



LIFE GROUP JOURNAL



verticalstpaul.org/groups

Welcome & Overview

Welcome to community at Vertical! We're so excited to walk with you through this process of forming, launching, and *walking with Christ in community* here at Vertical Church!

Our prayer is that your Life Group would grow to become like the early church in Acts...

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 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. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." (Acts 2:42-47)

Throughout this journal, you'll learn about God's design for how his people are to relate with one another, something we refer to as "biblical community." This kind of community is central to our vision here at Vertical: **All of us, making all of life, all about Jesus Christ.**

All of us are invited to live in a community that exists distinctly within the context of the blood-bought body (1 Cor 12:12-14) and bride of Christ (Eph 5:25-32); the family of God (Eph 2:19); a new humanity (Eph 2:15, 2 Cor 5:17); that is, the Church of Jesus Christ. Though all of these things are true of every believer everywhere, we also believe we are meant to experience this reality in the local gathering of believers—a local church. We like to think of this distinction similarly to how one may think about the difference between immediate family and extended family. While it may be true that you have extended family (think aunts, uncles, cousins) all over the country, your immediate family resides in your own home. They are local. They are the ones you are committed to, first and foremost. They are the ones you *do life with*. It is the same way with the local church. We have brothers and sisters all over the world, and that is beautiful. Yet, we also have brothers and sisters who call this church home. They are our "immediate family." The ones God has called us to be *in community* with, specifically.

That is why, here at Vertical, community is found in our third step of the discipleship pathway:

Worship
in Services & Stewardship

Work
on Teams, Together

Walk
with Christ, in Community

Importance of Membership

Our community groups are intentionally deep and relational, built on trust, vulnerability, and spiritual care. Because of that, we want a foundation of relationship and pastoral oversight in place first. Without that, those spaces could unintentionally become unhealthy rather than helpful. So requiring membership alongside community isn't about creating barriers—it's an invitation into something deeper. It's a way of saying, "I'm here," and opening yourself to being known, cared for, and shepherded well. At its core, membership simply defines the relationship and clarifies the shared commitment that helps these communities remain safe, meaningful, and Christ-centered.

Life Group formation and the **Membership Process** go hand-in-hand:

1. **Class:** You can signup for Membership Class on our website!
2. **Conversation:** Following the class, you can sign up for a conversation with an elder/staff.
3. **Commit:** Sign the membership commitment.
4. **Community:** Launch a Life Group as the final step before being officially installed!

Life Group Model

Life Groups are small groups of 3-5 people who are committed to meeting regularly, devoted to God's Word, seeking to grow in godliness together, under the leadership & authority of the church (members), and your same gender—seeking to foster vulnerability while protecting hearts. We highly encourage married couples to form Life Groups which overlap with one another (a guys group and a girls group), recognizing the deep importance of being known as a marital unit.

You can become part of a Life Group in one of three ways:

- **Start a group organically.** If you have a group of people you'd like to do community with, talk with them about forming a group together.
- **Be placed with a group.** Community Launch events happen throughout the course of the year. By signing up for this event, you will be placed with, connected to, and trained practically on how to do life with other believers in our church!
- **Join an existing group.** If you know of an existing Life Group (of less than 5 people) you would like to join, talk with the people in the group and see if they would be open to adding you to their group.

Our staff is always available to help you form or find a Life Group.

Community Formation



Section Outline

Listen to the Content:

*Episodes (3) available at verticalstpaul.org/groups
(or Vertical Life Podcast on Apple & Spotify)*

Session 1: The Why

*Encounter & Embody the Gospel
Ephesians 2:13-22; 4:15-16*

Session 2: The Way

*Marks of a Healthy Community Member
Colossians 3:12-17*

Session 3: The Win

*Priority of Presence
Genesis 3:9; Hebrews 10:19-25*

SESSION 1

The Why

ENCOUNTER & EMBODY THE GOSPEL



All of us, Making all of life, All about Jesus Christ.

Big Idea: Community is not an optional addition to the Christian life, but one of the primary places where we encounter and embody the Gospel together.

Key Truths:

1. *All of us* _____ biblical community.
2. *All of us* are _____ to be that kind of community.

Vertical Church's Discipleship Pathway

At Vertical, community is the third step in our discipleship pathway:

WORSHIP → WORK → WALK

Worship in _____

Work on _____

Walk with _____

The Church as a Family

The Bible speaks of the Church not as a service to consume, but as a family to belong to.

The universal Church is like our _____ family.

The local church is like our _____ family.

Why take the step to form or join a Life Group?

Because community is where we regularly:

_____ the Gospel & _____ the Gospel

To *encounter the Gospel* means that community becomes a place where we regularly hear it, remember it, and are strengthened to believe it.

To *embody the Gospel* means that community becomes a place where we extend grace to others and grow in our confidence, clarity, and ability to apply the Gospel to everyday life.

How the Gospel Creates a New Community:

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²²In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:13-22 ESV).

Because of His death and resurrection...

