

LEADER RESOURCE



COMMUNITY GROUPS





Knowing God, Being Known by God, and Making God Known

CFC places a strong emphasis on biblical fellowship, and encourages all attendees to be active in a Community Group. These tightly-knit small communities serve as a place for encouragement, growth, discipleship and accountability. These are the types of relationships that nourish and challenge us at the same time. Along with our weekend services and various ministries, community groups allow us to live out our mission in these three ways:

TO KNOW | Biblical Literacy

We will increase biblical literacy by helping people to understand, engage, and teach the Bible as a unified story that points to Jesus.

BE KNOWN | Healthy Community

We will foster a sense of healthy community that encourages deep friendships, spiritual growth, and serving one another during life's challenges.

MAKE KNOWN | Missional Mindset

We will advance our missional mindset by sharing the Gospel and equipping congregation-led ministries to reach vulnerable populations.



TO KNOW | Biblical Literacy

The Inductive Bible Study Method helps us dig deeper into God's Word and avoid misinterpreting it. It requires us to study a Bible passage in its context and make observations, draw conclusions on specific passages, and apply them.

Context - First study the context of the passage by answering the following questions:

- What kind of genre is this passage? (Letter, narrative, poem, proverb, apocalyptic, etc.)
- Who is it written to? What circumstances or passages surround the text that might help us understand the purpose of the text?

Observation - Use these questions to make observations as you study the text.

- What words or phrases stick out to you? Is anything repeated or emphasized?
- What do you think are the main points of the passage?
- Is there anything surprising in this text?

Meaning - What is the main message of this text? What does God intend for us to know?

- What does this passage teach us about God?
- How does this passage relate to Jesus?
- What does this passage teach us about ourselves?
- Do any other Scripture texts come to mind when reading this passage?

Application - How do we apply this passage to our life?

- How does the passage challenge or confirm my thinking?
- How does this passage challenge the way I live?
- What sin might this passage reveal in my heart?

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. Isaiah 55:10-11

Community Group Prayer

Praying with your community group is most powerful, for Jesus himself said: “Where two or three are gathered in my name I am in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). Here are some prayers from Scripture that give a wealth of methods, or styles, for moving your group to deeper levels of praying.

Opening	"Hear our prayer"	Nehemiah 1:11 ; Psalm 5:1-3
Adoration	"Hallowed be your name"	Deuteronomy 10:21 ; 1 Chronicles 29:10-13 ; Psalm 34:8-9
Affirmation	"Your will be done"	Psalm 27:1 ; Isaiah 26:3 ; Romans 8:38-39
Group Needs	"Give us this day"	Psalm 7:1 ; Nehemiah 1:11 ; Matthew 7:7-8
Confession	"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"	Psalm 51 ; Matthew 18:21-35 ; 1 John 1:9
Renewal (protection)	"Lead us not into temptation"	1 Corinthians 10:13
Thanksgiving	"Give thanks to the Lord"	1 Chronicles 16:34 ; Psalm 75:1 ; Revelation 11:17
Blessing	"The Lord bless you and keep you"	Numbers 6:22-27 ; Psalm 1:1
Commissioning	"Go therefore and make disciples"	Matthew 28:18-20 ; Acts 1:8
Healing	"The prayer of faith will make you well"	James 5:13-16 ; Psalm 6:2 ; Psalm 41:4
Warfare	"Get behind me, Satan"	Matthew 4:10 ; Matthew 16:23
Closing	"May the grace of the Lord be with you"	2 Corinthians 13:14 ; Ephesians 3:20-21

Helpful ways to include meaningful prayer time in your group

Brevity – Conversational prayer works best when people limit their prayers to phrases and sentences. Short prayers allow more people to participate, they take the pressure off those who are uncomfortable speaking in groups and encourage listening.

Simple - Use conversational language. Be honest and authentic. State the request and prayers in everyday language. This style puts the focus on the request rather than the person praying.

Rotate - Take turns opening and closing prayer time. Ask members ahead of time so they can be prepared.

