

GOSPEL COMMUNITY FIELD GUIDE

EMMAUS ROAD CHURCH

Sioux Falls, SD

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GOD IS FILLING THE EARTH WITH WORSHIPERS.

This is the world God loves. This is the world God gave his Son to save.

And God is redeeming this world from sin and death by saving people out of darkness and into the kingdom of his beloved Son.

One day, this world will be as full of people who delight in the glory of God as the oceans are full of water.

Until then, it is our joy to live our lives in gospel community on mission, bearing witness to Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us.

We hope to give every resident of Sioux Falls repeated opportunities to hear and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

God's Spirit saves lost people through the gospel witness of redeemed people. Disciples make disciples who make disciples. Disciples gather in churches, and churches plant churches that plant churches. We envision one Gospel Community for every 1,000 people in our city.

And so we pray as our Lord taught us to pray,

**“THY KINGDOM COME,
THY WILL BE DONE,
ON EARTH AS IN HEAVEN.”**

GOSPEL COMMUNITIES

WHAT ARE GOSPEL COMMUNITIES?

Gospel Communities (GCs) are groups of people who are trusting the gospel of Jesus Christ together, applying the gospel in all of life together, and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ together. GCs are disciple-making teams that bear witness to Jesus in word and deed.

GCs are not Bible studies, though they *do* study the Bible together. They're not prayer groups, though they pray together. GCs are small-ish, but they're not small groups or support groups. GCs are all about the gospel, trusting and treasuring Christ in all of life with other disciples. By God's grace, the result will be that the lost are saved, saints are sanctified, the church is edified, and God is glorified.

Gospel Communities are *gospel communities on mission*.

Gospel

We live all of life by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us.

The gospel of first importance is that Christ died for our sins and was raised on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). The good news of Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and session is the center and circumference of everything. It has been said that the gospel is not simply the ABCs or the elementary basics of the Christian faith; the gospel is the A-to-Z of the Christian life. By grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, spiritually dead sinners are reborn, guilty sinners are justified, and enemies of God are seated at the table as adopted sons and daughters. Everything that follows is grounded in this glorious reality.

Community

Our life in Christ unites us in gospel community.

The gospel is not merely good news for individuals. It has implications for our life together in community. Through the gospel of Jesus Christ, we are saved *out* of the domain of darkness and into God's covenant community. This reality informs the way we live everyday life together. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "The more clearly we learn to recognize that the ground and strength and promise of all our community is in Jesus Christ alone, the more calmly we will learn to think about our community and pray and hope for it." It is the Spirit of God who produces gospel culture as we live out the "one another" commands by faith in Jesus.

Mission

Our life in gospel community testifies to the world that Jesus is the risen Savior and Lord.

When the redeemed people of God live in gospel community, we display and declare the glory of God to the world (Isaiah 43:7; 1 Peter 2:9-10). The mission of the church is to make and multiply *disciples* of Jesus Christ by proclaiming the *gospel* of Jesus Christ. This is the mission that the risen Christ gave to his Church: “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). The church is a community of redeemed people with a mission—a gospel community on mission.

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

- 1 Peter 2:9-10

EVERYDAY RHYTHMS

Rather than viewing “church” and “mission” as extra programs to add into our lives, we see everyday life as the context for building community, engaging with unbelievers, and showing and telling the gospel of Jesus Christ. There are everyday rhythms—regular routines—in which all humans participate. By identifying these rhythms, we are able to be more intentional about building community and living on mission in our everyday lives. Since everyone regularly eats, works, talks, recreates, and celebrates, we already have access to numerous opportunities to interact with people for the glory of God.

WORK

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”
- Genesis 2:15

God made us to work, to subdue the earth and to have dominion. With sin came futile work and pain, thorns and thistles. But work itself is a good thing. And work is bigger than a job. We work around the house, we work on projects and hobbies, and we work to serve others. Asking for help can be awkward for independent people, but working together is one way to build community in the context of everyday life.

Consider: How can we use our skills and abilities to bless others? How can we invite others to work alongside of us?

CELEBRATE/LAMENT

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” - Romans 12:15

From birthdays and holidays to the Super Bowl and March Madness, disciple-making days are already on the calendar. Celebrations give us reasons to gather, to rejoice, and to give thanks to God. If we are intentional, these can be great occasions for building relationships.

In a fallen world, life is also marked by trials and loss. When those around us are grieving, we have opportunities to lament with them. People we know will endure funerals, miscarriages, layoffs, illnesses, and other afflictions. If we are attentive, these unplanned and unforeseen moments can be occasions to comfort others with the comfort of God (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

Consider: What will we celebrate together? How can we celebrate with those who are far from God? How can we comfort those who are suffering and bear one another's burdens?

EAT

"And they devoted themselves ... to the breaking of bread." - Acts 2:42

While we don't live by bread *alone*, we do require food to live. In his goodness, God supplies us with life-sustaining nutrients through food and drink that looks and smells and tastes good. Food is clearly for more than mere survival. Eating is social—it can be a shared experience. In fact, sharing meals together is a universal expression of friendship and hospitality. Since we all have to eat—usually multiple times a day—eating together is another way to build community.

Consider: *What meals will we share with each other and how often? Who else can we invite to the table?*

RECREATE

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." - Exodus 20:8

On the seventh day, God rested from his work (Gen. 2:1-3), establishing for us a pattern of work followed by rest. When we rest, we express our confidence in God to provide for us, and we are refreshed. Rest and recreation doesn't have to be solitary. Discipleship can happen in living rooms, backyards, parks, and campgrounds.

Consider: *How will we rest and recreate together?*

NARRATE

"We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done." - Psalm 78:4

Humans are not computers or robots, communicating through chunks of code; humans are characters in the unfolding story of God's glory. We communicate with each other by telling stories, describing what we have seen and experienced and how it has affected us. We process and make sense of the world by interpreting all of it through a lens—the lens of the story we think we're living. Knowing God and knowing ourselves involves knowing the Story of God revealed in Scripture and understanding how our personal stories are wrapped up in that overarching narrative.

Consider: *How will we make sure we know each other's stories? How will we grow in our understanding of the story of God's glory?*

GC LEADERS

Gospel Communities are always led by a team composed of at least one leader and one co-leader. Leading in teams embodies our value of multiplying disciples: “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2). Leadership teams also reflect our church polity, which calls for a *plurality* of elders.

The GC leader bears primary responsibility for the group, while the co-leader assists the leader in carrying out various tasks and responsibilities. This could include helping host, plan, pray, and lead a huddle.

While GC leaders may not be elders, they do function in a shepherding capacity. Therefore, both the qualifications for and responsibilities of GC leaders are drawn from the biblical qualifications and responsibilities of elders.

QUALIFICATIONS¹

GC Leaders Are Men (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6; cf. 1 Tim. 2:12)

God made men to bear the responsibility to protect and provide for their households. Likewise, some men bear the responsibility to lead, feed, and protect the church. If the men leading an GC are married, their wives are part of the leadership team, helping their husbands to carry out a variety of indispensable tasks (Gen. 2:18).

Spiritual Maturity

GC Leaders “must have a sincere and mature faith in Christ” (BCO 3.2). They must not be recent converts (1 Tim. 3:6).

“Above reproach” (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6) and “holy” (Titus 1:8)

BCO 3.3.1: The GC Leader’s “life must not have obvious flaws that make his life open to the charge of hypocrisy, bring shame to the gospel He is one whom others would call ‘holy’ in the basic, observable, but relative way that all fallen men can be holy.”

Question: *“Are you guilty of any offense over the past year that would cause a serious reproach to Christ, his church, or the gospel if that offense were to come to light (1 Tim. 3:2)?”*

“The husband of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6)

If an GC Leader is married, the health of his marriage is directly relevant to his ability to care for an GC. He must be faithful to his wife emotionally and physically. He must love, cherish, and nourish his wife (Eph. 5:25-33).

¹ These descriptions are based on the Sovereign Grace Book of Church Order, Section 3, “Qualifications for Elders.” The questions for self-assessment come from Douglas Wilson, *Mother Kirk* (Canon Press: Moscow, ID).

