

Launch Guide

for
Community Groups



LAKE CITY
Community Church

Community Group Launch Guide

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Chapter 1: Time to Launch!!!

Welcome to week 1 of our Community Group (CG) Launch Guide (LG)! Maybe you're here because you've known for a while that you wanted to be a part of a CG and finally everything has worked out for you to join one. But maybe you're here because a friend or maybe a pastor somehow "tricked" you into joining and showing up! Either way, we're glad you're here and we hope, by the time you're done with this first chapter, you'll know why we have Community Groups, and our prayer is that you will be a lot more excited about being a part of one.

Three things we are going to cover in this chapter.

1. Why Community Groups?
2. What are the 4 A's?
3. How do Community Groups function?

Why Community Groups?

The short answer is, for your good! Here's what Paul says in the book of Romans:

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function. Romans 12:3-4

By the way, this is also why we believe so strongly in the value of church membership. If you haven't chosen to become a member at LC3, we'd encourage you to consider it. We are called into community together. We are one body with many members. In the New Testament, the phrase "one another" is used 100 times. 59 of those are specific commands about how we are to live with and relate to one another. In fact, we see the phrase used a couple of times later in this chapter of Romans. God designed us to do life in community with one another.

But why? Again, the answer is for your good. For sure our faith journey is our relationship with Jesus. But Community is where we are known. Community is where we can go if we need help. Community is where we best grow in our relationship with the Lord. Community is where people who love me can speak truth into my life. Community is at the heart of our core values or what we call the 4 A's. We were created to be in a community!

Which brings us to the 4 A's. What exactly are the 4 A's? They are our core principles here at LC3 and you can remember them because they each start with the letter A. What are they?

Community Group Core Values (4 A's)

1. **Authentic** - to be authentically known and loved by others.
2. **Abide** - to grow in our abiding with Jesus.
3. **Armed** - to be better armed against the schemes of the enemy.
4. **Advance** - to advance the kingdom of God, individually as well as corporately.

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The 4A's are designed to keep us focused on the core principles that will help us to become devoted followers of Christ. All the things we do at Community Groups help promote one of these four core principles. From sharing meals together, to sharing one another's testimony, to praying for one another, to studying the Bible or discussing the sermon, our CGs happen to grow us in these four core values.

We know that community doesn't just happen. We also know it can't be forced or manufactured and it takes time. Over the course of the year groups will do a wide range of bible studies, book studies, sermon reviews or any number of things to grow in our walk with the Lord. Each fall, we ask all our groups to join us in an all-church series to kick off the fall season. Outside of that, we let CG leaders and their groups choose what they will cover.

Which brings us to the final question we want to answer; How do Community Groups function? Well, there are as many answers to this question as there are community groups. No two groups will function the same, but there are some principles or "best practices" that we've seen work. Here are some of the questions your group will need to answer.

How large should a Community Group be? Not too big and not too small! Super helpful answer, right? The truth is that is the answer. We've found that less than eight can feel too small (what if a couple of people don't show) and more than twelve can start to feel too large (the goal isn't to start your own small church). At the same time there have been plenty of successful groups smaller than eight and larger than twelve. That just gives you an idea.

How often should a Community Group Meet? Regularly would be our first answer. Our recommendation is weekly, but we have groups that meet every other week or twice a month or something in between. It's important that you meet often enough to accomplish the 4A's, but there's no required frequency. BTW, most groups choose to take the summer off or at least adjust their meeting frequency to accommodate family vacations and schedules.

Where do groups meet? The most common meeting place for groups is in someone's home. Best practices have found that having a home environment is conducive to relaxing and being comfortable to increase the possibility for connection and again accomplishing the 4A's. However, we have people that meet on the church campus, and we've had groups use other community meeting places due to space.

What about children? This can often be the most challenging question to address for groups with small children. There are a variety of ways that groups have dealt with children and childcare. Some groups have chosen to simply include the children in whatever they do as a group. Some groups have hired a couple of qualified teenagers to show up and babysit the kids. Still others have traded with another group that meets on a different night, one babysits one night, and they swap roles the next night. (We've included an appendix that outlines some of the requirements for offsite Community Group Childcare*.)

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Finally, “Where do we go from here?” The first thing is relationships start with a commitment. At first the commitment may be as simple as, “I’ll show up.” But eventually that commitment should start to encompass the four A’s and more. The second thing we would encourage is trust. At first, it may be hard for some to trust a new, possibly random group of strangers, so instead could we encourage you to trust the Lord. God wants you in community. Can you put enough trust in the Lord that He will direct your paths in this season. And thirdly, would you be willing to take a risk and share your story with your group. For some we know this will be an easy thing that you can do without much thought. For others this will be a real stretch. That’s why we’ve included a tool in the appendixes to help you put together your story.

