

# CG Planting Discussions

## Week 1 Discussion: Why community groups?

As we start the process of getting your group planted, we want to spend the first of four weeks answering this question: what brings us here? Weeknights are precious commodities; why would we commit one a week to this community group thing? And why would we let people that we don't know super well into our homes and lives? Answering these questions will be just as important for your core team as it was for you in the CG Leader Training. If you don't have solid reasons for why Jesus wants to use your life to build community among believers then it'll be hard for you to lead your core team in doing so, and if your core team doesn't have solid reasons then it'll be hard for y'all to lead your whole group in doing so. So we'll start with two aspects of the gospel impetus behind community groups:

1. How does my relationship with Jesus lead me into relationships with others?
2. How does the message of the gospel make individuals into a community?

Also in this first week we'll make sure we've settled on a couple logistics. Then, in weeks 2-4, we'll go a little more in depth as to what it means to Know the Gospel, Live the Gospel, and Advance the Gospel in our community groups.

First off, we'll turn to John 15:9-17, part of Jesus' final discourse with his disciples before his arrest, torture, and execution. The whole discourse, chapters 13-17, paints an intimate scene between Jesus and his disciples; it starts with Jesus washing their feet and ends with him praying for them. The man is about to die a terrible death and he's the one tending to their needs! And one of those pairs of feet belonged to Judas, providing a vignette of Jesus' inordinate grace. We'll read John 15:9-17, "love one another as I have loved you," to get a sense of how Jesus' love towards us utterly transforms the way we relate to others. Jesus, God of the Universe, has loved us puny mortals—there is now no one too far beneath us, too uncool or too unlike us, that we cannot love. Jesus, the perfect Judge, has loved us defiant sinners—there is now no one too offensive for us to love. Jesus loved us at great cost to himself, when we had nothing to offer in return, even when he knew we would undervalue his love—now we can do the same. If we can rightly see

ourselves as Jesus sees us, both as a wretched sinner and as his beloved child, then the resulting humility and thankfulness frees us to love others with abandon.

Then we'll turn to Ephesians 2:11-22 to see how this shared experience of grace takes disparate individuals and unites them into a family. This is kind of a longer version of 1 Peter 2:10, "Once you were not a people; now you are God's people." In Ephesians 2:1-10, Paul is making a big case for how the mercy of God resurrects us from spiritual death into spiritual life through our being united to Christ—thus we're not just made alive, but made alive together with Jesus, raised up with Jesus, and seated with Jesus in the heavenly places. It's this mysterious, holy union with Jesus that makes all our sanctification and communion with him possible.

Then, in Ephesians 2:11-22, Paul relates this to the church. Specifically, he addresses this to the tensions experienced between Jews and Gentiles, but as you'll see in the leader notes below, this still relates to us today because our union with Christ so reconfigures our identity that now no source of identity is a legitimate means for division within the body of Christ. But on a broader level, this passage shows us how union with Christ creates union between Christians. We are members of *his* body, and so we are united together. We were strangers and aliens, but now we are citizens and members of God's household together, which means we have a shared identity because we share a Father. Paul's big point here in Ephesians is this: *there is not an individual relationship with Jesus that is somehow separate from the shared life of God's people*. Union with Christ, the head, simply cannot be disconnected from union with the church, his body (Eph. 4:11-16).

In a sense, Christians are all spiritual orphans who have been adopted and brought into God's family. So that's the reality we pursue in community groups, not a reality we create, but one we seek to live within. And praise God, he teaches us what it means to live in his family! That's why we turn to God's word week in and week out and invite the Spirit to speak through it, so that we can learn what it means to live as God's children in unity with God and unity with one another.

