

WATERMARK COMMUNITY GROUP LEADERSHIP TRAINING MANUAL

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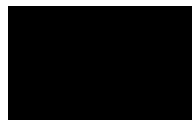


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COMMUNITY GROUP OVERVIEW

Thank you for your interest in leading a community group. We are excited you are willing to help others experience biblical community!

What Is Watermark's Mission for Community?

Connecting people in authentic relationships that lead to spiritual transformation.

What Are Community Groups?

Community groups are a voluntary gathering of individuals who meet regularly for the purpose of growing spiritually and loving one another.

Why Are Community Groups Important?

1. God Himself lives in eternal community. (Genesis 1:26)
2. Jesus gave us an example of living in community through His relationship with the twelve disciples.
3. Early church believers continued this example of community. (Acts 2:42-47)
4. Life change in Christ happens best in the context of relationships. (Hebrews 10:24-25)
5. Community guards against isolation. (Proverbs 18:1)

"The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community

What Does Biblical Community Look Like When Done Well?

Community groups should foster environments where people feel **encouraged** and **accepted**, where those in the group experience healthy **accountability** for and to each other, and where people can intentionally **care** for one another.

Encouragement

We need other believers to encourage us to be all that God has created us to be and remind us that there is not life outside of Christ and obedience to Him.

Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing - 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Acceptance

All of us have a deep desire for love and acceptance. "Are these people going to like me?" "If they knew the real me, would they still accept me?"

Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God - Romans 15:7

Accountability

The goal of accountability is not punishment or condemnation, but it is giving others permission to look at your life. By the very definition, it is being accountable to and for someone.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed - James 5:16

Care

Just as our cars can break down because of neglect, failure to care for one another can result in a similar breakdown but one of spiritual, emotional, and physical “costs” that could have been minimized or possibly avoided.

So that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other - 1 Corinthians 12:25

Imagine a group where it's apparent that the group members have been looking forward to meeting together because they know they are loved by the group. Members eagerly inquire about the week, asking each other specific questions. Time is spent actively praying for each other's needs and the lost. At any time, any group member could speak at length to the current spiritual state of any other member in the group, and members care for each other in practical ways such as hospital visits and providing meals to members in need. The group is a web of interconnectedness that includes evenings spent together, phone calls and e-mails, lunches and late nights, barbecues, and blogs. When the Bible is discussed, group members have insightful comments and applications that reflect a diligent study of the Word.

In group time, there is a sense of urgency to talk openly about what is going on with daily struggles. It is a place where real problems are addressed and highs and lows are shared openly and examined closely by each other. It is also a place where, through open sharing, issues are identified and members are equipped and held accountable for responses. The Bible is used to bring insight and wisdom to discussion, and members address practical application to help with marriages/dating relationships, parenting, purity, work, stewardship, and other issues. There is an unhindered sharing of knowledge and wisdom that can only happen by the Spirit of God.

What Does Community Look Like When Done Poorly?

Community done poorly does not consistently foster the type of life change that Christ promoted.

- A **supper club** where members gather together weekly, but fail to engage in authentic conversations regarding who and where they are.
- A **Bible study** where members meet to talk about God's Word, but don't talk about how to apply God's Word to real-life issues and genuinely grow spiritually.
- A **counseling session** where members gather to talk about issues and struggles, but do not integrate Scripture into the discussions or make time for one another outside the group to develop deep friendships.

COMMUNITY GROUP LEADERSHIP

The foundation of effective biblical leadership is a relationship with Christ. Before you can lead well it is imperative that you are following Christ.

What Is Biblical Leadership?

Biblical leadership is influencing and motivating others to become more fully devoted followers of Christ. It requires a passionate, genuine commitment to follow Jesus, love others, and serve those around you.

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| FOLLOW JESUS | “And He was saying to them all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.’” (Luke 9:23) |
| LOVE ONE ANOTHER | “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35) |
| SERVE ONE ANOTHER | “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45) |

Biblical leadership carries a serious weight and responsibility. It is not to be taken lightly. Just as Paul exhorts Timothy, so should you “set the example for other believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity.” (1 Timothy 6:11-16)

What Does Effective Community Group Leadership Look Like?

“The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you.” (Philippians 4:9)

As the leader, it is your responsibility to shepherd others, model authenticity, and foster relational trust. Here are several practical steps:

| | |
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| 1. Pursue Christ (Philippians 3:8) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust in the Lord. (Proverbs 3:8) • Practice obedience to experience Christ. (John 14:21) • Study and meditate on Scripture. (Joshua 1:8, 2 Timothy 3:16) |
| 2. Live with integrity (Acts 24:16) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your word. (James 5:12) • Know your character weaknesses. • Know what you could fall to. (2 Samuel 11-12) |
| 3. Find your significance in Christ, not men (1 Thessalonians 2:4) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strive to please the Lord, not men because He will evaluate our work. (2 Corinthians 5:8-10) • Don’t be deceived by the praise of men, rather allow it to be a test to discover where your devotion lies. (Proverbs 27:21) |
| 4. Stay focused on the goal and prize | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to pursue full devotion to Christ, don’t |