- Jesus integrated _____ & _____ (v13).
- Jesus imploded our walls of _____ (v14).
- Jesus instated a new _____ (v15).
- Jesus initiated _____ (vv16-17).
- Jesus invited us into familial _____ (vv18-20).
- Jesus indwells us by His _____ (vv. 21-22).

Everything the Gospel accomplishes is meant to be encountered and embodied within the family of God.

A Gospel Culture

In his book, *The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ*, Ray Ortlund describes healthy community with a simple equation:

GOSPEL + SAFETY + TIME

This is the kind of culture we want to mark every Life Group at Vertical Church.

Listen to our Gospel + Safety + Time sermon series for further reflection!

Lots of Gospel

The Gospel has the _____ and _____ word in our lives.

Healthy communities continually point one another back to Jesus and remind one another of who they are in Christ.

Lots of Safety

"Rather, speaking the *truth* in _____..."

(Ephesians 4:15)

Healthy communities create an environment where people can be honest about struggles and sin without fear of accusation, shame, or embarrassment.

Lots of Time

"Rather, speaking the *truth in love*, we are to _____ in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Ephesians 4:15).

People are complex. Growth is gradual. Change is difficult. God's not in a hurry, so neither are we. He uses faithful, long-term relationships to mature His people into the likeness of Christ.

Ephesians 4:15–16

- The body grows when each _____ is working properly.
- The body builds itself up in _____.
- Healthy community is not built by a few people doing everything, but by every member faithfully contributing to the whole.

The Life Group Model

Life Groups are groups of roughly _____ to _____ people who are:

- ✓ Committed to meeting regularly
- ✓ Desiring to grow together in godliness
- ✓ Devoted to God's Word and applying it to all of life
- ✓ Under the leadership and authority of the local church
- ✓ Same-gender communities that foster vulnerability and protect hearts

Though Life Groups are intentionally small, they are never meant to be isolated from the larger church family.

Why Same-gender Life Groups?

We emphasize same-gender Life Groups in order to encourage deeper relationships in which people can feel safer, more understood, and be more open than they might be otherwise. Confessing sin can be intimate, so keeping that within the same gender helps guard our hearts and emotions while fostering trust and accountability.

At the same time, Life Groups should continue enjoying fellowship with the broader church family through shared meals, gatherings, and meaningful relationships across the body (see note on married couples on page 4).

Membership & Community

Life Groups are for those who are members of Vertical Church or actively pursuing membership.

Membership simply says: "I am committed to this family as long as God has me here."
It also brings clarity to the pastors: "We are committed to shepherding these people first and foremost."

The order of the discipleship pathway matters:

WORSHIP → WORK → **WALK**

Community is the third step because healthy community is built upon worship, service, commitment, and a shared vision for following Christ together.

Personal Reflection

What encouraged or challenged you most from this lesson?

What is one step God may be calling you to take toward deeper biblical community?

Key Takeaway

Healthy community culture is Gospel culture—marked by lots of Gospel, lots of safety, and lots of time—where we encounter and embody the realities of this glorious Gospel together.

[illegible]

Session 1 Answer Key:

Page 8

- Need
- Called
- Services & Stewardship
- Teams, Together
- Christ, in Community
- Extended
- Immediate

Page 9

- Encounter & Embody
- Insiders & Outsiders (v13)
- Division (v14)
- Humanity (v15)
- Reconciliation (vv16-17)
- Fellowship (vv18-20)
- Spirit (vv. 21-22)

Page 10

- First & Final
- Love
- Grow up
- Part
- Love

Page 11

- 3 to 5

SESSION 2

The Way

MARKS OF A HEALTHY COMMUNITY



Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.

— Colossians 3:17

Big Idea: Biblical community does not happen by accident.

Healthy communities are made up of healthy community members—ordinary people, transformed by Christ, learning to love God and love one another well.

Colossians 3:12–17 gives us five marks that shape the kind of people we want to become and the kind of communities we want to build.

“Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:12-17 ESV).

Before Paul gives instructions for community, he reminds us of our identity. We are:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Because of who we are in Christ, we are called to "put on" a life that reflects Him. We do this by living out the 5 marks of a healthy community member found in this passage:

1. **Devote Daily (v12)**
2. **Relate Restoratively (v13)**
3. **Invest Intentionally (vv14–15)**
4. **Edify Eagerly (v16)**
5. **Walk Worshipfully (v17)**

Mark One: _____ (v12)

Your relationship with God is your most important relationship, and healthy communities are built by people who prioritize intimacy with Jesus above everything else.

Daily devotion is not about perfection, but consistency—walking with Christ through His Word, prayer, and obedience.

As Bonhoeffer wrote: "Let him who cannot be alone [with God] beware of community. Let him who is not in community beware of being alone."

Key Truth: You cannot _____ what you do not _____.

(You cannot *give away* what you do not _____).

When individuals show up rooted in Christ, the whole community is strengthened.

Mark Two: _____ (v13)

"Bear with one another and forgive one another..."

