
COMMUNITY GROUPS



 THE CHAPEL

THOSE WHO ACCEPTED HIS MESSAGE WERE
BAPTIZED, AND ABOUT THREE THOUSAND
WERE ADDED TO THEIR NUMBER THAT
DAY. THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO THE
APOSTLES' TEACHING AND TO FELLOWSHIP,
TO THE BREAKING OF BREAD AND TO PRAYER.
EVERYONE WAS FILLED WITH AWE AT THE
MANY WONDERS AND SIGNS PERFORMED
BY THE APOSTLES. ALL THE BELIEVERS
WERE TOGETHER AND HAD EVERYTHING
IN COMMON. THEY SOLD PROPERTY AND
POSSESSIONS TO GIVE TO ANYONE WHO
HAD NEED. EVERY DAY THEY CONTINUED TO
MEET TOGETHER IN THE TEMPLE COURTS.
THEY BROKE BREAD IN THEIR HOMES AND
ATE TOGETHER WITH GLAD AND SINCERE
HEARTS, PRAISING GOD AND ENJOYING THE
FAVOR OF ALL THE PEOPLE. AND THE LORD
ADDED TO THEIR NUMBER DAILY THOSE WHO
WERE BEING SAVED.

ACTS 2:41-47

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COMMUNITY GROUP AND D-GROUP

COMMUNITY GROUP

D-GROUP

<p>A life- changing community where you can belong, believe, & become.</p> <p>Belong: Where you are welcomed and accepted.</p> <p>Believe: Where you can encounter Jesus through His Word & people.</p> <p>Become: Where you can become who God designed you to be.</p>	DESCRIPTION	<p>A time-stamped, gender-specific, closed group that meets weekly for accelerated spiritual transformation.</p>
Open Group	MODEL	Closed Group
Believers and non-believers	MAKE-UP	Believers
Varies, but usually 12-20 people	SIZE	3-5 people
Co-ed or gender-specific	DYNAMIC	Gender-specific
Connect people into life-changing community	PURPOSE	Grow people as disciplemakers of Jesus Christ
Exists for a period of time and then launches new groups	TIME-FRAME	A smaller group that exists for 12-18 months
Flexible expectations of members, largely dependent on the Community Group as a whole	EXPECTATION	High expectation of participants, upheld by covenant commitments and consistent accountability
Designed for each member to find a place where they can belong, believe, and become	MEMBERS	Designed for each to show the MARCS of a healthy member: Missional / Accountable / Reproducible / Communal / Scriptural
Community Groups move people into D-Groups and over time, multiply into multiple groups	GROUP	One group multiplies into multiple groups
Intentionally inviting / Fun / Gospel centered (Prayer, Worship, Word) / Caring, Praying & Serving each other	COMPONENTS	Accountability / Bible Reading / HEAR Journals / Prayer / Scripture Memory /



DESIGNED FOR COMMUNITY

God created us for community—both with Himself and with each other. In the New Testament, there are 47 “one another” statements given to the early church that show God’s design for us to be in community. We are called to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2), “Confess sins to one another” (James 5:16), “serve one another” (Gal. 5:13), “Encourage one another” (1 Thes. 5:11), “Be hospitable to one another” (1 Peter 4:9) and much more.

So often today, when people think about church, a steeple and a pew are some of the first things that come to mind. But God’s design for church was something so much deeper. Corporate worship on Sunday morning is a great time for our church family, but it is just the start. One cannot experience the “one anothers” of Biblical Community as he or she sits in a chair with 400 other people.

It is when we move past Sunday mornings and begin to interact around the Word of God with others that we begin to experience one of the most powerful ways that God grows us in our faith. That is why we believe that life change happens best in circles, not rows. It is in smaller groups, that we experience more of who God is and we have the opportunity to join Him on His mission of spreading His name throughout all nations.

“LIFE CHANGE
HAPPENS BEST
IN CIRCLES,
NOT ROWS.”



DESIGNED FOR COMMUNITY

The Early Church had an amazing impact on its city and the nations. It grew in strength and number greatly (Acts 16:5). One of the most influential ways that they did this was through creating true, life-changing community. Biblical Community is more than a Bible study or a “hangout time” with friends; it is what happens when the people of God come together to be his Church.

Our task as the Church is to continue the work that Jesus began when he passed the baton to His disciples in Matthew 28. It should be our mission to provide a place where a God-guided transformation can happen. A place where someone can belong, believe, and become.