Specific - Pray specific requests not answers. Record prayer requests and celebrate answers. On a rotating schedule, encourage members to record the topics of prayer.

Silence - Silence during prayer time can be life giving. Listen in the silence. How is God leading you to pray? Is there a verse, song, or image that God is bringing to mind?

Divide Groups - Many times, especially when we are dealing with very personal challenges, it can be really helpful to split the group by gender for a more authentic prayer time.

Scripture - Praying scripture is a powerful way of praying in God's will for your group.

Share prayer requests - Follow up with your group during the week by sharing prayer requests via email or a private app like GroupMe or Whatsapp.

Lead by example - This is the best way to model prayer. Be vulnerable, rather than asking God to solve your problems, pray for strength, courage, and wisdom.

Split group in random pairs of two (by gender) during prayer time, especially when the group is new. It's one more way to build stronger connections.

Pray by subject - Pray as a group for the church, our leaders, your community, or someone or something specific.

The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? Psalm 27:1



BE KNOWN | Healthy Community

Community Groups exist to promote spiritual and personal growth through meaningful Christian relationships and the study of God's Word. **Our focus is on five primary activities:**

Share - Sharing our lives with others involves trust which will take time to build. As we open up about some of the struggles we face, we want to remind our group that our conversations remain nonjudgmental and confidential. (Proverbs 16:28)

Study - Each week we'll study a section from God's Word that relates to the previous weekend's sermon or an appropriate spiritual growth topic. Our goal is to learn how to read and study Scripture and consequently live out our faith in everyday life. (2 Timothy 3:16)

Support - Each week we'll learn how to take care of one another as Christ commanded (John 15:9-13). This care can take many forms such as prayer, encouragement, listening, challenging one another, and meeting real needs.

Serve - Spiritual Growth is fostered not only by studying God's Word and by what we gain through the support and input of others, but also through service to others. We are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus to our community. That's why, as a group, we find ways to serve in tangible and real ways. (1 Peter 4:10-11) Maybe it's helping someone move, clean an elderly neighbor's yard, or making meals for a new parent or someone in recovering from an illness.

Pray - Prayer is at the very core of our Christian life. Each week we connect with God and with each other through communal prayer. Once per month we take time to pray for people far from God as we incorporate our B.L.E.S.S practices. (Romans 12:12)

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:24-25

Why do you need community?

You will understand the Bible better in a community group.

In a small group setting, you can ask questions, participate in a discussion of the text, and hear others share insights and illustrations of the truth you are trying to grasp. The Bible must be applied to your personal situations and that happens best in community groups.

You will begin to experience God's family.

Over fifty times in the New Testament, the phrase "one another" is used to describe our relationship to other believers. We are instructed to love one another, encourage one another, pray for one another, accept one another, bear one another's burdens, and build up one another. The only way you can obey these commands is in a smaller group! We really do need each other. God never meant for you to go it alone in the Christian life.

Prayer will become more meaningful to you.

In a smaller group, you will learn to participate in prayer by having a conversation together with God. In praying with others in your community group, we find strength and answers to the needs in our lives; and we encourage others by praying for them.

You will find a place to grow.

Community groups are a great place to grow - not just in knowledge of the Word but also in your relationship and walk with God, and with your community group family. As you grow in authenticity, in sharing your lives, you also grow in accountability, in upholding one another in prayer and encouragement, in your convictions, and in your commitments to the Lord.

You can handle stress and pressure better.

Community groups provide excellent support in times of crisis, change, and stress. You'll have a sense of stability and security knowing there are people who really care for you and are committed to standing with you.

You will develop leadership skills you never knew you had.

The Bible teaches that every believer is given certain talents or "gifts" to benefit others in the family of God. As you share and participate in a relaxed community group setting, you'll discover your confidence and self-esteem rising. This will help you at work, at church, and in every other relationship.



MAKE KNOWN | Missional Mindset

CFC is deeply committed to outreach – in Lancaster County and globally. The world desperately needs the hope of Jesus Christ...we are called to do all that we can to help with that mission.

