

FACQ

(frequently asked Cohort questions)

For those of who weren't able to be present at the Community Group meetings where we described what Cohorts are and what participating in one looks like, or who are new to the Table, we've put together that presentation in a written format. If there's a question you have that isn't answered here, please let Daniel know and we'll answer it and work it into future versions of the document. Thanks for being interested!

Q1 :: What are Cohorts?

Cohorts are 3-5 person gender-specific groups made up of people from the same Community Group, who gather every other week to spend time in prayer, study and application of Scripture, and intentional conversations where we confess sins and fears to one another and deepen the Gospel into every aspect of our lives.

Q2 :: How often & long will they meet?

Cohorts will meet every other week for around two hours, at a day & time determined by its members that doesn't conflict with Community Group participation.

In addition to those two hours, to make the conversations about Scripture more fruitful, Cohort members will spend roughly 30 minutes a week reading 3-5 assigned chapters of the Bible and answering some questions about them that will help to interpret them appropriately in their context and consider what they are saying about who God is, who we are, and what God would have us believe, love, or do.

Q3 :: What do Cohorts do exactly when they're together?

Cohort leaders will help facilitate the meeting through the following practices, in roughly these time proportions, but will have the discretion to spend more or less time in each depending on the needs of a particular meeting and what's going on in people's lives:

- Checking in (5-10 min.)
 - Asking each other: How are you feeling, so we know how to care for you later in our time? What has God been doing in your life that we can give thanks for?
- Prayer (10-15 min.)
 - Prayer to God along the lines of adoration, confession, and thanksgiving (because finding our joy in praising and thanking Him is what we were saved for) before moving on to supplication. Then we ask God to pour grace

upon our efforts to pursue Him and participate in His mission, in recognition that we're wholly dependent on Him for change and empowerment for following Him.

- Scripture (30-35 min.)
 - After a few minutes of recapping & comparing how we answered the questions about the assigned reading during the preceding weeks, the Cohort explores how we should respond to those chapters of Scripture in our specific lives & circumstances: how is God calling these 3-5 people to believe, trust, feel, love, act, and live differently in light of these truths?
- Intentional conversation (55-60 min.)
 - The Cohort leader will ask the group who would like to share something that's happening in their lives and let the group speak into it, perhaps someone who introduced something in the check-in time or returning to someone who'd hadn't finished working through something at a previous meetings, and helps select one or two.
 - The leader will then help facilitate a conversation between that person and the group along these lines:
 - **Listen** :: Listening patiently and asking good questions shaped by an understanding of how God made us as head, heart, & hands people in His image to understand carefully what is happening, what the reasons are below the surface, and what help is needed.
 - **Assure** :: If something has been confessed, the group begins by first giving assurance of God's forgiveness and taking away of shame on the basis of Jesus' death and resurrection before anything else.
 - **Respond** :: Then, on the basis of having listened carefully first, the group is invited to help the person by speaking the truth with love: primarily of how deeper trust in and response to some facet(s) of the Gospel may help with the root heart need underlying the circumstance, but then proceeding back up from there to help the person with how to practically repent (if a sin) and/or act wisely with a plan and renewed habits to support what is desired to happen in the heart. Every conversation ends with prayer, and with an offer to help in any practical way the group can.
 - If time is a factor and not everyone who wanted to speak was able to, or there's more to talk through than time for, the Cohort leader will make sure that person or people will get a chance the next week to do so.
- Closing prayer (5-10 min.)
 - The group closes by praying for the specific needs discussed, and generally for God to help all in the group to experience the new life we have in Jesus over the coming weeks.

Q4 :: “Cohorts sounds intense.” - Sam Farmer

Yeah. This is a highly intentional use of time, and may feel different or more intense than what you’ve experienced in the past. You may rightly ask if all these things can be accomplished in two hours. This time isn’t intended to exhaust all there is to do or say in any category, but to help shape us through practice into people who do these things throughout our weeks. In that sense, it is a “liturgy”—a habitual practice that trains and teaches us by doing—and (hopefully) a catalyst that leads us into being a community of people characterized by prayer for one another, being holistically shaped by Scripture together, and listening well and speaking the truth with love to one another.

Having said that, the Cohort leaders are empowered to adjust how a Cohort uses its time based on where the conversation leads and where people are. Beginning with a rich structure will help each leader have a firm starting point from which they can make adjustments as well as give all Cohorts a shared experience.

Q5 :: Where’d this structure come from?

The structure we’re using is a combination of four or five other formats for such groups that have been tried over the past couple decades (including some that we’ve personally developed), and tries to take the best from each and learn from the positive and negative things we’ve seen in them. In determining what to emphasize or not, we’ve leaned heavily on the Table’s values—Hospitality, Imago Dei, Shalom, Gospel, and Truth with Love—and our mission to Know God, Love People, and Cultivate Beauty. If you were to point at any one component of it, we’d be able to tell you a whole history of where it came from and how it arrived there. But it’s also a living plan that we hope to adjust and continue developing based on feedback as we proceed.

Q6 :: How do Cohorts fit in with Community Groups?

