



# COMMUNITY GROUPS

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## INTRODUCTION AND MISSION

The mission of Ridgedale Baptist Church is for all of our members to Encounter Christ through personal and corporate worship, to Equip Disciples through community groups, and to Engage the Nations through mission and service. We believe that the church is not a place that you go but a body to which you belong (1 Cor. 12:12-14; Eph. 4:1-16). God has called pastors and teachers to lead the church to make disciples by equipping each member of the body to do the work of ministry (Eph. 4:12). As active members of the body, it is our responsibility to do the work of ministry by carrying out the Great Commission from Jesus (Matthew 28:18-20), to make disciples of all nations by sharing the Gospel and teaching them to obey everything that Jesus taught. The church is not only a body on Sunday, but is a living body whose identity is to be on mission every day of the week.

In the Gospels, Jesus has three different groups of various sizes that he teaches throughout his earthly ministry: the large crowd (Sermon on the Mount, Feeding of the 5000), the community group (the 12 Disciples), and the smaller inner circle of disciples (Peter, James and John). At Ridgedale, we follow this model of discipleship that Jesus lived out through:

- **CORPORATE WORSHIP:** gathering the crowd together on Sunday to hear the Word expounded faithfully.
- **COMMUNITY GROUPS:** small same gender or co-ed group Bible studies in which to live and grow in faith and fellowship together.
- **DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS:** also known as D-Groups, which are the inner circle of discipleship, consisting of 3-5 people of the same gender meeting weekly to practice the spiritual disciplines together.

The focus of this booklet is to equip leaders to effectively start and sustain Community Groups that grow and eventually start new Community Groups to reach more people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

# **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

To begin our discussion of Community Groups together, it seems prudent to cover a few frequently asked questions about Community Groups. In the next section, we will speak to the specific details of starting a Community Group and your first meeting together.

## **WHAT ARE COMMUNITY GROUPS?**

At Ridgedale, we offer a variety of Community Group settings:

- I. Sunday School Classes
- II. Small Group Bible Studies
- III. Home Groups

### **SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES**

The first type of Community Group that we offer at Ridgedale is our traditional Sunday School classes. Each Sunday morning, from 9:15-10:15 AM, these classes meet around the Ridgedale campus. Most classes are co-ed and age-segmented, although certain classes are same gender and open to a variety of age groups. A current listing of Sunday School classes can be found on the Ridgedale website and is also available at the front desk in the Welcome Center.

### **SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDIES**

The second variety of Community Group settings is our Small Group Bible studies. These groups meet throughout the week at various times and places. Several Small Group Bible studies meet on Wednesday nights on the Ridgedale campus from 6:00-7:30 PM. Wednesday night groups coincide with our children's and youth group Bible studies and are a convenient option for families.

### **HOME GROUPS**

The last category of Community Groups that we offer at Ridgedale is the Home Group. Home Groups take place in the homes of church members across the Greater

Chattanooga area at various days and times. Home Groups are co-ed and open to all ages. Home Groups share a meal together and then study the Bible together.

## **WHO CAN BE IN COMMUNITY GROUPS?**

As we work to Equip Disciples at Ridgedale, it is our expectation that all members will participate in community groups. However, we also welcome anyone who wants to follow the Great Commission, to enjoy fellowship, and grow in their faith with other members of the body to also join a Community Group. Lost family members, friends, and co-workers may not feel comfortable attending a corporate worship service, but they may very well accept an invitation to come to your home group to share a meal and discuss the Bible. Our lost neighbors may accept an invitation to come to a classroom setting or a coffee shop to learn about Jesus in a safer, relaxed environment, where they can ask questions and know that they are loved. We must always remember the Great Commission in everything that we do at Ridgedale to ensure that we are living on mission to Equip Disciples and Engage the Nations to Encounter Christ. Ideally, Community Group members will live in close proximity to one another, in the same neighborhood or at least the same part of the Chattanooga area, which will allow for regular interactions inside and outside of the Community Group.

## **WHY COMMUNITY GROUPS?**

In Acts 2, Luke tells us that the early church was committed to the apostles' teaching, the breaking of bread, and to prayer (Acts 2:42). Each week in our Sunday corporate worship gatherings, our pastors share and exposit the Word of God and prayer is offered throughout the worship service for God to work in and through the church. However, other aspects of the early church such as fellowship, giving possessions away to those in need, and sharing a meal in the home are best fleshed out in community groups (Acts 2:42-47). Community Groups effectively take the larger church crowd and make the body smaller and accessible, from hundreds of people to 10-20 people living in community together. Although it is essentially impossible to fellowship, to live in community with the entire body of Ridgedale Baptist Church throughout the week, members of Community Groups will study, pray, eat, and live in Gospel Community with the other people in their group.