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| (Philippians 3:14) | become distracted. (Proverbs 4:25-27) |
| 5. Live humbly (Micah 6:8) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pride is a danger full of dire consequences. God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. (James 4:6) • The Lord hates pride and arrogance. (Proverbs 8:13) |
| 6. Increase your effectiveness (1 Timothy 4:14-15) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on core strengths. • Prioritize and execute. • Understand you are not learning just for yourself, but for the benefit of others. • Seek wise counsel for big decisions, but do not over analyze small decisions. |
| 7. Seek reconciliation and restoration (Matthew 5:24) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand from the beginning that you will make mistakes, you will hurt feelings, and you will need to ask forgiveness from others in the group. • Accept responsibility whenever appropriate and seek reconciliation. • Make every effort to restore relationships that have been damaged or broken. • View conflict as an opportunity for growth. • See the “Lord of the Ring” conflict resolution resource for additional detail. |
| 8. Foster an environment of relational trust (John 13:34-35) | <p>Encouragement Therefore encourage one another and build up one another - 1 Thessalonians 5:11</p> <p>Acceptance Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God - Romans 15:7</p> <p>Accountability Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed - James 5:16</p> <p>Care So that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other - 1 Corinthians 12:25</p> |

“Many leaders fail to tend to themselves, and are eventually unable to serve others. They are starving intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. When they do read their Bibles, or listen to CDs or tapes, it is always for someone else. They are always preparing some Bible study for a group or message for others. They read for ‘program,’ not for personal growth, and neglect to consume the nourishment or apply it to their own lives. Their ‘talk’ is great. Their ‘walk’ becomes fake. They go through the emotions, but aren’t really spending time eating the ‘bread of life.’ They are spiritually starving... so close to food, yet never eating.”

Dr. Tim Elmore
Habitudes: The Art of Self Leadership

GROUP LIFE: STARTING A GROUP

Starting your group well is crucial to the initial and ongoing success of your group. We have provided a list of topics to cover that will help guide you through the “starting-a-group” process:

First six weeks:

- Create an environment that fosters relational warmth and depth.
- Have a “host” mentality.
- Promote authenticity.
- Align expectations.
- Prepare for and facilitate effective meetings.
- Understand and handle group situations.

After six weeks:

- Develop a game plan for growth.
- Evaluate group progress periodically.
- Share leadership with others.

Create an Environment that Fosters Relational Warmth and Depth

During the first six weeks leaders should strive to create an environment in which members feel welcomed and wanted. As a leader, your function is more than simply facilitating or teaching a group. We are asking each leader **to make a significant relational investment in people**. It is important for the leader to invest heavily in creating and nurturing relationships, especially during the first six weeks. One of the best ways to initiate relationships is to provide opportunities for members to connect outside of group time. A few ideas include:

- Go to breakfast or lunch together.
- Call individuals during the week or send an e-mail.
- Share life stories informally (i.e., over a meal) or formally (i.e., during community group time).
- Sit together at church.
- Host a game night for your group.
- Go to Raise the Mark together.
- Do a service project together.
- Host a potluck dinner.
- Attend a sporting event together.

Have a Host Mentality

As a community group leader, God calls us to a “host” mentality and as the leader, to encourage the members in your group to do the same. Dr. Tim Elmore explains the role of host well in the following excerpt from his book *Habitudes #2*:

Hosts and Guests

Leaders take the initiative in relationships. They are intentional about them. They see themselves as hosts, not guests, and go out of their way to connect with people and provide for them.

It has been said that “some folks make you feel at home, while others make you wish you were.” If you want to be a great “host” in relationships, you’ll need to do the following things.

1. ***Initiate.*** *Good hosts make others feel like the most important person in the room by:*
 - *Inviting the members of your group to spend time outside of group time.*
 - *Asking probing questions and showing a genuine interest in others.*
 - *Looking for the member on the outskirts and making an effort to draw them into the group.*
2. ***Connect.*** *Good hosts do their best to help others feel comfortable and at ease. They’re always trying to find common ground with others by:*
 - *Being willing to listen to others.*
 - *Finding a common interest and investing in the relationship through that interest.*
 - *Creating opportunities to share experiences together (e.g., serving the homeless).*
 - *Being available when needs arise.*
3. ***Provide.*** *Good hosts meet the needs of those around them and look for ways to benefit them.*
4. ***Direct.*** *Good hosts know that others are looking to them for clarity on which way to go. Hosts provide guidance by:*
 - *Organizing, setting expectations, scheduling meetings, and sending reminders.*
 - *Giving resources and instruction based on past experience.*
 - *Helping others do a “self-discovery” on their own, guiding them along the way.*
 - *Placing others in contact with key people to help them on their journey.*

Promote Authenticity

The goal of authenticity in community groups is to become more like Christ. As the leader, you must take the first step of trusting the group by sharing your own walk with Christ. Sharing should include spiritual growth areas, wounds and insecurities, wins and celebrations.

To get started, here are some suggestions:

- Create a safe environment in which members are comfortable sharing and understand the importance of sharing. (James 5:16)
- Model sharing for group members (e.g., share daily encounters, the condition of your spiritual walk, your need for accountability), be open about where you are and where you want to grow.
- Ask group members open-ended questions (e.g., What is the one area of your life in which you want to be more like Jesus?).
- Model the pace of sharing (e.g., a member sharing too much too soon versus a member never sharing).
- Keep prayer requests personal and specific.
- Allow others to pray, without putting anyone on the spot. Remember that some group members have never prayed in front of others. (See www.watermark.org/get-connected/community-groups for practical steps about praying out loud).
- Be authentic and real with what you share, resisting the temptation to exaggerate or embellish.

Align Expectations

Aligning expectations is the act of asking group members what the goals, objectives, and purpose of the group will be, and then comparing those expectations to what God says about biblical community.