Life Groups need to have a DTR; they need to "define the relationship."

The defining factor of any Christian relationship is the grace of the Gospel.

The Gospel teaches us that relationships are not disposable, but always an opportunity to extend the grace we've been given to another!

Key Truth: Christian relationships are built for _____.

"If nothing stands between me and God, then nothing will stand between me and you."

Healthy community members resist gossip, bitterness, and resentment, choosing instead to extend the grace they themselves have received.

Mark Three: _____ (vv14-15)

"Above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

Healthy communities do not happen by accident. They are formed through intentional investment, shared experiences, and consistent presence.

Friendships are _____, not _____.

Healthy communities pursue one another with:

- T _____
- I _____
- F _____

Investing intentionally means inviting others into your life, sharing meals, checking in, praying together, and choosing presence over convenience.

Mark Four: _____ (v16)

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

To edify means to _____. Healthy communities are rooted in the Word of God and guided by the Spirit of God. We do not merely share opinions; but speak God's truth into one another's lives.

Healthy community members seek to:

- Encourage _____
- Counsel _____
- Admonish _____

Edification happens when Scripture shapes our conversations, our counsel, and our care for one another.

Key Truth: _____ Christians are _____ edified.

Mark Five: _____ (v17)

"Whatever you do, in word or deed, do _____ in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Worship is not simply something we do on Sundays. It is a way of life.

Healthy communities are made up of people who seek to make *all of life all about Jesus Christ*.

Walking worshipfully means allowing our beliefs to shape our lives, our obedience to guide our decisions, and Christ to be honored in our work, relationships, finances, families, and everyday rhythms.

If we're going to see this vision come to fruition...

All of us,

Making all of _____,

All about _____.

We're going to need one another. We cannot do this alone.

What's Your Role?

Ultimately, the five marks serve to answer the question, "What is my role as an individual?" If you want to help your group thrive and experience all the blessings of Christian community, show up modeling these five things:

- 1. Devote Daily (v12)**
- 2. Relate Restoratively (v13)**
- 3. Invest Intentionally (vv14–15)**
- 4. Edify Eagerly (v16)**
- 5. Walk Worshipfully (v17)**

Personal Reflection

Which of these five marks comes most naturally to you?

Which one do you most need to grow in right now?

How can your future Life Group help you pursue greater faithfulness in this area?

Key Takeaway

Healthy communities are built by healthy community members—people who devote daily, relate restoratively, invest intentionally, edify eagerly, and walk worshipfully together in Christ.

[illegible]

Session 2 Answer Key:

Page 17

- Chosen
- Holy
- Loved

Page 18

- Devote Daily
- Impart, Possess
- Have
- Relate Restoratively
- Restoration

Page 19

- Invest Intentionally
- Forged, Found
- Time
- Intentionality
- Fun
- Edify Eagerly
- Build Up
- Daily
- Biblically
- Faithfully
- Mature
- Easily

Page 20

- Walk Worshipfully
- All things
- Life
- Jesus Christ

SESSION 3

The Win

PRIORITY OF PRESENCE



“Where are you?”

Big Idea: The win of community is _____.

What is the goal of Christian community? What are we actually after when we gather together?

The win is not simply gaining knowledge, building friendships, or following a program.

No, what we are after in community is the very thing God Himself has been after from the beginning: **restored** _____ **with His people.**

Our Story

After Adam and Eve sinned, God did not strike them down or abandon them. Instead, He asked a question:

"_____?" (Genesis 3:9).

God's first move after sin entered the world was an invitation back into His presence.

From Genesis to Revelation, God has been pursuing communion with His people:

John 1:14: The Word became flesh and _____ among us.

Revelation 21: God will _____ His people forever.

The Win: Prioritizing Presence

Our world is designed to keep hidiers hiding.

Distraction, isolation, busyness, fear, and superficial relationships all work against the kind of presence God desires for His people.

But there is joy, healing, life, and deeper communion with God on the other side of this puzzling word: *presence*.

Present in Three Directions

Christian community calls us to be present in three directions, or relationships:

Present to _____

Present to _____

Present to _____

Present to God

Being present to God means listening and responding to Him through:

- _____
- _____
- _____

We seek not merely more *from* God, but more *of* God Himself.

Present to Self

Being present to ourselves means honestly _____ our lives and
_____ sin within the context of communion with God and His people.

We slow down, pay attention to our hearts, and remember who we are becoming in Christ.

Present to One Another

Being present to one another means:

- _____ to one another
- _____ for one another
- _____ one another
- _____ one another
- _____ one another

All in accordance with God's _____ and guided by the _____.

Presence in Scripture

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:19-25).

The Christian life moves in all three directions:

"Let us *draw near* [to God]..." = _____

"With *our hearts* sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our *bodies* washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the *confession of our hope*..." = _____

"Let us consider how to stir up one another...not neglecting to meet together...encouraging one another..." = _____

Biblical community involves communion with God, honesty about ourselves, and intentional care for one another.