STRATEGY OF A COMMUNITY GROUP

A Community Group is...

A life-changing community

where you can belong, believe, and become.

Belong - Where you are welcomed and accepted

A corrupt tax collector. A prostitute. A Gentile. Jesus' spent most of his time with people that no one else would. He never required people to get their life together, before he loved them. Jesus created a place in his life where all people could be accepted and experience the love of God. Likewise, we must create a place where people feel welcomed and accepted. When we do this, people find a place where they belong.

Believe - Where you can encounter Jesus through his Word & His People

The call to belong to His community was only the beginning for those He called. While in community with Christ, people experienced the love of God and were brought to a point where they began to believe in him as the Son of God. Similarly, when we create a life-changing community where someone can belong, we create a place where people can encounter Jesus through His Word and through His people.

Become - Where you become who God designed you to be

No one who spent time with Jesus ever left the same. Peter's life is the prime example. Through a relationship with Jesus, Peter went from a cowardly, brash fisherman into a man who fearlessly proclaimed the Gospel and saw thousands come to a saving faith in Jesus. Similarly, when someone encounters Jesus in a personal way, he or she's life is completely repurposed. They become who God designed them to be.

DNA OF A COMMUNITY GROUP

Our approach to Community Groups is not a man-given method, but one that was given by Christ to the early church. In Acts 2, we see a picture of what Biblical Community looked like for the Early Church:

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. 44 Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. 45 They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

We see that the Early Church devoted themselves to the Apostle's teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. This resulted in a group of people who were fully committed to one another and to spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ to their communities. At The Chapel, we hold to the same values in our Community Groups.

Our Community Groups are devoted to faithful teaching of God's Word, to enjoying good fellowship, and to praying with and for each other. When we are doing these things, like the Early Church, it results in us caring for one another and serving the world.

DNA OF A COMMUNITY GROUP

THE DEVOTIONS OF THE EARLY CHURCH & OUR COMMUNITY GROUPS

God's Word

Just as the Early Church was dedicated to the Apostles' Teaching, we are committed to engaging with God's Word on a regular basis. We believe that "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17)." Our groups gather together, not just to read the Bible, but to discuss how we can apply it to our lives. We don't just ask, "What does this mean," but instead ask, "How do I apply this to my life today?"

Fellowship

The word fellowship today is defined as "friendly association." But the word (koinonia) used in the Bible means something deeper. It describes people who gather under the banner of a common idea or goal. Though they will differ in wealth, social status, ethnicity, interests, and maturity, they are unified under a common goal. Biblical Community is one that has individual diversity, but group unity around the common purpose of knowing Christ and making him known to others.

The Early Church must have had some Cajun in them because their fellowship was often in association with breaking bread together. The Early Church didn't just gather for a formal Bible study, but instead lived life together. The small moments of eating together and laughing were imperative to experiencing biblical community.

DNA OF A COMMUNITY GROUP

Prayer

The Christian life is one that should be lived in constant fellowship with the Father. One of the ways that we do this is through prayer. As a Community Group we not only pray corporately to the Father, but also pray for one another. As your group prays for one another you move from a casual to a close relationship. The depth of this relationship allows you to intentionally pray for one another's needs, personal struggles, and celebrate one another's victories. One cannot underestimate the power that prayer has both in our fellowship with the Father and the fellowship we have with one another.

THE RESULTS OF OUR DEVOTIONS

Care for One Another

"All the believers were together and held all things in common. They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need."

When God's people devote themselves to His Word, Fellowship, and Prayer, they gather under a common purpose. This moves our focus from self to group. Our focus shifts from not only looking out for their own interests, but the interests of others (Phil. 2:3-4). We discover a new joy when meeting the needs of others as we are able.

Caring for one another doesn't have to be anything drastic. It can look like lending a truck to someone in your group who is moving, being on call for 3AM emergencies, dropping by with soup when someone is sick, praying expectantly for a personal hardship, or volunteering to watch a couple's children so they can have a date night.

DNA OF A COMMUNITY GROUP

Serve the World

Biblical community was the means by which the Holy Spirit exponentially grew the Early Church. All throughout the book, we see thousands coming to know Christ and experiencing Him through the Church's life-changing community. Our Community Groups have the same opportunity today. Community Groups are more than just a program that the church offers; they are an avenue through which the believer can become who God designed them to be.