The first step in the process is to **paint the picture**. Spend time as a group walking through what community looks like from God's perspective. (Hebrews 10:24-25; Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 3:12-14)

Once your group understands what the Bible says about the importance of community, **initiate a conversation and ask questions**. Some questions to ask your group may include:

- What level of authenticity is everyone committed to? (e.g., Are we willing to discuss finances, marital issues and other potentially sensitive topics?)
- One year from now, what does success look like for this group? (i.e., What life change have we seen?)
- What do you see as the purpose for the group?
- What are the priorities for the group? (i.e., What are the expectations concerning attendance, participation, child care, etc.?)
- What sort of priority does the group have in your life?
- What are the group's expectations about getting together outside of the regularly scheduled group time? (e.g., lunch after church, service projects, dinner once a month, birthday celebrations)

Be sure to **talk through how the group will be structured**. Each group will be a little different, but listed below are a few of the most common ways to structure a community group. Don't be afraid to tailor your time depending on your group's needs.

Married Groups

Group A

- Men and women meet separately on a weekly basis for accountability and Bible study (2 hours each). This works well with the Watermark Women's Bible Study and the Summit men's study.
- Large group meets together twice monthly (2-4 hours, depending on the activity) in which share/care is the focus of one meeting and fun/fellowship is the focus of the other meeting.

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Group B

- Large group meets every week or every other week; half of the time the group meets together, and the other half is done with men and women separated.
- Fun and fellowship 1-2 times a month on other nights.

Single Groups

Group C

- Members meet weekly.
- Time is divided between accountability and Bible study.

Group D

- Members meet weekly for Bible study.
- Members break into smaller groups for midweek accountability outside of group time (major issues are still brought before the group).

After having the initial conversation, **document the results**. Write down all the thoughts from your group regarding expectations and e-mail them to the group. Save the information so you can revisit it at a later date. At the conclusion of this process, have members **sign the small group covenant** (see <http://campfire.watermark.org/pg/file/group:5280>). For further information about evaluation of your group, see the additional questions at page 20 below.

Prepare for and Facilitate Effective Meetings

Preparation for group time should be approached thoughtfully to ensure members understand that you value their time and will use it wisely. When preparing for a meeting, consider the **logistics** (e.g., environment, child care arrangements, agenda, and the other things that make a meeting run smoothly). Create an **agenda** in advance. An agenda will help your group think through their time together (e.g., The Journey, finances, marriages, etc.).

To ensure that you are equipped to lead a meeting, we have provided a six-week **starter study** at <http://campfire.watermark.org/pg/file/group:5280>. Remember that the purpose of your time together is to care for members through mutual shepherding by bringing applicable Scripture into each other's lives (encouragement, acceptance, accountability and care).

Facilitating Meetings

Facilitating a meeting can be intimidating, but good facilitation skills are a vital part of a successful community group. Here are some useful tips from *The Small Group Leaders Training Course* by Dr. Judy Hamlin:

1. **Listen.** Physically and emotionally focus on the person who is talking; convey your interest and intention to listen. Face the person to whom you are listening; lean forward if you're sitting, relax and maintain good eye contact. Use brief phrases like, "yes, really?" and "interesting" to show the speaker you are attentive. Listening is an art and is just as important to effective communication as speaking. (James 1:19)
2. **Draw others out.** Use questions with members who have not spoken recently and with those who have good ideas or opinions. The use of first names is important. Examples: "Mary, what do you think about the second question?" "Joe, I'd be interested in your opinion on this subject."
3. **Clarify.** Misunderstanding can arise when we assume we understand a speaker's meaning. When the meaning is unclear, ask a question for clarification. Examples: "I'm not sure what you meant. Would you please restate that?" "Could you repeat that and say a little more about what you mean?" Clarification is complimentary because it shows a speaker you are listening and attentive.
4. **Paraphrase.** A listener restating a speaker's thought or idea in his own words demonstrates careful listening and concern. Examples: "This is what I heard you saying Is that correct?" "Mark, your central concern is" "David, your reactions seem to be"
5. **Probe.** This involves asking people to give reasons for what they have said and should be done in a positive, non-argumentative way. Examples: "Help me understand that a little better by pointing me to what God has to say about it in His Word." "Why do you say that?" "Help me understand what the connection is between what we were discussing and your comment?"
6. **Redirect.** When a group member continues to address all his questions and comments to the leader rather than to the group, redirect the questions to the group. Use the group members' names to encourage them to talk with each other. If Mary continues to focus on the leader, the leader might respond, "Tom, what do you think about Mary's last question?" "How would you answer that, Tom?" This is particularly effective in involving new members in the discussion.
7. **Extend.** This involves adding to or expanding a line of thought in a discussion. After an answer is given, or a comment made, the leader might ask, "Does anyone have anything to add to what has been said?" or, "Is there anything else someone would like to comment on at this point?"
8. **Summarize.** At various points in the group discussion, it is helpful to briefly summarize and highlight what has been previously said. This technique works effectively when a group gets bogged down because it outlines where the discussion has been and should be going.

9. **Affirm.** It is always important to recognize and affirm the person who is talking. To one you might say, “Thank you for your comment.” To another you might add, “That’s an interesting point.” Be slow to ever tell a person he is wrong. Simply redirect the question to others: “What do the rest of you think?” Even when a comment seems unimportant, the speaker is still important.
10. **Be concrete and personal.** Use “I” messages instead of “you” messages. Communication improves when members take responsibility for their own ideas and feelings, using the personal pronoun “I.” To say, “I feel,” or “I think,” is much more direct and helpful than, “Some people think,” or “Some believe.”
11. **Be application oriented.** When a discussion seems too general, vague or abstract, an “application question” helps keep the conversation more direct and specific. Examples: “How would you apply that?” “How would what you are talking about affect you personally?” “Have you ever struggled with this issue yourself?” “How does this Scripture affect your daily life?”

