

Growth Groups

- Training Guide -

“So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.” II Corinthians 3:18

Discipleship with others, is the process of pointing each other to Christ so that we may behold Him more in order to become like Him more.

Our hope for Growth Groups:

To provide a space for the members of your group to be further transformed into the image of Christ.

How is this accomplished?

By cultivating friendships that will encourage a deeper study and application of the scriptures, an openness with struggles & areas of needed growth, and greater dependence on the Holy Spirit.

A Growth Group is an ideal format for deeper discipleship to take place.

“Community that doesn’t draw us deeper into discipleship over time just becomes another way to hide in plain sight.”

Three Types of Groups

Adapted from Tim Keller’s Center Church & Frontline Church

“All Truth, No Grace” Groups

This happens when the members of a Group make the goal of growth merely “not sinning”. This group establishes a type of “cuss jar accountability”, which lacks grace and doles out punishment and shame to the offenders. This does not take into account the gospel of grace that tells us that Jesus took our punishment on the cross and through trusting Him we can be forgiven. We don’t have to atone for our sin, because Jesus did that for us. A group that piles on shame and doles out punishment for sin, instead of pointing to what Christ has done, will end up fizzling out because the members of the group won’t feel safe to be “in process”. Or they will feel the need to cover their sin struggle with generalized statements like “It wasn’t a great week”, or “It was better than last week”, but they never get fully honest about what they are going through in order to receive “Grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16) because the Growth Group isn’t a safe place for real, true confession, it ends up becoming dull. We want to see Growth Groups be a place where real confession can happen, but that it would lead to true repentance.

“Cheap Grace” Groups

This type of group forms a kind of “confession booth” accountability. Sins are confessed weekly, which is good, but that’s where it stops. There’s a sense of “I’m glad I got that off my chest”, and we pat ourselves on the back and say, “It’s okay, I’m struggling too”. Now, we have to be willing to share openly and honestly in order to see God work through others in our lives. But accountability is not merely meant to try and absolve us of our guilt. There’s not a sense of “We need to be passionately pursuing holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). The result of these types of groups is they create “circles of cheap grace, through which we obtain cheap peace from a troubled conscience”. Our confession stops short of repentance as we confess the same sins over and over and refuse to take violent action against them. These kinds of groups feel great at first, but then they don’t last long because people get bored and don’t find much value in them. We need Growth Groups that allow space for real, honest confession...but that it wouldn’t stop there.

“Grace + Truth” or “Gospel Centered” Groups

We come with a “gospel based assurance” and a “grace motivated passion” to pursue all that God has for us.

Gospel Based Assurance = The gospel says We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus. This truth provides a safety, and stability from which we can pursue Christ more. A gospel based assurance also frees us to confess, repent and take action to turn from our sin because we don’t have to make performance and human acceptance the goal of our lives. Since we are already accepted and loved by the only one that it truly matters - our Father in heaven.

Grace motivated action = Understanding that we have everything we need in Christ for living the life He’s called us to live (II Peter 1:3). This means that we should believe by faith that God did not save us in order to be resolved to a life of perpetually falling into sin, but by His Holy Spirit, we can say no to sin and say yes to the Life of holiness He has for us.

This isn’t about perfection...obtaining some state of bliss while here on earth. It’s about practice. It’s about taking steps to grow in Christlikeness, motivated by an assurance that my actions don’t cause me to obtain God’s love and favor, but since in Christ I already am loved, and favored as a son or daughter, I want to respond in gratitude and obedience.

“Grace is opposed to earning, not to effort.”

-J.P. Moreland

In Growth Groups, we get to act as *gospel heralds* in each other’s lives.

“Whatever ditch you are most afraid of, you are in danger of falling into the opposite. Your group should endeavor to “pursue holiness in the fear of the Lord, but always in the context of deep safety, because we are accepted and beloved by Jesus.”

The Three Rhythms

SCRIPTURE

Goal: Transformation, not merely information.

How can your group accomplish this?

Approach the scriptures in such a way as to “feed on scripture”. Let the scriptures nourish you each day.

What does this rhythm of scripture look like in a Growth Group?

1) Sync your weekly Bible reading

Make sure you endeavor to make the reading attainable.

“No one should read their Bible in order to escape the guilt of not reading their Bible”.

