

Best Practices and How to Grow

CARE

❖ **Is the group investing the time needed to cultivate deeper friendships within the group?**

Level 1: Your only contact is during group meeting times

How to grow:

- Make sure you have everyone's phone numbers in your cell phone and e-mail address in your contacts
- Find something fun to do together and schedule it for a time other than your regular meeting time (i.e. watch a game together, grab a meal, play games together)
- Specifically seek to encourage/challenge someone else in the group through a phone call or e-mail at least once a week

Level 2: Sporadic interaction between meetings, inconsistent, but at least once a week

How to grow:

- Married Groups: schedule a regular meeting time outside of couple/regular group meetings for the purpose of cultivating your friendships (i.e. men's time and women's time)
- Make efforts to spend time with a different couple or member of the group every week in order to help build your relationships
- Plan a 24 hour getaway as a group (without kids)

Level 3: Contact/interaction with others in the group occurs on a regular/consistent basis

How to grow:

- Share Life Maps with one another in your group time – this is a great way to get to know one another on a deeper level
- Create a healthy combination of deep sharing as well as social time together

❖ **Do others in your group know the *real* you?**

Level 1: Superficial level of understanding

How to grow:

- Make sure you are spending some time together with each individual/couple in your group in order to see an individual's *blind spots* or couple interaction
- Take initiative in your group to openly share a prayer request concerning a hurt, habit or hang up
- Don't be afraid to ask, be aware of the primary areas where each individual struggles

Level 2: Awareness of some of the sins and struggles of the group members

How to grow:

- Pick one negative character trait for yourself that you would love to see God change and share it with the group
- Married Groups: go through Gary Smalley's *Marriage Inspection Questions* (Get these from your Community Director at Watermark)
- Regularly and honestly evaluate as a group how well you are doing in being transparent and vulnerable with one another

Level 3: Nothing off the table; full access into the lives and marriages of one another

How to grow:

- Dig deep by discussing finances (Watermark's MoneyWise Curriculum), if married: sexual intimacy (Sheet Music by Kevin Leman), and other personal struggles (Biblical Counseling Keys, available at Watermark)
- (1) Address top issues (2) find the Scripture that applies to those individual issues (3) hold one another accountable to regularly address how you are doing in those areas
- Do a heart check to see if there are some areas that you're not letting others into or that you are hiding

❖ **Do you practice the *one anothers* that the Bible mentions? (Admonish one another, encourage one another, be patient with one another, etc.)**

Level 1: Very little encouragement and support of one another

How to grow:

- Take time every meeting to share personal prayer requests – both prayers and victories
- Take the time to create an environment where people feel free to share burdens and celebrations
- Have the group rotate prayer partners for in-between meeting times

Level 2: Growing level of sharing/encouraging one another

How to grow:

- Model for others how to share trials and joys – do not wait for others to initiate; you may lead the way in your group if you will be willing to open up and share
- Make sure you are following up with one another outside of group time to both encourage and challenge one another
- Agree together that as trials come the group is not the last to know

Level 3: Sharing fully in one another's victories, burdens and dealing with conflict

How to grow:

- Have a dinner together to celebrate a victory in someone's life (i.e. taking ground in a struggle, birthdays, anniversaries, passing exams, etc.)
- Initiate a plan to meet a need (i.e. meals for the birth of a child or death in a family, babysit, etc.)
- Keep short accounts – deal with conflict head-on and as it arises (see Watermark's Lord of the Ring document)

❖ Is the group challenging each other to take the next faith steps?

Level 1: Members are unaware of areas in each other's lives where growth is needed

How to grow:

- Go online (www.watermark.org) and take the 5C Spiritual Growth Assessment
- Begin to have heart-to-heart discussions concerning where each individual would like to take ground (i.e. understanding what the Bible says, quiet time, regular time in God's Word, praying, how to pray, etc.)
- Spend the first part of your group time quickly going around the group and sharing where in God's Word have you been reading in the last 24-48 hours and what practical application is God showing you for your life
- Set basic actions steps for areas of desired growth and accountability for each person

Level 2: Growth areas have been acknowledged but no real action steps are being taken

How to grow:

- Begin to memorize Scripture together that coincides with what you are studying
- Read the daily online Journey devotionals and list your practical application steps
- Share the specific areas where God is challenging you as well as the Scriptures God is using to bring these issues to the surface
- Journal daily as a part of your personal time with God (example at JoinyTheJourney.com)
- Explore other studies that might encourage growth for the individuals or group
- If no growth is being observed (ex: contrite heart {Psalm 51:17}, fruit of the Spirit {Galatians 5:22}, etc.), then question the individual around what is keeping them from growing (i.e. unconfessed sin, unresolved conflict, fears, lack of trust with Christ)

Level 3: Members are aware of other's growth needs; have implemented action plans

How to grow:

- Be intentional about sharing what you're learning outside of group with others
- Accountability is still important, but members should share more freely their own struggles and areas of growth needed at this level than what is observed at Level 1
- Regular time is being spent daily in solitude with the Lord (journaling, prayer, Scripture)
- Commit to an individual Bible study plan (using The Journey for example) and call one another daily/weekly to encourage consistent time alone with God
- Take turns leading a Bible or topical study
- Go online and read more about a Spiritual Growth Plan (www.watermark.org)

❖ Is the group calling each other to obedience to God's Word?