Missional living is simple. It does not require extra steps or special actions; it simply means that you live life on mission for Christ. Once we come to know Christ personally, it colors the encounters we have with strangers and it affects how we respond to stressful situations and unfair treatment. A Community Group is often a vital part of someone's pathway to becoming a fully devoted follower of Christ. We desire to provide a place where people can belong, believe, and become.



COMMUNITY GROUP LIFE CYCLE

What does Community Group look like week in and week out?
We will look through the “life-cycle” of a Community Group.
We answer three things:

What do you do on the first night?
What do you do throughout the life of the group?
When is it time to multiply?

WHAT DO YOU DO ON THE FIRST NIGHT?

The first night is critical! We want to laugh and have fun, but we also want people to see how important the group will be to each person. During the first night, you want to accomplish three things:

Get to know each other

In South Louisiana, there is no greater way to get to know each other than over food. Whether you do a big meal or you get multiple people to bring snacks, good fellowship often happens over food. Additionally, it would help to organize some type of time where people share about themselves. This can be fun like playing the game, “Two Truths and a Lie.” Find the balance between organic connecting and intentionally setting things up to help people to get to know one another.



COMMUNITY GROUP LIFE CYCLE

Cast vision for the group

Though this time doesn't need to be long (10 minutes), it is as important as anything you will do for the entirety of your group. You are setting the expectations of the group for your people. You will want to share the purpose of your group. Everyone is coming in what a pre-conceived notion of what small groups are. We want to share the purpose of our group. Our Community Groups are more than a bible study and more than a social club. It is a life-changing community where you can belong, believe, and become. You can look at the first three sections of this book for help in sharing. Additionally, you can use Acts 2:42-47 as a passage to guide your time.

Share the Nuts and Bolts

Lastly, you will want to give a broad overview of what they can expect of the group. You may want to share the group's meeting schedule, curriculum, and childcare plan.

WHAT DO YOU DO THROUGHOUT THE LIFE OF THE GROUP?

Here are few things to share:

Schedule

Meet Weekly

Consistently meeting each week is huge in developing community. We encourage a consistent day in which you meet and if possible a consistent location. This will not only help increase participation from your regular members, but also make it much easier to invite someone new to the group.



COMMUNITY GROUP LIFE CYCLE

Party Monthly

When we have fun together, our relationships deepen quickly. That is why we encourage groups to break from the norm monthly and have fun. Go bowling together, do a potluck at a member's house, etc. Furthermore, these hangouts are the easiest way to invite someone new to your group. Make these parties as "Invite Nights!" People are more comfortable to hangout with strangers if it is a grill out than if it is a Community Group. Often, those people move from just coming to the monthly parties to attending your weekly group.

Serve Quarterly

We live in a world surrounded by hurt and brokenness, so it wise to also schedule times to serve as a Community Group. Once a quarter, step out and meet the needs of our campus, city, or world. It will unify the group and reinforce Gospel-centered relationships with one another.

Shared Responsibility

Though you are the leader/facilitator of the group, you want to encourage everyone in the group to have ownership and contribute. It is helpful to get a person or a group of people to be in charge of the following:

- Hosting Weekly Group or Invite Nights
- Snacks/Meal
- Serve Projects
- Prayer Requests
- Co-leading



COMMUNITY GROUP LIFE CYCLE

Curriculum

At The Chapel, we ask groups to use our sermon-aligned curriculum during the Fall and Spring. We believe that sermon-aligned curriculum helps what people learn to stick and be applied to their lives. We encourage sermon-aligned curriculum because...

Discussing Sunday's message moves people
from passive to active learning.

Group conversation helps people apply what they learned on Sunday.

Increases the focus of what is shared on Sundays.

Leaders can prep for group as they listen to the sermon
on Sunday mornings.

Childcare

For many, one of the biggest barriers to creating effective community in a Community Group is the issue of childcare. The question becomes, "What happens to the children when the adults meet for Community Group?"

Before tackling this question, remember one simple point: life is messy, so it's okay if Community Groups are, too. Still, many groups have found a few ways to make childcare nothing more than a minor issue.



COMMUNITY GROUP LIFE CYCLE

For some, they've found success in hiring a babysitter. In this scenario, all of the families may pitch in or they may rotate so that they only have to pay once every two months or so. Some put on a movie in another room. Some have even been known to use an iPad on FaceTime as a makeshift monitor. For more creative options and how The Chapel can help financially, you can take a look at the Childcare page at the end of this booklet.

Many groups, however, simply take the mild chaos of children in stride. Remember: you are fostering community and transparency. It's okay for the little to play among you as you're sitting and discussing what you heard from the sermon or the passage of Scripture. Children are major parts of our lives, and it is healthy for them to grow up hearing their parents talk about the Word of God with their friends.

