

[CITY GROUPS X]

BASIC TRAINING

Who am I? Why am I here?

Have you ever struggled with questions like these? Have you ever wondered what the point is? Is life only about sleeping, eating, and working? Or is there more? Most people struggle with these questions throughout life, and many never find the answer. In fact, a lot of the frustrations and problems we encounter in life can be boiled down to the fact that we have no confidence in the answers to these questions.

But God, the Creator of everything, has given very specific, clear purpose to everything he created. Scripture tells us that we were created "in the image of God." This means that we share many of the attributes and characteristics of God himself! Call it a "divine thumbprint," an echo of the Creator on the creation. And because God has been in constant, eternal community (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), much of our identity and purpose is fulfilled in the context of community.

If you've been around City Church for much time at all, you've probably noticed that we value community...a lot. We talk about it often, and God continues to show us the blessings of being actively engaged in gospel-driven, Jesus-pursuing community.

For us, the primary vehicle of this community is our City Groups. This booklet will walk through our core City Group trainings, and can serve as useful reference material and reminder as we live out our callings in Christ-centered communities.

At City Church, our hope is to see Christ-centered communities cultivating compassion for the city. This biblical principle can be found in the book of Jeremiah. Because of their sin, Israel had been taken captive by the nation of Babylon. While many Israelites assumed God would quickly deliver them from their bondage, the Lord sent a message to the people through the prophet Jeremiah:

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jer 29:5-7)

God says to build homes, and build up the city. Seek the city's good! God had very specific intentions for that city, and we believe he has very specific intentions for our cities as well.

We know from scripture that God is consumed with making his name known to all peoples of the earth. We'll go much more in depth with this theme later, but for now, here's a sampling of verses illustrating this extremely central theme of scripture:

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.
And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Gen 1:27-28)*

*"Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!" (Ps 46:10)*

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt 28:19-20)

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb (Rev 7:9)

God desires that everyone know him, and he's chosen to use his people to be the primary means by which others come to know him. Mission isn't a part of what the church is called to do; it's the very reason why it exists! Just as Jesus came in to the world to save sinners, we -his followers- are called to be in the world and make him known. City Groups can help us do that.

What are City Groups?

City Groups are families of people learning to follow Jesus together and helping others to do the same. Like families, they gather together at different times and places throughout the week for many different purposes.

Catch up on life over dinner, study and apply the Bible together in a DNA Group, and learn how to intentionally bring the good news of Jesus into the places you already go and to the people you already know.

City Groups seek to share the good news of Jesus with the world around us by saturating our spaces (school, work, gym, pub, etc) with the light and hope that Jesus has given us. City Groups aren't about adding another thing to your already-busy life; they're about taking the space God has already given you, and using it to show others who he is and what he has done.

Why do City Groups exist?

God never meant for his people to follow him by themselves.

City Groups follow Jesus together, and as we follow Jesus our lives will be transformed. But Jesus didn't come to simply transform us as individuals. Following Jesus draws us into community with others who are also being transformed.

We need one another: this God-designed family-on-mission is the environment where we grow and thrive by pointing one another towards Jesus. As we learn to follow Jesus together, we help one another grow in gospel-driven maturity by fighting sin and reminding each other of the good news of who Jesus is and what he has done.

What do City Groups do?

City groups meet together regularly, possibly in homes, coffee shops, or restaurants. They do things that a family would do: share meals, play games, watch sports, and tell stories. And they invite others to join them!

They throw birthday parties and help provide food for new parents. They serve one another by meeting financial needs, babysitting kids, repainting houses, or fixing flat tires.

They invite their neighbors over for Super Bowl parties and backyard BBQs. They go together to support their kids' baseball teams, and they even sometimes pick up the check of a family eating at the table next to them.

Equipping The Saints For The Work Of Ministry

Time for a short history lesson: Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus became Emperor of Rome in 306AD. Today, he is better-known as Constantine. Constantine may well be one of the most influential men in Christian history - for better or for worse. During his reign, Christianity became a norm of sorts in the Roman Empire, and along with this came the emergence of the paid clergy. It is from this societal shift that we can trace a common misconception in the modern church: ministry is for the professionals.