Understand and Handle Group Situations

There are several common challenges that can arise within the group. We have outlined a few symptoms and solutions below. Remember to process all issues and questions on the basis of Scripture rather than opinions.

| Symptom | Solution |
|---|---|
| Quiet member | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask clear and concise questions. • Direct easy questions to quiet member by name. • Enlist the help of others to draw him / her out. • Express appreciation for contributions he/she makes. • Have quiet member read passage aloud. • On an application question, break into smaller groups of 2 or 3. • Allow time for silence before asking another question too quickly. • Never force a member to participate. • Be patient, gentle, and affirming. |
| Overly talkative or dominant member | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to them privately about the need for silence after some questions for thought and reflection; help them see the group’s purpose. • Ask for his / her help in drawing the silent ones out. • Direct questions to people by name. • Suggest the person ask, “What does anyone else think?” • Sit at 90 degree angle and avoid eye contact. • Say “Thank you, I think someone else might like to share, too.” |
| Member who monopolizes group with his / her problem | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to the person privately, suggesting resources for help (see www.watermark.org/get-connected/community-groups for a list of resources to utilize). • Help group see its purpose (Bible study groups are not therapy groups). • Continue in prayer and loving support. |
| Disagreeing member | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to find the cause (e.g., is the person sheltering a deep hurt?). • Give feedback to the person who disagrees: “What exactly causes your hesitation?” • Challenge the group with the choice of holding back (no risk) or going ahead (with risk but also growth) by asking, “How can we get around this objection?” |
| Conflict avoidance from member to keep group peace | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize the person doesn’t have a biblical view of community and is avoiding conflict. • Talk to the person privately and help him/her see that he/she is burying honest interaction leading to resolution. • Reassure person that it’s okay for people to disagree on some issues. |

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| Superficial sharing from member | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be open in your own sharing. • Break down in pairs for sharing, application, and prayer. • Meet outside the group to find out interests, opinions, and ideas. • Remind the group that the Bible is written to individuals. Ask: “How will you know Scripture is convicting you?” “What should we do about this?” “How should we live in light of this?” “What might we do this week to apply this?” |
| A member won’t go deep | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask “why” questions. • Play devil’s advocate (e.g., take the opposite position, make them defend). • Meet with member outside of group time to deepen the relationship and increase the comfort level. |
| A controversial question is raised | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set some ground rules before the discussion; remember that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ We acknowledge that Christians hold different views on the topic; ➢ All viewpoints must be supported by Scripture; ➢ We are not going to settle this questions for all Christians for all time today; ➢ Focus on what the divergent beliefs hold in common. |
| A member is argumentative and obstinate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your composure, don’t take things personally. • Examine what is being said and try to find the good in it (bring them alongside you). • Visit one on one to see if this is a personal problem, communicate that their ideas are important, but that the behavior can’t continue. |
| Lack of prayer time or stifled prayer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan time for prayer in lesson planning (e.g., pray at the beginning of group time). • Pray prayer requests rather than sharing then praying. • Break down in smaller groups to pray. • Pray one sentence prayers, stating praise, confession, requests, and thanks. • Read a Psalm or pray from the Bible. |
| A difficult question is raised | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don’t be afraid to say “I don’t know.” • Offer to find an answer and report on it next time. • Open the question up to the group. • Assign members the task to research the question, give guidance for references to use. • Call your community director for help/insight. |
| An “incorrect” answer is given | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remember that sometimes the person is more important than the answer. • Note whether the response is truly wrong or just an opinion that differs from the leader. • Affirm the person’s willingness to share, but then continue the questioning process; see if you can bring the person around to the “correct” answer. • Ask: “What does someone else think?” “Does someone else have experiences along that line?” |
| A tangent arises | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge the tangent, but gently bring group back to the topic: “That’s a great topic, but let’s table that for the time being.” Then bring the group back to the topic by reviewing and summarizing where the discussion got lost. • Use a key word (e.g., bunny trail) to remind the group they’re on a tangent and gently pull the group back to the topic. |

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| Group apathy, confusion or complaints of wasting time | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide agendas and systematic approaches to discussions, making sure a clear constructive purpose is fulfilled at each meeting. Remember to incorporate the functions of a small group (purpose, worship, service, people). • Ask for evaluation from group members and allow them to take some part in planning group time. • Display enthusiasm and energy. |
| A member of the small group tends to “bug” or “rub” you the wrong way | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray for this person. • Ask God to change your heart for the person and let you see them through His eyes. • Step back and let the Holy Spirit work in both of you, love them as an act of faith and obedience. |
| Personality clash between group members | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize points of agreement. • Help each side to clearly understand the other. • Talk individually and corporately. • Team them up for group project (e.g., plan a service project for the group together). |
| Members come late | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a definite time that is workable and agreeable to the group members. • Begin each time promptly. • Discuss time with group: “We’re having trouble getting going. Is it too early? Do we need to change the time?” |

Developing a Game Plan for Growth

After utilizing the six-week starter curriculum, it will be up to you and your group to decide how to incorporate Scripture into your time together. For many groups a curriculum will be the best option. The church has provided a list of recommended resources for your consideration. To choose a curriculum, simply go to <http://campfire.watermark.org/pg/pages/view/5664/> and view the options available.