Questions: *“Is there any person or thing (e.g., work or hobby) competing for the time and affection you owe your wife so that it has aroused a godly jealousy in her? Have you developed any unhealthy emotional/relational attachments to other women that provoke your wife to jealousy (1 Tim. 3:2)?”*

“Sober-minded” (1 Tim. 3:2)

BCO 3.3.3: “The thought here is a clear-headedness that leads to rational thinking in difficult situations. The [GC Leader] must have the ability to see people in a variety of situations and not make rash judgments. Further, the [GC Leader] must demonstrate a basic wisdom and insight into the human heart. The [GC leader] should possess the ability to encounter sin without being surprised and without growing cynical.”

Questions: *“Are you given to great highs or lows emotionally? Would others say you are judicious in your counsel or given to extremes and overreaction?”*

“Self-controlled” (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8) and “disciplined” (Titus 1:8)

BCO 3.3.4: “Having ‘control of oneself’ has relevance in all areas of life, such as finances, sexual purity, decision making, spiritual disciplines, use of time, etc. The man’s lifestyle ought to reflect intentional thinking and living, prudence, and wisdom.”

Questions: *“Are there any areas that are normally lawful for the Christian in which someone could rightly accuse you of excess? Is there an area in which you substantively lack self-control?”*

“Respectable” (1 Tim. 3:2), “well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil” (1 Tim. 3:7), and “upright” (Titus 1:8)

BCO 3.3.5: “These terms represent the outward sense that others have of the [GC leader]. He is a man others would describe as ‘respectable,’ which means worthy of respect. He is dignified and proper in this outward sense. Yet 1 Timothy 3:7 also warns us that his reputation with those outside the church is important as well. The idea here is that if even an unbeliever thinks poorly of the man, how could we possibly elevate him in the church? This is speaking to his character, of course. If his reputation is poor specifically because of his stand for Christ and the gospel or because of slander, that is different. What is in view here is his integrity. It will be a ‘disgrace’ to appoint a man to this office whom even unbelievers think a poor example.”

Questions: *“Does your wife respect you (Eph 5:33)? Does she lead the family in respecting you? In what ways do you cause her to stumble in this duty by being difficult to respect? Do others respect you—why or why not?”*

“Hospitable” (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8)

BCO 3.3.6: “The ‘hospitality’ required of all Christians (1 Pet. 4:9) is to be practiced by the [GC Leader]. In his life, there is a general openness to other people, whether demonstrated by shared meals, giving of his time, or simply being consistent in building relationships with others.”

Questions: *“Are you ready to share with strangers? Do guests enjoy visiting your home? Do you bear with unexpected inconveniences graciously and do you lead your family to respond with grace?”*

“Able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9)

GC Leaders must personally understand and believe sound doctrine. They must also be able to teach and defend sound doctrine in small group and personal settings. The GC context calls for the ability to apply sound doctrine to the everyday stuff of life.

Questions: *“Are you skilled and well-equipped to instruct saints of differing maturity levels in the truths of the Scripture (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:9)? Can you discern and refute error readily? Are you vigilant in the care of those allotted to your charge (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2)? Are you taking any steps to study and equip yourself to discharge your responsibilities to the flock more faithfully? Do you have a solid grasp of the church’s doctrinal statement and general Bible content? If called upon, could you defend and explain these doctrines from the Word?”*

“Not a drunkard” (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7)

BCO 3.3.7: “The self-mastery of previous characteristics makes it clear that an [GC Leader] should not be mastered by wine, drugs, or any other substance, but Paul makes it explicit here. Other potentially ‘addictive’ types of activities such as gambling, pornography, computer gaming, or any activity that has overflowed its boundaries in the man’s life could potentially apply as well.”

Questions: *“Have you been drunk in the last year? Do you ‘need’ an alcoholic beverage after work to unwind? If your neighbors knew the frequency and volume of alcohol you drink, would they say you are enslaved to wine (1 Tim. 3:3)? Periodic feasting aside, would others consider you a glutton (over-eater)?”*

“Not violent but gentle” (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7); “not quarrelsome” (1 Tim. 3:3); not “quick-tempered” (Titus 1:7)

BCO 3.3.8: “An [GC Leader] faces difficult people and difficult situations and faces emotional conflicts between godly people. Thus, a man prone to bully, fight, or be generally ‘hot-headed’ should not serve An [GC Leader] must be ‘correcting his opponents with gentleness’ (2 Tim. 2:25) and must ‘be patient with them all’ (1 Thess. 5:14). There is a general ability to bring ‘peace’ to situations of conflict (‘peaceable,’ 1 Tim. 3:3, NASB). Occasional expressions of anger or impatience are simply part of our fallenness, but if these characterize the man for those who live with him— his family, co-workers, others in church—the man must not be an [GC Leader].”

Questions: *“Are you ever given to violent outbursts (1 Tim 3:3)? Have you ever struck your wife or any member of your family in a fit of anger? Are you harsh with the children or your wife? Are you argumentative or ready to find fault? Would your wife and/or children say that you are never satisfied with anything they do? Would you be satisfied if your sons turned out like you and treated their families as you treat yours? Do you honor your parents and your wife’s parents in tangible ways (1 Tim 5:8)?”*

“Not a lover of money” (1 Tim. 3:3) or “greedy for gain” (Titus 1:7)

BCO 3.3.9: “There are different ways to be disqualified because a man is a ‘lover of money.’ It can mean a general greed that motivates someone to exploit the church for his own financial gain (Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:2), or worse, to steal from it (Eph. 4:28). It can also mean a ‘covetousness’ in the man’s life that is really a form of ‘idolatry’ (Col. 3:5), or it could simply be a continual discontent with what God has provided for him (Phil. 4:10-13; Heb. 13:5). All of these are temptations for everyone, but when they are characteristic of a man, he should not serve as an [GC Leader].”

Questions: *“Do you often think of how you can acquire more money? Does your family’s spending reflect biblical priorities? Does your job in any way conflict with your God-given responsibilities to your family? To the church? Based on how you exercise stewardship of your own resources, would others trust you to manage their resources (e.g., tithes and offerings)?”*

Skilled Managers of Their Homes (1 Tim. 3:4-5; Titus 1:6)

BCO 3.4.3: “The Bible makes an explicit connection between caring for your family and caring for Christ’s church: ‘For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?’ (1 Tim. 3:5). The implication is that effective leadership in the home requires a set of gifts that eldership in ‘God’s church’ also requires. We can think of the combination of strategic thinking and personal relationship; the need to be both strong and gentle; the need to speak God’s truth clearly, but in an environment of love and affection; the challenge of accepting someone fully for who they are and yet lovingly calling them on to something greater; and more besides. All of these dichotomies come together in the home and in the church. We believe that it is for this reason that God upholds a man’s home as a necessary tool for evaluation.”

Questions: *“When you return home from work, do you positively or negatively influence the spiritual and relational climate of the home? How would you characterize your relationship with each child? Does each child love and respect you, and do they feel they can approach you with any problems? Is there any distance or feeling of alienation with any of them? ... How healthy is each child spiritually? ... Have you given thought to your wife’s spiritual state and are you actively nourishing and cherishing her? Have you had a purifying influence on your wife (Eph 5:26-27)?”*

Serving Willingly (1 Peter 5:2)

GC Leaders must serve gladly, joyfully, willingly, and eagerly. We know that the burdens and responsibilities of leading can produce burnout, so we must remain attentive to our own gauges and the gauges of those with whom we lead. There is always an off-ramp, and it would be better to take a break than to serve under compulsion.

Questions: *“Do you desire to serve as an [GC Leader] (1 Tim. 3:1)? Do you think of [leadership] as a burden you must reluctantly carry (1 Pet. 5:2)? Is the role of an [GC Leader] a right or a privilege?”*

RESPONSIBILITIES

In *The Shepherd Leader*, Timothy Witmer summarizes four biblical functions of shepherd-leaders: *knowing*, *feeding*, *leading*, and *protecting* the flock of God.