Though there is nothing inherently wrong with paid clergy, there is something terribly wrong with thinking that paid clergy are the only people who can “do ministry.” In our Judeo-Christian America -especially in the south- that may sound good, but the only problem is that it is completely unbiblical! Here’s what the apostles Peter and Paul have to say:

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (1 PET 2:9)

“I URGE YOU TO WALK IN A MANNER WORTHY OF THE CALLING TO WHICH YOU HAVE BEEN CALLED... GRACE WAS GIVEN TO EACH ONE OF US ACCORDING TO THE MEASURE OF CHRIST'S GIFT...” (Eph 4:1,7)

“...AND HE GAVE THE APOSTLES, THE PROPHETS, THE EVANGELISTS, THE SHEPHERDS AND TEACHERS, TO EQUIP THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF MINISTRY, FOR BUILDING UP THE BODY OF CHRIST.” (Eph 4:11-12)

Paul and Peter seem to be convinced that “ministry” is not restrained to those who are paid for it. We know this because in almost every letter of the New Testament, these men refer to their audiences (followers of Jesus from different religions and cultures) as “saints.” This is the same word used in the phrase above, “to equip the saints for the work of ministry.” Too often we think that “saints” are supposed to be perfect, sinless people. But that’s not how the New Testament talks about saints. Paul called the believers in Corinth saints, right before he reminded them not to sleep with their step-mothers (1 Cor 5:1)! So, Paul says that those people are saints, and he says that saints are to be equipped “for the work of ministry”!

Also, the letters written to “saints” in the New Testament were not written to perfect, sinless individuals. They were written to broken, yet redeemed groups of people in the process of being changed by Jesus.

So, in light of these things, it seems like there are two main qualifications for a person to “do ministry”:

1. You are somewhere in the process (beginning, middle, or end) of being redeemed and restored by Jesus.
2. You are not dead.

If you meet both of those qualifications, congratulations! You’re qualified and called to ministry!

Let’s look back at some of what Paul said:

*“GRACE WAS GIVEN TO EACH ONE OF US...AND HE GAVE THE APOSTLES, THE PROPHETS, THE EVANGELISTS, THE SHEPHERDS AND TEACHERS, TO EQUIP THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF MINISTRY”
(Eph 4:7,11-12)*

Every follower of Jesus is not only called to ministry; every one is uniquely gifted for ministry! There are so many different gifts and different ways that people are wired, and Jesus, the Sovereign King, has a specific purpose in mind for each!

Part of City Groups is helping each person to realize and grow in their individual giftings so that the saints can be equipped *for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.*

Intentional space

What Is Intentional Space?

An intentional space is a specific location or group of people on which your City Group chooses to focus and build relationships for the sake of the gospel.

This might be a restaurant, a local high school sports team, a coffee shop, or a neighborhood. There probably won’t be a perfect fit for everyone, but the key is to pick an intentional space that makes sense for your City Group.

An intentional space doesn’t have to last forever. Pick a space, and pick an amount of time to test it out. If it works, great. If not, you can always try something else!

The mission of Jesus is to clear the path for the world to know the Creator. He himself left a perfect, sinless heaven to engage a broken sinful world. He healed the sick and raised the dead to show the power of God. He befriended the outcasts and he called the self-righteous to repentance. He died to remove the burden of sin, and he rose from death, calling all people to follow him, that they might know and enjoy God forever.

As followers of Jesus, our mission is to know him and help others come to know him as well. And like Jesus, we should leave our comfortable environments in order to engage with a broken and lost world. We are

called to befriend the outcast and call people to repentance through Jesus. We are to love others as Jesus first loved us. Jesus has entrusted us with the greatest task anyone could be called to: to proclaim his blood-bought freedom to a world enslaved to unloving, unfulfilling, ungracious masters. That's good news!

God is consumed with the whole world knowing him and helping others to come to know him. Paul writes in Acts:

BUT YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS COME UPON YOU, AND YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES IN JERUSALEM AND IN ALL JUDEA AND SAMARIA, AND TO THE END OF THE EARTH.”
Acts 1:8

If we are truly “following” Jesus, we will do the things that Jesus did. We will talk with those that Jesus talked with. We will pray like he prayed, and we will go to the people he calls us to. The life of a follower of Jesus is not one of comfort and bored safety; it is the life of high risk and high reward, a life of hard-fought-and-won joy. Will we, as followers of Jesus, follow Jesus?

Gospel Intentionality

Have you ever thought about the Bible as a complete book? Obviously, it looks like a book. But often we think of the Bible quite differently than we think of other books. Let's take, for example, JRR Tolkien's famous work, *The Hobbit*.

The Hobbit, and every other recognized novel, has three distinct parts: a beginning, middle, and an end. In the beginning, the status-quo world is often interrupted by a crisis. In the middle of the book, the characters journey to overcome the crisis. The end of the book is the resolution, wherein the crisis is resolved and the world is returned to status-quo or even a better status-quo. The Bible is no different!

