

INTRO TO

GOSPEL COMMUNITY

Learn what it is, how to do it, and
your role in it.

A NOTE ABOUT USING THIS GUIDE

The following material is meant to be walked through by a group of people, with various members sharing the reading and facilitating. Read through each of the following sections and pause to answer the question(s). For new and existing communities, this is a great way to establish (or re-establish) the vision and expectations of Gospel Community.

WHAT IS GOSPEL COMMUNITY?

On Sundays we gather corporately but throughout the week we meet in smaller communities for the day to day living out of our faith in obedience to Christ. These smaller communities are where we experience Gospel Community - *life together under the Lordship and in the pattern of Christ*. It's here that we find the God-intended context of discipleship as we walk with others in learning to live out all that Jesus teaches and commands.

THE FOUR FOCUSES OF GOSPEL COMMUNITY

Our Gospel Communities are centred around the four focuses of the early Church found in Acts 2:42: "And they devoted themselves to the 1) apostles' teaching and 2) the fellowship, to 3) breaking of bread and the 4) prayers."

1) The Apostles' Teaching

The Bible is God's authoritative Word, revealing His character and purposes in the world, while guiding us in all aspects of life and equipping us for good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17). As Jesus' people we are submitted to Scripture as our standard of truth, conforming our lives to God's will rather than cultural trends or personal feelings.

Practically, this will mean that the bulk of our time together each week will be spent reading, studying, and applying the Scriptures so that we can better learn to live in light of all that God has spoken.

2) Fellowship

The New Testament describes the church as a family united in Christ, with a biblical responsibility to love and care for one another. As Jesus' people we are devoted to embodying this identity and calling by living out "one another" practices such as, having Christ's mind, offering His welcome, speaking His words, showing His love, and giving His grace.

Practically, this means that we are all responsible for caring for one another, encouraging each other, and doing our best to keep one another accountable. It means that we speak up in the conversations, we reach out during the week, and don't shy away from hard

conversations. Resources for all of these kinds of things can be found at wchurch.ca/gcresources.

3) The Breaking of Bread

The Christian life is centred on Christ's sinless life, death, resurrection, and ascension, with the Lord's supper being central to gatherings. As Jesus' people we are devoted to a life of dying to self, living by faith, and surrendering personal desires to align with Christ's will, guided by Scripture and the Holy Spirit.

Practically, this not only means that, on occasion, we will receive communion together but that we will also seek to help each other do the hard work of laying our lives down. It means we will practice confession and repentance, and find ways to lovingly challenge one another.

4) Prayers

Prayer in the simplest form is talking and spending time with God. As Jesus' people we are devoted to pursuing an ongoing relationship with Him that is formed by His Word and His Spirit, as He brings us into alignment with His heart.

Practically, this means that one of the core practices of our time together each week will be prayer—prayer with and for one another. It will look different at different times. But whatever it looks like, the aim is always a dependence on God to do the transformative work in each of us that only He can produce. Together, we seek God in prayer.

STOP + DISCUSS

1. Which of these four focuses are you most excited about practicing together this year?

THE SHARED RESPONSIBILITY OF GOSPEL COMMUNITY

If you've ever been in a small group in the past, you're likely familiar with a structure that involves a set of leaders and then a group of members. The leaders carry the responsibility of the group, while the members are called to participate. But in Gospel Community, this looks a little bit different.

In fact, we don't have "Leaders" at all, because the Bible calls *every believer* to participate in community, care for other members, pray, worship, and do all sorts of "one-anothers" in order to foster healthy, transformative, Gospel-centred community. In light of that, by committing to a Gospel Community, we are each taking on the responsibility for the group and each other.

That being said, there will be a "Host" or hosts for every Gospel Community—those who open their home and maybe take it upon themselves to communicate the plan with the group each week. But that's it. So don't look to them to keep things going. Because they are just going to be looking back at you.

Practically, this means that every member of the community will receive the Community Guide each week, and is responsible to come prepared to talk, pray and participate as they are able. It also means that anyone can and should take on planning other events and hang outs, Bible-study/prayer times, and more. And it means that if something challenging comes up in your community or an individual's life, *you* might actually be the one to come alongside them or to reach out to church leadership and ask for help.

Overall, this idea of shared responsibility means that we are not only responsible for our own discipleship, but that we recognize the role we play in others experiencing life in Jesus.

STOP + DISCUSS

1. How is this vision of community different than what you've experienced in the past?

BEST PRACTICES FOR YOUR 90 MINUTES TOGETHER

Starting fresh can feel a bit daunting. And even if you've been doing this for a while, the reality is that the time we spend together each week can be easily side-tracked into less than productive conversations and habits. So it can be helpful to have a bit of a refresher on how best to spend your time together. What follows is what we're called to as Gospel Communities, and a few ways it tends to work best. Talk through each of the following sections.