## **WHAT WILL WE STUDY IN COMMUNITY GROUPS?**

Each week, Community Group leaders will be provided with a brief outline of the previous Sunday's sermon, containing the main points of the sermon and questions to spark discussion. Community Groups should read the biblical text from the sermon together and review the main points of the sermon before turning to discussion questions. Discussion questions will focus on how to apply the message of and respond to the sermon. The Bible teaches us about how God has acted to save his people throughout history and then presents us with how we are then to live in light of the salvation he has provided. Therefore, discipleship is not merely a matter of knowing more about the Bible, but rather about life change in applying the wisdom of the Bible to our everyday lives. To not apply what we have learned from the sermon in our daily lives is to miss the point.

## **WHY SERMON-BASED DISCUSSION?**

In today's world, we are inundated with information, with various media vying for our attention. What we need now is not more information but rather to apply the knowledge that we have learned. Rather than introducing another topic, another book of the Bible, another message, we believe that it is of greater benefit to the people of Ridgedale to meditate deeply upon the message that God has given to the pastor each week by discussing the sermon in greater detail and trying to apply what we have learned to our daily lives. Just as a text without a context is a pretext, so too knowledge without application serves little purpose.

## **WHAT ELSE WILL WE DO IN COMMUNITY GROUPS?**

Along with the regular group meetings to share a meal, pray, and study the Word together, we also think it is important for group members to spend time doing other activities together. We encourage our groups to party and serve quarterly. So for one group meeting a quarter, you just share a meal, play games, etc. These party dates are great times to invite prospective group members, family, friends, neighbors, to come see what your group is all about. For one group meeting quarter (and obviously as often as you desire to do so), we would love for our groups to find a way to serve and be on mission in their communities. More details can be found on p. 9.

## WHEN SHOULD WE START A NEW COMMUNITY GROUP?

As was mentioned above, part of the mission of Community Groups at Ridgedale is to see new Community Groups started or planted out of existing groups. There is no exact timeline or particular number of members that suggest it is time to start a new group. However, when a group gets to a size in which there is not time for each member to participate in the discussion in some way, if the group becomes so large that the leaders are having difficulty keeping up with the members' names, or even something as practical as the group has outgrown the space that it currently meets in, it is likely time to reproduce and start a new group. Group members need to understand this from the beginning. To reproduce, to replicate and start a new group, is to reach more people in discipleship and Gospel community. Just because a new group is birthed from a group that has grown does not mean that those members can no longer hang out or be friends. It simply means that for an hour or two a week that they will share a meal, pray, and study the Bible with a slightly different group.

## YOUR FIRST MEETING

At your first Community Group meeting with a new group, it is vital to do two pivotal things: get to know each other and discuss and establish expectations for the group. Both of these work best while sharing a meal if possible.

## GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER

In working to establish authentic Gospel Community with the other people in your Community Group, it is important to lay a solid foundation for building relationships at the first meeting. You will be living life with the other members of this group over the next months or years, and on into eternity. It will be an incredible investment in the life of your group to get to know each other individually and corporately. Keep in mind that the goal is to live life together. Let the conversation flow as naturally as possible. You will likely know (or will soon discover) the dynamics of your group and what will work in your group. Especially at your first meeting, let people sit comfortably as they normally would at any other dinner party. When the meal is done, people will naturally move away from the dinner table to other seating. As Brad House discusses in his book *Community*, try to avoid the "circle of awkwardness." Try to have a setting conducive to group conversation, but it is not necessary to set up furniture any differently than you normally would in your home, with the exception of extra seating for the additional guests. Remember,

discipleship and community are not programs but the lifestyle and mission of the body of Christ.

The most natural conversations tend to take place around a meal. Standard questions about occupation, children, and hobbies are definitely worthwhile during this time, but try to move past this level. You will likely discuss these items with anyone that you have a conversation with. In this first meeting, try to have each person share at least one thing about this spiritual life. You could ask for each person to share a brief testimony of how they came to know Jesus, of what they have been learning in their own private devotional time, or what they are hoping to learn or gain from the time in the Community Group. It is worth noting here that you may already have an established relationship with one or more of the other group members. Do your best to move out of your comfort zone to get to know the other group members that you do not know well during this first meeting.

## **GROUP EXPECTATIONS**

As was mentioned above, it is pivotal to establish expectations for the group. Asking each person what they hope to learn or gain from the time in the Community Group is a great way to have each person invest in the vision of the group and will show each person that you care about hearing their ideas.

## **SCHEDULE & LOGISTICS**

One of the first expectations that needs to be discussed is when and where you will meet each week. We believe it is crucial to establish a regular rhythm of meeting together, so choosing a day of the week and time that will work for the majority of the group the majority of the time is important during this first meeting. Some groups like to meet at the same location each week. For some, rotating meetings to different members' houses every week or every few weeks helps to share the responsibility of hosting the group. (Note: the leader of the group does not have to host the group and vice versa) Remember to keep parking needs in mind, particularly if you are meeting in a neighborhood. Regardless of what you choose to do, be sure to communicate regularly and clearly with your group members, whether that is through text, email, or social media.

## **MEALS**

Another expectation that needs to be discussed is how you will handle preparing the meal each week. Again, communication is key. Some hosts also provide the meal each week. Some groups always do potluck settings where each member brings part of the meal.

Regardless of what you choose, breaking bread together is very helpful in facilitating fellowship and establishing community.

