren."⁷

If we're honest, many of us believe Christian community is less of a grace from God and more of a perk, an obligation, or even a burden. Here in modern-day America we tend to treat community as a source for meeting our own ends, to give *me* company, acceptance, accolades, or benefits. We can try to climb our social environment like a ladder; we can treat our neighbors like extras in our life's movie; we can fear others as a liability on our happiness. Today's American disposition is, on the whole, contrary to true Christian community.

Reflecting back to week one and our Biblical summary of community we can easily see these American assumptions for what they are: a false gospel. Much of our cultural context would tell us community really exists to serve our own purposes, but Christians follow a savior who "came not to be served but to serve." (Mark 10:45) Our social environment is characterized by surrounding yourself with those who agree with you and shunning those who don't; Christians walk the hard road of clinging faithfully to Christ while loving and praying for their enemies. (Matt. 5:44) And while the American Dream preaches self-sufficiency as a virtue, Christians believe that God supplies for our every need in the midst of our weakness. (2 Cor. 8:9)

⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 20



One of these deep-set needs is the need for one another. The Christian is dependent on other Christians for encouragement and support, for being built up in the faith, and being reminded of the loveliness of Christ through the Word. Bonhoeffer captures this need for one another in *Life Together*:

God has put the Word into the mouth of men in order that it may be communicated to other men. When one person is struck by the Word, he speaks it to others. God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of man. Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. He needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation. He needs his brother solely because of Jesus Christ. The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother's is sure.

And that also clarifies the goal of all Christian community: they meet one another as bringers of the message of salvation.⁸

What Bonhoeffer captures here, and what we see in the pages of Scripture, is a freeing truth: on your own you are insufficient. This is the core truth of the Gospel: Jesus lived the life you couldn't live and died the death you deserved. But rather than wallowing in the sorrow of our insufficiency, we get to rejoice that God has supplied everything we need for life. (2 Pet. 1:3) Part of this supply is the body of Christ, who is fit together so that we, as a whole, grow up in health and love. (Eph. 4:16)

Spending time together in and outside our regular group gatherings will, quite obviously, take time, which is a precious commodity in our society. It will take prioritization, problem solving, and putting others before yourself. It will also take grace, knowing that the forgiveness we have in Christ extends to the times we fail in Christian community.

While no good thing in life comes without effort, we Christians get to rejoice that the real effort of making believers into a new family has already been done by Christ:

⁸ Bonhoeffer, 22-23



Because God has already laid the foundation of our fellowship, because God has bound us together in one body with other Christians in Jesus Christ, long before we entered into common life with them, we enter into that common life not as demanders but as thankful recipients. We thank God for what he has done for us. We thank God for giving us brethren who live by His call, by His forgiveness, and His promise. We do not complain of what God does not give us; we rather thank God for what He does give us daily.⁹

⁹ Bonhoeffer, 28

