

From Christian Clique to Covenant Community

In Acts 1-4, we see a “witnessing community.” Disciples are filled with Holy Spirit and bearing witness to the resurrected Jesus; together living in solitude, because He is Lord, Savior, Redeemer and King. Their devotion along with miracles and wonders are signs that they had been with Jesus.

The practices that marked this community were:

- **Devotion to Apostle’s Teachings**
- **Daily prayer & engagement with scripture**
- **Fellowship with other believers**
- **Shared meals**
- **Generosity: Selling property and sharing financial resources with one another**
- **Worship: song, praise, personal worship,**

As a result of this faithful obedience:

- **All were filled with Holy Spirit**
- **There were signs and wonders (Tongues, Healing, Freedom from Demons, etc.)**
- **They preached with clarity, boldness, and defended the faith with wisdom**
- **Many were added to their number those who were being saved.**

How do we move from inward facing small groups that often form around personal preference and self-improvement to covenant communities that exist to bear witness to the Risen Jesus and invite others to live in the light of the resurrection?



1. Evaluate Your Small Group

Covenant groups focus on following Jesus and living out the mission of the church in Acts 1-4 and the ministry of reconciliation given to us in 2 Corinthians 5. These are explicitly Christian Groups so Covenant Group Leaders should believe in a statement of faith like InterVarsity's. Group members could be committed Christians or those exploring their faith.

If you are part of a church bible study, campus ministry, or other Christian fellowship, reflect and evaluate if your gathering exists for the comfortable growth of its members OR for bearing authoritative witness of the Kingdom of God. The disciples came from diverse backgrounds and perspectives and traditionally segregated groups in society. Our small groups should mirror that diversity. Here are some questions you might want to ask:

- **What is the vision of your group for the community in which you live?**
- **What are the spiritual disciplines you practice as a community that spur your spiritual growth?**
- **When was the last time your group attended a community board meeting, protested, lamented, or discussed the marginalized groups in our church and in our culture – women, minorities, the LGBTQIA+ community, immigrants, unemployed, formerly incarcerated etc.?**
- **When was the last time someone new visited that was of a different faith background, class, race, gender or age?**
- **When was the last time testimonies were shared about someone coming to faith in Christ or being healed spiritually or physically?**

If you don't have strong answers for the above questions, you should invite the core members of your group to consider doing a manuscript bible study on Acts 1-4 asking three questions:

- **What does this passage say about God?**
- **What does this passage say about us?**
- **What will I/we do to respond in the next week in light of what I/we learned about God?**

If you are not part of a Christian community, then this is an opportunity for you to build relationships and establish the foundation for continued spiritual growth. OR if your church community is not an outward facing, spirit-led movement, then this may be an opportunity to find like-minded believers who you could grow alongside.



2. How to Form a Covenant Group

Forming a Covenant Group starts off with studying scripture and responding actively to God's call for all of us to go on mission with Him. This mission transforms bible studies from affinity groups to a witnessing community.

Some places where you could find potential members are:

- **Church**
- **Friends**
- **Neighbors**
- **Work**
- **Meet-up groups**
- **Online forums & Facebook groups**
- **InterVarsity and other ministry alumni**
- **Find connectors and networkers and ask them if they know folks who might be willing to join**

Once you have a DIVERSE, HUMBLE & HUNGRY group of people (OR THEY WANT TO BE!) host a gathering and let them know you'd like to explore starting a Covenant Group.

- **Gather contact information and reach out via email and phone to invite potential members to your home OR a warm place to host a "Vision Meeting"**
 - **Be clear about your intentions in your invitations via email, phone or in person.**
 - **Have some great food!**
 - **Send out an agenda with questions they should be prepared to answer for discussion.**
 - **What is a passage of scripture that has changed the way you live your life?**
 - **What lifestyle change would you like to make in response to what you're learning from Jesus?**
 - **What type of commitments have you already made?**
 - **What kind of diversity would make your group desirable to them? (class, gender, race, politics etc.)**
 - **Plan the meeting to be 2 hours (leave room for the Holy Spirit)**
 - **The goal of the first meeting is to gauge interest in creating a covenant community. At the end of the meeting, interested people should commit to meeting again and then you draft your covenant!**



3. Suggestions on How to Run a Covenant Group

These are questions and suggestions on how to run a Covenant Group. These are SUGGESTIONS, as each group will likely respond to God in ways that are similar but not necessarily the same.

- **How many people are in your group?**
 - **We recommend 4-8 people. In groups larger than this, it can be difficult for every person to feel heard and seen.**

- **When should my group multiply?**
 - **When your group grows to more than 10 people, we think it's time for your group to multiply. Consult our group multiplication resources* on how to commission your leaders to begin a new witnessing community.**
 - **Resources*: We hope to develop a truly useful ministry exchange to deepen personal and corporate discipleship and broaden our reach.**

- **Time Commitment**
 - **For students and those in school, we suggest at least 1-year commitment.**
 - **For other adults, we suggest at least 2 years.**

- **How often will you gather?**
 - **We suggest gathering once a week. Here are some ideas for your gatherings:**
 - **Social Gathering & Delight**
 - **Discipleship & Action**
 - **Bible Study & Prayer**
 - **Debriefing, Planning, & Reflection**

- **How long should the meetings be?**
 - **We suggest aiming for no more than 2 hours.**

- **Who is responsible for the content & planning?**
 - **We recommend that each group member commits to serve in each role as leader, host, or planner at least once per quarter. This builds ownership and allows everyone to contribute and/or grow.**
 - **Ex. David hosts the social gathering and Jackie plans her favorite games and activities to share how she delights. Jim is in charge of food and**



beverages. The next gathering, Jackie hosts and Megan is in charge of the discipleship and discussion. David provides the beverages and food.

