



A THEOLOGY OF COMMUNITY

WE BELIEVE PEOPLE ARE CREATED FOR COMMUNITY.

There is a groove in the heart of every human for authentic relationships. We have an intrinsic desire to be part of, and belong to, something; however, the suburban world in which most Americans live is a great obstacle to this God-given desire. Consider these observations: George Gallup, Jr. concluded from his studies and polls that Americans are among the loneliest people in the world. That is amazing considering the ease of transportation, the availability of “connecting” technology, and the massive amount of people on the planet. Gallup also offered the following insight into isolation:

“We are physically detached from each other. We change places of residence frequently. One survey revealed that seven in ten do not know their neighbors. As many as one-third of Americans admit to frequent periods of loneliness...”

We believe Scripture has the answer for our communal thirst.

WE ARE CREATED FOR COMMUNITY WITH GOD.

The Bible teaches that people are created for community, deep relationships with other people. Several Biblical texts illustrate this point. Ecclesiastes 3:11 shows how God put eternity into the hearts of men and women. We were created with a deep groove that only community with God can fill. When Jesus was talking with the woman at the well, He offered water that would quench her thirst. Only God can quench the communal thirst of the human heart.

WE ARE CREATED FOR COMMUNITY WITH PEOPLE.

The stream of community broadens to the body of Christ. After God created man, He makes an important statement in Genesis 2:18, *“it is not good for man to be alone.”* (Notice, this was before sin entered the picture.) There is also a groove cast into the heart of men and women for earthly companionship. As practical evidence of this fact, consider the emergence (or explosion) of coffee shops and social-networking sites. One of the primary images used for the New Testament church is the body, with each part of the body being interdependent and connected to the other. An essential truth: People need to be involved in meaningful (and constant) community or they will continue on indefinitely in a state of intense loneliness.

We believe the church body provides the solution to our communal thirst for God and authentic relationships with others.

Proper community ultimately reflects the image of God. Therefore, in an effort to promote Biblical community, we deeply and passionately encourage our members and attenders to be involved in the lives of others. Our hope for community is more than you getting to know other people. Rather, our hope is for you to engage in the battle for deep and lasting relationships within our church body. We find several characteristics of Biblical community:

- 1. SACRIFICIAL LOVE** – Sacrificial love is a necessary component of Biblical community. In 1 John 3:16-18, John commands us to love not in word or talk but in deed and in truth. Before this command, John shows us the purest example of love, Christ laying down His life for us. Biblical

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community requires this sort of sacrificial love. It requires us placing the needs of others above our own.

2. **CONSISTENCY** – In Acts 2, the Spirit of God fell upon the people causing revival to break out. By the conclusion of chapter 2, the church is gathered and a descriptive picture of Biblical community emerges. One element clearly observed in the early church was their consistent gatherings, both corporately and in smaller groups, to encourage and pray for one another. Biblical community only exists when people are regularly meeting together.
3. **WORSHIP** – Another element clearly observed in the book of Acts is authentic worship. They worshiped in a variety of ways that included the Lord's Supper, singing, fellowship, and reading the Word. They were "praising God and having favor with all the people." We also want to create a culture of community that worships the Lord through the Lord's Supper, singing, fellowship, and reading the Scriptures.
4. **AUTHENTICITY** – The last principle describing Biblical community is probably the most difficult. Authenticity is allowing people to know the real you. Authenticity means people know you "behind the scenes." Biblical community only surfaces where authenticity develops within a group of people. Therefore, we want to create environments where people are comfortable confessing their sins to one another and praying for each other (James 5:16), where we can be challenged to put sin to death and live surrendered to Jesus.

HEMGRUP SUCCESS

SUCCESS FOR HEMGRUPS

Corporate Connection Goal: 90% of our members involved in Home Groups.

**This is not the goal of small groups, simply the goal of connecting people into small groups.*

Individual Group Goals:

TRUTH:

- Are the people in small groups growing to love truth?
- Is the truth of Scripture evident in the lives of people?
- Do people know truth/Scriptures?

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY:

- Are habits being developed that position you in the stream of God's grace?
- Are prayer, Bible Study, Scripture memory, etc, occurring in meaningful ways?

COMMUNITY:

- Are people being engaged with: encouragement, ministry, accountability, authentic relationships?

SERVICE:

- Are we finding ways to selflessly give our lives away to others in our groups?
- Are the people in our home group being ministered to?
- Are we consistently praying for each other through the week (prayer partners)?
- How well are people taken care of when burdens, sickness, etc occur?