Knowing

"I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,
just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep."

- John 10:14-15

GC Leaders *know* the people who belong to their Gospel Community and they are available and approachable so that they can be known by others. We gauge disciple-making progress with a simple question: **"How many people do I know well enough to identify where they need the gospel?"** (See "Discipleship Gaps," p. 13 and "Appendix 10: The Functional Centrality of the Gospel" in the Discipleship Huddle Guide.) The size of our group doesn't equal success or growth. The question is whether we *know* the people in our group well enough to help them apply the gospel to their lives. That question gives clarity and focus. At any given time in the life of your GC, you can ask yourself, "What can I do next to get to know each of these people better?"

Use Realm to help you *know* the people in your GC:

- Keep your group roster up to date on Realm so you know who is part of your group.
- Use the "Participants" tab on Realm to pray regularly for your group by name.
- Take attendance on Realm after your weekly GC Gatherings. This will help you to recognize when someone has missed several weeks in a row.

Feeding

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul."

- Psalm 23:1-3

GC Leaders play an important role in *feeding* their Gospel Communities. The elders of our church are responsible for feeding the flock through the public preaching of the Word and through pastoral counseling, but GC Leaders also have weekly opportunities to open up Scripture with people in a personal context. See the Narrate section for ideas and resources.

Leading

"Then he led out his people like sheep and guided them in the wilderness like a flock."

- Psalm 78:52

Leading a Gospel Community involves big picture responsibilities like setting a direction, planning for each week, and helping the group establish rhythms. It also involves leading weekly gatherings and facilitating sermon discussions. Biblical leadership is not a matter of grasping at authority but taking responsibility. As you cultivate a sense of responsibility for the people in your GC, ask yourself what needs to be addressed, encouraged, corrected, or strengthened.

Protecting

"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock."

- Acts 20:28-29

Protecting the flock involves keeping watch for wolves and confronting those who may be introducing false doctrine or stirring up division. This requires, first and foremost, leaders who are spiritual (i.e., walking in the Spirit) so that correction and restoration is done in gentleness (Gal. 6:1; 2 Tim. 2:25). Protecting the flock calls for theological discernment, constant attentiveness, as well as courage and conviction (1 Tim. 1:3).

**WE MEASURE DISCIPLE-MAKING
PROGRESS WITH A SIMPLE QUESTION:**

**"HOW MANY PEOPLE DO I KNOW WELL
ENOUGH TO IDENTIFY WHERE THEY
NEED THE GOSPEL?"**

DISCIPLESHIP GAPS

"Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me."

- Colossians 1:28-29

Our mission is to make and multiply disciples of Jesus Christ. Gospel Communities provide a life-on-life context for discipleship. As you lead an GC made up of finite and fallen people who are in a divinely directed developmental process, there will be times when you are tempted to be discouraged, overwhelmed, or frustrated. One factor that frequently tempts disciple-makers to frustration and discouragement is the gap that exists between where people *are* and where we want them to be. Think of these gaps as *discipleship gaps*.

Don't Be Surprised

When you identify discipleship gaps, don't be surprised. Most of the New Testament was written because of such gaps. Four times in Matthew, Jesus remarked, "O you of little faith!" (Matthew 6:30, 8:26, 14:31, 16:8). Paul exclaimed, "O foolish Galatians!" (Galatians 3:1). Both Paul and the author of Hebrews observed the slow progress of some churches: "I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready" (1 Corinthians 3:2). And, "Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God" (Hebrews 5:12). Thankfully, God meets us where we are, not where we should be.

Respond in the Spirit

When you notice discipleship gaps, it is imperative that you respond in the Spirit. "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are *spiritual* should restore him in a spirit of gentleness" (Galatians 6:1, emphasis added). You are qualified to address discipleship gaps when you are living by the Spirit, walking in the Spirit, and bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 22-25). When you see a discipleship gap, is your response marked by love, peace, patience, kindness, and gentleness? Or do you respond in frustration, irritation, and despair?

No matter how *right* you are, reacting in the flesh is wrong. "The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:20). Anger, frustration, or exasperation may produce temporary and counterfeit change, but it cannot produce heart change. Instead, your stress, resentment, and impatience will cultivate an environment of chronic fear and anxiety. People can only fake fruit to please you for so long, but the long-term results will be ugly.

Rather than getting frustrated that people are not yet where you want them to be, you can rejoice that you have identified an area where the gospel may need to be applied. As a disciple-maker, it is crucial to maintain a vision of where God is taking people and what God's agenda is for people. It's also crucial to be realistic about where people are so that you can teach and train them. When you notice areas of immaturity, sin, unbelief, or disobedience, you are noticing areas that God wants to address. Think of discipleship gaps as opportunities for gospel ministry and lean into them.

Mike Bullmore says, “A local church is healthy to the degree that: (1) its pastor-teachers are able to accurately, effectively, and broadly bring the gospel to bear in the real lives of their people; and (2) its people have a deep personal understanding of and appreciation for the gospel, so as to be able to live in the good of the gospel daily.” Bringing the gospel to bear in each other’s lives is what we call “the functional centrality of the gospel.”

Labor in Faith

Those who labor to make and multiply disciples must labor in faith like the farmer who knows that the harvest is coming. It is the strong gospel of Jesus that allows us to relate to others in hope and faith. While we cannot believe *unto salvation* for someone else, we can believe the promises of God are true for someone else before they do. The author of Hebrews expressed this optimism toward sluggish Christians: “Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation” (Hebrews 6:9). And so did the Apostle Paul: “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all” (Philippians 1:6–7).

Discipleship gaps exist because of ignorance, unbelief, or both. The problem can only be solved when it is addressed with truth and grace. Not only does the gospel call for faith in those to whom it is preached, the gospel also requires faith in those who preach it. When we present the gospel to others, we must trust God to work through his Word and by his Spirit: “My word ... shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11). Trusting such promises will enable you to relate to others in non-anxious ways. As Ray Ortlund has said, and we often repeat, Gospel + Safety + Time = Change.

“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.” - 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

SERMON DISCUSSION

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom.”

—Colossians 3:16

Rationale

Gospel Communities gather around the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the central message of the Word of God (Luke 24:25-26). Our aim in gospel community is to build one another up in faith in Jesus Christ, which never happens apart from the Word of God. “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17).

So the Word of God is the central component of Gospel Community gatherings. And a vital way GCs gather around the Word is by discussing and applying the text of Scripture from the previous Sunday’s sermon.

For Christians today, there is no shortage of books, podcasts, blogs, YouTube videos, and Bible studies to consume. While much of this content is valuable, our abundance leaves us susceptible to a particularly kind of temptation, the danger James warns about: “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22).

Those who enjoy lots of opportunities to hear the Word must be especially careful to apply the Word in order to guard against self-deception. If we listen to several sermons each week on our commute, read a few blogs every day over lunch, and subscribe to numerous podcasts, we are doing a lot of hearing. The real question is whether we will apply what we are learning.

The aim of sermon-based discussions in gospel community is simple: to move us from hearers to doers. Rather than quickly moving on from Sunday’s sermon to the next content in the queue, we want to take time to interact with the text, reflect on it, pray over it, and discuss its meaning and application in community. We want the Word of God to get stuff done in us, to “dwell in us richly” (Col 3:16). That’s why we prioritize sermon-based discussions in our GCs.

Sermon-based discussion maximizes our preaching ministry in several ways. It encourages attentive listening and note-taking on Sundays. For those who miss the Sunday gathering, it provides an incentive to go back and listen to the sermon, which is the one place where God is addressing our entire church corporately. GC Discussion Questions provide homework that directs people back to the Word to think, engage, and interact with the text. Talking about God’s Word in community deepens learning and application.

Facilitating Discussion

As a GC Leader, make sure you listen to the sermon every week and read through the GC Discussion Questions (posted on Realm) in advance. When your GC meets, you will be responsible for facilitating discussion, and the discussion questions are a tool to help you do that. Encourage people to read and answer the discussion questions prior to your gathering. Even if they do this in the car on the way to your GC gathering, that’s worth it.