- **How could you handle conflict?**

- We recommend having some guidelines for how you will handle interpersonal conflict and disagreements. The following are great books and resources to help with that.
 - **Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Tools:**
 1. [Community Temperature Reading](#)
 2. [Ladder of Integrity and Demonstration](#)
 3. [Incarnational Listening](#)
 4. [Clean Fighting](#)
 - [Difficult Conversations by Stone and Patton](#)
 - [Crucial Conversations by Patterson and Grenny](#)

- **What is your typical agenda?**

Here are some examples of the types of gatherings you could have:

- **Social Gathering & Delight**
 - Play
 - Birthday Parties & Holiday Celebrations
 - Share a hobby or favorite activity
- **Bible Study & Prayer**
 - Worship
 - Manuscript Study
 - Testimonies and intercession
- **Discipleship & Action (Encounters with God in scripture and then Movement in Light of God's Sovereignty & Implementation of Shared Ideas)**
 - Direct Action (nonviolent protest, peaceful demonstration, civil disobedience)
 - Inductive, Manuscript, and other methods of Bible Study
 - Lament and Confession
- **Debriefing, Planning, & Reflection (monthly)**
 - Assignments of roles for next 3 months worth of meetings.
 - Sharing using Community Temperature Reading or other rubrics for collecting contributions from group members.
- Meeting with other Covenant Groups and Communities to share and learn from them.

- **What are your shared rhythms of life?**



- **Individual and Communal Disciplines** are responses to the group members' scripture study, prayer, and unique giftedness in what is learned and taught.
- **Group members commit to holding one another accountable and being held accountable to the lifestyle changes that members have committed to.**

4. Questions & Suggestions for How to Maintain A Healthy Covenant Group

- **What could communication look like between group meetings?**
 - **Group members can decide on conference calls, facebook groups, Voxer/GroupMe chats, twitter lists, and other modes of connecting throughout the week.**
 - **Determine other points of contact like one-on-one hangouts, coffee dates, workouts together etc.**
- **What if someone wants to leave?**
 - **No one is perfect and conflict is certain to arise when different kinds of people get together. Each Covenant Group should commit to some type of format for conflict resolution so that you are able to bless someone out of the group or reconcile to remain together. We also suggest a system for grieving the loss of a member and processing his or her exit.**
 - **We recommend seeing life transitions as opportunities to adapt rather than reasons to leave. Graduation, summer break, marriage and children shouldn't be disqualifiers for community but worked on to keep committed members involved.**
- **Here are some components that could help create a healthy culture:**
 - **Create a climate of vulnerability**
 - **Spend informal times together as well**
 - **One-to-One mentoring and discipleship**
 - **More mature believers mentor younger people in the faith.**
 - **Eat! Meals make every meeting better!**
 - **Don't skimp on play and celebration!**
 - **Birthdays, anniversaries, holidays**
 - **Go on retreats or vacations together**
 - **Acknowledge news and current events that may be disruptive to the group.**
 - **There are lament resources available at nycurbanproject.com/resources.**
 - **This group is about practice, not achievement. Sanctification is a process, not a goal.**
- **Here are possible ways that you can debrief your group:**
 - **We value debriefing each meeting because it allows us to see where we are thriving and where we can grow. Our experiences in leadership often give us information and puzzle pieces; debrief is where we construct the puzzle to see what we have to learn.**



- **Three possible lenses for debrief:**
 1. **Vision – How did our gathering support or help us live out the vision of our community?**
 2. **Goals – Did we meet our goals? We set a goal for 4-6 people to come, did 4-6 people come? Why or why not? We hope to attend 3 protests in the next 6 months, how many did we attend?**
 3. **SWOT – SWOT Analysis stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. We recommend filling out this diagram and allowing what you learn from the experience to help plan your next gathering.**
 - a. **What was strong in the gathering? Planning? Conversation? Response? What was weak?**
 - b. **What are opportunities for next time?**
 - c. **What are threats to our goals and vision?**

5. How to Grow/Multiply Your Group

The disciples “added to their numbers daily those that were being saved”. How does your group grow?

Here are some ideas:

- **Invited people who might be interested in exploring faith or joining a Covenant Community to meet your group.**
- **During seasons of transition like marriage, children, graduation, etc., this might be an opportunity to re-evaluate membership and set new expectations.**
- **Have each person write out his/her testimony and commit to sharing it with at least 1 person a week. Ask your group to pray for these people by name that they may come to a relationship with Jesus.**
- **Choose the number of people you want and stick to it! Remember, the reason you joined a Covenant Community was to see more people come to know Jesus, not a social club**
- **If your group has grown, commit to gathering all groups together periodically.**

6. Send Us Your Covenant!

This Covenant Guide is a specific, flexible set of steps that will help you develop an outward facing group whose devotion becomes a sign for the Kingdom of God. Email nycurbanproject@gmail.com with any questions, comments and a copy of your Covenant! We would love to hear from you.



[Here is a sample format you can use!](#)