MISSIONAL LIVING:

- Is our group outward focused?
- Does our group consistently pray for those outside of God?
- Does our group consistently include those outside of a relationship with God?
- Do each of us know our neighbors?
- Do we know the names of each other's neighbors?
- How is our small group engaging the nations (unreached people, people in need, etc)?
- What is our plan for multiplication?

HOMEGROUP SPECIFICS

RESPONSIBILITIES:

- RESPONSIBILITY 01: lead/facilitate the discussion
- RESPONSIBILITY 02: childcare
- RESPONSIBILITY 03: host (direct the food)
- RESPONSIBILITY 04: ice breaker/worship

4 ESSENTIALS OF A HOMEGROUP:

- A: rotate homes
- B: rotate responsibilities
- C: consistently separate men and women
- D: come ready to play, engage, and to give

A TYPICAL HOME GROUP MEETING:

- 5:00 – 5:45 share a meal together
- 5:45 – 5:50 announcements/vision oriented issues
- 5:50 – 6:30 ice breaker or testimony/worship/pray and minister
- 6:30 – 6:50 kids go out for lesson and play :: adults open the Bible and discuss
- 6:50 – 7:00 splitting men and women

HOME GROUP MULTIPLICATION

Growing the kingdom is always a painful process, which is why most churches stop at some point along the way. This is especially true for Home Groups. Consider our hope for a good home group. People are being ministered to. Couples have grown to love each other, with authentic and deep relationships built. Our hope is that it is a sweet thing for every person involved.

QUESTION: *why would they want to fracture that?*

If the expectation is not driven in, discussed, dreamed for, and communicated, groups will never multiply and the Kingdom will not grow. Multiplying groups means new people get to step into new rolls. Multiplying groups means the Kingdom continues to expand. Multiplying groups means letting go of great relationships for the sake of new relations. Multiplying groups means more neighborhoods are being reached with and influenced by the gospel. Multiplying groups is essential to the strategy of the church.

HOMEGROUP SPECIFICS

YEARLY CALENDAR FOR SMALL GROUPS

The year will be divided into 6 sections of 6-8 weeks. Within each section we want to include:

- A: 4-5 normal meetings
- B: 1 service project
- C: 1 missional project
- D: 1 other

SESSION 1: September 13 - October 25

SESSION 2: November 1 - December 13

SESSION 3: January 3 - February 14

SESSION 4: February 21 - April 4

SESSION 5: April 11 - March 23

SESSION 6: June 6 - July 25

SESSION 1:

- 01: september 13 - explanation
- 02: september 20 - homegroup 1
- 03: september 27 - homegroup 2
- 04: october 04 - homegroup 3
- 05: october 11 - homegroup 4
- 06: october 18 - homegroup 5
- 07: october 25 - homegroup 6

SESSION 2:

- 01: november 1 - homegroup 1
- 02: november 8 - homegroup 2
- 03: november 15 - homegroup 3
- 04: thanksgiving - homegroup 4
- 05: november 29 - homegroup 5
- 06: december 6 - homegroup 6
- 07: decebmer 13 - homegroup 7

Off for the Holidays

SESSION 3: starts the week of January 10.

HOMEGROUP SPECIFICS

SPECIFIC ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS:

1. WHAT ABOUT CHILDCARE?

2. WHAT IS THE WORSHIP PART OF HOMEGROUPS AND WHY DO WE DO IT?

3. WHAT IS THE PRAYER PART OF HOMEGROUPS AND WHY DO WE DO IT?

4. WHAT WILL WE BE DOING FOR A BIBLE STUDY AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

- website (homegroup - resources - Bible study)
- the Fall semester (James)
- the four (primary) questions:
 - 1) What pops out as you read the passage?
 - 2) What does the passage teach about God?
 - 3) What is the meaning of the passage?
 - 4) How do you apply the truth of the passage?
- how to make our Bible Study time most effective...everyone participating/contributing.

5. WHAT DOES THE TIME IN GENDER SPECIFIC GROUPS LOOK LIKE AT THE END OF THE NIGHT AND WHY DO IT?

- we want the groups to move us toward holiness and one of the best ways for that to happen is through Biblical accountability.
- typical set of questions

6. CAN WE INVITE FRIENDS TO OUR HOME GROUP?

- definitely, Home Groups are a great way to expose others to the Stonegate Family.

7. WHAT WILL MAKE OUR HOME GROUP MOST EFFECTIVE?

- You coming prepared to share prayer requests and your thoughts on the passage.