“Less is more” should be your mantra. A smaller, consistent diet of the scriptures over the course of six months is better than lots of Bible haphazardly achieved over the same span of time.

Keys for success in Bible Reading

- Start in the NT
- Start with a chapter a day
- Find a good reading plan that you can all stick to

*Find links to these great Bible reading plans: Project 345 or F260 NT on our Growth Groups resource list.

2) Daily Scripture Journaling

Encourage your group members to include a notebook with their quiet time.

Scripture Journaling allows your members to write down key insights from the passage, promises to claim, wrong thinking that needs to change, and applications for their life.

This is an area where modeling will be really key. Some members of the group may be new to this practice. Be patient and encourage your members to grow into it.

Some helpful approaches for studying the scriptures (your group may want to adopt a certain approach to studying so that you are all on the same page)

HEAR

Highlight - Highlight each verse that speaks to you by copying it under the letter “H”. Write out the following:

Explain - EXPLAIN what the text means. By asking some simple questions, with the help of God’s Spirit, you can understand the meaning of a passage or verse.

Apply - answer a series of questions to uncover the significance of these verses to you personally, questions like: How can this help me? What does this mean today? What would the application of this verse look like in my life? What does this mean to me? What is God saying to me?

Respond -Your response to the passage may take on many forms. You may write a call to action. You may describe how you will be different because of what God has said to you through His Word. You may indicate what you are going to do because of what you have learned. You may respond by writing out a prayer to God. For example, you may ask God to help you to be more loving, or to give you a desire to be more generous in your giving. Keep in mind that this is your response to what you have just read.

THE FOUR QUESTIONS (see “The Four Questions” PDF on the Growth Groups resource list)

- Who is God?
- What does He do?
- Who are we in light of this?
- What are we called to do in light of who we are?

What happens when someone in the group isn't doing the assigned reading?

Don't do:

Shame and guilt them into reading

Say it's no big deal and lower the bar

Do:

Keep talking to your group about the importance of daily reading and in grace push each other towards the need to feed on scripture if they expect to grow.

“This is non-negotiable and non-optional for our group, but it also will not be a source of shame...You are safe in his love but you must feed on scripture if you expect to grow.”

SHARING

The sharing portion of a Growth Group is meant to allow space for open, honest conversation around areas of suffering and sin so that God can use others to aid us in our pursuit of Christ.

The three areas to discuss in the SHARING portion are what have been called “The Three S's”: Sanctification, Suffering & Sin. Or put another way “Good fruit”, “What's hard” and “Bad fruit”.

Ask these questions:

- 1) Where have you seen good fruit in your life this past week?
- 2) What has been hard this past week?
- 3) Where have you seen bad fruit (sin) in your life this past week?

“Some groups dive deep into the good fruit and what’s hard and neglect honest and specific confession of sin. Other groups dive deep into the confession of sin, but neglect to encourage each other by pointing out the growth they see in each other—however small—as well as neglecting to join each other on the mourning bench.” -Frontline Church

When in doubt aim at the heart.

When it comes to sin, the heart of the issue is the issue with our hearts. Many Christians operate on a surface level Christianity. As long as their actions (surface) are in order, they think everything is okay. However, in the sermon on the mount, Jesus defined sin as not only our outward actions but also our internal motives and desires that are not in line with the Kingdom of God. The process of growing in Christ is bringing not only our actions in alignment with the Kingdom but also our motivations and desires. This is one of the blessings of Growth Groups. By asking these three questions weekly, the members of your group will have an opportunity to identify actions *and* motives that are not in alignment with the truth of our identity in Christ.

*Check out “Listen for the Heart” & “Ask Good Questions” articles on the Growth Groups resource list.

What do we do when someone confesses sin?

When someone in your group shares about a struggle or sin issue, often our first response is to want to share advice on how to overcome that sin. Now, the heart of this is good in that we don’t want to see our brother or sister linger any longer in sin. But the goal of this time should not just be to keep each other from sinning. Our goal should be to get to the heart issue underneath each sin and struggle and show how Jesus wants to change us and transform us there. Change that doesn’t affect our hearts and motivation is not true change.

Here are some helpful ways to approach when a brother or sister confesses sin.