While we want to make sure to open scripture and study God's word every time we get together, we also want to live out our calling to share the gospel and to love and serve others.

Individual members of the group can certainly find places to serve in various ministries at CFC on a regular basis, and we welcome and encourage that, but we don't want to miss the opportunity to serve together. By serving together, we build stronger bonds within the group and we can encourage one another along the way.

Serving brings us closer to God's design for His church. The early church, on its first day, began the practice that "All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need" (Acts 2:44-45). Some service projects require financial giving, but in most cases it's more about rolling up our sleeves and helping someone in need.

On the following page you can find some ideas and questions that will help you identify outreach opportunities for your community group but don't limit what your group can do, to just this list. If you see a need in the community, then your group is officially commissioned to meet that need in whatever way you can. If the need is larger than just your group, consult with your peer group leader or reach out to another community group from your peer group and invite them to join you.

Your community group can be used by God in incredible ways as you make yourself available to serve. Even seemingly mundane activities can be such a blessing to others and to you.

Serving Together - Reaching out to our Community

"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." Galatians 6:10

As followers of Christ we are called to serve others. (James 2:14-17) Here are several reasons why serving together can strengthen our group and at the same time combine good works with good news.

- Serving others helps a community group unite and connect more quickly.
- Serving reminds everyone in the group that we're not just here to care for group members, but for others as well.
- Serving meets real community needs.

Ideally, a small group takes on one project per semester or three times per year. As a group, prayerfully discuss and plan practical, tangible ways you can reach out to others in your community. The following questions may help you in the process.

- What common cause resonates with the group?
- What are some tangible ways we can give the gift of our time, resources, energy, abilities?
- What service projects allow us to build a meaningful relationship with those we are serving?
- Does someone in your group have a neighbor who needs some help?
- Are there CFC mission partners that need help?

Reach out to your peer group leader if you have questions or need some ideas. Consider sticking with a single cause for a while to build stronger ties and relationships. When scheduling service projects, remember not to wait until "everyone" can be involved. Consider this proven method:

1. Invite your group to help identify a service project.
2. Schedule a date that can work for most of the group.
3. Pray for a fruitful outcome leading up to the project.
4. Serve with whoever can make it.
5. Thank God for the opportunity and pray about picking the next project.

"And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is

pleased."Hebrews 13:16

B L E S S

Practices

GOING BEYOND OURSELVES

"For the love of Christ compels us." 2 Corinthians 5:14

B - BE IN PRAYER

Once per month in your community group, take time to pray for people in your lives who do not know Jesus. Write their names down and share them with your group. Share your own updates and stories and give words of encouragement to others in your group. Talk about how some of the other B.L.E.S.S. practices can help us reach others.

L - LISTEN

Practice active listening in your group and discuss why this is so important when trying to build meaningful relationships with others. Share testimonials as an icebreaker and discover how really listening to someone's story can help us know and understand each other better.

E - EAT

Share a meal or have coffee together with people from your BLESS list. With the simple act of eating together, we practice hospitality and deepen relationships.

S-SERVE

Identify service projects as a community group that allows you to interact with others. Build relationships with those you are serving and find opportunities to connect with them even after you have served them. You may find that God will open doors for you to share your faith with them.

S-SHARE

We all have our own unique journey of faith. When the time is right, share your story with others. Ask for prayer from your community group when you have an opportunity to share your faith and let them know how it was received.



RESOURCES & TOOLS





CFC is committed to providing resources, tools, and relevant training that will support you as shepherd your community group.

Here is how we equip you to lead:

New Leader Orientation provides you with an overview of our community group ministry, expectations and available support. (quarterly)

Leader Huddles bring all community group leaders together to pray, learn, and discuss relevant topics. (semiannually)

Peer Groups along with a **Peer Group Leader Couple** are assigned to each new community group leader. Offering support, prayer, and encouragement, peer groups are cohorts of five to six community group leaders that meet semiannually to collaborate and discuss challenges and opportunities.