Don't feel like you have to use every discussion question. Read through them ahead of time and pick the ones that work best for your group. There will always be more questions than a group can cover in one gathering, so feel free to scale your discussion up or down to fit your group and setting.

The questions under "Your Story" are meant to serve as icebreakers to get people talking and to help people get to know one another, which is a vital part of gospel community. The "Review" question is the same every week: Read back through the sermon text and look over your sermon notes. What was something that caught your attention, challenged you, or confused you? Some weeks, that might be the only question you use! The questions under "God's Story" are meant to help people observe the passage from the sermon. And the "Digging Deeper" questions usually dig into other related passages of Scripture. The goal of sermon-discussion is not simply to regurgitate the sermon, but to receive God's Word in faith and be transformed by its significance.

The long-term goal is that all of our people are able to read and study the Bible on their own. The basic approach to studying Scripture involves observing what it says, interpreting what it means, and applying the significance to our lives. Anyone can read any passage by asking those basic questions: What does it say? What does it mean? What difference does it make? Depending on your experience studying the Bible and facilitating discussion, feel free to come up with your own questions to help people observe, interpret, and apply God's Word.

"And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32)

LEADING & PLANNING

LEADING GC GATHERINGS

The church is not merely a building or event, but a group of people united in covenant community through the blood of Jesus Christ. However, the temptation always exists to think of “church” as the location where we meet or the event that happens when we meet. Likewise, it’s easy to think that the GC is the meeting that happens once a week rather than the group of people who gather together *at least* once a week.

GC Leaders seek to encourage, model, and facilitate gospel community that spills into everyday life—barbecues and playdates, grocery shopping and hobbies. When we commit to live in gospel community with specific people, we are committing to share our lives with each other. These are not simply the people you study the Bible with. These are the people you do life with.

Over the years, we’ve structured our weekly GC gatherings in different ways. Here are two general approaches that have worked well.

Weekly Rhythms

One way to structure your weekly GC gatherings is to build them around a specific *focus* (i.e., gospel, community, or mission) and a specific *rhythm* (i.e., eat, work, recreate, narrate, or celebrate).

For example, one week’s gathering might be a *celebration* with a *Gospel* focus. The agenda might include a time of singing and prayer that celebrates specific truths of the gospel. Another week might be a *shared meal* with a *Missional* focus, which could look like a backyard barbecue with friends and neighbors who don’t yet know Jesus. A *Narrate* week could have a *Gospel* focus, reading and discussing a passage of Scripture. Or a *Narrate* week could focus on *Community* by giving everyone time to share recent highs and lows from their personal lives. These simple combinations can prompt a wide variety of ideas for your gatherings.

Three-Thirds

“Three-Thirds” is another way to structure your weekly GC gatherings. Rather than treating the GC gathering itself as the time when all of the rhythms have to be practiced, this approach utilizes the weekly gathering more like half-time, the time when the disciple-making team takes a break to regroup before heading back out. The GC gathering becomes the time when the group plans ways to participate in everyday rhythms and live on mission together during the upcoming week or month. The gathering is divided into three parts:

1. Look Back (5-10 minutes)

The goal here is to identify evidence of God’s grace among us, to celebrate God’s faithfulness, and to encourage one another to rely on God in the future. As a leader, listen attentively during this time. What people share can help you identify areas where growth or training is needed.

Questions to discuss:

- Where did you see God at work in your life last week?
- What steps of faith did you take last week to build a relationship or share the gospel?
- What challenges or obstacles did you encounter?

2. Look Up (30-45 minutes)

This is the centerpiece of the gathering, where we give our undivided attention to God through his Word and prayer. There are numerous ways to use this time:

- Lead a study through a passage of Scripture
- Sing and/or pray together
- Learn or practice a gospel tool
- Discuss or teach on “roadblocks” (i.e., challenges that have come up in the past)

3. Look Ahead (15-20 minutes)

Make specific plans to live in gospel community and on mission together *outside* of the weekly gathering. See “[Everyday Mission](#)” for one template for planning.

- Who will we **talk** with this week/month and how can we bring up the gospel?
- Who will we **bless** this week/month?
- Who will we **eat** with this week/month?
- Who will we **recreate** with this week/month?
- Who can we **celebrate** (or **lament**) with this week/month?

PLANNING GC GATHERINGS

A practice that many of our GCs have found productive is to plan a month (or more) at a time. This gets leaders out of the stressful and unsustainable routine of trying to plan for gatherings the week of (or worse, the day of).

First, schedule a monthly time for you leadership team to meet, either *outside of* your GC’s normal gathering or *instead of* your regular GC Gathering. For example, you might meet an hour before your GC Gathering or on a different night of the week. Or you might take a week off each month so that you can meet to plan during your regular gathering time. Figure out a rhythm that works for your team and your GC, given your current season of life.

Here’s a suggested process for an GC planning meeting.

1. Look In: Check the gauges

- How is everyone doing spiritually, emotionally, relationally, physically, etc.?
- Is there any burnout, discouragement, or unbelief that needs to be addressed?
- What promises are you trusting? How is God working in *your* lives?

2. Look Back: Review and debrief the previous month

- What evidence of God’s grace do you see in the members of your GC?
- Where do you notice God at work?
- What went well last month? What didn’t go well? What can you learn?
- What discipleship gaps need to be addressed in the weeks to come? (See p. 13)

3. Look Up: Pray for your GC

- As you pray, identify a specific prayer focus for the next month. What is one thing you are asking God to do in your group this month?
- Pick a passage of Scripture to pray for your GC.

4. Look Ahead: Plan the next month of gatherings

A. Consider the current and upcoming seasons.

- Our rhythms of life in South Dakota vary drastically from season to season. People hibernate during the winter and re-emerge when temperatures climb above freezing. Your plans will reflect this.
- Consider holidays and community events, as well as birthdays and anniversaries of losses.

B. Plan each week.

- Let your review of the previous month and your time of prayer inform your plan.
- If you structure your GC Gatherings around weekly rhythms, determine your focus and rhythm for each week.
- If you are using the Three-Thirds structure, most of your planning will focus on the Look Up portion, though the other parts require attention as well.

C. Assign roles and responsibilities.

- Who will lead each part of the gathering (e.g., discussion, singing, prayer, etc.)?
- Who is responsible for the meal plan?
- Who will post on Realm?

D. Communicate your plan

- Whether on Realm or in person at your next gathering, give people a general heads-up so they know what to expect in the coming weeks.
- It's a good practice to post your gatherings as events on Realm at least 48 hours in advance. When your gathering involves a meal, try to give even more lead time. This serves people by giving them time to plan and prepare.

GOSPEL DOCTRINE

+

GOSPEL SAFETY

+

TIME

=

GOSPEL CULTURE

OVERSEEING HUDDLES

Discipleship Huddles are made up of people from the same GC. GC Leaders are responsible for overseeing the Discipleship Huddles attached to their GC. Here are some pointers.

Huddle Participants

To participate in a Discipleship Huddle, one must be a member of Emmaus Road Church. The mutual commitment and accountability that exists between church members protects the depth of vulnerability that develops in Huddles. If someone who is not a member wants to participate in a Huddle, you can affirm that interest, explain why membership is required for Huddles, and offer to help them explore the membership process.

- Share why we believe church membership is biblical. Helpful resources include "[Is Church Membership Biblical?](#)" by Matt Chandler and "[Twelve Reasons Why Membership Matters](#)" by Jonathan Leeman.
- Direct them to emmausroadsf.com/foundations to register for the next Foundations Class.
- If necessary, refer them to the elders for further conversation.

On the other hand, some church members may not be actively participating in a Huddle. While our [Membership Agreement](#) includes a commitment to “actively seek regular biblical fellowship” with one another, there’s never any pressure or compulsion to participate in a Huddle. We recognize that different seasons of life require different rhythms, and there are numerous reasons why someone might take a break for a time. If a “break” seems like it might become more permanent, check in to make sure there isn’t some unresolved conflict or other unaddressed issue.