Sharing Leadership with Others

Developing apprentices begins by identifying people in the group who show leadership potential and then actively investing in them. There are three basic principles to consider when developing apprentices:

1. *Choose carefully.* Look for people who make their daily walk with Christ a priority in their lives.
2. *Invest.* Spend time with them outside the group, integrating them into your life. Train them to become competent in the Word and model for them what it takes to effectively lead others.
3. *Delegate responsibilities.* Delegate tasks and responsibilities to give them an opportunity to lead. (Allow them to plan and run a meeting, start meeting with others within the group, go to community group leadership meetings at the church, etc.)

Evaluating Your Group

Periodically evaluating your group helps to ensure the group’s expectations are met. For specific steps on how to assess and evaluate your group see the *Evaluating your Group* paragraphs within the *Group Life: Ongoing Groups* section below.

GROUP LIFE: ONGOING GROUPS

Our hope is that together you will experience relationships where you feel encouraged and accepted, where individuals in the group experience healthy accountability for and to each other, and where people can intentionally care for one another.

Caring for Each Other

Partnering with your group means having a God-given concern for others that propels us out of our comfort zone and imitates the way Christ loved and cared for others.

Focus on the “One Another’s” of Scripture

We call the following verses the “One Another’s” of Scripture because they paint a picture of what we are called to and how to live a life that is others-centered.

| “One Another’s” of Scripture | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Love One Another | We are called to love each other. | 1 John 4:11 |
| Seek Counsel from One Another | As the leader, ensure all counsel given reflects Scripture. | Matthew 18:16; 1 Corinthians 6:1-4; Proverbs 11:14, 14:7, 15:22, 18:1-2, 18:15, 19:20, 24:6, 28:26 |
| Speak Truth to One Another | Love someone enough to speak truth, even when it isn’t comfortable (hint: learn how to incorporate tactfulness). | Proverbs 12:19, 24:11, 24:26, 25:12, 27:6; Zechariah 8:16-17; James 5:12; 2 Timothy 4:2; Psalm 141:5; Ephesians 4:1-3 |
| Pray Continuously for One Another | Care for the members of your group by consistently praying for them. | James 5:16; Mark 10:45, 11:24; Philippians 2:3-4; 1 Corinthians 10:24; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 |
| Serve One Another | Be others-centered. | Galatians 5:13; 1 Peter 4:10; Mark 8:6-7; Acts 2:45, 4:32-35; Exodus 17:12-13; Romans 15:25; Titus 3:14 |
| Encourage One Another | Be an exhorter, build up each other. | 1 Thessalonians 4:18, 5:11; Hebrews 3:13, 10:24 |
| Be available to One Another | Make time for others. | 1 Thessalonians 2:8; Proverbs 27:10; Acts 4:32 |
| Submit to One Another | Consider others first. | Ephesians 5:21 |
| Be devoted to One Another | Be devoted to others in love. | Romans 12:10-11 |
| Spur On One Another | Encourage others towards love and good deeds. | Hebrews 10:24 |
| Accept One Another | Accept others as Christ accepted you. | Romans 15:7 |
| Forgive One Another | Forgive others as Christ forgave. | Ephesians 4:32 |
| Bear One Another’s | Carry each others burdens. | Galatians 6:2 |

| | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Burdens | | |
| Regard One Another | Regard others in humility. | Philippians 2:3 |
| Be Responsible for One Another | Have a brother's keeper mentality. | Ezekiel 33:6-9; Proverbs 24:11-12; 1 Peter 4:10; Ephesians 4:16, 5:11-14, 5:21; Galatians 6:1-2; Philippians 2:4 |

Develop Deep Relationships

Our hope is that your community group goes from casual friendships to experiencing deep love and care for one another. We are asking each leader **to make a significant relational investment in people to create relational trust**, which is a key to developing deep relationships. Those kinds of relationships within your community group will allow you to have a support system of love and encouragement for celebrating victories and processing life.

As the leader you can help create a welcoming and fun environment by encouraging members to engage with one another outside of formal group meeting times and by making your community group relationships a personal priority (Hebrews 10:24). A few ideas to help foster that environment include:

- Call group members between meeting times (e.g., have lunch, breakfast, etc.).
- Keep track of group members' important dates and events (e.g., birthdays, anniversaries).
- Be "others" focused—have a host mentality.
- Be creative and strategic in planning events.
- Be flexible but firm in emphasizing the importance of spending fun times together.
- Ask for help and delegate when you need help.
- Respect members where they are, but encourage them to share and join in the fun.
- Have a good ice-breaker question or game prepared when you need it.

Create opportunities to help build unity within the group. A few ideas for activities include camping, birthday get-togethers, sporting events, State Fair, bowling, fishing, whirly ball, game night, boat outing, concert, picnic, museum, and vacations.

Experience Authentic Sharing

As the leader, it will be your responsibility to model a lifestyle of authenticity. A few helpful hints include:

- Model transparency and authenticity by sharing your story and struggles with the group.
- Don't force anyone to share.
- Be okay with silence.
- Balance speaking truth with grace.
- Encourage group members to shepherd each other.
- Fight for unity within the group and church by giving encouragement and dealing with conflict as it arises.

As we move toward caring for others and partnering for spiritual growth, we will naturally encounter conflict. How you choose to resolve conflict is crucial. Keep in mind that conflict is an opportunity for growth.