WHEN IS IT TIME TO MULTIPLY?

All throughout the Bible, you see a theme surrounding how the Gospel impacts God's people: Healthy things reproduce. Whether it is individuals or communities, when the Gospel is being lived out in God's people, they "bear fruit." For this reason, one of the expectations of any Community Group is that it replicates itself after a period of time. Because each group is different, each group's multiplication strategy will also look different. Some groups may be full of people who cannot wait to start their own groups in their own communities. Some may be hesitant to multiply because they grew so closely together, and you're the only one who steps out to begin another group. As the group's leader, use your best judgment to know how and when your people are ready to multiply.



COMMUNITY GROUP LIFE CYCLE

Here are some indicators that your group may be ready to multiply out.

Your group voices that they want to reach
a different neighborhood in Baton Rouge

Your group has grown so large
that meeting has become logistically difficult

Your group has grown so large that people no longer know everyone

Your group has key leaders that want to start their own group



PRACTICAL LEADERSHIP

Earlier we laid out the vision and strategy behind why Community Groups are so crucial in the life of individual believers and in the life of the church. But a philosophy is only as good as its usefulness. Community Groups, which are about life change and creating fully-devoted followers of Christ, should be able to be deeply practical.

Because a Community Group is made up of people, it is an organic entity. No two will look the same, just as no two people do. But just because the groups won't look the same doesn't mean they don't contain similar elements. Here are some things to make sure you are doing with your group.

LEADING PRACTICALLY

Eat Together

As we all know, in South Louisiana the center of every good party is good food. Whether it is bringing snacks or doing dinner, when your group eats together it can bond people. It helps to start your group with a designated time to for food and fellowship. This casual time typically helps people get to know one another better and is a great way to start friendships with those new to your group.



PRACTICAL LEADERSHIP

Pray Together

Prayer is not an activity only for the super-spiritual or for an obligatory before-the-meal ritual. We are to pray without ceasing, and do so with glad hearts! It is important for you to pray for your group and as a group, because prayer is the most effective tool by which the Holy Spirit will mold you into the image of Christ.

When praying, don't use fancy, extravagant language that sounds like it came from a Seminary class; use normal language. For some, praying in a group can be terrifying, so when they hear you lead using prayer that sounds as if you are talking to a friend, it gives those with worries more confidence than they thought they could have. God doesn't want your fancy words, He wants your sincere heart.

Take time to collect prayer requests from your group. This is a time to really share things that are going on in your lives. It is okay to expose struggles—prayer is the best way to begin when dealing with them. An excellent way to encourage your group to be transparent in the way that you'd like them to be is by modeling the kind of transparency you expect. If you're putting up a front that you have it all together in front of your group, you can bet that they will, too. Exposing struggles and problems is not a sign of weakness, but of strength.



PRACTICAL LEADERSHIP

Model Transparency

If you cannot open up to your group, you cannot expect them to open up with you or with each other. You don't have to fake it. If you don't know the answer to a question, simply say you don't know. Be humble, because humble, transparent leaders gain credibility in their group. One gains nothing from pretending like they have it all together. Nobody does, and a Community Group is the perfect avenue for being genuine. There is a difference between sharing just to say something and truly opening up.

You can set a tone of transparency early on in the life of your group. An excellent question to have the members of your group answer (and for you to model with your answer) is "How did you come to be sitting in this chair?" It allows them to tell a bit of their story, some of where they're coming from, and what connections or realizations brought them to join a Community Group in the first place. Model transparency yourself, and you will see your group members follow.



PRACTICAL LEADERSHIP

Host Well

When most people see “Host Well,” their first thought is usually something along the lines of, “I hope my house is as clean as it should be!” However, spotless cleaning is not what makes a good host home for a Community Group meeting. Here’s a question to get at the heart of what makes a space “prepared” for Community Group: Are you spending as much time preparing spiritually as you are cleaning?

It is important to make sure your home is presentable, but if you aren’t spending an equal amount of time stressing about praying over your home as you are making sure the coffee table doesn’t have dust on it, you may have a priority issue. You can’t prayer walk through your home if you are too busy moving the furniture to vacuum underneath it.

You are a spiritual leader to the people in your group, so you must prepare to lead them spiritually. Again, this does not mean that you have it all together; you simply must be intentional in speaking into their lives about the things of God.