## Discussion Questions (notes for leaders in blue)

- Could someone read John 15:9-17?
- Jesus said this at the last supper with his disciples, the night before he was crucified. Why do you think Jesus said these things to them that night?
- What does it mean to you personally that Jesus has called you friend?
  - Ideally this is where we would get personal with one another. That Jesus would love me and lay down his life for me as his friend, even while he was fully aware of my disobedience and opposition to me, should never cease to blow me away.
- This passage talks about Jesus' sacrificial love compelling us to love others. How does that work out in your life; how does Jesus' love for you compel you to love others?
  - Let's drive conversation here away from the theoretical process and towards actual lived experience. "How does Jesus' love for you, Joe, make you feel towards the family that lives next door?"
- How could this passage inform the way we build this community group?
- Take a moment to read Ephesians 2:11-22. According to Paul here, how does God's mercy transform us?
  - There's a ton in this passage. You could talk about aliens becoming citizens or strangers becoming children. But another big thing here is the transformation of identity—God has taken Jews and Gentiles, "two men," and broken down the dividing hostility between them, making "one man."(v.14-15) That's not to say they had their cultural identities totally erased, it just meant that their own relationship to their identity was so reconfigured by the gospel that these two people groups could now be united by a superseding identity in Jesus. You can see how that unification of identity is important to community groups, which bring very different kinds of people together.

- Specifically, what does it mean that God has taken us from being “strangers” to being “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God”?
- How can this passage help us understand what binds us together in this community group?
  - Big point here: it’s not like mindedness, or shared interests, or similar life stages that provides the bedrock for our unity. Only the shared identity we have in Christ can cut across all our many differences and unify us through the ups and downs of shared life.
- Last thing for tonight: what are your hopes for this community group?
- Let’s close in prayer, asking God to do those things and more through. Psalm 127:1 says, “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” Let’s ask for the Lord to build this community into what he wants.
- Before we leave, let’s make sure we’re settled on meeting time, day, and location for our community group. If what we’re rolling with right now is good then we can leave it how it is.

## Week 2 Discussion: Know the Gospel

The goal of this meeting is for your group to leave knowing why we study the Bible in our group gatherings. In short, without God's word there is no community group because without God's word there is no Church. Without the gospel we have no hope for salvation, and without the Scriptures we have no hope of knowing God. Put positively, it's the Spirit working through the Scriptures that gives birth to the community of the local church in which we find ourselves. No metaphor quite grasps the whole of it—God's word is a fountain of hope for meaningful community, the foundation upon which we build that community, instruction on how to be community builders, glasses through which we can finally see one another clearly, sustenance for each other's soul. In community groups we're captivated by God's word because in it we come to hear from God himself through his gracious self-disclosure. We hear straight from him about the wonders and mystery of his glory, and by the work of the Spirit we grow in greater alignment with him and with one another.

We'll start by looking at 2 Peter 1:3-8 (you could also substitute 2 Timothy 3:16-17 here and use the same exact questions). Here Peter explains that the Scriptures, our source of the "knowledge of him who called us," provide us with "all things that pertain to life and godliness...so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature." He captures how the Bible helps us commune with God, to hear from him, learn about him, and grow deeper in our relationship with him. In verses 5-8 he encourages us to continue increasing in faith, knowledge, virtue, self-control, etc., and this helps us see that Peter doesn't separate out growing in relationship with God from growing in greater obedience to him. We grow in faith and virtue, love and self-control; as we cling to God's word we grow in greater and greater alignment with his intentions for our lives. There is a sense to which I come to the Scriptures to both learn who God is and to learn who I am meant to be.

In addition, we come to the Scriptures together to learn who we are meant to be together. So we'll turn to Colossians 3:16-17 in our discussion as well, which captures the tone and disposition we're meant to have towards one another. This passage calls us to both encourage and admonish one another with scripture. To admonish means to warn or

reprimand someone, and if we're honest, that's a command we'd rather avoid at all costs. But warning one another against the dangers of sin and disobedience is crucial to the lives of believers, just as crucial as encouragement. What we see in this passage is that we're called to be a people of God's word, both individually and inwardly ("dwell in you richly") and corporately and externally ("teaching and admonishing"). God's word is meant to reside in our minds and on our tongues as the currency of our thoughts and relationships, the very lifeblood of our faith and community.

### **Discussion Questions**

- Could someone read 2 Peter 1:3-8 for us?
- What can this passage tell us about the Bible?
- Based on this passage, how are we meant to relate to the Bible individually?
- What's one way you hope to grow in your relationship with God's word in the near future?
- Could someone read Colossians 3:16-17 for us?
- What do you think this passage means for our community group?
- How can God's word serve as a foundation for our community?
- How can we go about helping each other know God's word?