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he 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 he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell

you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” (Matthew 18: 15-20)

Below are a few community group roadblocks that often lead to conflict:

- Lack of attendance or commitment;
- Superficiality in sharing;
- Participating in gossip;
- Creating cliques or pairing off within the group.

Growing Together

Ultimately, our growth is dependent upon a work of the Holy Spirit. Paul states, “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1:6) It begins the moment we place our trust in Jesus Christ and continues throughout our lifetime until we are made perfect when either we die or Christ returns (1 Corinthians 6:11; Romans 6:12-13; Philippians 3:21; 1 Thessalonians 5:23). Biblically, our growth in Christ is known as the sanctification process.

As much as our growth is ultimately dependent upon the Holy Spirit, this does not mean that we do not play a role in the growth process. Scripture states: “On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” (1 Timothy 4:7-8) **We are called to “discipline” ourselves for the “purpose of godliness.”** How do we do this? By practicing the spiritual disciplines.

The spiritual disciplines are habits of devotion that promote godliness. They can be compared to spiritual exercises. “To go to your favorite spot for prayer or journaling, for example, is like going to the gym and using a weight machine. As physical disciplines like this promote strength, so the spiritual disciplines promote godliness.” (Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*)

The spiritual disciplines include: Bible intake (reading, studying, meditating, hearing, memorizing), prayer, worship, evangelism, serving, stewardship, fasting, silence and solitude, journaling, and learning. There are no shortcuts. Practicing these disciplines is essential to spiritual growth. One man has rightly observed: “My central claim is that we can become like Christ by doing one thing—by following him in the overall style of life he chose for himself. If we have faith in Christ, we must believe that he knew how to live. We can, through faith and grace, become like Christ by practicing the types of activities he engaged in, by arranging our whole lives around the activities he himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in fellowship of his Father.” (Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*)

In addition to using the spiritual disciplines, **the Lord also uses other people in our lives to promote spiritual growth.** Scripture states: “And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.” (Hebrews 10:24-25) And, “Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” (Proverbs 27:17) Based upon these passages and others, it is clear that spiritual growth happens best within the context of biblical community. We need each other for accountability, encouragement, correction and support. (Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1-2; Hebrews 3:13) Although some may piously claim that all they need is Jesus and therefore are able to grow on their own, isolation is detrimental to our growth and clearly unbiblical. (Proverbs 12:15, 18:1-2)

Finally, **the Lord uses different circumstances and trials to promote spiritual growth.** Different circumstances in our life promote growth: the home we grew up in, the people we work with, where we happen to relocate for a new job, the schools we attend, etc. are all used by God. (Romans 8:28) We also grow whenever we exercise our spiritual gifts to serve others. (Ephesians 4:1-16; 1 Peter 4:7-11; Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12) The trials of life that can come from financial pressures, illness, loneliness and various other means (James 1:2-4), help us to grow as well.

Practically speaking, how then can your community group help you to grow? While relying upon the Holy Spirit to be your guide, your community group should:

- **Practice** the spiritual disciplines (both as a group and individually).

- **Invest** in accountability and encouragement.
- **Take** the next step of faith given the group’s current circumstances and trials.

To help you practice the spiritual disciplines, learn from other people and grow from your experiences, Watermark offers a variety of tools and training opportunities for you to take advantage of individually or as a community group. Regardless of where you are in your spiritual journey—either a new believer or someone who has walked with Jesus for years—there is something for you: Bible studies, community group curriculums, audio recordings of different messages, classes and workshops, etc. All of the tools and training opportunities are found either in the Watermark News or on the church’s website (www.watermark.org).

Having an Impact Together

We believe life is a long-term mission, and every day is a short-term mission opportunity. Becoming an externally focused person starts with your places of interaction and influence (family, neighbors, coworkers, and friends) and continues by serving those in our neighboring communities and throughout the world. Becoming externally focused is vital to influence an unbelieving world.

Influence Others Eternally

Jesus commanded all believers to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:18-20). As the community group leader, it is your responsibility to model a life of loving and reaching out to the lost (Luke 14:13). Encourage the members of your group to write down their own stories of grace and share it with friends and family.

There are a few action steps that we believe will help prepare your heart and open your eyes to more opportunities to share Christ with others.

| Goal | Scripture | Ask Yourself |
|---|--|---|
| See lost people as God sees lost people | Luke 15:1-7, Luke 15:8-10, 2 Peter 3:9 | How does God feel about the lost? |
| Understand Jesus’ mission | Luke 19:9-10, Luke 5:29-32, John 3:16-17, 1 Timothy 1:15-16 | What was Jesus’ mission? |
| Imitate Christ by loving the lost | Acts 1:8, 2 Corinthians 5:10-11, Colossians 1:28-29, 1 Thessalonians 2:2-4 | What is our role in loving those far from God? |
| Expand your circle of comfort | Matthew 28:18-20 | What keeps you from sharing Christ with others? |

To help ease the fears that can sometimes be associated with evangelism, here are a few helpful hints:

- **Pray** for eyes to see the unbelievers in your world. Pray for opportunities to move unbelievers towards Christ. And pray for the courage to leave your circle of comfort. (1 Timothy 2:1-4, Ephesians 6:19-20)
- **Engage** with the people in your sphere of influence and those outside your circle of comfort. What keeps you from engaging others in spiritual conversations? Help each other develop a strategy to develop and maintain relationships by writing names down that God brings to your mind. Challenge each other to initiate one progressive action step towards an unbeliever every day. Utilize the tools that Watermark provides such as the Top 10 Card, Watermark Tri-Fold, Imagine Card, Celebrate Recovery Card, etc.
- **Share** with others the difference that Christ has made in your life. Consider using Paul’s model in Acts 26 of sharing your story of grace (before knowing Christ – verses 4-11; conversion experience – verses 12-18; as a follower of Christ – verses 19-23).