Why This Matters

If we remove any one of these relationships, we no longer have a truly healthy, Gospel-centered community.

God made us for communion:

- With Himself,
- with one another.
- and with a right understanding of ourselves.

Healthy community requires *all three*.

Life-giving Structure

Healthy communities need *clarity* about what they are doing when they gather. Not rigid structure. Not control. But **rhythms** that produce life, joy, and growth.

Like a trellis helps a vine flourish and bear fruit, healthy rhythms help communities thrive. Whenever we gather, we want to remember:

We are here to be present to God, to ourselves, and to one another.

Three Ingredients for Prioritizing Presence

Becoming present cannot happen without three essential practices:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

_____ **until you hear.**

We slow down. We pay attention.

We seek to truly hear God and truly hear one another.

Healthy community listens with grace, patience, and love.

_____ **until you see.**

We seek God's face, not merely His hand.

We see ourselves and one another in light of what Christ says is true.

We learn to recognize what God is doing in the lives of others and encourage His work within them.

_____ **until you enjoy.**

Presence cannot be rushed. People do not want to be known if they are not also enjoyed.

By God's grace, healthy communities grow in both their desire to be together and their delight in one another.

Key Idea: You cannot have genuine relationship with someone you do not *hear, see, or enjoy*.

A Practical Tool

One simple way to prioritize presence in your Life Group is to ask **three questions**:

How are you feeding your _____?

How are you feeding your _____?

How are you feeding your _____?

These questions help us stay present to ourselves, to God, and to one another.

The Main Thing

From Genesis 3:9 onward, God continues to ask His people:

"_____?"

Healthy community creates space to answer that question honestly before God and before one another in each relational direction: God, self, others.

Final Encouragement

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote:

"Christian brotherhood is not an _____ which we must realize; it is rather a _____ created by God in Christ in which we may _____."

Christian community is not something we create.

It is something we enter into, steward, and enjoy by God's grace.

Personal Reflection

What area of presence (God/self/others) do you most need to grow in right now?

What rhythms or practices might help you prioritize presence more intentionally?

Key Takeaway

The win of Christian community is prioritizing presence.

We become present to God, present to ourselves, and present to one another through hearing, seeing, and enjoying one another in the context of Gospel-centered community.

[illegible]

[illegible]

Session 3 Answer Key:

Page 26

- Presence
- Presence
- Where are you?
- Dwelt
- Be with

Page 27

- God
- Self
- One Another
- Scripture
- Prayer
- Worship
- Assessing
- Confessing
- Listening
- Praying
- Encouraging
- Counseling
- Admonishing
- Word & Spirit

Page 28

- Present to God
- Present to Self
- Present to One Another

Page 29

- Hearing
- Seeing
- Enjoying
- Listen
- Look
- Stay

Page 30

- Faith (God)
- Flesh (Self)
- Friends (Others)
- Where are you?
- Ideal
- Divine Reality
- Participate

Community Launch



Section Outline

Attend the Class:

Register to Join a Life Group at verticalstpaul.org

Session 1: Commencement

Starting Well

Session 2: Conflict

Struggling Well

Session 3: Care

Staying Well

SESSION 1

Commencement

STARTING WELL



Sharing Your Story

A Life Map is a visual representation of your life from birth to today. It highlights events God has used to mold and shape your character and helps others to know you. The Life Map process gives insight into how God has designed you and worked in your life, and where he is leading you. It will also help your group members get to know one another. Use these three steps to help you develop and communicate your Life Map:

Step 1: Reflection

Prayerfully consider people, places, and events that have marked your life. Make a list. Be sure to use the Life Map Worksheet on the next page to help you categorize your thoughts. The terms in the worksheet identify categories and describe things to include. Ask yourself the questions for each category and fill in the worksheet.

Step 2: Analysis

Now that you have reflected over your life—your heritage, heroes, 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.

Step 3: Organization

Now try to synthesize this information into a logical flow of thought. How do these people, places, and events fit together?

Sharing with Your Life Group

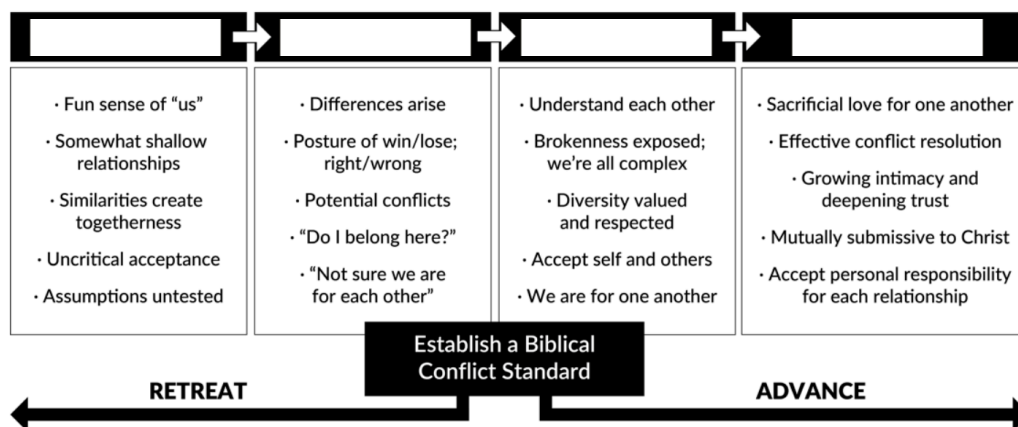
Sharing your story can be as simple or creative as you'd like. Feel free to just write it down and share from the page. Or, present it in a way that is creatively unique to your personality. For example, someone might like to draw a Life Map or use photographs and music that is meaningful. Another person might just share five highlights and lowlights in life. Regardless of how you share, each person (or couple) should plan about 20-25 minutes to share.