Sermon Based Curriculum with discussion questions are made available by the end of Thursday, prior to the weekend's message. Find them on the [CFC website](#) or in the weekly CFC email.

RightNow Media is an excellent resource with over 10,000 video bible studies on a variety of topics. It is available for free to all who call CFC their home church. Invite your community group to register here: <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Account/Invite/communityfellowship>

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. Romans 12:4-6

Community Group Leader Expectations

To lead a Community Group, we ask that you:

- Commit to leading a community group for a minimum of one year.
- Commit to integrity, character, and spiritual growth.
- Review and understand the leader resources guide.
- Connect with a CFC Elder and your peer group leader.
- Attend peer group meetings and leader huddles.
- Sign the Community Group Leader Covenant.

Skills / Abilities

- Leadership, shepherding, and/or facilitating – strength in one or more of these areas.
- Social Skills – possessing emotional awareness and ability to connect with others.
- Biblical Literacy – foundational understanding of scripture.

Expectations of a leader

- Pray for your group members.
- Incorporate B.L.E.S.S. practices with your group monthly.
- Communicate special needs or challenges to your peer group leader.
- Provide feedback on your group to your peer group leader.
- Follow up promptly with potential new members.
- Commit group to one service project per year.
- Identify and mentor a new potential leader from within your group.

“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them, not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”

1 Peter 5:2-4

Community Group Leader Covenant

Community Fellowship Church’s mission is to make committed followers of Christ through worship, evangelism, fellowship, discipleship, and service.

At Community Fellowship Church, community groups are an integral part of our mission. Because we only attend one corporate gathering per week, much spiritual growth and relationship building happens within community groups.

As a community group leader, I understand that I am entrusted with building a group that intentionally seeks to fulfill the five purposes of CFC. These purposes are worship, fellowship, evangelism, discipleship, and service.

As a Community Group Leader at CFC, I agree to the following:

- Model a life of spiritual growth and accountability
- Church membership and regular attendance
- Communicate and meet with my peer group leader throughout the year
- Attend leader huddles and peer group meetings
- Identify and mentor potential leaders in my group
- Invest in lives of members as much as possible, inside and outside of group meetings
- Commit to pray for the members of my group
- Strive to foster an environment of transparency, encouragement and accountability
- Meet weekly during the three trimesters. (30 meetings per year)
- Lead my group in one service project per trimester

Name: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____ Date: _____

“And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.”

1 Thessalonians 5:14-15

Community Group Covenant

Community Fellowship Church (CFC) mission is to make committed followers of Christ through worship, evangelism, fellowship, discipleship, and service. At CFC, Community Groups are an essential part of our mission.

Because we only attend one corporate gathering per week, much spiritual growth and relationship building happens within Community Groups. Throughout Scripture, community is integral for the carrying out of God's mission. God chooses to work through people to redeem His world.

This is the reason CFC has developed the following covenant to outline the value it places on Community Groups and their significance for one's personal growth with Christ.

As a Community Group Member, I pledge to the following:

- Make attendance at our group meetings a priority and let the group leaders know in advance if I will not be present.
- Pray for one another regularly, specifically lifting our needs and praises up to God.
- Be honest and seek to be transparent as you grow in trust with one another.
- Never share or divulge anything shared in confidence outside of the group.
- Help with meeting preparation, clean-up, and other activities.
- Give permission to group members to hold me accountable to areas agreed upon.
- Invest in the lives of the group members as much as possible, inside, and outside of group meetings.
- Participate in group service projects.
- Live out my faith in my daily life and to allow my relationship with God to influence and determine my daily lifestyle and interaction with others.

Name _____ Date _____

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another, and even more as you see the Day approaching.”

Hebrews 10:24-25

Peer Group Leaders

“I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another.” Romans 15:14

Throughout scripture, great men and women of God had mentoring relationships. Exodus tells us the story of Moses as he was mentored by his father-in-law Jethro and then later went on to mentor Joshua. In 1 Samuel, we learn of Eli who mentored Samuel and later the book of Ruth portrays Naomi as a mentor to Ruth, her Moabite daughter-in-law. The prophet Elijah mentored Elisha and even in the New Testament we find Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, mentoring Mary after she learned she was to be the mother of Jesus.