Be a Facilitator

The best spiritual leaders aren’t master teachers, but are great discussion facilitators. If you don’t have all of the answers, that’s fine; if you aren’t okay sitting in uncomfortable silence while your group wrestles through an issue, that may be something to work on. Be more concerned about guiding your group through questions that they can discuss than you are about answering everything that is asked.



PRACTICAL LEADERSHIP

We will provide you with material to lead your group in advance, so you have time to think and pray through the kinds of things you can ask pertaining to the passage. Remember: your role is more like a moderator than a lecturer. You want to give your group things to talk about so that they can use each other to arrive at the truth of God's Word for themselves.

Deal With Conflict

Because you are all human beings, there will come a time when conflict will arise. It may be something as small as a clash of personalities or something large like theological disagreement. Whatever the conflict that arises, do not run from it. Don't make a mountain out of a molehill, so to speak, but also don't let something go un-dealt with. Conflict is actually healthy: working through it will both reveal avenues for personal growth and grow a group together.

At the same time, if you spend your entire time accommodating everyone's individual needs, the group will get nowhere. You are the leader of the group, and so you will sometimes have to draw some lines. It is okay to say, "I'm sorry this doesn't work for you, but it's how our group operates." Err on the side of grace and wisdom, but don't shy away from making a decision if you have to.

When dealing with conflict, remember that the goal is not "winning an argument," but restoration. Matthew 18:15-20 is a step-by-step guide for dealing with conflict and sin with the goal of restoration straight from the pages of Scripture:



PRACTICAL LEADERSHIP

"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

"Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

"Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

BUILDING INTENTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Meet Outside of the Group

A Community Group is meant to be a community—that means you should have fun together. When Jesus created community, they lived their whole lives together. They shared in the work and the play. We noticed before that the early church "met daily"—they were engaged in the same thing Jesus established.

With our busy schedules, it's often difficult to find a lot of time outside our regular activities to meet. Meeting outside the group doesn't have to be fancy gatherings, though. What are some things you're involved in that others could do with you? What hobbies do some of your members have that others can try, as well? As we grow spiritually, we should grow in relationships, also.



PRACTICAL LEADERSHIP

It is healthy to take a week every couple of months that you designate a “fun week.” An occasional going out to dinner with the group and enjoying one another’s company is crucial in your growth together. Remember the three expectations of a Community Group’s schedule: meet weekly, party monthly, and serve quarterly.

As the leader, you can also encourage individuals or couples from the group to meet during the week to strengthen individual friendships, as well. For example: if you have mostly couples in the group, you can write each couple’s name on a piece of paper and put them in a hat. Each couple will draw the name of a couple they can spend time with outside of the group that week. You should be growing as friends with the same intentionality as your commitment to grow spiritually.

We are creating biblical community, not only Community Groups. Don’t just ask people about their lives; live life alongside them.

Serve Together

An excellent way to intentionally develop a relationship outside the walls of your homes is to serve together. Spot needs in your neighborhood area or in the church. Volunteer with your group to serve one week in the children’s department or on parking lot duty. Additionally, you can contact Vick Green in Community Life Department at The Chapel who will be able to connect you with as many service opportunities as you can handle! As you work together to enrich the world around you, you will find that your relationships with each other and with the Lord will grow, as well.



PRACTICAL LEADERSHIP

Develop Discipleship Groups

Because Community Groups are just a step on the pathway to discipleship, you have the opportunity to cultivate an atmosphere of discipleship in your Community Groups. Ideally, a discipleship relationship finds its first legs in the space provided by a Community Group. As friendships develop between the people in your group, certain ones will want to take their relationships with each other and with the Lord to the next level, deciding to meet separately in a discipleship relationship.

Capture Moments

Remember that this is a Community Group—you are people growing closer together and closer with the Lord. Don't get so caught up in the technicalities of "group" that you miss the life change and spiritual growth going on right under your nose. If someone you wouldn't expect contributes a particularly good insight, pull them aside as people are leaving and encourage them. A fitly spoken word of encouragement goes a long way.

Your Community Group should be bound together and committed to Jesus Christ. This will affect both the relationships within your group and their individual relationships with the Lord.

SUBSCRIBE

The Chapel has a Disciplemaking Podcast!

We believe that life change happens in circles, not rows. So, whether your circle is a Community Group, D-Group, or family, this resource exists to help equip you to make disciples that make disciples!

A new episode is released each Wednesday!
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NOTEWORTHY

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

 THE CHAPEL
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