Again, welcome to week 1 of your Community Group launch. We’re so glad you are here. We hope maybe you’re a little more excited about being here too! Have fun getting to know each other!

What do we do about Childcare?

Childcare can be a challenge – logistically, financially, or both. Here are some ways that our Community Group can manage childcare during our meeting times.

1. Consider making the group more intergenerational and include the kids, at least occasionally, so they see an authentic Christian community modeled. Please include them in the opening prayer, and icebreaker if appropriate, so they know our group is centered on Jesus. This helps each child know they are known and loved. It also allows the children to build healthy relationships with adults.
2. Hire 1 or 2 babysitters who can care for the children in another room or a nearby house with a paid or volunteer babysitter. The sitter can be a qualified teenager or other adult. Alternatively, group members could babysit on a rotating basis. This will take members away from the group, but it is an option. The group should consider the financial cost of hiring sitter(s) and ensure that all members with children are able and feel comfortable contributing to the cost of the service.
3. Alternately, each group member needing childcare services can arrange for their own childcare needs weekly.

Regardless of the Groups choice on managing Childcare, please ensure that children are kept safe. We’ve provided LC3’s offsite Childcare policy below to help with your decision-making.

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Discussion Questions:

1. As a group talk about the questions regarding size, frequency, location and children. This is a good time to bring up questions or concerns. Remember to reach out to your coach if you need any help.
2. Look at the 7 Community Building Questions (Appendix 7). Go around and read each question and discuss any concerns or questions you might have about any of these. These questions are connected to our Core Values (The 4 A's), so they will make more sense as your group studies each of the Core Values.
3. End your first meeting by going around and sharing prayer requests with one another. Then finish with a time of prayer.

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Chapter 2: A1 ~ Authentic

Ice Breaker:

- What is something about you that no one here would know?

“To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything.” ~Tim Keller

When it comes to core values in our LC3 Community Groups, we begin with the first **A** representing **Authentic**. We have a vision that at LC3 we would have groups that live out **Authentic Community**.

The word authentic is defined as: “Not false or copied; genuine; real.” Think of the difference between counterfeit money and the real thing. Real money is authentic. There is something different about authenticity. You’ve probably heard about how they train bank tellers to recognize counterfeit money. It’s not by exposing them to all the various types of “fake” currency. Rather, they have them handle the “real” thing so much that when they come across the counterfeit, they instantly know something’s different. It’s not authentic.

In much the same way, when we are building community, being Authentic is allowing others to get to know the real you. As you build trust and relationships it gets easier and easier to feel like you must put on a “false” persona and be genuine. That’s the goal of this first A.

So why is that one of our core values? What does the bible say about authentic community? How do we achieve Community Groups (CG) that live out authenticity? Answering these questions is the goal for this week’s lesson.

- 1) **Why is Authentic one of our core values?** There are several reasons why authenticity is a core value for our CGs. Here are 3:
 - A. **Acts 2 describes the early church as a community that did life together.** When you read through the book of Acts, you read about a church community that “had all things in common”. In the early church this included everything from physical possessions to worshiping together. The heart of the early church was living for Christ and living life fully with one another. You might say it was all about Christ and Community, which can only happen if there is Authentic Community.
 - B. **Authentic Community allows us to encourage, support, challenge, celebrate and love one another best.** Like the early church, today an authentic community is the best way for us as a church to encourage, support, challenge and love one another. In a church the size of LC3, it would be easy to show up at a service, get lost (or hide) in the back, enjoy worship and a good message, and then sneak out before the last song. But it’s hard to live the Christian life all alone.

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C. God has wired us for authentic relationships. Even secular psychology confirms this. Several years ago, Psychology Today ran an article titled, “The Core Need - The need to be known and valued by self and others.” Gregg Henriques Ph.D., says one of the key questions when examining someone is, “To what extent is this individual known and valued by self and important others?”

This shouldn’t surprise us because we are wired by God for authentic relationships. Like the Tim Keller quote at the beginning of this lesson, to be known and loved is what we need most. Certainly, by God, but also by others in our life. Of course, this begins first with an authentic relationship with God, but it would also include being authentic with others.

Which brings us to:

2) What does God’s word say about authentic community? Well again, Acts 2 describes a community that truly lived out authenticity with one another... sharing everything!

Romans 12:4-5 reminds us, “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”

And then in Ephesians 4:25 we read this:

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

Ephesians goes on to describe how speaking the truth should lead us to live a Godly, fruitful life with one another, putting away bitterness and wrath, instead being kind to one another. Remember, “authentic” speaks to something that is genuine or real, so Authentic Community requires that we be genuine and real. This only happens in a community where we know and are known by one another. It is what we were created for and it’s what God models for us in the gospel of John.