Taken from Ed Welch’s article “How to Talk with Someone about Sin” which can be found on the Growth Groups resource list.

1) Don’t simply commiserate.

A common mistake is either to match sin for sin or to sympathize in some way. It may be important to relate to the struggle that someone is facing by sharing your experience, but don’t let it dissolve into matching struggle with struggle. To stay on track, offer partnership, humility, and patience but not commiseration.

2) Get to the heart

Our understanding of sin is that it is a matter of the heart, which means that we are part of a process of redirecting the person’s compass toward Jesus. We prefer to manage aspects of our lives in our own way; we love our desires more than we love Jesus. At those times we need to be reminded of who God is and what he has done, who we are, and how we live in light of God’s Word.

3) Develop a plan

Will you be aggressive towards sin and its grip on your life? Establish a plan to keep yourself from falling into temptation. This may include identifying times and seasons where temptation is increased and having a plan for what to do in those circumstances.

4) Recognize the messy nature of growth and change

Spiritual growth is like other patterns we see around us. It is barely perceptible from day to day. The enemy would want to convince us that we will never break free of a certain struggle. This is why asking about “good fruit” each week will be important, so that we can see the work that the Lord has been doing. Remember as a group to “count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus” Romans 6:11.

5) Lead in saying “Thank you” to God.

“Thank you” means that there is no long trip back to God after we come to our senses and turn from our sin. No, indeed. Wherever we go, all we do is turn around, and our God is right there.

Remember, deep conviction over our sin should lead to true confession of our sin, which should lead to turning away from our sin (repentance).

Your Growth Group should come alongside one another in order to lead each other through these steps.

PRAYER

The prayer portion of your meeting is a way for your group to express dependence upon the Holy Spirit as the only one who can truly change us from the inside out. As Paul commands us in Philippians 4:6 we are to “make our requests known to God”. We get to bring our burdens, struggles, and difficulties to the Lord in order that He might change us and transform us by His grace

Note, this will be the hardest of the three rhythms for your group to do with consistency. But make it a priority each week.

Two out of the three is...not great.

What can often happen in Growth Groups is that after a time of awesome discussion about the Scriptures and a time of open, honest confession of sin, we fail to “pray it into our hearts”. Merely talking about change and expressing a desire for change will ultimately be fruitless unless we are yielded to the Holy Spirit who is the one that produces true, lasting change in our hearts. Inviting the Spirit to work in our lives and asking for His power and presence over us is an important aspect of Spirit-led prayer.

*Check out “Praying Beyond the Sick List” by David Powlison in our Growth Groups resource list.

Signs of Spirit-Led Prayer

Adapted from Frontline Church

What will it look like when we invite the Spirit into our prayers and “bear one another’s burdens” together?

- (1)** The gaps of awkward silence decrease as our prayers comfortably move in and out of silence.
- (2)** We don’t feel like we need to just pray once. Instead, we feel the freedom to pray multiple times as the Spirit leads.
- (3)** Our prayers include Scripture, thoughts, pictures, and even gut impressions, spontaneously brought to mind by God—always filtering them by Scripture and weighing them in a wise community.

Questions to ask leading into your prayer time:

- What do you sense God doing in you that you need to respond to?
- What do you sense God doing around you that he is inviting you into?
- What do you sense God doing through you that you need courage for?

WHAT SHOULD WE DO FOR OUR FIRST MEETING?

These are just suggestions to get you started in launching your Growth Group

1st Meeting

Spend time discussing this training guide in order to set clear expectations so everyone in your group understands the commitment.

Spend time talking through the section “The Three Types of Groups” and discuss these questions with your group:

- What type of small groups have you been a part of in the past?
- How can we avoid these ditches as a Growth Group?
- What will our blindspot be?
- How can we grow to become a gospel-centered Growth Group?

If you still have time, discuss the Three Rhythms of Growth Groups together. Share, discuss, plan and commit.

Use these notes as a guide map for your discussion.

Feel free to take your first two meetings to work through this training guide.

Future Meetings

Once expectations have been set and everyone has committed to following the three rhythms, organize your meeting around the three rhythms, Scripture, Sharing, and Prayer.

At some point, plan to have everyone in your group share testimonies. You can sprinkle these throughout your meetings, or set aside an entire 1-2 meetings to share testimonies.