Huddle Size

The ideal size for a Huddle is three people, though it’s common for Huddles to have four or five participants. (See “Discipleship Huddle Guide,” p. 7 for reasons.) When a Huddle reaches 6 committed participants, it’s time for that Huddle to multiply into two groups of three. If a Huddle is healthy and people have been meeting together for a while, they may need some guidance and a gentle nudge to break up the group they have grown to love. Share the following suggestions with the Huddle facilitator so that the Huddle can take responsibility for its own multiplication process.

- Explain the benefits of group dynamics in a Huddle of 3 compared to a Huddle of 6.
- Identify a facilitator for the new Huddle (see “Huddle Facilitators” below).
- Decide when and where the new Huddles will begin meeting, allowing a few weeks for the group to get used to the idea.

Huddle Facilitators

The nature and dynamics of each Huddle will vary depending on the participants, but every group inevitably has a “leader.” We call this person a *facilitator* because the responsibilities are basic: 1) communicating when and where the group is meeting and 2) keeping the group on track when it meets.

It works best to clearly identify one person to be the “facilitator” for each Huddle in your GC. This gives structure and clarifies channels of communication. As an GC leader, check in monthly with each Huddle facilitator to see how the group is doing. As needed, you can provide resources or suggestions to help each group.

Huddle Content

At each meeting, a Discipleship Huddle should practice two habits: Repent and Believe, and Plan and Pray. Weekly Huddle Questions are posted on Realm. Occasionally, you may overhear that someone wants to read a book or work through a group Bible study. Encourage Huddle Facilitators to keep their Huddle gathering focused on our two habits. If people want to read a book or discuss other content at another time, they are free to do so. (Unless, of course, someone is trying to introduce content that contradicts our Statement of Faith. If you are ever unsure, reach out to one of the elders.)

Huddle Frustrations

Perhaps the most common frustration comes from unmet expectations—when one or two members are committed, but the rest of the Huddle is not. Rather than addressing the least committed members, encourage those who are most committed to be consistent. If there is only one who is committed, see if that person can meet with another Huddle from your GC. If there are two committed people, encourage them to keep huddling regularly, even though there is not yet a third committed member. Their consistency will provide something predictable to invite others into.

NARRATE IDEAS

As human beings, we are narrators and interpreters. We typically communicate with each other by telling stories, not by reciting raw data. Even when we do use spreadsheets and pie charts, we use them to tell a story. We also process and make sense of everything going on in and around us by interpreting all of it through a lens—the lens of the story we think we’re living.

When a gospel community intentionally engages in this storytelling rhythm—what we call “narrate”—the aim is twofold: to understand God’s Story as revealed in Scripture and to know one another’s stories. Ultimately, the goal is to help each other reframe and reinterpret our own stories in light of the story of God’s glory. We want to know the Bible and know each other.

TELLING OUR PERSONAL STORIES

One way we gauge our growth in gospel community is by asking, “How many of these people do I know well enough to identify where they most need to apply the Gospel?”

Share that question with your Gospel Community and help everyone learn to make the most of meals, game nights, bonfires, and small talk by getting to know each other with that kind of gospel intentionality.

Here are some specific ways to use Narrate weeks to grow in this area.

Tell Your Story With Jesus as the Hero

Over the course of several Narrate weeks, give every person in your GC the opportunity to tell their personal spiritual autobiography. Have everyone use “Telling Your Story With Jesus as the Hero” (Appendix 1 in the *Discipleship Huddle Guide*) to prepare an outline of their story. This will also prepare everyone to use their personal testimony to share the gospel with unbelievers. Use “Listen for the Heart” (Appendixes 2 and 4) to help everyone learn to listen attentively with gospel ears.

Highs & Lows

Another way to help people tell their life stories is to give each person time to share 4-5 turning-point moments from their life, a few of the highest highs and lowest lows that have shaped who they are today. What made that moment (or moments) so significant and formational? (This usually takes several weeks to get through everyone in the group.)

60-Second Stories

Give each person sixty-seconds to share as much of their life story as possible. When the time is up, they have to stop, but the rest of the group gets to ask 3 open-ended follow-up questions off the clock.

Updates

Share the following prompts with your GC in advance and ask everyone to pick one or two to answer when you gather. Go around in a circle so that people clearly know when it's their turn, but give people the option to pass if they aren't comfortable sharing. If you do this consistently (e.g., at the end of every month), you will start to see progress in sanctification or notice themes and patterns of unbelief. If possible, leave time for others to respond with a word of encouragement, a promise, or a prayer.

- How has the gospel been good news to you lately?
- Tell us about an average day in your life... What does most of your day involve? (Work, chores, school)
- Tell us about the people you spend the most time with during the week? (Co-workers, significant other, family, friends)
- Tell us about some of the ways you've been spending your time lately.
- What have been some of your recent priorities?
- What are some of your goals? This year? Next 5 years?
- What do you fear losing the most? (Or more broadly, what's a current fear, worry, or challenge you are facing?)
- What do you see as challenges in your life? At work? At home?
- How does your life now compare to how you would have imagined it ten years ago?

Additional Prompts for Narrate Weeks

Two Flowers and a Weed

Share an update on life's blessings, both the pleasant ones and the painful ones. Come prepared to share two flowers and a weed: two things that have been flourishing and fruitful and one thing that has been frustrating or painful in your life.

God's Presence

Describe a time, or two (or three) in your life when you have been particularly aware of God's presence and movement in you. As you recall these, what lingering truth about God or yourself or your relationship with God do you sense?

Key People

Who are some of the key people you have had significant relationships with in your life? What is it about them that attracted you? How did they influence your story and shape your development? How did they help you see Jesus in your every day life?

Joys & Strengths

Where do you find your greatest pleasure or satisfaction or life-giving energy? What is it about these activities or places or people that is life-giving to you? What do you consider to be some of your strengths? What sense do you have of God's participation and invitation in these aspects of your life?

GC MEALS

“And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.”

- Acts 2:46-47

GCs eat together often. Eating is a basic rhythm of human life, and table fellowship has always been a normal part of life together for Christians. Shared meals express our unity in Christ (Acts 2:42, 46; Jude 12) and provide a context to connect with unbelievers for the sake of the gospel (e.g., Luke 5:29-32; 4:1-26). Jesus described his own ministry by saying, “The Son of Man has come eating and drinking” (Luke 7:34). In fact, Jesus shared meals with sinners so frequently that the self-righteous misjudged him as “a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.” The point is that eating together is a normal setting for gospel community and gospel mission.

Whether your GC shares a meal once a month or every week, it is important to be intentional about breaking bread together regularly. Snacks and treats after a gathering are great, but something significant happens when we sit down together at the table to be nourished and sustained by a family style meal. Eating together like a family cultivates community.

However, there are many understandable obstacles and objections to eating together. It can get expensive. And crowded. And messy. People have allergies. People are picky eaters. Some people follow fad diets with ever-changing restrictions. Eating on our own can certainly seem easier. But the biggest obstacles are found in our hearts, not in the kitchen or dining room. If we address those issues with the gospel, we can figure out the other details.

HOSTING SHARED MEALS

First, think of church as family. We are adopted sons and daughters of God. And in a family, it’s natural and important—though not always easy—to eat *together*. Think of GC meals like a party or holiday gathering with your extended family. The goal is not to entertain or to impress; the goal is to be together, to partake together, to linger in conversation and to catch up with each other. The atmosphere is full of affection, anticipation, and acceptance, and the attitude is *the more the merrier*.

Plan

Just like GC planning (see p. 15), it is stressful and unsustainable to wait until the last minute to plan your meal. As a leadership team, decide how often your GC will eat together, then make menu planning part of your monthly (or quarterly) GC planning meeting. You don’t have to decide all of the minutiae here, but you can at least set the general cuisine or theme for each meal week: Italian, American, Mexican, breakfast, soup and sandwiches, etc. This is also the time to assign who will be responsible for planning any additional menu details, preparing (and/or delegating) the entrée, and communicating the plan to the GC.

