

WHY WE NEED COMMUNITY GROUPS AT TBC

The numerical growth at TBC has revealed a need which we've had for a long time: the need for authentic community which promotes spiritual growth while joining God in the work of mission around us.

Community is not an option. It is the WAY in which God does His work in and through us. Passages like Acts 2:42ff, Ephesians 4:11ff, Hebrews 10:19-25, 1 Peter 2:9-12, 1 John 4:7-21 all emphasize the need for each other in community. As one reads these passages and others it is apparent that this was more than a gathering for corporate worship. Jesus said that it is together that our light shines (Matthew 7:14-16), drawing people to God Who does His good work in us.

Community includes meeting together regularly. One factor listed or often implied is that food was present. Somehow Christ shows up when we take the time to gather long enough to eat together, to share life together, to share faith together.

Spiritual formation is another must. The reason we meet together is that it is when we are together that we grow. *We spur each other on to love and good deeds*, says Hebrews 10:24. Paul writes to the believers in Galatia that his goal is that Christ be formed in them (Galatians 4:19). To the believers in Colossae he says that Christ in them is the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). God's work is to form us into the image of His Son (Romans 8:29), so we must submit to His transformation by the renewing of our very thinking (Romans 12:1-2).

But what does spiritual formation look like? It involves intentional, yet simple practices that help us develop godly habits: meeting together, learning how to and praying together, listening to and learning how to study God's word together, learning to listen to others, serving together, learning how to share and live the good news of Jesus, caring for those in need beginning with our brothers and sisters in Christ, developing a heart for those whom society forgets or ignores, developing a spirit of thankfulness and generosity. Spiritual formation is intentionally cooperating with the Spirit in His good work (Philippians 1:6).

Mission is imperative. Lest we become inward focused, we pray and join God together where He is already at work, where He is inviting us to join in His mission. His very nature is that He is a missional God, a God on mission. As His beloved children we are His missionaries, sent where He has placed us . . . in our neighborhoods, schools, families and places of work. We love God. We love others. We make disciples . . . together. Matthew 28:17-20, Mark 12:29-31 and Ephesians 2:8-10 become important in keeping us focused on what is primary.

What would happen if everything we did, from the youngest child to the most senior adult, modeled and equipped us in these three areas: community intentionally formed in Christ for mission around us?

We must move beyond simply talking about our faith to helping each other live it. Content is important, but is useless if there is no life change. Our culture and society are dying to see genuine relationships which show and share the way to the Savior.

HOW TBC COMMUNITY GROUPS FUNCTION

When we read the biblical accounts of community, we begin to realize that what community initially looked like among the first believers in Jerusalem is different from those to whom John writes his letters. Similarly the churches in Corinth (southern Greece), Philippi (northern Greece) and Ephesus (Asia Minor/Turkey) are quite different from each other, even though Paul spent significant time with each congregation. His letter to Titus, who pastors among largely Gentile followers of Jesus on Crete, is very different from his instructions to Timothy, who pastors the “more mature” church at Ephesus, yet he addresses the need for each to choose qualified leaders.

When we speak about community groups at TBC, what one group looks like will differ from another. Some groups will form around similar age or life experience, while others will be intergenerational. Some will form more geographically (e. g. northwest Jamestown, Gackle, etc.). Some may form around a common mission. Some will form around established relationships.

What **all groups will share** are the three areas of spiritual formation, community and mission. Some groups will naturally gravitate to one or perhaps two, but all three areas are essential if the group is to grow in proper balance. The three together help us walk with Jesus as His disciples to make disciples.

Mission. Charlie Hogstad mentioned the challenge for some of the groups at River City in choosing the mission focus. Remember, part of the very reason why we come together is so that we join as missionaries together with God in His already-mission where we live. What are some of the places or points of contact for mission? Perhaps there is a heart for those in the correctional center, the prison, substance abuse treatment (alcohol or drugs), mental health, single parents, high school students, those who live in a trailer court, who go to a particular grade school, business leaders, farmers, etc. The list is really endless. We are sharing the good news of Jesus in deed and word. Spend time thinking and praying specifically about this. How do the gifting and experiences of the individuals in your group help to determine where God may be inviting you to join Him?

Spiritual Formation. This area intentionally directs people to growing in/toward faith in Christ. Interacting with God’s word is key. We will encourage groups to use questions based on the teaching from Sunday’s message to consider the significance and application where we live. Prayer will be vital. We will learn how to listen together . . . to God’s word, to our spouse, to each other, to our families, to our neighbors, to those who do not know Jesus. As we learn to listen our spiritual eyesight will also become sharper so that we can encourage each other where God is at work. We will learn to trust so that we begin to share beyond surface issues. With some we will practice regular confession of sin. We will extend the grace we receive from God to each other, His good work through us (Ephesians 2:10) becoming evident in an Ephesians 4-6 lifestyle. Service, generosity and humility will become a way of life as our hearts become more passionate to live as God’s kingdom citizens now.

Community. What I’ve shared above is essential to community. Trust. Care. Keeping confidences. Vulnerability. Bearing each other’s burdens (Galatians 6:1-5). We eat and laugh and cry and share life together. We will need to commit to meeting together each week, which will mean reordering our lives. We will be careful not to overburden our hosts, nor to count as trivial our relationships. Some will choose to spend more time together. Some groups may come together for joint mission, mentoring or even training. As our community groups interact with the Jamestown area, Jesus’ light will be most evident . . . and our joy will be more full. What step will you take to make community a priority?