As you step into your role as a Community Group leader... the modeling, encouragement and listening ear of an established leader can prove invaluable. Especially when it comes from someone you have come to know and grown to respect. That’s why you are asked to connect with a peer group leader; someone who has experience in leading a community group and that can walk alongside you as you grow your leadership skills.

Peer group leaders will assist you in a variety of ways:

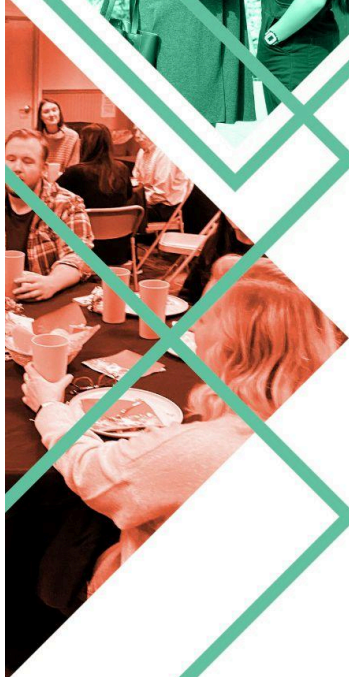
- Pray for you and your group.
- Discuss challenges and offer potential solutions.
- Provide you with training and available resources.
- Connect you with other leaders for fellowship and support.

Twice per year, peer group leaders will invite you to join them and the other leaders of your peer group for a time of prayer, feedback and collaboration during one of the Sunday morning services. Discuss challenges and work together with other leaders to seek solutions and invest in one another.

Your Peer Group Leader is: _____

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.”

Acts 20:28



MEETINGS THAT MATTER



Make Your First Meeting Awesome!

Whenever we start up again after a break and especially when we are starting a new group with people we may not yet know, it's important to start well and set the tone for the season ahead. Experience tells us that many people will decide whether they will stay with the group in the first 10 minutes of our initial meeting. This may be even more true for new believers.

We'll never be able to make it "perfect" for everyone. Be at peace with that. There are steps we can take to foster authentic relationships and an environment where people feel safe, engage openly, and grow in their relationship with Christ. Here are a few ideas for you to consider as you open your home for your first Community Group meeting and every first meeting after a break.

Prior to the meeting

- Send out a friendly email reminder with the starting time and meeting address.
- Encourage everyone to bring a snack.
- Prepare your home for the meeting (find a spot for your children outside of the meeting area).
- Pray over your meeting and new group.
- Use name tags for people to learn one another's names.

Meeting flow

- Welcome people personally as they come in.
- Start with prayer, then introductions, followed by an icebreaker.
- Have a conversation about the discussion topic for the trimester.
- Ask for prayer requests and praise reports and pray together as a group.
- Discuss expectations (hand out the Community Group Covenant)
- Decide on how you will best communicate as a group (email/text etc.)
- Involve members of your group from the beginning (snacks, prayer requests, etc.)
- Set a start and stop on your meeting time.

Meeting follow up

- Send out a group text/email the day after the meeting. (thanking everyone for coming and share the prayer requests from your time together)
- Reach out to anyone that didn't make the meeting. (How can we pray for you?)
- If anyone in your group showed vulnerability and shared a personal concern, send them a note and let them know you will be praying for them.

Ask engaging questions rather than give answers!

Asking good questions is the best way for a leader to create a conversational environment. Throughout His ministry, Jesus was asked many questions and responded with few answers. Instead, He asked questions as His answer. Jesus knew that good questions challenge people to consider the truth, think about their own experience, and take ownership of their faith journey.