NAME:	AGE/LIFE STAGE LOCATION	AGE/LIFE STAGE LOCATION	AGE/LIFE STAGE LOCATION	AGE/LIFE STAGE LOCATION
HERITAGE: How have your family relationships, ethnic, or geographical influences shaped your life?				
HEROES: What relationships influenced your character/shaped your direction (positively & negatively)? How? Why?				
HIGH POINTS: When did you come to know Christ? What experiences have you especially enjoyed? Felt closest to God? Why?				
HARD TIMES: What experiences were especially difficult or painful? Felt furthest from God?				
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.				

Group Dynamics & Expectations

Groups who are committed to stay together encounter four key stages: the Honeymoon Stage, the Differences Stage, the Acceptance Stage, and the Community Stage. As you begin to do life together, you'll notice a natural progression from one stage to the next. The tendency is to stop at Stage 2 ("_____") when conflict arises; people either leave the group or retreat to Stage 1 ("_____"). However, if your group matures onto Stages 3 ("_____") and 4 ("_____"), you will experience new depth, rich relationships, and God's beautiful design for provision through community.

THE STAGES OF COMMUNITY



Setting Your Group Up for Success

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." (Colossians 3:16)

God has given his Spirit, his Word, and his people to protect you, build you up spiritually, and provide for you. That's good, because all of us are naturally prone to wander into sin. Since biblical community is a priority for your overall spiritual health, it is something that you should begin to schedule your life around. Setting specific meeting days and times to block your calendar will help prevent the busyness of life from crowding out community. Also, it is important to structure how you will spend your time when you are together. Work together to establish a rhythm that prioritizes presence in the following three areas:

- 1) Present to God**
- 2) Present to Self**
- 3) Present to One Another**

Life groups can prioritize presence weekly during group time. Remember, relationships are strengthened throughout the week, so work to connect outside of your set group time, too. If your group feels crunched for time, try to text updates during the week to keep others informed and to prioritize discussion topics when face-to-face. Share in the ownership of your group. Volunteer to serve your group in areas of giftedness and be willing to participate in one another's lives in different ways so that you can experience the joy of fellowship that God intends for you together.

The following questions will help you discuss group expectations and roles going forward. What you decide as a group now does not have to go on forever, but it will provide a starting point that can be adjusted in the future when necessary.

When Do We Meet?

Consistency is vital for the ongoing health of any group. Most men's and women's groups meet weekly for around two hours. Married groups often meet together as couples every other week, and then the husbands and wives meet separately in same-gender groups in the off weeks. When life gets busy or children get sick, many groups struggle with knowing whether or not to meet. When considering whether you should miss your group meeting, a helpful comparison would be that if something would cause you to miss work, then it might also be something that would cause you to miss your group meeting. Discuss with your group when it is okay and when it is not okay to miss your meeting so that you do not frustrate one another. Wedding showers, happy hours with co-workers, family in town, etc., are all scenarios to discuss. When you think it may be best to miss the group, assume a posture of humility and ask for your time commitment back.

Practice: Ask for your _____ back.

Where Do We Meet?

Most groups meet in homes, which can create a warm environment for people to connect. Some groups choose to rotate each session in different homes or take turns hosting every month. This can also allow groups to coordinate shared childcare, if necessary.

How Will We Share Group Ownership?

The best groups share ownership. All responsibilities should not fall to your Community Group Leader(s). Ask group members what they are passionate about and how they would like to use their gifts. Then, assign ownership to an area for which they are passionate. While every person may not have a designated role, it is important for everyone to participate with their gifts and passions as integral parts of the group. Below are a few examples of some possible ownership roles within a group:

Administrative: This person will be in charge of keeping the group moving forward. He or she can send out prayer requests after each meeting or help implement a plan to follow up on group initiatives. Reminding groups of events, meetings, and serving opportunities would also fall under this role.

Fun & Fellowship: This person finds creative ways to have fun together and build relationships outside of group time. Examples include planning meals, retreats, or events with other community groups.

Service: The person in this role will find and coordinate opportunities for the group to serve together, considering each member in their area of service or passion.