Cohorts and Community Groups are intended to function together and complement each other; Cohorts are formed by people from the same Community Group for that reason. They aren’t parallel paths to choose from but mutually beneficial parts of a whole that need each other. In Community Groups we offer hospitality to our neighbors and one another, and care for *felt needs*; in Cohorts we go deep with just a few people and care for one another’s *spiritual needs*. In Cohorts we hope to be transformed through the Gospel from selfishness into selflessness, which we will take back to our Community Groups where we can put that into practice by offering hospitality and putting one another’s interests above our own; and in Community Groups we will have an immediate context to live out what we pray for and discuss in Cohorts, and an opportunity to see each other beyond the way that we self-report in Cohorts.

Community Groups can be uncomfortable at times, because they're different than the small group ministries you may have participated in the past. You might have been familiar with ones that combined what we're doing in Cohorts with what we're doing in Community Groups: small groups oriented around providing both spiritual and practical care. By separating the two into distinct experiences, we hope that each becomes better; making it possible to have a place to invite non-Christians into our community in a non-threatening context so they can see the grace of Christ at work in the way we love one another and hopefully want to find out more, and moving the spiritual care into a smaller context where we can more effectively know and provide that care to each other.

Q6 :: What commitments are involved in being a part of a Cohort?

These kinds of groups require trust and familiarity with one another to be most fruitful, and Cohorts also function within the broader framework of the Table's ministries. In light of that, the commitments we'd ask you to make in order to participate in a Cohort are:

- **Continued Participation in Community Group** - for the reasons in the point previous to this, that Cohorts and Community Groups are intended to be a mutually beneficial whole, this is a requirement for participating in a Cohort.
- **Confidentiality** - everything that's said and shared within a Cohort stays within a Cohort. (With the sole exception that a Cohort leader may speak with Daniel, Brad, or Adam for help with how to care for you better or for prayer.)
- **Consistency** - regular participation of everyone in the group helps the whole group trust one another and know one another. You're coming not only or even primarily for yourself, but to help the people around you. If someone regularly misses a meeting or two, they will miss major things happening in others' lives, making it harder for the group to trust that that person will be present to follow up. While we understand that life is legitimately busy, we ask that you make a real attempt to be there as often as possible and make it a high priority to participate consistently for the season you've committed to it (see below, "How long would I committing to be a part of one?").
- **Redemptive Vulnerability** - Transparency says, "Look, but don't touch." Redemptive Vulnerability says, "Here's everything, help me see where Jesus wants to transform my heart." This means being both willing to speak and willing to listen, and conversely, being committed to speak the truth with love and listen patiently before doing so. We don't expect that we'll all be perfect at this; rather the opposite, we know that we won't be and will need to extend the grace of Jesus to one another as we learn, and hope that this will be an opportunity to do so.

Q7 :: Why “Cohorts”?

The term “cohort” is most often used to describe a group of students who go through an educational program together, providing support to one another as they build relationships over the course of their studies. Cohorts at the Table, similarly, are groups of disciples of Jesus helping one another as we follow him together.

Q8 :: How long would I be committing to be a part of one?

We’ll be asking you to commit to participate consistently in your Cohort from when you join until the next September. Every year at that time we’ll have an open door policy where, if you’ve decided you no longer have the time available to commit to it or need to take time off for some reason, you can do so; but if you choose to stay on, you’re saying you’ll do so for another year. This will help create an environment where deep transformation and redemptive vulnerability are possible. The longer you stay with the same people in this kind of relationship, the more fruitful it will be for everyone. If crises or other unexpected changes come up simply talk the matter through with your Cohort leader.

Q9 :: How do I become a part of one?

We’re still in the process of training enough leaders to accommodate the growing number of participants in Community Groups, so the length of time until you could be in Cohort depends on which Community Group you’re a part of. Some will begin in March ‘17, while the next round of Cohort leader training will finish in 3-4 months, and fill in many of the gaps from the first round.

Whichever group you’re in, if you’re interested in participating in a Cohort and willing to make the above commitments, you can indicate your interest by joining the “Interested in Cohorts” group on Planning Center Online, accessible here:

<https://tablechurch.churchcenteronline.com/groups/cohorts/interested-in-cohorts>

If you use the same email you used to create an account with PCO at the Table (e.g. for Children’s Ministry), it will connect it; if you don’t have an account with Planning Center Online, you’ll be prompted to create one.

We’ll be working with the Cohort leaders and Community Group leaders to put groups together from people who have joined that PCO group, and we’ll get in touch with you during the next month to either let you know which group you’ll be joining or how long you might expect to wait until a Cohort leader is available to start a new Cohort in your Community Group.

Q10 :: If I'm not a Christian but interested in participating, is that OK?

Anyone willing to make the above commitments is welcome. Cohorts are very *explicitly* Christian, and rely deeply on foundational Christian ideas to make any sense. If you're willing to participate in those practices and make the same commitments to hear one another out and study Scripture and discuss what it and the Gospel might mean to your life—by all means, please do! If this describes you and you're interested in joining a Cohort, in addition to joining the PCO group please give Daniel an email or call so we could chat about what you can expect and how to navigate some of the challenges and opportunities you'd uniquely face.

If you have any other questions, please call Daniel Frampton, Ministry Development Director at 317-340-7146 or email him at daniel.e.frampton@gmail.com. It might show up next on the FACQ!

For a more bird's-eye view of Cohorts and the Table's vision for growing deeper together in Jesus, read [this blog post](#) on the Table website, and the [Community](#) page for another short description.