Serve Others

As a community group leader, it's important to encourage the members of your group to passionately employ the gifts, talents and experiences God has entrusted them (Matthew 25:14-30, Luke 10: 25-37). God doesn't need our service, but it gives Him glory and allows us to learn more about His character when we joyfully apply the resources He's given us.

Serving Internally

There are many opportunities available to you at Watermark to serve that range from welcoming people on Sunday mornings and brewing coffee to volunteering with our children's and media ministry. One of the ways that you can encourage your group to begin to serve is to help each other determine the gifts, talents, and life skills God has given each person in the group. Then, find ways to apply those gifts within the body. Serving internally not only encourages others, but also deepens your connectedness to the body (1 Corinthians 12: 12-27). Download a Service Opportunities Brochure from the Watermark website and sign up for the volunteer opportunity that's right for your unique talents and gifts. Some community groups pick an area of serve so that the entire group can serve together.

Serving Externally

D.L. Moody said, "Out of 100 men, one will read the Bible, the other 99 will read the Christian." To help all of us focus on the world outside our doors, we are sharing with you some ways you can immediately begin serving others and reaching your community for Christ. Many are already involved in missional organizations and missional living, and we celebrate these efforts. If you're not serving externally, we want to help you find new ways to share the love of Christ with the people in your sphere of influence and those outside your circle of comfort.

- **Develop intentional relationships** with the express purpose of demonstrating and speaking Christ's love to others within your sphere of influence:
 - Neighborhood.
 - Workplace.
 - Schools.
 - Sports teams.
 - Workout facilities.
 - Shops and stores you frequent.
- **Take advantage of Watermark opportunities** for serving in places outside your circle of comfort as you engage:
 - Neighbors in and around Dallas who are in need of restoration.
 - Ministries that serve the homeless, the poor, and the elderly.
 - Organizations that serve in times of crisis.
 - Believers anywhere who lack basic essentials.
- **Begin to take steps to serve externally by:**
 - Discovering God's passions and how to align your interests, energy, time, and gifts with His. Creatively consider how you could best serve people in our community.
 - Spend time with your community group processing your findings and convictions.
 - Select an area of service and visit www.watermark.org/serve or our Volunteer Center on Sunday mornings to get information about additional service opportunities.
 - Schedule a meeting, presentation, or site tour with one of our external focus team leaders.

- Begin to pray for the people you will be serving and for opportunities to share the love of Christ and serve their needs.

For more information, check out www.watermark.org/serve/external.

Steward Your Time, Talents, and Treasure Well

Stewardship is the way a person manages the resources God has entrusted them. This includes time, money, gifts, and talents. It is important to help your group understand and apply stewardship principles because God calls us to be a good steward with the things He has entrusted to us.

A few biblical examples of financial stewardship include:

- Providing for your family. (1 Timothy 5:8)
- Finding a church body where you can give joyfully. (2 Corinthians 9:7, 1 Timothy 5:17-18, Galatians 6:10, 1 Corinthians 16:1-2)
- Seeking opportunities to share and give to others. (Hebrews 13:16, 1 Timothy 6:17-18)

As the leader, it is your responsibility to set the example by sharing how you manage your resources. Outlined below are a few helpful hints:

- Focus on God's Word, not what the world has to say. (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Joshua 1:8, 1 Corinthians 3:18-20)
- Recognize that you are a sinner and your stewardship of God's resources could fall victim to this. (Ecclesiastes 7:20, Romans 3:23)
- Enter a stewardship discussion with a teachable spirit, recognizing that most of us still have a lot to learn about financial stewardship. (Luke 14:11, Proverbs 18:15, Psalm 66:18)
- Be open and authentic with your community group in sharing financial details, you will grow more in community than in isolation. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Proverbs 11:14, 13:20, 18:1)
- Encourage others. Remember that the objective is to help one another grow, not to discourage one another. (Luke 6:36, Hosea 6:6, Proverbs 12:18, Psalm 19:14)
- Be committed. (Proverbs 16:3)

Remember that the purpose of sharing is to bring glory to God, become more like Christ and help your group understand and apply stewardship principles. It is bigger than a curriculum or study. It is a lifestyle. Feel free to utilize Watermark's MoneyWise curriculum; contact your community group director for this curriculum or if you have any questions or concerns.

Evaluating Your Group

Evaluating the group is vital to measuring a group's pulse. Take the time to walk through the steps outlined below:

- Informal Assessment
 - Every six months, informally revisit the expectations set at the beginning of the community group. Start by reading through the group's initial vision and goals and compare that information with where the group currently is. If the current assessment is not aligned with initial expectations, talk through as a group the best approach to get back on track.
 - Every year, Watermark members fill out a 4B form online to check in with members of the church. Feel free to use this as an evaluation tool by having each member of your group fill out the survey online and send the results to you.
 - Utilize the questions listed in the evaluation questions section below to gauge group growth utilizing care, grow and impact environments of community.