Reflection on Group Expectations

- What are the best days and times of the week for you to meet with your community group? List two possibilities.
- What are some ways that you can personally share ownership with the group?
- What are some things you will commit to do in order to build relationships with members of your community group outside of your scheduled meeting time?
- What stage of community development sounds most exciting to you? Least appealing? Why?

Ideas for Sharing Group Ownership

- Take a personality or strengths assessment and discuss the results together as a group
- Take time to share about your gifts and passions (service areas, people groups, pastimes, restaurants, travel destinations, etc.)
- Plan a retreat somewhere away from home
- Designate some roles for group members and find ways for everyone to contribute

[illegible]

Session 1 Notes:

Session 1 Answer Key:

Page 40

- Honeymoon
- Differences
- Acceptance
- Community
- Honeymoon (*graphic*)
- Differences (*graphic*)
- Acceptance (*graphic*)
- Community (*graphic*)

Page 41

- Time

SESSION 2

Conflict

STRUGGLING WELL

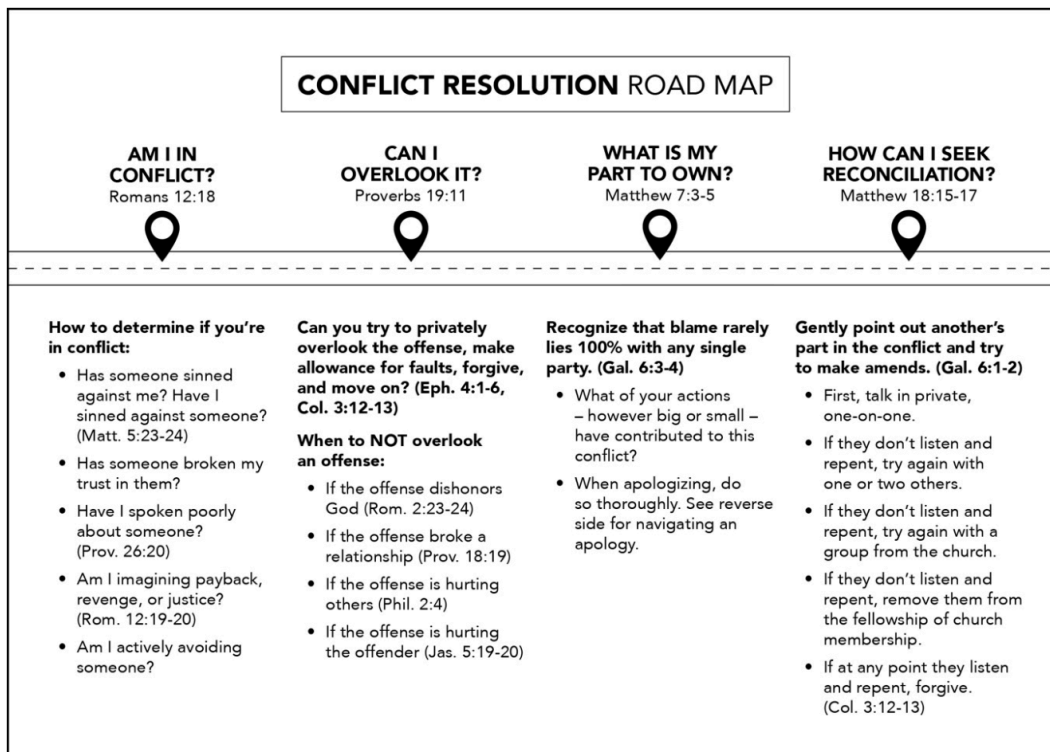


Conflict Resolution

As you deepen your relationships with one another, conflict is unavoidable. At the first sign of conflict in your life group, you may ask yourself, “Did I make a huge mistake getting in this group?” As you have tough conversations and experience conflict with others, you may even be tempted to leave the group. But God’s people are called to respond to conflict in a way that is remarkably different from the world. Conflict actually provides an opportunity for you to glorify God, serve other people, and grow to be like Christ.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9). Though conflict is inevitable, healthy community groups will commit to respond to conflict with biblical principles to maintain “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). They actively pursue peace and reconciliation instead of accepting premature compromises or allowing relationships to wither.

Below is the Conflict Resolution Road Map. Be sure to take the time to read the Scriptures it references. You will see a few key ideas surface, like how to identify when conflict needs to be addressed (Romans 12:18), taking responsibility for your own contribution to the conflict (Matthew 7:3-5), showing your brother his fault (Matthew 18:15), and seeking reconciliation (Matthew 5:23, 24).



Communication in Conflict

Handling conflict in a healthy way begins with managing yourself. This is difficult—especially during conflict. It requires honesty about your shortcomings, a humble assessment of your response patterns, and care for how to best communicate with love.

“And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.” (2 Timothy 2:24-25)

Unhealthy Communication Patterns

Study the list below of destructive communication patterns that often appear during conflict. See if you can identify your natural tendencies. Try not to be a W-E-N-I when you communicate!

