

Grace Group Leaders Training

Spring 2021

Vision of Grace Groups (What do we want to be true about Grace Groups?)

Grace Groups are communities in which we look to draw closer to Christ as we draw closer to one another.

Mission of Grace Groups (How are we going to realize the vision of Grace Groups?)

We look to foster communities in which we are loved, known, and cared for as we point one another to the life-changing power of God in the gospel.

Components of Grace Groups

How can we stay faithful to the mission of Grace Groups? It's by focusing on two aspects of its mission - to a) draw near to Christ, and to b) draw near to one another. There are several components that would allow us to live out these aspects of community:

- A. **Worship** - As we come together as a community, it is crucial that we are formed and shaped by the beauty of who God is and what he has done for us. This is a component that participates with the Spirit of God as he calibrates our hearts towards him. In addition, as we worship together, our hearts are drawn closer together in unison, much the same way fans of sports teams find solidarity with one another.
 - a. "We are called to worship because in this encounter God (re)makes and molds us top-down. Worship is the arena in which God recalibrates our hearts, reforms our desires, and rehabilitates our loves. Worship isn't just something we do; it is where God does something to us. Worship is the heart of discipleship because it is the gymnasium in which God retrains our hearts."
- James K.A. Smith - *You Are What You Love*
 - b. Methods of Worship in Grace Groups
 - i. Music - Singing isn't the only way we can worship God, but is nevertheless an excellent way of doing so. If you are uncomfortable with leading your group in singing or playing an instrument, you might want to consider finding songs online and playing them for your group. Whether your group decides to sing along or not, it will be helpful to have the lyrics available for your group to follow along. Also, please try to pick songs that are regularly sung at church and may be familiar with many in your group.
 - ii. Psalms - Praying through a Psalm is an excellent way to engage our hearts towards worship. Please be sure to either have the psalm printed out, or make sure that everyone in the group has the same Bible translation. You might teach people to pray through a Psalm by saying something like this -

"The book of Psalms is called *the Prayerbook of the Bible* because it contains poems and songs that are written to reflect the whole of human experience lived before God. With that said, we'll start our group by

meditating on Psalm 147. Once the psalm is read, let me give us a minute or two where we can read the psalm again in silence and offer it up as a prayer to God and ask Him to speak to us through it, and I'll open us up in prayer. [At this point you can decide to read the psalm yourself, or assign the reading to someone else in your group, and the same goes with prayer. Remember, the more you get others involved in various elements of the group the healthier you group will be long-term.]

Psalms of Praise and Thanksgiving for your consideration - Selections from Psalms 7, 28, 30, 34, 44, 50, 57, 69, 86, 100, 103, 106, 107, 111, 118, and 136

- iii. Resting in God's Word - Choose a short passage and read it for the group. Ask the participants to choose a phrase or a verse in the passage and meditate on it in silence. Ask the participants to use the time to reflect on God's character and to allow the phrase or a verse to lead them into adoring God's beauty. You can spend as little time as 30 seconds or even up to a few minutes on this, depending on your group's level of comfort in the practice of meditation.

Here is a sampling of passages that you can meditate on in your group - Matthew 7:13 - 14, Psalm 23, Mark 4:35 - 41, Philippians 2:1 - 13, John 10:30, Psalm 119:105, 1 John 1:1 - 10, John 1:6 - 8; 19 - 28, I Chronicles 16:31, 34, 36, Isaiah 25:1, 38:18, Daniel 2:20,23, Acts 2:46,47, Romans 11:36, I Corinthians 15:57, Ephesians 1:3; 5:19, I Timothy 1:17, Hebrews 13:15, I Peter 2:9;4:11

- B. **Bible Study** - Even as we look to fulfill our calling in Grace Groups to foster a community in which we are loved, known, and cared for, we turn to God's Word to teach us what that looks like and to help us point one another to the life-changing power of God in the gospel. However, that is not to say that the Bible study ought to be the centerpoint of our life together. Rather, the Bible study serves to orient our conversation around the God of the Bible. To that end, we recommend you choose a Bible Study from one of many we have curated for you in RightNow Media, and utilize the accompanying study guides on the website. We recommend that you spend no more than 40 minutes on Bible Study so that your group can spend the time needed for other elements of the group gathering.

Here are some tips on facilitating the discussion based on the study guides -

- a. Be Enthusiastic: Your evident enthusiasm for the topic under discussion and your evident concern for what people are sharing establish the appropriate and expected behavior in the group. Your attitude as a leader sets the tone for the group.

- b. **Be Honest:** Your honest sharing, transparency, and vulnerability as group leader will be contagious. You don't need to tell people to be open. You need to model openness and others will follow. If you are not transparent and truthful, others will probably not be either. You will have only surface conversations which will have very little impact on people's lives.
- c. **Be Affirming:** Do not ridicule or make light of what people share in sincerity. Instead affirm them for their honesty (even if you don't quite agree with what they are saying!) Though if this is the case, you may need to gently correct them as well.
- d. **Encourage Safety:** Unless you are going around the circle in a sharing activity, do not put people on the spot by calling on them to answer a given question or forcing them to share. This may embarrass them. They will no longer feel that the group is a safe place to be and are likely to be withdrawn and they may not return.
- e. **Stress Equal Access:** If an individual dominates your group's discussion you might need to say in a tactful and light-hearted way, "How about someone else this time?" If the behavior continues you might need to talk to that person individually outside the group.
- f. **Always Assume a Mixed Audience:** Be mindful of the fact that there may be some in your group that are new to the faith or are exploring Christianity. This does not mean you need to "dumb down" the gospel message. They are, after all, there to explore and learn about Christianity! It doesn't mean, however, that you should be careful with your vocabulary (eg. using "Christianese", using divisive language when referring to Christians vs. non-Christians, etc.) to make sure you are hospitable towards those who may be seeking.
- g. **Be Comfortable with Silence:** Silence in a group can mean a number of things. You must diagnose the silence if you are to address it correctly. But don't be afraid of it! Allow it to linger (uncomfortably long). Someone will usually break it. If not, consider the following:
 - i. It may be a good question and people are just thinking about it. Let the silence endure. Perhaps rephrase it to fill up the silence so others aren't intimidated by it.
 - ii. It may be that people don't understand the question. Rephrase it.
 - iii. It may be too obvious. Get it answered quickly and go on to the next one.
 - iv. The question is too risky for anyone to answer. If so, take a stab at it yourself.
 - v. It may just be a bad question. Make it into a better one.