## Week 3 Discussion: Live the Gospel

The goal of this meeting is for your group to leave with a better sense of what it means to live in community together. We'll start by focusing on a specific but crucial aspect of sharing our lives: handling conflict. To do that we'll read Matthew 18:15–20, which will give us some ground rules for how to deal with our sin against each other. Then we'll look at Acts 2 to see an example of flourishing group life in the early church, which will also help us talk about group rhythms.

You've already had a whole training session on Matthew 18 and conflict resolution (session 5), so I won't reiterate all of that here, except to remind you of two things. First, Jesus gives guidance on handling sin because he intends for us to do so. Doing anything else, whether ignoring it, minimizing it, or stewing over it, ruins the fruit your group is meant to bear. Second, the steps through Matthew 18 seek to restrict the amount of people in the know, which diffuses gossip, a common problem among community groups. So, while Matthew 18 is only slightly less than half your discussion for the night, it's a terribly important topic to address here at the start of your group. Feel free to draw on everything we discussed in training from Ken Sande's *Peacemaker* or the Three Trees Diagram (and maybe take a moment to brush up on that content, if it's been a while).

Acts 2:42–47 is another text we looked at in our training (session 4), and this one will help us imagine what a thriving Christian community can be. There at the end of Acts 2 we meet the early Christian community composed of the apostles, Jesus' broader group of disciples, and the 3000+ converts from Peter's sermon at Pentecost. Most of these people were brand new Christians and, considering so many Diaspora Jews were in Jerusalem for Pentecost, it's likely that many of them didn't know each other. But almost immediately they take up a beautiful expression of Christian community, caring for one another, worshipping together, sharing meals—these six verses are idyllic. Lest we lose heart when we think of our own communities, we should remember that tensions will soon flair over food distribution in Acts 6; what we're seeing in Acts 2 is the honeymoon phase. But nevertheless, their shared life should form a pattern for us. Here we have a people who are freshly aware of the work of Christ and the forgiveness they have in his name, and the

overflow of this awareness is a community of rejoicing, mutual care, and devotion. Our wonder over the gospel and our joy in community are inextricably tied.

Talking about group rhythms is a little bit tacked on to the Acts passage, but it's as good a time as any to discuss it. As we saw in leader training, group rhythms will help you and your group members build a thriving community inside your official weekly group meeting and outside it. That weekly Bible study discussion meeting is your default, but what other rhythms would you like to install? That's things like regular games nights, cookouts, monthly guys/ladies nights, perhaps even quarterly service days, regular weeks you take off in the year around holidays, etc. Biggest thing to keep in mind is this: don't bite off more than you can chew. Here in the beginning you might come up with so many ideas that it isn't manageable, or that your group spends so much time together it hampers your mission (which we'll talk about more next week). So, keep it reasonable and you'll be off to a great start.

### **Discussion Questions** (notes for leaders in blue)

- Could someone read Matthew 18:15-20?
- Being in community involves navigating conflict. How does this passage help us deal with sin in a Christlike way?
  - You can also reference James 5:16-20, which tells us to confess our sins and restore one another.
- How can Matthew 18 help us commit to dealing with each other's sin?
- Could someone read Acts 2:42-47 for us?
- What's going on in this passage?
- How can this passage help us understand what it means for Christians to share their lives together?
- This is a great time for us to think through group rhythms. What are the weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc., rhythms that we want to characterize our group?



- Undoubtedly, you'll need to explain what a rhythm is. Feel free to reference the list in the intro above but keep the ideas vague so that people come up with their own ideas.
- Remember: don't overcommit your group to too many rhythms. A couple will do to get y'all started.
- What are some of your hopes for the shared life of our community group?

## Week 4 Discussion: Advance the Gospel

This session will wrap up your planting discussions, and after this you'll be a fully open group for new visitors. Hopefully the past few weeks with your core team have been a sweet time getting to know one another and talking about your shared desires for your new group. For this final week we'll turn to the Great Commission to see how your group can earnestly desire to be used by the Lord, both when you're gathered and when you're scattered.