W _____: When one person prematurely “checks out” of a conversation without any chance for understanding or resolution. It may appear gracious (“I don’t want to fight about this”), frustrated (“You just do what you want”), or apathetic (“I really don’t care”). The person may also stop engaging or physically leave the room. (Proverbs 3:11-14)

E _____: When a conversation’s intensity increases because of inflammatory comments or someone raises the emotional stakes. Common escalation methods include bringing up side topics or sensitive issues, exaggerations, and character attacks. (Proverbs 15:1)

N _____: When a listener receives a message negatively, falsely assuming the speaker had poor intentions. For example, a negative interpreter might receive the comment, “Are you feeling okay?” to mean the speaker thinks his or her physical appearance looks bad. (Proverbs 3:5-8)

I _____: When someone responds in a way that minimizes or denies the significance of another’s feelings, ideas, logic, or goals. Rather than listening and understanding, an invalidator discredits. Responses such as, “That doesn’t make sense!,” “How can you believe that?,” and “You’re being silly and irrational,” are examples of invalidation. (Proverbs 18:2)

Conclusion

Healthy communication takes work, especially during times of conflict. Guarding against your natural destructive communication patterns and being purposeful in the way you communicate will help build relational trust as you work together through life with your group. Pray that God would give you the courage, patience, and wisdom to make the most of the opportunities he puts before your group to pursue peace with one another.

“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;” (Hebrews 12:14-15)

Below is another helpful diagram which will help you engage in biblical forgiveness, seeking real repentance and reconciliation when necessary. As followers of Jesus Christ, we always want to see grace have the final word in our relationships.

NAVIGATING AN APOLOGY	FORGIVENESS IS NOT...
1. ADMIT WHAT YOU DID WRONG. Acknowledge the harm you caused without justifying or downplaying your actions. Express empathy for how your actions might have made them feel. 2. APOLOGIZE. Tell them you are sorry for what you did. Be specific. 3. ASK FOR FORGIVENESS. Say the words, “Will you forgive me?” 4. ACCEPT THE CONSEQUENCES. Do what you can to make it right and alter your behavior. You are not truly sorry if you continue causing harm. “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:35	1. EXCUSING. There is no excuse for sin. God will make sure all sin is paid for. 2. DENIAL. Do not pretend you are not hurt. Honestly bring your pain to God. 3. FEELING. Forgiveness is a decision you can make no matter how you feel. 4. FORGETTING. To forgive you must remember the offense, God’s justice, the cross, and God forgiving you. 5. TRUST. Forgiveness is a gift, but trust must be earned. 6. OPTIONAL. God commands us to forgive. Refusing to forgive is rebelling against God. 7. RECONCILIATION. Reconciliation takes action from both sides; forgiveness is between you and God.

Reflection on Conflict

- How was conflict handled in your home while growing up? How do you think that affects your view of conflict now?
- Do you have a tendency to run from conflict or create unnecessary conflict? Give one example.
- Do you have conflict with anyone now? What steps can you take to move toward peace in this relationship and in your ability to resolve conflict in the future?

Ideas for Living Out Peacemaking Principles

- Pray that God would reveal any unresolved conflict in your life; ask him to show you any “logs” in your eye (Matthew 7:3-5)
- Process with your community group about how to best reconcile any known relationship conflicts (consider family, co-workers, friends, etc.)
- Memorize scripture with your group that will help you during conflict
- Ask loved ones to list some ways that you can grow in how you respond to conflict

Reflection on Communication

- Which destructive communication patterns (W-E-N-I) are a struggle for you?
- When have you used electronic communication in a way that caused harm?
- What method of communication do you prefer? Why?

Ideas for Healthy Communication Practices

- Memorize 2 Timothy 2:24-25 as a group
- Ask family and friends which destructive communication patterns they most often see in you, then pray that God would help you respond differently during conflict
- As a group, commit to resolve conflict face-to-face

[illegible]

Session 2 Notes:

Session 2 Answer Key:

Page 47

- Withdrawal
- Escalation
- Negative Interpretation
- Invalidation

SESSION 3

Care

STAYING WELL



Confession

Confessing sin might feel terrifying to you. Publicly revealing ways that you fall short can make you feel unworthy, unloved, or unwanted. However, God is not out to make you miserable. He wants you to find healing, seek restoration, and create freedom through the act of confessing your sins to both him and others in your life.

What is Confession?

The word confess, in the original language, means to say the same thing, acknowledge, or agree with (Mark 1:5, Matthew 3:6, Acts 19:18, and James 5:16). So, a practical definition of confession is to vocally agree about disobedience toward God (sin).

Why Do We Confess?