I am the good shepherd. I KNOW my own and my own KNOW me, John 10:14

So, if Authentic Community is one of our core values and God’s word affirms it, the question now is:

3) How do we create authentic communities in our LC3 Community Groups? Here are 7 essential traits we must have if we are to be Community Groups that are authentic.

A. Christ Centered - at LC3 we are about Christ and Community, in that order. Without Christ, our community groups become social gatherings for our entertainment. Christ is what separates us from all other communities out there. True Authentic Community will drive us to **ABIDE** more with our Lord and with one another. Because of Christ in us and in our groups... because of what Christ did for us on the cross... because

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we are Christ Centered... we should live life with one another in such a way that others look at us and ask, "What is going on there? How can they love one another like that!?" And the answer is, because of Jesus.

- B. Safe Place** - Ephesians 4:29 says, let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And Proverbs 11:13 says, A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret. Our community groups need to be a safe place for people to come and be authentic. Not just safe from slander and gossip, but safe from judgment and condemnation. Oftentimes our instinct is to counsel or pile on when someone shares their struggles, when what they need in that moment is a compassionate ear and a community that will listen. There will be time for counsel and advice later.
- C. Faithful Friends** - Authentic community is built when people know that we will be there through thick and thin. If my life goes well, I want my community to celebrate with me. If I'm struggling in my life or in my walk with Jesus, I want to know that my community isn't going to abandon me. Proverbs 17:17 A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.
- D. Known and Loved** - Our greatest desire is to be fully known. Our fear is if you knew me then you wouldn't like me. Authentic Community is built when people can be truly loved because they are fully known. Cartoonist Tim Kreider said it this way, "If we want the rewards of being loved we have to submit to the mortifying ordeal of being known." Authentic community helps remove the mortifying part by focusing on the loving part! That said there are aspects of being known that can be scary. But that's the part of Authentic Community that is helping us be **ARMED** in our walk with Christ. It includes:
- 1. Confessing sin** - James 5:16 tells us, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." While it may feel mortifying, God's word encourages us to let even our sins be known by our community, that we may be healed.
 - 2. Sharing struggles** - 1 Corinthians 12:26 reminds us, "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." One of the best ways we can support each other is in the areas we especially struggle. Praying for those challenging areas of one another's life. Supporting one another when problems arise. No one likes to admit we need help, but Authentic Community is built when we share in one another's burdens.
- E. Fellowship together** - this one probably doesn't need a lot of explanation. Authentic community includes times of enjoying one another's company, breaking bread, and having fun.

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- F. Pray for Each Other** - Again, not a lot of explanation needed, but James 5:16 reminds us, as we grow to know and love one another, it must include praying for one another.
- G. Serve together** - Authentic Community is built around the common mission to **ADVANCE** the Kingdom of Christ. Authentic Community should encourage us to advance the kingdom in the way we share Christ with the lost as well as how we serve and disciple our spiritual brothers and sisters. But Authentic Community also gives us a beautiful opportunity to serve the Lord together in ways that we can't serve Him alone, advancing the kingdom by living out the great commission of Matthew 28.

In the appendix, you will find 7 questions that are designed to help you build community by addressing these essential traits. Use these Community Building Questions each week as we strive for Authentic Community. A place where we are fully known and truly loved. A place where we are encouraged and challenged to live out our Christian walk to the fullest. Christ and Community!

Discussion Questions:

1. What makes you feel known?
2. Have you ever been a part of a community or group where you felt really known? What made it so?
3. Which of these 7 traits do you have the most challenge with? Why?
4. Which of these 7 traits are you most excited by? Why?
5. Are you willing to commit to helping your community group live out these 7 traits? What do you think that will look like?
6. As a group talk about the 7 Community Building Questions in Appendix 1.

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Chapter 3: A2 ~ Abide

Ice breaker:

- Tell us about a childhood friend you wish you would have stayed connected to and why?

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the words that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:1-5

This chapter deals with our second Core Value, our second A, Abide. As a Community Group, we want to help encourage one another to closer abiding in two primary ways.

1. First and foremost, Abide with Christ.
2. Second, Abide with his bride, the body of Christ.

The cross is a perfect reminder of this biblical truth.

The vertical beam of the cross reminds us of our primary relationship with Jesus (Love God) and the horizontal beam reminds us of the importance of our relationship with others (Love Neighbor).