Here are a few tips:

- Ask open-ended questions, not those that can be answered with a simple yes or no. (For example, begin questions with who, what, when and/or where).
- Ask questions that evoke feelings, thoughts, and insights.
- Ask questions that have more than one good answer.
- Ask questions that encourage the sharing of personal examples.
- Ask questions that stimulate people to apply what they are learning.
- Don't be afraid of silence. Embrace it. Give your group time to think and respond to your questions.

Strong leaders don't simply answer group members' questions; they respond by encouraging participation from the whole group and asking follow-up questions. They connect questions to the discussion topic, admit their own struggles with difficult questions, and encourage self-discovery by allowing the group members to arrive at conclusions themselves.

Directing questions strategically also allows us to engage members of our group that tend to be quiet. A word of caution here: Our goal is never to put people on the spot, group members will share when they are ready and when we create the right and safe environment for them to do so.

Helpful Hint: Give the quieter members of your group some advance notification so they can have time to process. You may be surprised as to how much valuable insights they can contribute to the group.

"You are the people of God; he loved you and chose you for his own. So then, you must clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Be tolerant with one another and forgive one another whenever any of you has a complaint against someone else. You must forgive one another just as the Lord has forgiven you. And to all these qualities add love, which binds all things together in perfect unity." Colossians 3:12-14

Ice Breakers

Fellowship is not always easy even for followers of Christ. Because we are all uniquely made, it can be hard at times to move our groups toward authentic conversations where we can grow, connect and learn. One way to break through some of these walls is to introduce icebreakers that help us be more open and comfortable with each other.

Ice breakers should be fun but more importantly should help us learn more about each other. You may already know of some. Here are some examples of icebreakers that will help you “break the ice” and at the same time get to know each other on a deeper level.

Defining Moment

Ask everyone in the group to share a defining moment in their life as they were growing up. Something that impacted their life and shaped their journey. How is their life different today because of this incident?

Who is your hero?

Ask each member to name three people, past or present, whom they admire. Why? Or, ask them if they could interview anyone in history, who would that be and why? What one or two questions would you want to ask?

Make Believe

If you could go anywhere in the world now, where would you go and why? If you could talk to anyone in the world, who would it be? Why? If you could talk to any person who has died, who would you talk to and why?

House on Fire

Ask, “Your house is on fire, and everyone is safe. You have 30 seconds to run through the house and collect three or four articles you want to save. What would you grab? Why?” After everyone has done this, the group can discuss what they learned about the things they value.

How would you change the world?

This will engage people’s imaginations and help them share their passion. Ask the question, “How would you use \$1 million to change the world?” After everyone has had a chance to share, ask the same question about \$100 and then about \$1,000.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Sample Meeting Outline

6:45 pm - Welcome members into your home. Use this time to get to know each other better. Encourage conversation and share snacks.

7 pm - Open your meeting on time. Start with a short prayer. Many groups will rotate leading the study, in which case, have the leader of the evening be the one opening in prayer.

7:05 - Icebreaker - Especially if your group is still new or as you start in a new trimester, it helps to start the evening with a short icebreaker. This will get everyone participating, even those that tend to be quieter during the meeting and it gives us an opportunity to learn more about each other.

7:15 - Reflections from the previous week. When we end our meeting with a challenge or call to action, we want to follow up with a quick check in. "How did it go for you?". "What did you experience during the week?" In a 10 minute time period not everyone will be able to contribute, but incorporating this practice reminds us to reflect on our study during the week.

7:25 - Always start by reading the scripture you are studying for the evening. Whether you are following along with the sermon notes or discussing a RightNow Media study, opening God's word sets the tone and direction for your time together.

7:30 - Most community groups follow along with the sermon series. Before you dig into the study questions ask the group for their overall thoughts on the message. "Did you feel God speaking to you through Pastor Bobby?". "How did this message speak to you directly?"

7:35 - Work through the questions and whenever a specific scripture is referenced, have someone from the group read it.

8:10 - Start wrapping up the meeting by offering a call to action for the week as it relates to the discussion. Maybe it's memorizing a short verse or a specific action related to the B.L.E.S.S. practices.