Communicate

Communicate the plan on Realm early enough for others to RSVP and to plan their grocery shopping. Try to give people at least 48 hours. As you get more organized and comfortable with the process, you might be able to give a 3-4 day heads-up. When you post, give specific ideas of items everyone can bring, such as sides, beverages, desserts, paper products, etc. It also serves the group well when everyone communicates not only *what* but *how much* they are bringing (e.g., a salad for 6 or drinks for everyone).

Be Flexible

One of the most important parts of hosting shared meals is your own willingness to be flexible. As someone wise observed, “Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not be broken.”

Inevitably, someone who signed up to bring an important side dish will cancel. Someone else will RSVP late. Your headcount and place settings will be off. You’ll realize at the last minute that you forgot a key ingredient, or something will burn. *This* is where we really need the functional centrality of the gospel. In all of the craziness, remember that your joy is not dependent on the meal going according to your plans. In fact, anxiety *about* the meal is more detrimental to the group than a less-than-perfect meal ever could be.

“Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife” (Proverbs 17:1).

“Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it.” (Proverbs 15:17).

So maybe you overcooked the main dish. If the Spirit of God in you is producing the joy and peace and love of God in you, the aroma around your table will be the sweetness of Christ. It’s going to be okay.

Of course, it doesn’t hurt to have some emergency fallbacks in mind. If all else fails, order pizzas and ask everyone to chip in \$5. Or grab rotisserie chickens from Costco. Worst case, set out bread and peanut butter and jelly, and no one will starve.

Model and Teach

Ever since the Garden, food has been exposing sin and idolatry. Today, eating in community often reveals discipleship gaps (see p. 13). The world is worried about sinning by *what* they eat, whether it’s GMOs, animal products, high fructose corn syrup, or gluten. But as Christians, we know that it is not what goes into the stomach that defiles us but what comes out of our hearts (Mark 7:14-23). What really matters is *how* we eat.

“God created [food] to be received *with thanksgiving* by those who believe and know the truth” (1 Timothy 4:3).

“Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Not everyone has yet learned to thank God for meat or sugar or butter. Of course, a few people have serious allergies, and making accommodations to include them expresses love and consideration. But many follow fad diets and restrictions that falsely promise security or control while effectively creating barriers to community. Be patient, humble, and gentle if or when you have to address heart issues as you invite people to participate around the table.

The Lord's Supper, the meal that nourishes our souls, informs how we think about shared meals. "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for *we all partake* of the one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:17). We eat *together*; we partake of the same meal *together*. One problem with fad diets is that they cause people to focus more on ingredients and calories than community.

If you notice someone in your GC is *not* participating in the meals with everyone else, follow up later. Start by gathering more information. Is there a genuine health concern or an allergy that could be accommodated? If necessary, explain why we value eating together—not just being at the table together, but partaking together. Finally, work with them to find something they *can* eat along with everyone else. That might mean keeping something simple on hand to put out for everyone (e.g., chopped veggies), or it might mean *they* bring something they like and that they can share with others (not a protein bar or shaker bottle).

Don't be surprised if other discipleship gaps emerge as you share meals together. Some people will need to learn how to plan ahead, how to communicate and RSVP, or how to contribute thoughtfully and generously to the group. It requires God's grace to host well and it requires God's grace to be good guests. The wisdom in 1 Thessalonians 5:13–17 applies to anyone making and multiplying disciples over shared meals:

"Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

Give Thanks

God created food to be received with thanksgiving, so give thanks in all circumstances. And whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. God is glorified, not when the meal and the place settings measure up to Instagram standards, but when our hearts are satisfied in him. As Christians, we feast together, not to find satisfaction, but because we are already satisfied in Christ.

Shared Meal Liturgy

James K. A. Smith has said that liturgies are habit-forming practices that aim our hearts in a particular direction. The sample liturgy for shared meals (p. 38) is an outline that we have used at the beginning of our shared meals. It has been an effective way to engage kids at the beginning, while we have their attention. For adults and children alike, a routine like this can become a sweet and formational time of worship and discipleship.

KIDS & GC LIFE

“Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.’” - Matthew 19:14

Children are vital members of our GCs, and GC life provides a rich environment for children to grow in grace as they participate with their church family in everyday rhythms of life.

Throughout both the Old and New Testament, it was normal for even the youngest children to be present when God’s people assembled:

- When a great multitude of foreign enemies gathered against King Jehoshaphat, the people of Judah “assembled to seek help from the Lord” (2 Chronicles 20:4). As the king stood in the assembly and prayed, Scripture says, “All Judah stood before the Lord, *with their little ones, their wives, and their children*” (2 Chronicles 20:13).
- According to Joel 2:16, when God’s people gathered in a solemn assembly, the congregation included children and nursing infants.
- When Paul and his companions stopped in Tyre on their way to Jerusalem, Luke records, “When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives *and children*, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed” (Acts 21:5).
- And in Acts 2:39, Peter proclaimed, “The promise is for you *and for your children* and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

Children are not merely *present*, they are *participants*. God calls parents to diligently teach God’s word to children in the everyday stuff of life (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) and to raise children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). The word translated “discipline” in Ephesians 6 is *paideia*, a concept packed with significance in ancient Greece. It referred to the entire process of *enculturating* children in a way of life—rearing, training, educating, and disciplining them to become mature members of society. In the church, the way to enculturate children in the gospel is to involve them in gospel community.

This comes with challenges and takes intentionality, but we encourage GCs to include children of all ages in gatherings and events as much as possible. As kids observe adults and participate with us, they are being discipled in gospel fluency, learning to live all of life by faith in Jesus.

Welcome

The first step is to cultivate a biblical *attitude* toward kids. God’s intent is that children should be a blessing: “Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward” (Psalm 127:3). When Jesus’ disciples rebuked parents who brought their children to Jesus, Jesus rebuked his disciples: “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:14). There are times when it is appropriate to plan adult-only gatherings due to the nature of the study or discussion (Nehemiah 8:2-3).

However, deciding whether or not to include children should never come from an attitude that views children as a problem or a pain.

Love & Discipline

The entire moral law is summed up in a single command: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Galatians 5:14; cf. Romans 13:9, James 2:8). As adults, we must remember that children are our neighbors and we are commanded to love them, not to despise them or neglect them.

However, loving children does not mean letting them run wild. In English, *discipleship* and *discipline* share the same Latin root, which has to do with instruction. *Undisciplined* children are *un-disciplined* children, and Hebrews 12:8 is sobering, “If you are left without discipline, ... then you are illegitimate children and not sons.” Similarly, Proverbs 13:24 highlights the connection between love and discipline: “Whoever spares the rod *hates* his son, but he who *loves* him is diligent to discipline him.” Love disciplines.

A gospel community that shares everyday life together is a context where discipleship gaps in both parents and children are exposed. An atmosphere of *grace* does not mean turning a blind eye to misbehaving children (or misbehaving parents, as the case may be). In fact, because we are committed to a culture of grace, it is appropriate to protect that culture from threats that come from rowdy or unruly children. Grace does not indulge sin; grace trains and disciplines (Titus 2:11-12).

As GC leaders, be attentive and willing to engage with grace, patience, truth, love, and wisdom. As needed, the GC leader should address the parents of any misbehaving children to make sure that they are aware of problems and equipped to address them biblically.

Welcoming other people’s children into your home can be challenging. It helps to distinguish between God’s rules and house rules. Hitting, stealing, and lying should not be tolerated in any home because these are violations of God’s law. But whether we keep our shoes on or take them off in the house might vary from family to family. GC leaders can communicate the expectation to all families with kids that the host home sets the rules and everyone else respects those rules. This means that if the host home does not allow jumping on the couch, it is not unchristian to gently remind a child by saying, “We don’t jump on the couch in our house.”

Scripture is honest about the fact that children are not automatically a blessing. Children bring either joy or sorrow depending on how they behave. “A foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her who bore him” (Proverbs 17:25; cf. Prov. 17:21, 19:13, 29:15). Loving discipline is a gift to children because it helps them become the kind of people that others enjoy rather than avoid. “A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother” (Proverbs 10:1).