Jesus said, “I am the true vine”. And like any healthy plant, the only way we can bear fruit is if we remain connected and abiding in the vine. The Greek word translated *abide* is sometimes translated as remain. To “abide” is a verb. It is active. Abiding in Christ is not a feeling or a belief, but something we do. It’s this idea that we are to abide or remain connected to the true vine. When a branch on a tree gets cut off from the tree, it may stay green for a few days, but eventually it will begin to brown and dry up. It has been cut off from what it needs to sustain life. In the same way, the only way we can stay healthy spiritually is to abide or remain connected to the “true vine”.

- 1) **Everything begins and ends with Christ.** The “great” commandment given in Matthew 22:37 is to love God with your entire being (heart, soul, mind, and strength). One of the keyways that we abide with Christ and live out the great commandment is by investing in our relationship with the Savior daily. How healthy would a tree branch be if it were connected to the tree only once or twice a week. 1 Timothy 4 speaks instead of training or disciplining ourselves for godliness. Disciplining means forming and establishing practices that help you grow in your love and obedience to God (abiding).

The purpose of this training isn’t to check a box, or to prove how much you love God, or to somehow make God love you more. The goal isn’t even to become more disciplined. The goal is to abide and allow God and his Spirit to transform us more and more into the image of Christ. Two key places to start your training are reading scripture and praying daily to strengthen your relationship with Christ.

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A. Reading the bible - A commitment to abiding should include a plan to read God's word daily. The best way to do that, if you want the best chance of sticking with it, is to have a plan for your reading. Without a plan it's too easy for the busyness of life to take over. If you don't know where to start, the You Version bible app is the simplest solution. It has multiple plans to choose from. There are plans that will walk you through the entire bible in a year, others will do just the New Testament or a particular book of the bible or any number of other choices. Where you start isn't important, trust that as you spend time daily reading God's word, that He will direct your time and experience. If time is a challenge, start small, 15 minutes a day. Remember the goal is to spend time with God, to learn more about Him and to grow in our love for the Lord. After you read, ask the Lord to show you something that you can take away from that day's reading. Doing it with a friend or with someone from your Community Group is a great way to increase your chance of success in your new discipline. Maybe connect each day to share what the Lord showed you that day from your reading. If you are still having trouble, don't be afraid to ask your Community Group leader for suggestions.

B. Prayer - If reading God's word is hearing from God and learning directly from Him, prayer is having a conversation with God. It's an opportunity to thank Him, to let him know what's on your mind, and to make requests of Him. If we are going to love God with our whole being, it's hard to imagine doing that only conversing a couple of times a week. 1 Thessalonians 5 tells us to rejoice always and to pray without ceasing. Like reading, staying connected should include a regular, daily time of prayer. It can be completely unstructured, "Lord here I am ready to have a conversation with you." Or you can use an acronym like ACTS to guide your prayer time:

Adoration—Praise God for who he is.

Confession—Confess your sins to God.

Thanksgiving—Thank God for his gifts to you.

Supplication—Make your requests known to God.

Some people find using a prayer journal to be a helpful way to organize their thoughts and record their conversations with the Lord. You can write down your prayers or just record your prayer requests and keep track of answered prayers.

To be sure, these aren't the only things God has made available to us in our training for Godliness. There are things like journaling, memorizing scripture, bible studies, mentoring relationships, accountability groups and more. But **bible reading and prayer represents the 2 key components of abiding or remaining in Christ**. What are some ways as a community group that you can help one another commit to daily spending time with the Lord?

2) **We are called to love one another**. The phrase "one another" is found over 100 times in the New Testament. It's a reminder that God intends for us to walk this journey with one another. Of course, we start with our relationship with Christ, everything begins and ends with Jesus. But God doesn't want to transform us only in our quiet times with him. And He certainly does not intend for us to hoard our growth and relationship with Him like a

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child hovering over his pile of candy on Halloween. God wants to use our relationships with others in the discipleship process (Proverbs 27:17) and He calls us to be devoted to one another. Biblical community gives you the opportunity to live out this calling.

Being committed to your Community Group is one of the ways you can show your devotion to each other. We do this by investing time and energy into a relationship, loving one another, and putting others needs above our own (Philippians 2:3). Here are just a few ways that you can live this out in your Community Group:

- Show up - being committed to one another means showing up as often as you are able. Obviously, things come up, but being together each week begins to build trust and confidence in your relationship with one another.
- Beyond the meeting - while your regular meeting time is crucial, it can't stop there. Community means living life together. Reach out to each other in between your regular meetings. Send an encouraging text, check in about a prayer request, or just say hi.
- Pray - we already mentioned this but make it a habit to pray for the others in your group.
- Fellowship - as a group, consider planning some time outside of your normal meeting to just be together. It can be a BBQ or a special outing (movie or trip).
- Grace - Romans 15:7 says, "Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." People will disappoint you. You will disappoint others. There is a chance you won't naturally like someone in your group. We are still called to love and devotion, one to another.