Level 1: Rarely opens the Bible and shares more from one's own opinion rather than from God's Word, no real accountability taking place

How to grow:

- Determine if all members are committed to the same purpose of the community group which is to have the counsel of others that are also seeking Christ
- Ask questions in group such as, "What does Scripture say about that?"
- Ask each member about their personal time with God in each meeting
- Challenge members to be more vulnerable in areas where they are not allowing God's Word to transform their lives

Level 2: Use Scripture sometimes, group members sporadically share from God's Word, inconsistent accountability taking place

How to grow:

- Discuss areas in which members are holding back from the Lord and create and action/accountability plan for becoming more open
- Begin a Scripture memory challenge in the group
- Commit to spend time together outside of the group and be intentional with struggling members
- Commit to pray for the other members of the group throughout the week and follow up via e-mails/texts/phone calls
- Ask a WM community staff for materials that might help gain a better understanding of God's Word

Level 3: Always process issues with Scripture, group members consistently share what they are learning from God's Word, accountability accompanied by great follow through

How to grow:

- Share proactively with other community group leaders what is working for your group
- Can use Scripture in an appropriate and useful way that encourages healthy growth
- Take turns as a group letting different individuals/couples lead in sharing in-depth how they are applying Scripture to their lives

❖ **Are group members encouraging each other to pursue intimacy with Christ?**

Level 1: Members are inconsistent with their quiet times with the Lord, if they have time at all

How to grow:

- Identify / discuss the importance of time with God (read *Tyranny of the Urgent*, from Watermark)
- Start with short-term and realistic goal of spending time with God (begin with 15 minutes), remove distractions during this time, get to a quiet place and if necessary have a sheet of paper to write things down that pop into your head that might be important to remember later but that will distract you during this time
- Ask other community group leaders, members, or staff for ideas of ways to structure a plan

Level 2: Group members spend time with God as it fits in with other priorities

How to grow:

- Discuss barriers to executing the agreed upon plan and make any necessary changes
- Truly discuss if spending time with God is important to everyone, ask for specific reasons from each person why they feel it would be important for them
- Creating margin in schedules is the common culprit, so discuss with your group what priorities are being put first and ask for insight from other members of the group about what they are observing
- Have each person pray about this specifically and how God can show each person things that are being put first before God

Level 3: Group members prioritize regular time to be alone with God (i.e. reading, memorizing Scripture, quiet time, journaling, etc.)

How to grow:

- As these growth steps are taking place, have each person evaluate their heart to ensure that these items are not becoming *tasks* to mark off but transformation in each person's heart
- Share what God is revealing to you with others in the community group to encourage and challenge them in their own walks
- Engage a more mature Christian and ask them to share how they've been able to grow with God
- Go online and take the 5C Spiritual Growth Assessment to reevaluate your growth for the year



❖ **Are the group members praying for those who are far from God and sharing their faith?**

Level 1: Not praying for those who are far from God; not sharing their faith

How to grow:

- Know your story of grace and how Jesus changed your life
- Pray for God to reveal names to you and make a *Top Ten List* of those who you know are far from God
- Share your *Top Ten List* with your group

Level 2: Praying for those who are far from God but not sharing with them

How to grow:

- Practice sharing your stories of grace with each other within the group
- Memorize Scripture together that presents the gospel (i.e. Romans Road, etc.)
- Hold one another accountable to share their story with 1 person within the next month (someone who has never heard your story before)

Level 3: Praying by name for non-believers; consistently seeking opportunities to share your faith

How to grow:

- Share *Top Ten Lists* and have accountability for praying and sharing
- Pray for *Top Ten List* and others
- Pray for encounters with people far from Christ

❖ **Do the members of the group steward well the resources God has entrusted to them?**

Level 1: Group is unaware of the stewardship of the other members' resources

How to grow:

- Understand Biblical need for wise counsel with finances
- Go through Watermark's MoneyWise curriculum as a group
- Identify those around you in need and set goals of how you'll begin to steward your resources accordingly

Level 2: Consistently giving to your church body and to those around you in need

How to grow:

- Pray through how the Lord would allow you to maximize your stewardship of resources
- Create margin in your budget to give (do this prayerfully and as a group)
- Couples/individuals share stories of how they're feeling the burden of where to better allocate their resources

Level 3: Giving according to Scripture (i.e. joyfully, prayerfully, generously, sacrificially, etc.) and those in the group can account for each others' stewardship

How to grow:

- Full disclosure of finances to the group
- Discuss heart in spending decisions
- Celebrate stories of how God is honoring those that give freely

❖ **Are group members serving and using their talents internally and externally?**

Level 1: Serving sporadically; inconsistently serving internally

How to grow:

- Learn what your gifts are – take the S.H.A.P.E. inventory (get from Watermark)
- Attend the Ministry Fair at Watermark and/or look get the Service Opportunities handout
- Set a goal that everyone in the group will choose an area of service within the next month

Level 2: Fulfilling the Watermark membership requirement; internally serving consistently

How to grow:

- Begin talking to the Believe Team and investigate ministries/organizations where you can serve externally
- Talk/pray through as a group where you'd like to serve as a group monthly – and DO IT
- Begin thinking through and serving those in your neighborhood and local community (i.e. school, nursing home, etc.)

Level 3: Serving consistently internally and actively searching for external serving opportunities

How to grow:

- Adopt an outreach ministry where you can serve regularly
- Pray for changed lives and opportunities to serve those in the outreach ministry
- Build long term relationship with those that are involved or being served in the ministry