Involve

As much as possible, involve kids in the normal rhythms of your GC. Make space for them to participate in discussions, prayer, singing, and other activities. Here are some practical suggestions:

- Find ways to “front-load” the gathering so that kids are involved at the beginning when their attention is higher and dismissed (to an adult-supervised area) later.
- If young kids are present, it may be unreasonable to expect them to sit through an hour-long prayer gathering. In such cases, either modify the length of the activity, provide a suitable quiet activity (such as coloring pages or activity sheets), or arrange for childcare.
- Adult-only discussions should be more of the exception rather than the norm throughout the course of a year, but when childcare is needed there are a few options. One approach is to leave it up to each family to make their own arrangements; another is to rotate volunteers from within your GC to supervise kids.

GC Kids

A simple way to involve the children in the life of the GC is by incorporating what is called GC Kids. Each week, the curriculum for GC Kids will be posted in the GC Leaders group on Realm. This will include the weekly lesson from Marty Machowski’s *Gospel Story Curriculum*. Originally designed to be used during the Sunday gathering, this material is packed full of readings, activities, and lessons for 150 Bible stories!

The aim of this curriculum is for the entire church to be walking through the Bible with our kids together. The material was designed for an hour-long lesson, so there is much more there than you will likely go through, so use as little or as much as you would like. Sing songs, memorize scripture, play games—these are simple and great ways to involve our children in the life of the church.

Life in gospel community is a key part of discipling children. “He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments” (Psalm 78:5–7). May that be true of our children!

EVERYDAY MISSION

It's easy to think of evangelism and discipleship as extra activities *outside* the scope of our everyday lives—something to squeeze into already busy schedules. But as we learn to live under the lordship of Jesus in all of life, we see our everyday lives as the very context for making and multiplying disciples.

When we talk about everyday mission, we don't mean that disciple-making suddenly happens accidentally or automatically. But if we think intentionally and strategically, we can live on mission in the everyday stuff of life. The following exercise is one way to do that.² (See the example on the next page and the [blank template](#) on page 42 of the Appendix.)

Rhythms: Daily, Weekly, Monthly

Start by identifying some of the specific activities that fill up your schedule. Use the everyday rhythms to brainstorm: when do you work, eat, celebrate, recreate, and narrate? Organize your activities based on frequency. Is this something you do daily, weekly, or monthly?

We should not necessarily assume that all of our commitments and activities are wise or good. When we conduct an audit of our rhythms like this, we may realize that we are overcommitted, that our priorities are disordered, or that we spend inordinate time somewhere. As the Spirit brings conviction, repent, make adjustments, and walk by faith.

Focus: Gospel, Community, Mission

Now consider whether there are ways you could involve another believer from your GC (Community) and/or someone who is not yet a disciple of Jesus (Mission). Not everything is conducive to this, but you might be surprised at the ideas this generates. Even if you *could* do something more easily or efficiently alone, it may be worth including someone else for the sake of the gospel. Finally, plan and pray about ways to bring Jesus up in conversation (Gospel), to talk about God and his Word, or to pray with and for others.

Proactive/Reactive Mission

We have found it helpful to think in terms of *reactive mission* and *proactive mission*. Reactive mission is gospel witness in response to the unexpected opportunities that may arise wherever you happen to be. Proactive mission means pursuing gospel opportunities, initiating and building relationships, possibly crossing geographic or social barriers to do so. One is not better than the other, and your focus may vary during different seasons of life.

Discuss together: *What gospel opportunities exist where I already spend my time? What steps can I take to find new gospel opportunities somewhere?*

² Based on Michael Foster, "Missions and Community Through the Ordinary," *The Grassroots Gospel*, September, 11, 2008, <https://michaelfoster.typepad.com/blog/2008/09/missions-and-co.html>

EVERYDAY MISSION (EXAMPLE)

(A blank template like this is located on p. 42 in the Appendix.)

DAILY Work, Eat, Recreate, Celebrate, Narrate	COMMUNITY Involve another believer	MISSION Involve someone far from God	GOSPEL Talk about Jesus
- Eat (3 meals) - Go to the gym - Drive to work - Walk the dog - Playtime with kids	- Workout with John	- Eat lunch once a week with co-workers - Carpool with Aaron	- Ask Aaron about spiritual beliefs
WEEKLY Work, Eat, Recreate, Celebrate, Narrate	COMMUNITY Involve another believer	MISSION Involve someone far from God	GOSPEL Talk about Jesus
- Game night - BBQ - Movie night - Groceries & errands - Trip to the library - Pick-up basketball - Yard work - Watch football - Woodworking (hobby)	- Host a game night with GC - Invite Sam to help with woodworking project	- Invite Doug & Debbie to a BBQ with GC friends - Offer to help Fred (elderly neighbor) with yard work - Invite Jesse to watch the games together	- Share testimony with Doug & Debbie - Share 3 Circles w/ Fred (loneliness)
MONTHLY Work, Eat, Recreate, Celebrate, Narrate	COMMUNITY Involve another believer	MISSION Involve someone far from God	GOSPEL Talk about Jesus
- Car maintenance - Budgeting - Haircut - Camping	- Plan a camping trip & invite church friends	- Invite Joe on camping trip	- Share my story with Joe

GC COMMITMENTS

(SEE APPENDIX: "SAMPLE GOSPEL COMMUNITY COMMITMENTS")

What?

- GC Commitments spell out specific ways that a particular GC intends to grow in the gospel, cultivate gospel community, and live on mission.

Why?

- The process of discussing goals and commitments together helps the members of the group take ownership and responsibility for the health of the group.
- Putting specific commitments in writing gives tangible direction and clarity.
- When two or more parties seek to live in gospel community and on mission together, trust is required, and clarifying expectations is a way to establish and deepen that trust.

When?

- It is a good idea to review, revise, and renew your GC Commitments yearly.
- As seasons of life change or new participants are added, it becomes necessary to update shared commitments.
- A clearly defined one-year commitment is more realistic and less overwhelming than indefinite commitments.
- Updating GC Commitments yearly keeps things fresh and helps build momentum.

How?

- If this is your GC's first time writing out commitments, or if you have several new members this year, use a tool like the MC Primer to introduce everyone to what we mean when we talk about gospel, community, mission, and commitment.
- If your GC wrote out commitments for the prior year, take time to look over last year's commitments and celebrate evidence of God's grace in each other.
- Use the tools for evaluating MC Health to facilitate discussion about goals for growth.
- As you look ahead to another year, invite your GC to think and pray about specific ways *this* group could grow in the gospel, cultivate love for one another, and live missional lives together. Spend one GC gathering (or more) generating and discussing ideas.
- Using the Sample GC Commitments (p. 43) as a template, create a rough draft that includes specific ideas the group has discussed.
- Allow a week or two for more feedback and revisions, then write a final draft for everyone to sign.

APPENDIX

GC PLANNING TEMPLATE

Month:

Prayer for the month:			
Date	Focus	What?	Who?

SAMPLE LITURGY FOR SHARED MEALS³

Welcome

(Warmly welcome those who have gathered, especially any guests.)

Toast

This is the day the Lord has made.

We will rejoice and be glad in it!

Prayer

(Recite The Lord's Prayer together, or the leader can pray from Scripture or pray spontaneously.)

A Blessing *(Everyone says the underlined nouns out loud)*

"May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!" (Psalm 67:1–3).

Catechism Questions *(Ask a different question of each child; rotate questions periodically)*

1. What is our only hope in life and death?
That we are not our own but belong to God.

2. What is God?
God is the creator of everyone and everything.

3. How many persons are there in God?
There are three persons in one God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

4. How and why did God create us?
God created us male and female in his own image to glorify him.

5. Why did God make you?
I was made to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

6. What is the gospel?
That Christ died for our sins and was raised on the third day.

7. How can we be saved?
Only by faith in Jesus Christ and by his substitutionary atoning death on the cross.

8. Why is the Bible the best story in the world?
Because it's the true story of the world.

9. What is the point of the whole Bible?
Kill the dragon, get the girl!

Sing *(to the tune of the Doxology)*

Be present at our table Lord; be here and everywhere adored
These mercies bless and grant that we may feast in fellowship with Thee
Amen

³ Based on Doug Wilson, "Sabbath Liturgy." *Blog & Mablog* (blog), April 23, 2004. <https://dougwils.com/the-church/prayers/sabbath-liturgy.html>

GC HEALTH

There are various ways you can use the following tools. You can use them with your leadership team to celebrate progress and growth while identifying possible discipleship gaps to address (see p. 13). Or you can also use them with your whole GC to gather feedback and observations from everyone.