Remember the goal is to abide with Jesus and abide with one another. Both things require intentionality on our part to make them happen. But it's what we were created and called to do. Here are some discussion questions to further consider this:

Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways would you like to grow spiritually?
2. This guide suggested one prayer acronym (ACTS). There are many others, such as WAR, HEART, PRAY, etc. As a group, share your favorite, or research others to help each other grow in prayer.
3. How do you think being in community might help you abide in your relationship with Jesus?
4. How did you abide with the Lord this week?
5. Have you ever experienced real acceptance in a relationship? Share your experience with someone.
6. Building relationships with others takes time. What is one way you could reach out to someone this week to get to know someone in your community group?
7. As a group talk about the 7 Community Building Questions in Appendix 1.

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Chapter 4: A3 ~ Armed

Ice breaker:

- Tell about an embarrassing moment in your life.

Some people take issue with Christians using military verbiage in sermons or illustrations; describing aspects of life as battles to be fought. However, it is God that has chosen to use these analogies in scripture. Consider Ephesians 6:10-20. Paul uses the imagery of a battle, only this battle isn't against flesh and blood, but this battle is, "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." The reality is, in our journey with Christ we are up against an enemy. Sin exists and the enemy is ready to use that against us. John 10:10 reminds us that Satan comes to "steal, kill and destroy". Thankfully, in that passage of Ephesians Paul also reminds us, "Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm."

This chapter isn't so much about dissecting the armor Paul speaks of (belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, sword of the spirit) but rather, taking up that armor. To be sure, understanding Ephesians 6 and the Armor of God is very important and we will refer to it. Here, we will address 2 questions about sin and Satan's schemes:

1. What can I do in the context of my Community Group to arm myself against the schemes of the enemy?
2. What is my role in helping my brothers and sisters in my Community Group to be armed in their battle as well?

Satan is the great accuser of the brethren (Rev 12:10). He hates God and therefore he hates all Christians. He loves to remind us of our sin and unworthiness. Satan says look at your sin and God says look to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith (Heb 12:2). Satan wants us to believe that our sin will somehow diminish our worth or God's love for us. But God's word reminds us that God will not change his mind about those He has called to salvation (Rom 8:38-39). That doesn't keep the enemy from trying. If he can get us to believe that our sin defines us, then he truly steals, kills, and destroys. He steals our joy, kills our excitement, and destroys our ability to share Christ with others.

In this lesson, we want to consider what God's word says we should do when it comes to our sin (and yes, we all have sin in our life - 1 John 1:8) and the sin of others. Remember a couple of chapters back we talked about the desire to be fully known and truly loved. That can't happen if all we ever share is an airbrushed version of our life. The accuser would continue to suggest, "if they really knew you, they wouldn't love you." Bringing your sin into the light is the easiest way to combat the schemes of the enemy (James 5:16). We just came out of COVID where everyone wore a mask at some point. But, when it comes to authentic community and our spiritual journey, masks aren't a good thing. Masks allow the accuser to continue to accuse. They also prevent others from really knowing us or, as James 15 instructs us, to pray for one another.

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With that in mind, what does it mean to authentically share sins and struggles? It means bringing those things to the light (Ephesians 5:11). That isn't easy to do since it goes against our sin nature to expose those things (John 3:20). But as Christians, the Bible calls us to live as children of God who walk in the light as we follow him (Ephesians 5:8, John 3:21). This means that we need to confess our sins to each other (James 5:16).

Each of us has the responsibility to confess our sins quickly and fully to others. Confession may feel like punishment, but it's a gift from God! Confession brings mercy, forgiveness, fellowship, healing, purification, and restoration. Be honest about what you're struggling with and why. Don't just focus on the behavior, but also on what's going on in your heart, which is where sinful behavior comes from (Matthew 15:19). Since the way you live comes from your heart (Proverbs 4:23; 27:19), if you only confess your actions, the root of the problem will remain unaddressed and in the dark.

In response to any sin that is confessed, the Bible tells us that we should pray for healing (James 5:16). This is a powerful way to support one another as a community group. When someone confesses sin, pray for that person right away. Ask God to heal his or her heart. Share verses from Scripture that speak to what was shared. Celebrate the fact that God is working! Remember to accept each other, just as Christ has accepted you (Romans 15:7). Be kind to each other, be compassionate, and forgive each other in the same way that God has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:32). After you confess, you'll probably feel like a weight has been lifted from your shoulders. You experience forgiveness, and fellowship is restored (1 John 1:7,9).