In the beginning, God creates man, and the world is perfect. No sin. No pain. No death. Man walks with God in the garden of Eden, and everything is at peace. But the story is quickly interrupted in Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve commit sin, separating themselves from the perfect, holy God because of their lack of faith in his words to them. However, God quickly makes a promise that he will fix everything. He says that he will send someone to repair the divide created by sin between man and God.

Most of the rest of the Bible is the story of people journeying back towards a restored relationship with God. The journey finds its resolution in the person and work of Jesus, who, being God-in-the-flesh, came and paid for the sins of humanity by the shedding of his own perfect, innocent blood. In the ultimate conclusion (Rev 20), we see the New Heaven and the New Earth where there is once again no sin, no pain, and no death. Humanity is finally and eternally reunited with the Creator God through Jesus.

Did you know all that? Did you realize that the entire Bible -all 66 books, written over thousands of years, by more than forty authors, in three different languages, on three different continents, from multiple cultural backgrounds- comes together to form the most perfect story ever told?

Did you know that there are multiple themes that run the entire length of the Bible? God's tenacious love for his people is glaringly obvious when we take this high point of view over the story of the Bible. God as the ultimate Creator and Artist is on display throughout much of scripture. The nature of humanity, always searching for identity and purpose, can be found on nearly every page of the Bible.

Arguably the most important theme, is the theme of Gospel Intentionality. Gospel Intentionality is the sum captivation of the tenacious love of God that fuels his unflinching redemption of sinners. Gospel Intentionality is the fuel behind the idea of mission. Jesus left heaven and came to earth, and thus mission causes us to leave our self-centered lives and focus on others, near or far. Gospel Intentionality is the fuel behind love and care for orphans and widows.

And Gospel Intentionality is not a mere reaction to the problem of sin. We see in Genesis 1:26-28, before sin ever entered the world:

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.
And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth
Gen 1:27-28*

God did two incredibly important things here, right at the very beginning of humanity. He gave all people identity and purpose. As identity, he gave them his own image. As people created by God, we each bear a bit of the divine image. It is like we are all mirrors, reflecting back the character of God himself. Second, he gave them purpose. He basically says, "Now that you are all image-reflectors of me, your mission is to take that image and fill the earth with it." That's it. So no matter what we do in life, our ultimate mission is to fill the earth with the reflection of the image of the character of God!

Of course, sin quickly followed and put a big smudge on the mirror. We don't perfectly reflect his character as we were designed. But the story of God is the story of how he uses broken mirrors like us to show the world who he is.

The theme runs constant through the rest of scripture. Genesis 12, Joshua 2, the Psalms, Isaiah, and Malachi are a few of my personal favorites from the Old Testament.

The New Testament is the story of the life and works of Jesus as he brings final resolution to the problem of sin in the world. The world's favorite scripture is John 3:16, which says,

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life.
John 3:16*

We do a great injustice when we think that John 3:16 is just about you or me. God is not just after an individual; he wants the world! The rest of Jesus' life reflects the same desire. His last words on earth to his closest followers are recorded at the end of the book of Matthew:

*And Jesus came and said to them, " All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.
Matt 28:18-20*

Finally, in Revelation we see the ultimate culmination of Jesus' work and the love of God for the world:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb
Rev 7:9

God's mission from the beginning was to fill the world with image-bearers and worshippers. At the end, in Revelation, we see he has accomplished exactly that: people from every tribe, people, and language!

So, if this theme of Gospel Intentionality is so prevalent in scripture, shouldn't it also be prevalent in our lives, now? As followers of Jesus, shouldn't we be consumed with the mission and purpose of Jesus? If our identities are to be reflectors of the character of God, and our mission is to fill the earth with other image-bearers, shouldn't that change the way we live on a daily basis?

All of life, no matter who we are or what we do, should be lived with Gospel Intentionality. This is why the idea of Intentional Space is not just optional, but critical. We each only have a limited number of days in life, and it is our calling to use those days to know God, and to help others to know him.

For many, Intentional Space may be an intimidating thing. But I think I can help. Often, we think we must really search and find the perfect space. That's tough to do...maybe impossible. So instead of trying to find the perfect Intentional Space, let's focus on trying to be Intentional with our Space.

Where do you normally go? What do you normally do? God hasn't called for a group of superheroes to each champion a specific location or people. He is calling normal, broken people to be intentional where he has already placed them!

Do you spend a lot of time at a specific coffee shop or restaurant? Do you go to the same gym and see the same people multiple times a week? Is your kid in school or on a sports team? What about your job? Do you see the same people multiple times a week? What about the people living in your neighborhood, apartment complex, or college dorm?

What if we began to be intentional with the spaces God has already put us in? What if we invested our energy into building relationships with the baristas we see every day, or the neighbors across the street from where we live? What about your kid's school teacher or the parents of another kid on your son's t-ball team?