## **CHILDCARE**

For many of your Community Group members, establishing a great game plan for childcare will be an integral part of their regular and continued participation in the group. Sunday School classes and Wednesday Night Small Groups that meet at Ridgedale will have childcare available through the children's and youth ministries. However, off-campus Community Groups will need to discuss how childcare will be provided at your first group meeting. Some groups may choose to all chip in a few dollars to hire a babysitter. In some groups, an older teenage sibling may be more than capable of watching the younger kids. Other groups may have the adults each take a turn on a rotation watching the children. There is no one correct answer to providing childcare for your Community Group, but it is important to discover what works best for your individual group.

Children of all ages should join their parents in sharing the meal together. When the meal is done and it is time to begin the Bible study and discussion time, younger children should move to another section of the house, if possible, to help cut down on the noise. Putting on a movie is a great way to maintain quiet in the house while giving the kids something to enjoy. Older children, particularly high school students, are encouraged to participate in the Bible study with the adults, assuming that they are not on babysitting duty.

## **SERVICE & MISSION**

As we believe that these groups are to be missional entities in their communities, it is important to discuss ways in which your group can reach your neighborhood with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Also, as we read in Acts 2, you should discuss ways in which you can meet needs and serve your community. This may be participation in a neighborhood clean up or a project through your HOA. You could provide meals for those in need, or help an elderly couple with some chores or projects around their house. Many other service and mission opportunities are available through Ridgedale that groups can participate in as well.

## **REGULAR PARTICIPATION**

The last item that needs to be discussed is participation in the group. Community Groups are open groups, in the sense that new members should be encouraged and invited to be a part. However, group members need to understand that they are committing to live life together, to fellowship regularly, and to grow in faith and unity in the body of Christ. It is

our expectation that all members of Ridgedale Baptist Church will be members of a Community Group. However, we understand that at different times and different seasons, it may be difficult for people to participate. They may need to be a part of a different Community Group or join the Community Group later. Barring unforeseen circumstances of life that happen to all of us, Community Group members are committing to meet regularly together.

## **GROUP MULTIPLICATION**

As referenced above, all Community Groups should operate with the understanding and expectation that groups will grow until new groups need to be started out of the original group. Once again, there is not a particular number or a certain moment in the timeline when new groups should be formed out of existing groups, but all members need to know and help move the group towards growth and multiplication. Please see pp. 6-7 for further discussion of group multiplication.

## **LEADER GUIDELINES**

The main focus of this booklet is to equip Community Group leaders to start, lead, grow, and eventually reproduce Community Groups. Below you will find some guidelines for leading your group well.

## **FACILITATING DISCUSSION**

The primary role of the Community Group leader is that of facilitator. As a facilitator of the sermon-based study, the leader's goal is to have the other group members speak more than the leader does. Your role is to guide the discussion into further knowledge and application of God's Word, not to provide all of the answers yourself. Encourage and affirm group members when they answer the questions. Strive for all members to speak in some way during each meeting if possible, and, particularly as you get to know each other better, push one another to move past surface level answers into deeper meanings and application in your lives. More details about the sermon-based study can be found on p. 6.

## **PRAYING TOGETHER**

A key component of the Community Group meeting is praying together. As the leader, your transparency level will often dictate what the other group members are willing to share. We should absolutely pray for those in need of healing from the Great Physician,

however, we should also be willing to ask for prayer for other needs, including spiritual struggles. The more open you are as the leader of the group, the more your group members will open up to you and others. For the first meeting, and possibly for the first several meetings, be prepared to lead the prayer yourself. As the group gets to know each other better, you will likely identify others who will be more than willing to lead the group's prayer session. Remember to pray in everyday language. Be authentic. Keep in mind that God knows what we need before we ask (Matt. 6:8) and that the Father loves to give good gifts to his children (Matt. 7:7-11).

## **WORSHIP TOGETHER ON SUNDAY MORNING**

Encourage your group members to worship together on Sunday morning. It is of course an expectation that all church members will be in attendance at Sunday worship. However, try to have your Community Group to sit together and worship together during the corporate gathering. It is a special blessing to not only live life together but to also praise God together in worship!

## **LIVE TOGETHER OUTSIDE OF THE GROUP MEETING**

The longer the group meets together, the more that members will desire to get together outside of the group meeting time. This is the way it should be! As the group leader, actively pursue ways to get to know group members outside of the group meeting. Once again, Brad House in *Community* suggests doing something as simple as having a standing reservation at a favorite restaurant one evening a week. Discover the hobbies and interests of the other members, and you will likely find common ground in playing sports, a favorite sports team, TV, movies, books, or other interests. Always be on the look out for common ground to live life together with your Community Group. Again, as the leader, the other members will look to you as the model of how to do this. Don't think about the Community Group as a once a week event but as a group to live life with!

# DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY

ENCOUNTER CHRIST THROUGH  
PERSONAL AND CORPORATE  
WORSHIP.

EQUIP DISCIPLES THROUGH  
COMMUNITY GROUPS.

ENGAGE THE NATIONS  
THROUGH MISSION AND  
SERVICE.