The next step is repentance, which is actively turning away from the sin that you confessed (Acts 3:19). Your group should help you process what steps of repentance to take—how you can turn to move toward God, away from your sin (2 Timothy 2:22). The last step is to move forward. The Bible says that when a righteous person falls, they get back up and keep going (Proverbs 24:16). By God's grace, Christians can move past sinful behavior and press on towards Christ (Philippians 3:13-14), being confident that nothing we do could ever make God stop loving us (Romans 8:38-39). Don't isolate yourself in the dark with your sin. Come out of hiding, confess to your community, and enjoy the life and healing that follows.

And what's our responsibility when it comes to others? You can think of this as a sub-A category that comes under Armed. This is the **A - Admonish**. When you look up admonish you see words like, warn, advise, or urge. Part of helping others to be armed against the schemes of the enemy is by admonishing them well. When sin gets exposed what do we do? Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- We all need encouragement:
 - Be bold, be strong (Ephesians 6:10, 19)
 - Keep your eyes on the prize (Philippians 3:14)
 - Don't lose heart (1 Thessalonians 5:14)
 - Keep doing good (Galatians 6:9)
 - Finish well (1 Corinthians 9:24)

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- Admonishment should be delivered with patience, grace, and compassion. The goal should be growth not shame.
- A practical way to think about encouragement and admonishment is to answer three questions for yourself (from Watermark Church), and to help others answer for themselves. Something like this: To fully obey God's Word and pursue his best for me, what do I need to:
 - Keep doing? (Encourage one another to keep up the good work.)
 - Stop doing? (Point out sin or unproductive behaviors to turn away from.)
 - Start doing? (Suggest new opportunities to pursue Christ more fully.)
- Have grace with each other. It's possible that someone will one day admonish you poorly. Try to look beyond that and consider what God has for you in that moment. In the same way, let's not be anxious to find fault in others, but be quick to show grace.

Thoroughly and lovingly processing these questions will help your group point one another toward Christ. This can look different for each group and member. Some people may want help in specific areas, such as memorizing Scripture or sharing the gospel. Others may want a general time of confession and repentance.

All of this can be hard, but remember the goal is to arm ourselves against the schemes of the enemy. He loves for us to keep our sin in the dark so he can go on accusing the brethren. Let's develop an authentic community that allows us to be fully known and truly loved.

Discussion Questions:

1. When have you felt comfortable sharing a real struggle with someone? What was it about that person that made you feel safe?
2. Has anyone in your past broken your trust after you shared something personal? How did you respond to that broken trust?
3. Is there anything you're struggling with that God is prompting you to share or confess?
4. How do you best receive encouragement? Admonishment? Who has encouraged and "sharpened" you well in your life?
5. Does anything come to mind that you need to keep doing, stop doing, or start doing?
6. What are some ideas for keeping our group connected so that we may pray and support one another in this area (Prayer App, WhatsApp messaging group, etc.)
7. As a group talk about the 7 Community Building Questions in Appendix 1.

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Chapter 5: A4 ~ Advance

Ice breaker:

- Tell about a time you had good news you could not wait to share. Tell us the story of how you shared it.

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:18-20

In sports, athletes and teams train hard, individually, and collectively. They correct each other, they encourage each other. They learn and grow and get better and better at the role they play. Imagine now, after all that work, on game day, the team decided they’d rather just stay in the locker room with one another.

In a sense that’s what could happen if we were to create a vibrant **Authentic** community... helped each other **Abide** well with Jesus and with each other... we even **Armed** each other by doing the hard work of exposing and dealing with sin and struggles in our lives... and then decided that we should just keep that in our group! What a shame that would be.

If we remain inwardly focused, we miss a big part of what God is calling us to do, to **Advance** the kingdom. In Matthew 28, all believers are told to go and make disciples. Making disciples that will observe, all that Jesus commanded, means teaching them to also go and make disciples. Like all the other A’s we’ve been studying, this one can feel daunting. But as Jesus tells us in verse 20, he’s always with us. And once again, in our Community Groups, we can support each other on the journey.

As a group you can approach this in a variety of ways. Everyone comes with different gifts and different passions. Depending on who’s in your group you could choose unique ways to advance the kingdom. Regardless, you should start by considering how you might love and serve:

- The local body of Christ (Galatians 6:10)
- Other believers (1 Peter 4:10)
- Non-believers (Luke 19:10)
- The poor and needy (James 1:27, Proverbs 14:31)
- People in other nations (Acts 1:8, Matthew 28:19)

Here are some ways you might decide to advance the kingdom (the possibilities are endless):

1. Adopt a missionary. One of the simple ways for Community Groups to engage in missions is by adopting one of the many missionaries that LC3 supports. You can send them encouragement, pray for them, help them meet ministry needs as they arise or countless other things. Ask your coach if you haven’t already adopted a missionary.
2. If someone in your group has a particular mission that they currently support, you could choose to all rally around that ministry. You could even rotate if there are more than one.