We shouldn't view mission or Intentional Space as another thing to add to our list. We just need to be intentional with the spaces we already live in. Once we begin to do this, we can also begin to share the good news of who Jesus is and what he has done with the people he has already placed around us.

DNA groups

What are DNA groups?

DNA groups are groups of three same-gendered people who spend time together to study the Bible, confess sin, encourage and challenge one another, pray, and remind each other of the truths of the gospel.

DNA groups meet each week, separately from the City Group. They might meet in homes, or a coffee shop, or at an office.

When DNA groups meet, they'll walk through three distinct steps: Discover, Nurture, Act. During these steps, groups will look at the bible, talk about their lives, and remind each other how to apply the gospel to the issues of real, everyday life.

Over time, DNA groups will become trusting, tight-knit relationships where each person knows the others' stories and struggles intimately and can lovingly speak truth into their lives.

In a typical weekly City Group meeting, you may not spend much time together in the Bible. That's okay. But the Bible is central to DNA Groups.

“ALL SCRIPTURE IS GOD-BREATHED AND IS USEFUL FOR TEACHING, REBUKING, CORRECTING, AND TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS SO THAT THE MAN OF GOD MAY BE FULLY EQUIPPED FOR EVERY GOOD WORK.”

2 Tim 3:16-17

The Bible is nothing short of critical for the success of a DNA Group. Through scripture, we can see the perfect heart of God, and we can see where our beliefs don't line up with what God says is true. Together we can seek repentance, remind each other of the truths of the gospel, and move forward in renewed faith.

“CONFESS YOUR SINS TO ONE ANOTHER AND PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER THAT YOU MAY BE HEALED...IF ANYONE AMONG YOU WANDERS FROM THE TRUTH AND SOMEONE BRINGS HIM BACK, LET HIM KNOW THAT WHOEVER BRINGS BACK A SINNER FROM HIS WANDERING WILL SAVE HIS SOUL FROM DEATH AND COVER A MULTITUDE OF SINS.”

JAMES 5:16,19-20

“WHATEVER DOES NOT PROCEED FROM FAITH IS SIN.”

ROM 14:23

“WHERE THERE IS NO GUIDANCE, A PEOPLE FALLS, BUT IN AN ABUNDANCE OF COUNSELORS THERE IS SAFETY.”

Pr 11:14

DNA Groups, if done correctly, will bring our sin to the surface. But it is here, in the light of gospel-driven community, that Jesus can heal our wounds and restore our ability to accurately reflect the character of God to the world.

NATURAL RHYTHMS

What are natural rhythms?

Natural rhythms refer to the normal, everyday activities that people already fill their lives with. These vary depending on life-stage, economic status, or location.

Natural rhythms might include a carpool to the office, picking up kids from school, evenings of soccer practice, or your daily visit to a local coffee shop. Other natural rhythms might be birthday parties, a weekly poker night, family dinners, or a long-weekend vacation.

Understanding the natural rhythms of your life and those people around you will help you see what opportunities God has given you to saturate the world around you with the truths of the gospel.

City Groups operate in the natural rhythms of life. Being in a City Group isn't about fitting one more thing into your schedule. It is about learning together how to saturate our normal, everyday lives with the power gospel intentionality.

In our everyday, natural rhythms of life, we eat meals together, go to work, exercise and play, take time to rest or go on vacations. We create things: art, music, woodwork, outfits, homes. We celebrate birthdays and graduations; and we mourn loss and hardship. We listen to each others' stories, and we bless others by meeting needs with the things God has blessed us with.

And we do it all, so that the world can see the power and the person of Jesus, active in the normal, everyday lives of real people.

Above is a list of natural rhythms in life. It is extensive, but may not be exhaustive. You may find that everything in your life fits into one of those rhythms, or you may not. The point however, is to take stock of what you and others around you do normally, and engage in them with gospel intentionality. We do this because we follow Jesus, and that's what Jesus did.

*“THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND MADE HIS DWELLING AMONG US.”
JOHN 1:14*

Living Out Identity and Purpose

Wherever you are in life, and whatever you are doing, you can engage the world around you with the good news of Jesus. The call of the Jesus follower is to saturate the world with this news. City Groups, and all of their components, will help us accomplish this task.

There's no feeling quite like being firmly rooted in your God-given identity, and being sold out to your God-given purpose. The days might be long, and you'll definitely have to sacrifice of yourself, but the payoff is a joy more pure and lasting than any we could gain otherwise.

The authentic community that forms around Jesus' mission can't be found anywhere else. And it's the way that God designed us and desires us to be!