- Formal Assessment
 - Work with your community group director as individual needs arise within the group, such as lack of commitment, members leaving the group, and similar issues. Don't hesitate to utilize your community group director in the assessment process.
 - Evaluation questions. A large part of the evaluation process is the willingness to ask tough questions and give honest feedback. Using our mission ("Connecting people in **authentic relationships** that lead to **spiritual transformation**"), we have outlined informal questions to ask your group.

Authentic relationships

Encouragement

1. Does the group celebrate victories and bear burdens together?
2. When a member(s) of the group "falter(s)", is there a feeling of judgment or encouragement?
3. Do members of the group feel more encouraged with their Christian walk by being with each other?

Acceptance

1. Do all members of the group feel they are moving toward acceptance and authenticity with hurts, habits & hang-ups?
2. Is there a sense that the group can challenge areas in each other's lives that may be considered "blind spots"?
3. Does each person feel they accept others in the group and try to see how they can be a part of how God is growing the other person?

Accountability

1. Do others in the group know and understand the areas in which individuals need to grow spiritually?
2. Do group members feel free to confront obvious issues (marriage, financial, sin)?
3. Are there any aspects of life that the group has been unwilling to explore?

Care

1. Is the group cultivating friendships within the group on a weekly basis?
2. Do members of the group feel there is follow-up with accountability, when someone is sick, when a hurt is shared, etc.?
3. Is the group becoming a place where each person feels truly cared for?

Spiritual transformation (Growing and helping others grow in these areas)

Believe in Christ

1. Do I know what I believe and why I believe it?
2. Do I initiate friendships with those far from God?
3. Do I know my story of grace and share my faith with others?

Belong to His body

1. Do I realize the importance of belonging to a community of believers?
2. Have I fully committed to a group of believers that also desire spiritual transformation?
3. Do I feel fully engaged, authentic and known with those in my group?

Be trained in truth

1. Do you spend time as a group understanding the Bible and its implications for each other's lives?
2. Do you use Scripture and prayer to process the vast majority of issues considered in the group?
3. In what ways are you personally being changed by what you read in Scripture?

Be strong in worship and ministry

1. Do you know one another's spiritual gifts?
2. Are the group members actively serving so that Jesus is more known or honored?
3. If you know that worship for God is loving and serving others, who could you be more intentional about loving and how could you best use your gifts in serving?

Adding New Members

As your community group flourishes the question will arise whether or not to add new members to the group. Before taking any action sit down with your community group and address the question head on. Once your group has agreed to expand there are two basic ways to add new members to your group. The first is through natural, organic relationships (e.g., a co-worker, a friend from church, a neighbor), and the second way is through Watermark's GroupLink process.

Before you ask someone to join your group, understand their expectations and commitment level to ensure they line up with your group. Look for common life stage, desires, and life overlap, but remember it is not about finding a certain personality or even maturity level; it is about looking for people who have the same commitment level and expectations for a community group. For additional insight regarding the process of adding members, refer to the Group Life: Starting a Group section above.

Transitioning a Group

While some groups last for years, others will transition over time for various reasons.

Healthy Reasons for a Group to Transition

There are several healthy reasons to transition a group. Some of these include:

- **Answering the call to multiply:** One of our responsibilities as followers in Christ is to go and make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). As Watermark grows, there may come a time when someone from your group feels led to start a group so that others can experience biblical community.
- **Changing life stages:** Transitioning a community group due to a change in life stage is a healthy reason to end your group (e.g., the addition of children, a change in marital status or a change in geography). Regardless of the change, be sure to process major life change decisions within the group.
- **Lack of commitment:** If your community group does not view your time together as a priority, then it may be time to make a transition. Be sure to talk about your concerns with the other group members and readdresses each participant's expectations and commitment.

Unhealthy Reasons for a Group to Transition

The most common unhealthy reason to transition a group is from **unresolved conflict**. While conflict can be hard, the Bible calls us to address and resolve conflict. For assistance in resolving conflict, see the "Conflict Field Guide" resource at http://www.watermark.org/fileadmin/pdfs/conflict_field_guide_web.pdf.

Transitioning a Community Group Well

Transitioning a community group should be a time of reflection, encouragement and celebration. Reflect on and encourage one another with the growth that has occurred and celebrate the many victories and fun memories you have experienced. As the leader, you will set the tone for how your group transitions. The following suggestions will facilitate transitioning a group well:

- **Initiate a conversation.** If your group is considering transitioning, initiate a conversation and talk openly and honestly as a group to ensure everyone is on the same page. Transitioning a group should never come as a surprise to group members.
- **Consider prayerfully.** Take time to pray individually and as a group to address the motivation behind the group transition.
- **Celebrate.** If your community group decides to make a transition, plan a time to celebrate the time you shared together and reflect on the growth you experienced.

- **Help members find new community groups.** Finding a new community group can be a difficult and stressful venture for some people in your group. If your group is transitioning, it is important to present clearly other options available to group members. Feel free to refer them to other groups or point them to GroupLink.

CONCLUSION

Community groups create environments for people to feel **encouraged** and **accepted**, where those in the group experience healthy **accountability** for and to each other, and where people can intentionally **care** for one another. Biblical community done well will transform people into fully devoted followers of Christ and cause others to seek to know Christ.

As followers of Christ, we are sent as ambassadors for Him (2 Corinthians 5:20) to proclaim by our words and lives the Good News about Jesus Christ to a watching world. (Colossians 1:28) Your willingness to lead a group into biblical community helps fulfill that mission. We echo Paul's prayer for the Philippians (Philippians 1:3-7) as we pray for you with joy because of your participation in the gospel and the opportunity to partner with you in the sharing of God's grace at Watermark.