1. General Best Practices

- Respect each other's time
 - Arrive on time and wrap up on time.
- Be considerate
 - remove distractions (ex. silence phones, etc.)
 - avoid interrupting others or having side-conversations during group time - save this for later.
- Be mindful:
 - Be inclusive and aware of who is in your group? Single / married / divorced. Don't make assumptions. Consider where people are at before you speak We aware of sensitive issues - if you don't know the group members well, keep the conversation very general until trust is built
 - Include everyone in the group - nobody should feel like an outsider in your group

2. Hosting & Hospitality

- If you are the host...
 - please ensure there is seating space for all participants,
 - Please ensure that the space is clean and tidy - remove distractions such as clutter, dirty dishes, laundry or pets.
- Please start and end on time.
 - If the host home and participants have agreed to spend extra time together afterwards - please ensure the 90 minutes of guided time is completed on time so that those who need to leave on time are able to do so.
 - If the host has not offered an extension beyond the 90 minutes, please don't overstay. If an extension is offered one week, do not assume that is the norm.
- Be welcoming and inclusive
- Create a weekly snack schedule.
 - Each group can decide the nature of the food they are bringing each week. Some weeks you may wish to do a potluck - if so, you'll need to start earlier in order to be done on time.
- Communicate plans clearly
 - Make sure everyone knows what is happening
 - Decide on a common communication channel for the group

3. Discussions

- Be respectful in the way you speak to each other and about others
 - No cross talking (i.e. One person talks at a time. Others listen respectfully and attentively)
 - No disunifying, dissentious talk, including gossip or slander
- Be inclusive, participate equally in conversations
 - Good rule of thumb for everyone - don't say more than 3 sentences in a row (it's not as easy as you think!)
 - Do your best to engage in the conversation, especially if you're someone who tends to disengage or stay quiet
 - Consider this: if there are 9 people in a group and we meet for 90 minutes - that means the total talk time per person is 10 minutes
- No "counseling"
- Keep things confidential
 - No sharing stories about other people - those are their stories - encourage people to share but don't share for them.
- No solicitation (financial or otherwise)

4. Prayer Times

- Pray in smaller groups of 2-3 people (more comfortable and effective)
- Prayer requests can be shared during the week in group chat; use the designated prayer time to pray, not share
- Use provided prayer prompts (and prayer initiatives)
- Stay on topic
- Pray in alignment with Scripture
- Pray for the church
- Pray for church leadership

5. Group Chat Etiquette (WhatsApp, etc.)

- Be sure to include everyone
- Avoid sub-chat groups, unless for triads/accountability groups
- This is for prayer requests and encouragement
- This is for questions about the GC, church and/or sermon related topics
- This is not for personal or ongoing conversations
- This is not for business networking or promotions
- This is not for controversial/political views, youtube videos, etc.

6. Common Challenges

- Have the courage to correct someone if they are off-base or theologically incorrect.
 - We don't want to be so accommodating that we allow people to say things which are false without clarifying +/- or correcting.
 - When left unaddressed this leads to confusion and disunity.
 - This is done in love for the purpose of peace and unity, not shame.
- As a participant and as a group, avoid...
 - Personal tangents
 - Theological tangents

7. Using the Community Guide

- Follow Community Guide and stay on track - avoid tangents
- This guide should take you 90 minutes to go through. Leave 15 minutes at the start and finish for catching up

STOP + DISCUSS

1. What do you think will be one of the more challenging things on this list for you personally?

GETTING STARTED

That's all you need to know for now! Continue to meet together each week, engaging with the Community Guide resources that we'll send you.

Three Action Steps:

1. Make sure you have a way to communicate as a group.

The Planning Center (Church Center) app has a built in chat function that we encourage you to use. That way you won't have to worry about making sure people get added/removed, since it's synced with your registered list of members. But you may also consider using something like WhatsApp if that works better for your group.

2. Talk through your schedule and rhythms

Beyond just meeting once a week, make sure you're all aware of the other events (like Prayer & Worship Nights) and classes that are happening so that you can plan when and how you'll attend together. We also encourage you to plan whether or not you'll eat a meal together and how often you want to practice communion on the night you meet.

3. Pray

Take a few minutes right now to pray that God would help you live into what it means to be a Gospel Community.

LOOKING FOR FURTHER RESOURCES?

For help with having hard conversations, tools for studying the Bible, and so much more you can always head over to wchurch.ca/gcresources. And if you still can't find what you're looking for, reach out to community@wchurch.ca.