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3. As a group you could choose to do a mission's project. You can check with The Neighborhood Center (TNC) or the Global Missions Team (GMT) for ideas, but the skies the limit on what you could do locally or globally.
4. Volunteer together at the LC3 foodbank, our Community Garden, or some other local mission organization.
5. Put together a fundraiser to raise money for a mission's project. Again, the GMT or TNC can be a help to you if you need it. Or if you are already adopting a missionary, you could check with them.
6. Get to know your neighbors, both those near LC3, and your own neighbors where you live. Invite them for coffee, or simply have a front porch chat.

Whether you're advancing the kingdom individually or doing it as a Community Group, we are called to make disciples. Part of answering the great commission will involve discipling other believers. That's why helping each other grow in our community groups is so important. A community that is **Authentic** so that we are known and loved. Encouragement and support in **Abiding** with Christ. A community that will help me be **Armed** against the schemes of the enemy. And a place where I'm encouraged and supported in **Advancing** the kingdom of God.

Discussion Questions:

1. What, if anything, makes you uncomfortable with sharing the gospel (e.g., fear, lack of knowledge, etc.)? When did you last share the gospel? How can you grow in this area?
2. Are there specific causes, people, or regions for which God has stirred your heart? How are you currently serving (or intend to serve) in the area for which God has stirred your heart?
3. Do you know your spiritual gifts? Would you share with your group an example of how you've used your spiritual gift? If you don't know your gifts, please consider reviewing one of the tools listed at the bottom of this section.
4. Can you share an example of how you or your Community Group served one of the groups listed on the prior page (the local body of Christ, etc.)?
5. What are some additional ways you can serve individually or collectively? How can the members of your Community Group encourage you in continuing to serve and Advance the Kingdom of God?
6. As a group talk about the 7 Community Building Questions in Appendix 1.

To learn more about Spiritual Gifts, consider these resources:

- The LC3 SHAPE for ministry class
- Take a spiritual gifts assessment such as: <https://giftstest.com/>
- Ask for feedback on how others see you use your gifts to share God's love.

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Appendix 1: Community Building Questions

- 1) How has your abiding with God been this week? What have you learned?
- 2) What has inspired or encouraged you this week? What was your “high” this week?
- 3) What has been weighing on you this week? What was your “low” this week?
- 4) How have you struggled with sin or temptation this week?
- 5) How have you shared Christ with and/or shown god’s love to others this week?
- 6) How can we pray for you or serve you (advice, encouragement, support) this week?
- 7) What are your hopes or goals for next week?

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Appendix 2: Community Group Agreement

Building community is where we are focused on our 4 A's requires intentionality. Setting and communicating expectations for ourselves and each other can help build community within our group.

We encourage every Community Group to read through the following statements as a group during their first few weeks together. These statements can help build the foundation for living out the 4 A's.

As you read through these statements, note those that are most important to you and why.

Within our Community Group, we agree as a group to do the following:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Attend: | We give priority to each other by attending meetings. |
| Participate: | We actively participate in group discussions to learn more about each other and grow together |
| Maintain Confidentiality | What is said in the group stays in the group. We will not gossip. |
| No fixing | We are not here to fix each other. Jesus does that part. We will give encouragement, speak truth, and point to Jesus. |
| Make Disciples | We will help each other grow in our relationship with Christ and put our faith into action. |
| Accountability | We give permission to group members to hold each other accountable to goals we have set for ourselves. |
| Share Responsibility | We will share the roles and responsibilities of this group. |

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Serve Others

We will serve the people in our group and make an impact outside the group through service to the local and global community.

Celebrate and Have Fun

We will celebrate God's work in our lives and keep our relationships vibrant by enjoying each other's company inside and outside of group time.

Share within your group to learn more about others in your community group. Is there anything missing from this list? Feel free to add it and share more with your group!

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Appendix 3: Sharing Roles and Responsibilities within the Community Group

1 Peter 4:10 “Each member should use their gifts to serve others.”

Each member of your Community Group brings amazing skills, gifts, abilities, and interests. We can each use these to work together to build community and live out our 4 A’s.

Consider each role below. You may not need all of these in your Community Group, but feel free to step up and consider serving in those roles that bring value to your group.