You're undoubtedly familiar with Matthew 28:16-20 and the Great Commission, but some of its components will be relevant to discussion. Here Jesus has resurrected from the dead and Matthew draws his Gospel account to a close with a final command from Jesus (check out Acts 1-2 for a bit more on the global scope of this command). And as much as Jesus is speaking to the Apostles here, their mission was simply the mission of the church, a mission which has been handed down to us. Jesus says three big things here that form a core command sandwiched between two sources of comfort.

First, Jesus proclaims that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him by the Father (28:18). What he says there is something no other being in the universe can say the same. Your parents, whoever can fire you at work, even world leaders can only say "some authority has been given to me." Jesus includes this 1. as a confirmation of his exaltation and Lordship, following his resurrection, and 2. as a comfort for us through the ages. Given how hard Jesus' life was, making disciples like him is a tough gig, but we can take heart knowing that ultimate authority has been granted to the one giving us our task, meaning he has the authority to commission us for service and the authority to see our mission out. So there is ultimately no thing, power, or person that can stand in our way that Jesus doesn't have complete control over.

Second, Jesus tells us what to do on this mission: make disciples (28:19-20a). With the way the sentence is constructed, teaching and baptizing are both components of the primary command to make disciples. But think of what it means to teach someone ALL that Jesus commanded. That's monumental! How can you do that while living the rest of your life, working a job, raising a family, or trying to have friends?

Because of the third point—because Jesus is with you always (28:20b). And for Jesus to “be with us” isn’t just a nice platitude because his Spirit is alive and active within us. Again, check out Acts 1–2 and you’ll see a powerful example of Jesus’ presence among his disciples through his Spirit. So as you consider how to be on mission as a group, take heart knowing that Jesus is sovereign and that he is with you to enable you, strengthen you, give you time and opportunity, comfort you, and guide you as you obey his commission to make disciples.

Much like we discussed in CG leader training, discipleship in community group has several simultaneous modes. It involves both the making of new disciples and the shaping of established disciples, and it occurs both when your group members are gathered together and when they’re scattered. At Vintage we believe the gospel is deep enough to simultaneously reach doubters, seekers, and followers, so that’s why our discussions always follow some sort of gospel arc in order to reach a diverse audience. Regarding the gathered and scattered modes of discipleship, your discussion this week will be helpful in setting the tone for how your group members can 1. Welcome new people into your group, regardless of where they are in a faith journey and 2. Support one another when you aren’t together. In the normal life of your group you’ll share a couple hours a week together at most, so your group members will spend the vast majority of their time out in the mission fields where God has placed them. So consider how your group can be a staging ground for that scattered mission, how you can pray for one another, support each other, and urge one another on. And then consider also how the Lord can use your group together, whether you’re interested in serving together with a specific ministry or non-profit, or you’re passionate about reaching a specific neighborhood or area. Refer to the training materials and the A.C.T plan (week 6), or [this post on the CG Leader website](#), for more info on how to meet a need together as a group. Again, keep in mind what we talked about last week and don’t bite off more than you can chew. Feel free to use this discussion as a jumping off point for dialogue about how you want to be on mission together.

## Discussion Questions (notes for leaders in blue)

- Could someone read Matthew 28:16–20 for us?
- How does it feel for you personally to receive this mission from Jesus?
- What's a group of people, or specific person, in your life who you long for God to work in?
- How do you think God has commissioned you for that specific group or person?
- What are some ways we can support one another in our separate workplaces/neighborhoods/families/etc.?
- What are some ways we want to make our group a welcome place for folks who may or may not believe in Jesus?
- What are some ways you could see our group serving together or reaching out to a specific group of people together?
- Turning back to Matthew 28, how does this passage encourage you as we consider all this mission?
  - I know time is limited for these discussions, but definitely end on this question, even if you need to skip one or two above. This will help mission feel less like a big to-do list you have to get done before Jesus comes back and more like what it actually is, a shared mission with Jesus in which we follow where he leads.