We confess sin because God commands it; he already knows about the sin and he wants us to agree with him about sin. We also confess because it is spiritually healthy for us. Read the comparisons below about the harm of unconfessed sin and the blessings of confessing sin:

UNCONFESSED SIN LEADS TO:	CONFESSED SIN LEADS TO:
Hardship for self (Proverbs 28:13)	Life and glory to God (John 3:17-21)
Weariness (Psalm 32:3)	Cleansing (1 John 1:9)
Sickness (1 Corinthians 11:30)	Healing (James 5:16)
Heaviness (Psalm 32:4)	Burdens relieved (Psalm 32:5)
More sin (Genesis 4:6-11)	Freedom and mercy (Proverbs 6:5, 28:13)
Hardening of the heart (Leviticus 26:40-41)	Forgiveness and a clean heart (James 5:15; 1 John 1:9; Psalm 51:10)
God's discipline/opposition of pride (Luke 18:9-14)	Honor and justification (Luke 18:9-14)
Hardship for others (Joshua 7)	Reconciliation/warning for others (Matthew 5:23-24; 1 Timothy 5:20)
Blocked communication with God (Psalm 66:18)	Worship of God (Leviticus 5:5; Numbers 5:7)
Separation from God (Genesis 3:9; Isaiah 59:2)	Restoration with God (2 Chronicles 7:14)

Big Idea: “Confession is _____.”

“He was not ashamed to be crucified for us as an evildoer. It is nothing else but our fellowship with Jesus Christ that leads us to the ignominious dying that comes in confession, in order that we may in truth share in his Cross. The Cross of Jesus Christ destroys all pride. We cannot find the Cross of Jesus if we shrink from going to the place where it is to be found, namely, the public death of the sinner.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Confession in the Bible

“Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,’ and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.”

Psalms 32:1-5

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

1 John 1:9

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”

James 5:16

Thoughts on Confession

- Confession is for _____
- Repentance is for _____

How to Confess

- Confess to God
- Confess to Another (Life Group)
- Confess _____
- Confess _____
- Confess _____

Responding to the Confession of Another

Initial Response

1. Listen _____
2. Pray
3. Be _____
4. Be _____

Faithful Admonishment

1. Seek more than behavior _____
2. Call them to _____ in Christ
3. Be sensitive
4. Check your own _____
5. Be _____ honest

"Will not his sin be a constant occasion for me to give thanks that both of us may live in the forgiving love of God in Jesus Christ? Thus the very hour of disillusionment with my brother becomes incomparably salutary, because it so thoroughly teaches me that neither of us can ever live by our own words and deeds, but only by that one Word and Deed which really binds us together—the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Processing vs. Reporting

Big Idea: Reporting shares a decision _____ it's made. Processing works through a decision _____, before it's final.

What Does the Bible Say?

- "Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future" (Proverbs 19:20).
- "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice" (Proverbs 12:15).
- "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple" (Psalm 19:7).
- "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

Ground Rules for Processing Decisions Together

1. Get into the _____ at the same _____.
2. Don't have conversations that _____ details in a particular light.
3. Try to help everyone get a picture of the situation.
4. _____ ask and receive _____ questions.
5. See Page 58 for ten wise questions for navigating life decisions.

When It's Painful

- "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy" (Proverbs 27:6).
- This process is for your good — not to make you feel less-than or keep you from something good.
- If your group disagrees, use it as a chance to handle conflict.
- Don't be afraid to reach out to your Life Group Shepherd or a Pastor/Staff if you need further help.

Reflect & Apply

1. A decision I'm facing right now that I need to process with others:
2. One question I want to ask my group:

Navigating Life Decisions

Thankfully, Scripture gives practical advice on how to wisely process major decisions. The ten questions below are principles pulled from the book of Proverbs. They form great questions to ask yourself and your community when processing big decisions. When processing major decisions, get everyone into the room at the same time. Don't have one-off conversations that would make it easy to frame details in a different light or ignore important topics.

Do I have all the facts?

"If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame." (Proverbs 18:13)

Am I fully entrusting this decision to the Lord?

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Is the pressure of time forcing me to make a premature decision?

"Desire without knowledge is not good, and whoever makes haste with his feet misses his way." (Proverbs 19:2)

For better or worse, what are the possible motives that could be driving this decision?

"All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit." (Proverbs 16:2)

How should my past experiences inform this decision?

"Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly." (Proverbs 26:11)

What is the collective counsel of my community?

"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice." (Proverbs 12:15)

Have I honestly considered the warning signs?

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." (Proverbs 16:25)

Have I considered all the possible outcomes of this decision?

"The simple believes everything, but the prudent gives thought to his steps." (Proverbs 14:15)

Could this decision jeopardize my integrity or hinder my witness to the Lord in any way?

"Like a muddied spring or a polluted fountain is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked." (Proverbs 25:26)

Is there a better option that would allow me to make a greater impact for the Kingdom?

"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and whoever captures souls is wise." (Proverbs 11:30)

[illegible]

Session 3 Notes:

Session 3 Answer Key:

Page 55

- Discipleship
- Healing
- Freedom

Page 56

- Early
- Often
- In Detail
- Well
- Kind
- Wise

- Modification
- More
- Fully

Page 57

- After, Together
- Room, Time
- Frame
- Gently, Good

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VERTICAL CHURCH