Because of the gospel, we can engage in honest reflection and evaluation with hope and not despair. Where we are strong, we boast in Christ, and where we are weak, we need not wallow in discouragement or shame. Instead, we can celebrate evidence of God's grace where we see fruit and repent where the Spirit convicts us of sin. Additionally, we are free to take personal responsibility for our contribution instead of blaming others.

For "Questions for Gospel Communities," reflect on whether or not each statement is true of your GC. You can simply mark each statement with a "T" for true or "F" for false. Or you could use a Likert scale and mark each statement with a number from 1 through 5, where 1 means "strongly disagree," 2 means "somewhat disagree," 3 means "neither agree nor disagree," 4 means "somewhat agree," and 5 means "strongly agree."

QUESTIONS FOR GOSPEL COMMUNITIES⁴

God: Are You God-Centered?

1. People often extol the goodness and greatness of God in normal conversation.
2. Our corporate worship stirs people's affections for God (love, fear, hope, confidence, desire).
3. Prayer is a regular part of our life together.
4. People pray together outside meetings as and when issues arise.
5. When we pray as a community, most people contribute.
6. When we pray as a community, it is sometimes difficult to contribute because other people are quick to pray.
7. Our prayer requests focus on God and his glory rather than on us and our comfort.
8. We are trusting in God's sovereignty rather than trying to do his work of conversion or worrying about results.

⁴ Taken from *Everyday Church: Gospel Communities on Mission* by Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, © 2012, pp. 149-151. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org.

Love: Are You Others-Centered?

1. People often see one another between scheduled meetings.
2. Most people eat with other members of the community at least twice a week.
3. People often help one another in practical ways such as doing chores.
4. People feel a sense of responsibility for one another.
5. People use the language of *we* rather than *you* ('We should ...' rather than 'You should ...').
6. People are generous with their time, money, homes, and possessions.
7. People are willing to discuss their time and money.
8. People make decisions with regard to and in consultation with the community.

The Bible: Are You Word-Centered?

1. There is a hunger for God's word and an excitement when it is taught.
2. People often talk about how the Holy Spirit is speaking to them through his word.
3. The Word of God is often discussed outside scheduled Bible studies.
4. People meet up to read the Bible together.
5. There is evidence that the Word is changing individual lives.
6. There is evidence that the Word is changing the life of the community as a whole.
7. People speak the truth in love when others face pastoral issues.
8. People look to the truth about God rather than blaming their circumstances.

Grace: Are You Grace-Centered?

1. People are open about their sin and struggles rather than hiding or pretending.
2. Conflict is open rather than suppressed, and reconciliation is proactively pursued.
3. People repent of sinful attitudes such as anxiety, pride, complaining, fear of others, self-justification, bitterness, anger, and selfishness.
4. People repent of good works done for self-righteous motives.
5. People are not afraid to make mistakes.
6. People feel able to relax and enjoy leisure activities.
7. Broken people are attracted to our community.
8. We constantly return to the cross in our conversation, prayers, and praise.

Mission: Are You Mission-Centered?

1. Unbelievers are involved in the life of our community.
2. We often have opportunities to talk about Jesus.
3. We are flexible and take risks for the sake of the gospel.
4. We are crossing cultural boundaries.
5. We are contributing to neighborhood and city renewal.
6. We value involvement in work, business, art, culture, public service, and government.
7. We have a vision to start a new gospel community or congregation.
8. We are actively and generously involved in mission around the world.

GOSPEL COMMUNITY HEALTH⁵

1. How often do you have conversations with people in your Gospel Community outside regular meetings?
once a month once a week twice a week more than twice a week
2. How often are people from your Gospel Community in your home or you in theirs?
once a month once a week twice a week more than twice a week
3. How often do people in your Gospel Community talk about how the Holy Spirit has been speaking to them through God's Word?
once a month once a week twice a week more than twice a week
4. How often do you talk with people in your Gospel Community about your struggles to follow Jesus?
once a month once a week twice a week more than twice a week
5. How often do unbelievers spend time with your Gospel Community?
once a month once a week twice a week more than twice a week
6. How often does your Gospel Community spend time with unbelievers on their territory, in places where they feel comfortable?
once a month once a week twice a week more than twice a week
7. Are the prayers of your Gospel Community gospel centered? Do you pray regularly for:
one another's godliness gospel opportunities boldness to speak of Christ
the conversion of the lost the spread of the gospel around the world
8. With how many unbelievers does your Gospel Community have regular conversations about Jesus, and how many are involved in Bible studies?
none one or two three or four many
9. How many people in your Gospel Community do your most significant unbelieving friends know by name?
none one or two about half of them most of them
10. Would you bring your closest unbelieving friends to a typical get-together of your Gospel Community?
no in theory ..., but in reality I don't only if it's specifically designed around them yes

⁵ Taken from *Everyday Church: Gospel Communities on Mission* by Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, © 2012, pp. 107-108. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.crossway.org.

PLANNING FOR EVERYDAY MISSION

DAILY Work, Eat, Recreate, Celebrate, Narrate	COMMUNITY Involve another believer	MISSION Involve someone far from God	GOSPEL Talk about Jesus
WEEKLY Work, Eat, Recreate, Celebrate, Narrate	COMMUNITY Involve another believer	MISSION Involve someone far from God	GOSPEL Talk about Jesus
MONTHLY Work, Eat, Recreate, Celebrate, Narrate	COMMUNITY Involve another believer	MISSION Involve someone far from God	GOSPEL Talk about Jesus

SAMPLE GC COMMITMENTS

GOSPEL: We are saved by the death and resurrection of the Son

"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared."
– 1 Corinthians 15:3-5

We desire to be formed and transformed by the true story of God's redemption in and through Jesus Christ. By God's grace, we will strive to grow in the Gospel by:

- Worshiping together weekly at our Sunday gatherings;
- Regularly rehearsing and celebrating the message of the cross at our GC gatherings;
- Actively participating in a Discipleship Huddle;
- Memorizing Romans 8 together;
- Praying with intentionality and direction individually and corporately;
- Using our Narrate rhythm to studying how the gospel applies to a specific area of life this year (e.g., parenting, marriage, finances, etc.)

COMMUNITY: We are adopted by the Father

"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." – John 13:35

We desire to love one another with brotherly and sisterly affection as those who were once orphans and have now been adopted into God's family. By God's grace, we will love one another as family by:

- Committing to live as a household of faith that worships together, prays together, eats together, laughs together, serves together, and reads together;
- Getting to know one another's stories in such a way that we know where each person most needs to apply the Gospel;
- Committing to live in community in such a way that we join in one another's joys and bear one another's burdens; and
- Looking for ways to share our lives together outside of GC gatherings.

MISSION: We are empowered and sent by the Holy Spirit

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." – Acts 1:8

We desire--as people who have been called and sent by our Lord Jesus--to actively and intentionally participate in making disciples in the city of Sioux Falls and to the ends of the earth. By God's grace, we plan to live missional lives by:

- Sharing weekly updates and prayer requests about the unbelievers God has brought into our lives;
- Identifying ways and places where we can engage with people who are far from God;
- Intentionally creating space for our neighbors/friends/co-workers to feel safe and welcome among us;
- Practicing the 3 Circles weekly (either at GC or Huddle);
- Initiating dozens of gospel conversations this year; and
- Regularly praying individually and corporately that God would welcome more and more of the people we encounter into his fold as they hear the Gospel message.

[illegible]