C. **Prayer Requests/Fellowship** - As we share the joys and the sorrows of our previous week/s, we are drawn closer to one another as we carry one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2). In addition, we are drawn closer to God as we see the evidence of his works in the lives of others and are encouraged and challenged by it. We encourage you to practice transparency/vulnerability with yourself first as to set the tone for this time,

while being patient with those in your group that are not yet comfortable reciprocating the level of transparency and vulnerability you are exhibiting.

- a. “Fellowship’ is one of the great words of the New Testament. It denotes something that is vital for our spiritual health and central to the church’s true life. It is two-dimensional, and it is first vertical before it can be horizontal. That is, we must know the reality of fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ before we can know the reality of fellowship with each other in our common relationship to God. In the horizontal dimension of fellowship, sharing with our brother and sister Christians, we give as God has given to us, and we receive. So Christian fellowship is seeking to share with others what God has made known to you, while letting them share with you what they know of him as a means of finding strength, refreshment and instruction for one’s own soul. Gratefully one receives what others share. Equally, one labors to give. And in the giving, no less than in the taking, one finds renewal and strength. Fellowship is an expression of both love and humility. It springs from a desire to bring benefit to others coupled with a sense of personal weakness and need. It has a double motive: the wish to help and the wish to be helped, the wish to edify and the wish to be edified. It is thus a corporate seeking by Christian people to know God better through sharing with each other what individually they have learned already. We seek to do others good, and we seek that others will do us good.”

- J.I. Packer

- b. If your group needs some help in figuring out what to share, here are two areas that you can highlight in asking for their prayer requests -
 - i. Praise Reports. Begin by having someone talk about something specific and positive that God did in their life this week. This not only instills the discipline of gratitude but allows members to keep track of each other’s personal histories.
 - ii. Areas of Struggle. To go deeper, the leader can then ask the group: “What adversity or difficulties did you face this past week?” Hearing these reports serves as good segues to the prayer time. It is helpful to have someone keep a written record of what is talked about in the sharing time so that months later the group can look back on the record of how God worked in their lives. It is also vital that information shared in a group be kept confidential, so as not to violate the trust of the group members.

D. **Prayer** - As we bring one another’s needs before God in prayer, we are drawn closer to the God who is eager to listen and answer our prayers. In addition, we are drawn closer to one another as we internalize one another’s needs as our own. Here are some tips as you consider how to model your group’s prayer time -

- a. Be bold and specific in prayer
 - i. I’ve met many leaders who are weary of lifting up “earthly concerns” before the Lord, and encourage their members to prioritize “spiritual”

prayers over “worldly” ones. That’s a big mistake! We are instructed by Jesus to pray for “our daily bread” (Matt 6:11).

- ii. John Newton wrote, “Thou art coming to a King, large petitions with thee bring, for His grace and power are such none can ever ask too much.” If God who is Father is also King, we can come to him with bold prayers for one another. Exhibit the boldness and audacity that befits our identity as children of the living God in your prayers, and others will follow!

b. Pray Kingdom-Centered Prayers

- i. For God’s Glory - Even as we ask bold and specific prayers that pertain to our lives, we know that all of our felt needs and longings ultimately point to our longing to be satisfied in God glorified (see Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 1). To that end, model the kind of prayer that seeks God’s glory, if not *in addition to* our prayer requests, but *through* them. When praying for someone’s physical healing, try praying something like, “we pray for his/her healing, that he/she will experience the healing power of a God who holds all of our bodies together, that He will receive honor and praise for His power and goodness.”

- ii. For Changed Hearts - Even as we pray for the external circumstances that shape our lives, we want to pay attention to the inside-out dynamic of life change brought about by the gospel. Instead of simply praying for one’s promotion, try praying something like, “we pray for his/her promotion, and as we do so, we pray that God will keep them secure in His love, that out of the riches of His grace, and the confidence and freedom that flows out of it, that they will use their elevated platform to serve others in their company.”

- c. You may decide, depending on the demographic of your group, to have each member pray out loud, break out in groups, or pray in silence and have the leader close in prayer. While we encourage you to be sensitive to the comfort level of each member in the group, we also encourage you to foster an environment in which every member is getting a chance to pray, whether it’s out loud or in silence.

E. Service - One of the most practical ways of learning to draw closer to Christ and to one another is by engaging in loving acts of service. This is one of the most neglected, yet crucial aspects of our life together as a Christ-centered community. We encourage you to consider serving quarterly with your group.

- a. For opportunities to serve, please visit our [website](#) for more information.