8:15 - Take time for prayer requests. Some groups will separate men and women during prayer time to allow for more transparency and openness .

8:30 - Close the meeting on time out of respect for those that have to wake early or have childcare waiting. Some members may choose to stay around for more prayer time, especially when they are going through challenges.



OVERCOMING CHALLENGES



The Four Questions

There are times when one or more of our community group members is dealing with an important issue. Whether it's illness, job loss or someone they love that has walked away from God, it seems to consume them. Sometimes these issues persist and group discussion and prayer time can end up focusing only on this person and the challenges they are going through. As a result, over time, other members feel left out, not seen and not heard. The question then becomes: "How do we love the person with the challenge as well as our other group members?"

Here are four key questions to ask when someone comes to you with an ongoing issue they are experiencing. These questions will demonstrate that you care about what they're going through, and they will help you gain clarity of what's going on. Getting the facts and context usually makes the next steps relatively straightforward on how to support them or to provide them with the kind of help they may need.

1. How long have you been dealing with this? (The duration of the issue)

- When did this first occur?

2. Who else knows? (Involvement of others)

- Have you talked to anyone else about this? If so, who? How often?
- Do any other people know?
- When was the last time you talked to someone about it?
- How did they respond?

3. Have you received any advice or counsel on how to deal with this?

- What have those you've talked to said about this situation?
- Have you sought any other help or resources regarding this issue?

4. Do you have any plans for your next steps?

- What do you think might be your next step?
- Would you like me to check on some other resources? (Don't make the calls, but give them referrals, etc.)

5. Pray

- Never miss an opportunity to pray for someone in a challenging situation.

"For where two or three gather together in My name, there am I with them."

Matthew 18:20

Principles of Loving Christian Confrontation

In Matthew 18:15-17, God has given us clear principles for loving confrontation.

“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.”

1. The goal is restoration

The temptation is to confront someone just to make ourselves feel better or to hurt someone who has hurt us. But that is not love. The goal in confrontation is restoring your relationship with them and their relationship with God.

2. Begin by approaching this believer in private

While it is easier to stuff our hurt down deep inside, or to gossip about them to others – the first loving step is to confront them in private.

3. Loving confrontation may need to involve others who also love this person

Confronting a fellow believer in Christ may not always lead to restoration but we are not to throw up our hands in despair. Continue the process of restoration with other like-minded believers.

4. Loving confrontation may need to involve your peer group leader, your community groups ministry leadership or in some cases even an Elder

If this believer refuses to repent, it is time to involve the leaders of your church. Lord willing, because they respect the authority of the church, this person will see the seriousness of that sin, repent, and return.

“Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others”

Philippians 2:3-4

Four Actions to Take in Conflict Resolution

Many times even small disagreements can turn into much bigger challenges when they are not addressed. The past years have shown us that even as Christians, we have different perspectives on a variety of “hot” topics and current issues. Left unaddressed, these issues can escalate and cause people to leave our group and worse yet, walk away from God. As shepherds of our groups, we need to be aware and ready to step in. Here are actions we can take to bring reconciliation to the situation.

Address difficult situations as soon as they arise.

Unresolved conflict in your group can destroy all the trust you have worked so hard to build. This, too, shall pass, is not a good option – ever.

As an added benefit you’ll find that addressing conflict right away helps set the course for deeper and more authentic conversations.

Your whole group is impacted by unresolved conflict.

In a community group setting it’s never just the involved parties that are impacted by stress situations. People will feel as if they are walking on eggshells.

You can change the temperature of the whole group by clearing the air.

Always involve all parties in the conversation.

The person in conflict has a vested interest in making himself or herself “right”, if you place yourself in the position of judge and jury.

Too often this can lead to “he said - she said” and as a result it can encourage gossip and potentially portray an appearance of favoritism.

Choose not to be offended. You cannot control the outcome.

Especially when we seek to love those in our care, it hurts when things don’t turn out the way we want.

When it comes to serious conflict in your group, many times this is a wonderful time to ask for help.

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.” Galatians 6:1