Role	Description	Who will serve in this role?
Leader(s)	Provides vision and coordination within the group.	
Service Coordinator	Helps the group identify service opportunities and makes initial coordination when needed	
Food	Helps plan anything with food like snacks, dinners, etc. This person fills a coordination role. They are NOT expected to provide the food!	
Social	Helps the group plan social activities	
Prayer Communicator	Documents prayer requests and praises and makes sure the information is shared with the Community Group members.	
Communication	Communicates with the group about scheduling, ideas, changes, etc.	
Childcare	Helps arrange for childcare and assist with equipping the sitters with developing age-friendly activities	

Anything missing? Feel free to edit, combine, delete, or add to the list. The goal here is to share the load and serve the group! Every group is different, so use only what works for your group.

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Appendix 4: Developing Your Story Using a Life Map*

Romans 8:28, NLT

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, and to those who are called according to His purpose.”

Have you considered how God has used significant experiences, people, or events to form and develop His people? A Life Map is a visual representation of your life from birth to present. It highlights events God has used to mold and shape your character. The insights you gain through the Life Map process help you tell YOUR STORY by answering the questions, “Who am I, and where is the Lord leading me?” It can also help your group get to know and understand you better.

Consider the life of Abraham. His journey took him through both the lows and highs of life. They also brought him in contact with all sorts of people and places. Most importantly, you can see how these experiences helped shape his relationship with God. All of Abraham’s experiences – decisions, people, places, events, etc. - helped form and develop him.

These four steps will help you develop your YOUR STORY so you can share it with others:

Step 1: REFLECTION:

Prayerfully consider people, places and events that have marked your life. Then, using the Life Map worksheet on the next page, write down your thoughts. The worksheet includes categories and questions to guide your reflection.

Step 2: ANALYSIS:

Now that you have reflected over your life up to today and have a list of your heroes, heritage, high points, hard times and “hand of God” moments, it’s time to analyze which of these you want to put in your Life Map. While it would be nice to share everything, focus on the most significant influences and experiences in your life. Spend some time praying through what you have listed. What you choose is totally up to you. You should not plan to spend any longer than 20-25 minutes sharing your Life Map with your group.

Step 3: ORGANIZATION:

You are now ready to synthesize this information into a logical flow of thought. How do these people, places and events fit together?

Step 4: PRESENTATION:

This is where you exercise your creative powers. How will you deliver your story? What medium fits your style of communication? You could draw your map like an ancient sea journey with battles, treasures, and tropical islands. You could also use a narrative story, graph, photographs, or music. Be as creative as you can be to depict your life story. If you are presenting this to your group, remember to make it large enough for everyone to see and read easily.

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When you're ready, let your Community Group know that you're ready to present your story. At each Community Group meeting, time can be scheduled for 1-2 group members to share their stories. As a group member, remember everything that is shared is confidential. As you listen to the stories of those in your group, see how God has worked uniquely and creatively in each life to bring experiences, gifts, talents, and abilities together to both serve Him, His creation, and His community.

End each story by praying for the person, thanking God for the people He's brought into their life, acknowledging His hand, even in times where it could not be seen, and for the person's worth. Be specific about the details they mention in their story.

Remember:

Romans 8:28, NLT

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, and to those who are called according to His purpose."

(*Life Maps courtesy of Watermark Church)

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LIFE MAP WORKSHEET

Across the top of the worksheet, you can consider age ranges, life stages, locations where you lived, jobs you held, or any other “divider” of time to help you think about your life map. Feel free to add more columns if it helps you through your reflection time.

Name:	Age/Lifestage Location	Age/Lifestage Location	Age/Lifestage Location	Age/Lifestage Location
<p>HERITAGE: How have your family relationships, ethnic or geographical influences shaped your life?</p>				
<p>HEROES: What relationships influenced your character/shaped your direction (positively & negatively)? How? Why?</p>				
<p>HIGH POINTS: What experiences have you especially enjoyed? Why?</p>				
<p>HARD TIMES: What experiences were especially difficult or painful? Why?</p>				
<p>HAND OF GOD: When/how have you seen God’s hand at work in your life? List specific events that illustrate His work in your life.</p>				

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Appendix 5: Childcare Policy

All groups meeting officially as part of Lake City Community Church should adhere to the LC3 Risk Prevention Policy regarding childcare. This policy requires two childcare workers/volunteers for any childcare. The minimum ratios observed at LC3 are as follows:

- Nursery (0-2 years): 1 adult to 4 children
- Toddlers (18 months – 3 years): 1 adult to 7 children
- Preschoolers (4 years – 5 years): 1 adult to 10 children
- Kindergarten – 12th grade: 1 adult to 15 children

This requires a minimum of one of the two workers or volunteers to be 18 years or over.

This requires a minimum of 2 years of age difference between children being cared for and those giving care.

This requires all workers/volunteers 15 and over to have completed LC3 Risk Prevention Training.

If you have any questions regarding this policy or its implementation, please contact the Lake City Community Church office @ 253-582-8040 or email us at Community@LC3.com.

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Notes: