

21 October 2015

EQUIP

Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.
(Eph 4:15–16)

This life therefore is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness, not health, but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it. The process is not yet finished, but it is going on. This is not the end, but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified.
(Martin Luther)



Community group rhythms

WHAT SHOULD COMMUNITY GROUPS LOOK LIKE IN OUR CONTEXT?

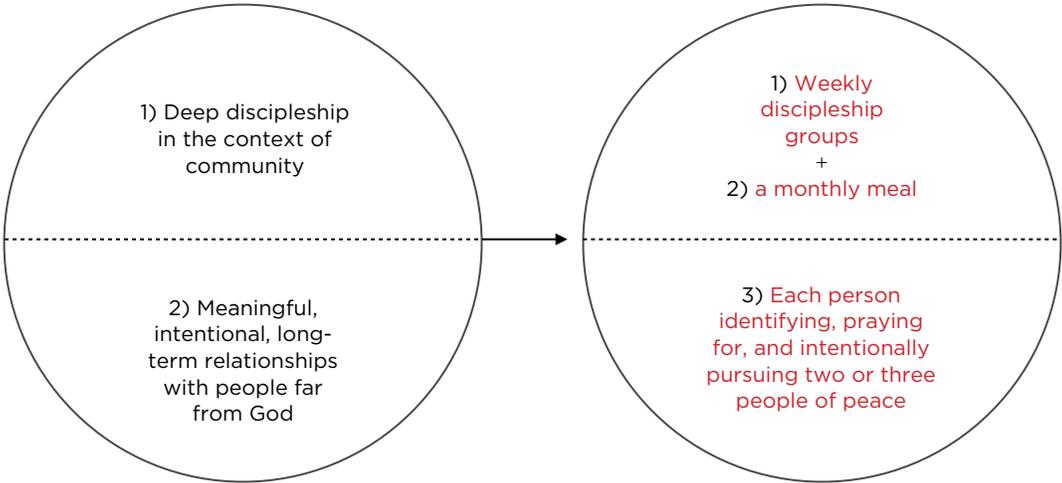
We have to take the unchanging truth of God’s Word, and the unchanging communal rhythms it calls us to as biblical Christians (confession, repentance, encouragement, exhortation, the exercise of all the spiritual gifts, evangelism, etc.), and *then* we have to ask what those rhythms ought to look like in Oklahoma City in the year 2015. What should those rhythms look like in our unique time and place—our context? I’ve been asking that question for years now in my current role as Pastor of Community and Discipleship. I’ve spent many hours leading groups, coaching others as they lead groups, and talking to our elders as they’ve led groups and coached group leaders themselves. Like many of you, I’ve discipled new believers and built relationships with and shared the gospel with non-believers. I’ve read books by, and talked to, other pastors around the country. As a result, I feel like I’m gradually beginning to settle on a few rhythms that I feel are especially appropriate in our context. Now I’d like to commend them to you.

Please Note: If you hear things that sound different from what you’re currently doing as a group, don’t panic! It doesn’t mean what you’re doing is wrong. It doesn’t necessarily mean you need to change anything that you’re doing. I’m here to serve you, not order you around. I’m here to equip you, not micromanage you. If you feel any tension between what you’re doing and what I’m going to describe, let’s embrace that tension and let it lead to dialogue and conversation right on the spot, here tonight—and I’ll be providing opportunities for us to do that.

TWO CONTEXTUAL CONVICTIONS

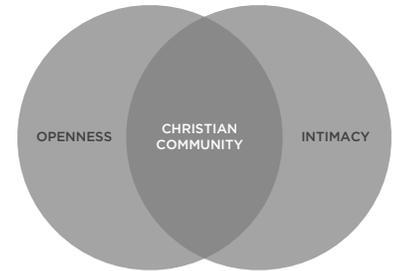
As I consider both our mission and our values, our collective strengths and weaknesses, and the reigning idols in our culture, I believe two of the biggest contextual needs we have here at Bridgeway, are: 1) to move deeper into discipleship, and 2) to move farther out on mission. To say it another way, I am persuaded that there is room for us to grow in 1) deep discipleship in the context of community, and there is room for us to grow in 2) building and maintaining meaningful, intentional, long-term relationships with people far from God (e.g. non-Christians). I would like to recommend three concrete ways we can walk these two things out in the monthly rhythms of our community groups:

- 1. Weekly discipleship groups
- 2. A monthly meal
- 3. Each person identifying, praying for, and intentionally pursuing two or three people of peace



HOW CAN A COMMUNITY GROUP BE SIMULTANEOUSLY INTIMATE & OPEN?

I believe that Christian community needs to be both intimate and open. Considered individually, intimacy and openness seem like excellent traits to cultivate. In my experience, the tension often arises in trying to pursue and preserve both of them simultaneously in the context of a community group. When someone new visits the group, it invariably changes the dynamic of the group. Existing group members wonder if this new person is safe, and if they will keep confidential the things they hear. Some groups attempt to solve this problem by simply closing the group, as they tire of constantly having to “reboot” the group’s intimacy whenever someone new is inserted. Sometimes group members feel discouraged by their inability to invite into their group non-believers or newcomers to Bridgeway. How can this tension be resolved? I believe that by pressing deeper into discipleship and farther out on mission for reasons *larger* than solving this tension between intimacy and openness—reasons which I just listed above—in so doing we’ll *also* make great progress in solving this tension! What do I mean?



The (at-least) monthly meal becomes your front door. Warm, relational, natural, hospitable, with easily flexing liturgies. What do I mean by easily flexing liturgies? For example, if non-believers are present and you discern they would be overwhelmed, instead of going around and asking for prayer requests, you can ask people to share a high and a low from the past few weeks. You can adjust what you talk about and how you talk about it out of consideration for who is present. (Please note that the word “meal” can dangerously evoke laboring for hours over an intricate recipe while babies are screaming at your feet. Eating together at least once a month—a “monthly meal”—simply means eating *together* how you already eat *apart*—ramen for college students, Chic-Fil-A for young, tired families, elaborate meals for foodies, etc.)

The weekly discipleship groups provide consistent places of safety and intimacy. They’re not drop-in experiences or relational revolving doors. Trust and safety are built over time. Confidentiality is required and preserved. Friendship and discipleship happen in natural, enjoyable ways as we entrust the fine china of our lives to each other, and listen well, and pray heart-felt, Spirit-led, informed prayers for each other.

Consistent d-groups and a consistent family meal allow us to be both open and intimate. If want to add in a “flex night” (see calendar on page 6) and look for missional opportunities that are natural, neutral, and regular—all the better. Those are ways that you can provide even more on-ramps for hospitality in your group. But, again, if you’re able to eventually provide d-groups for everybody in your group, then in a significant way “everybody gets to play,” to fulfill the spirit and intent of the every-member, one-another ministry described in Ephesians 4.

Discipleship group rhythms

I would like to offer you four rhythms or movements to incorporate into your d-group gatherings. You may not be able to get to all of these every time you gather, but making sure that each rhythm occurs regularly in you group is a way of improving and maintaining the health of your d-group. The four rhythms are: 1) Scripture, 2) Sharing, 3) Spread of the gospel, and 4) Supplication and Spirit.

Scripture... Come prepared to share what you read this past week, yes, but more particularly I would encourage you to make it a goal to bring to the group *one bit of Scripture that applies to one bit of your life*. One bit of Scripture can do any number of things. It can lead you to: 1) adore God, 2) see and hate your sin, or 3) ask for grace. To apply one bit of Scripture to one bit of your life requires at least meditation if not memorization. Dallas Willard famously said:



Bible memorization is absolutely fundamental to spiritual formation. If I had to choose between all the disciplines of the spiritual life, I would choose Bible memorization, because it is a fundamental way of filling our minds with what it needs. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth. That's where you need it! How does it get in your mouth? Memorization.

Sharing... I “squared” the word sharing in the visual above to represent three more words that start with “S”—sanctification, suffering, and sin... In that order. Good fruit, what’s hard, and bad fruit. That order is informed by Scripture, and is full of love and compassion, and looks at the whole picture, while preventing imbalance in several directions at once. Some groups do the first and second well, and neglect the third. Some groups do the third, and neglect the first and second, but we need them all.

The spread of the gospel... Who are your persons of peace? Ask yourselves diagnostic questions like these: Who comes to mind in response to, “They like you and you like them”? Who is already responding positively to you? Who are you called to love intentionally? Who do you most want to see saved? Who specifically would you most love to see reached for Jesus? Name those people and then share about your interactions with them, your margin for mission (which we’ll talk about more in a minute), and then pray right on the spot for God to open their eyes to the beauty of Jesus (2 Cor 4:6)!

Supplication and Spirit... Are we sensitive to promptings from the Holy Spirit? Do we know how to let the Spirit guide us in encouraging, rebuking, and exhorting each other? Do we let the Spirit call Scripture to mind? Furthermore, how can we pray beyond the sick list? We need to pray for physical healing, we need to pray for loved ones and friends, and we need to ask God to change our circumstances when they’re hard. But we also need to pray for hearts devoted to him right in the middle of our circumstances, and we need to pray for his kingdom to come. We need to pray for each other that we would bear fruit in the year of drought (Jer 17:5–8). *Remember that the circumstance is significant but not determinative.*

Thus says the Lord: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit” (Jer 17:5–8).

Moving farther out on mission

Mission begins for us here in this time and place with margin. Mission begins with margin. Not boldness, or zeal, or a passion for souls, but margin. Space. Labor that emerges from a place of rest. Obedience that is sustained by the experience of Jesus’ easy yoke. Margin. Rest. *Sabbath* rest. One day in seven with no have-to’s. Do you have that in your life? It doesn’t just come. It’s something you wrestle to the ground by faith. It’s counter-intuitive. It’s counter-cultural. It’s a kind of rest that is only entered into through the door marked “grace-fueled effort”.

margin➔ **mission**

Many people who already are operating with little to no margin in their lives hear the call to be on mission as added homework. But, moving out on mission is often less about doing *more*, and more about doing it *differently*, doing it with different *people*, or doing it in a different *place*.

While mission will ultimately always require sacrifice, from another perspective going on mission in your surrounding community requires simply asking questions of geography and affinity—where do you live and what



do you love? Or, in other words, who has God placed in front of you and what are you passionate about? Embracing mission requires being willing to be increasingly led by God out of a selfishly introspective approach towards day-to-day life, and into greater and greater mindfulness of both God and others—increased sensitivity, increased intention, and increased kindness.

Steve Timmis and Tim Chester suggest an exercise to help identify opportunities for everyday mission. Think of all the activities, however mundane, that make up your life: (1) daily routine (traveling to work, eating meals, doing chores, walking the dog, playing with your kids); (2) weekly routine (grocery shopping, watching your favorite TV shows, exercising); and (3) monthly routine (playing pick-up basketball, getting a haircut, going to the movies). You should have a long list of activities. For each one, ask whether you could add:

1. a *community* component by involving another member of your Christian community;
2. a *missional* component by involving an unbeliever; and
3. a *gospel* component by identifying opportunities to talk about Jesus.

Alan Hirsch suggests the following questions to ask periodically to help evaluate your missional focus: 1) Are we in close proximity with those we feel called to? 2) Are we spending regular time with these people? 3) Are we too busy to develop meaningful relationships?

Do we know how to ruthlessly eliminate hurry? How do we do that? One of the most concrete answers to that question is also one of the hardest for us, here in this time and place. Simplify. Do less. Say No, not as a means of being sinfully, selfishly autonomous, but say No precisely so you can say Yes to what's important. So you can increasingly say Yes to the Holy Spirit. So you can create margin on the page. Margin for mission.

SIMPLIFIED LIVING

Establish weekly rhythms of rest

STRATEGIC BOLDNESS

Prayerfully choose and consistently pursue two or three people far from God

SENSITIVITY TO THE SPIRIT

Aim for the heart while listening to the Holy Spirit

In praying for us in this regard a year or two ago, a heading and three sub-headings very quickly came to my mind, and I wrote them down before I could forget them. *Margin for mission* came to me as one of our greatest needs, and 1) simplified living, 2) sensitivity to the Spirit, and 3) strategic boldness came to me as the subheadings. Some of you are saying, “I want to get better at mission, but I don’t feel like I have any margin in my life.” You might be helped by thinking about mission in these three ways. You can think of them as three ways of making room for God to come in.

As we begin to ruthlessly simplify our lives and weed out hurry, we will find that we have an increasing amount of energy for strategic boldness and we’ll find ourselves increasingly sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s still, small voice saying, *This is the way, walk in it* (Isa 30:21). Saying, *Go over and join this chariot* (Acts 8:29). Saying, *Go to a street called Straight* (Acts 9:11). What does strategic boldness look like? It looks like Paul saying, *...to the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews...* (1 Cor 9:19–23).

I would like to give you a vision of what margin for mission could look like here at Bridgeway. Here's one concrete example of each of these three rhythms—simplified living, strategic boldness, and sensitivity to the Spirit—that I would like to see become tools in the toolbox of every believer at Bridgeway.

1. Practice a weekly rhythm of sabbath rest (an expression of “simplified living”)
 - A day with no have to's
 - Unplugging from screens and their inevitable isolation
 - Praying and playing together
 - Margin means cutting things out of our calendars until there's space to invite our neighbors over for dinner, or at least until we aren't rushing by the man lying by the side of the road. Margin means letting Christ be king not only of our words, actions, thoughts, and checkbooks, but also letting Christ be king of our calendars.
2. Prayerfully select and consistently pursue two or three people far from God—using a loose set of principles that have historically been referred to here at Bridgeway summarily as identifying one's “persons of peace” (an expression of “strategic boldness”)
 - For all interactions with neighbors and coworkers, jotting down names and pertinent facts—keep a running list for the sake of prayer and further relationship-building
 - Move towards others and greet them
 - Sharing about and praying for your people of peace at the close of each d-group meeting (this can also be done as a larger group in the context of your community group)
 - Asking what you do daily, weekly, and monthly, and then asking the three strategic questions of how you can increasingly do those things with 1) someone with whom you're in community, 2) someone far from God, and 3) with greater gospel intentionality
3. Always strive to move conversations one step deeper with your people of peace, while simultaneously seeking to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit right on the spot (an expression of “sensitivity to the Spirit”)
 - Ask questions that aim for the heart in conversation
 - Pray during, before, and after the conversation
 - Meditate on and memorize Scripture, which will increase your ability to hear the Spirit's voice on the spot
 - Tim Keller writes, “The gospel has versatility to address the particular hopes, fears, and idols of every culture and every person.” Indeed it does. Do you know what the particular hopes, fears and idols of your person of peace are? How will you apply the gospel message with particularity, and demonstrate to that person how powerfully and perfectly the gospel addresses their hopes, fears, and idols, if you don't even know what their particular hopes, fears, and idols are? God can drop them into your mind. He's done it before. But it's wrong of us to develop principles from what's possible. Scripture teaches us time and time again that God tends to use *means*. Aiming for the heart is one of the most powerful means. Prayer is one of the most powerful means. Populating our minds with Scripture is one of the most powerful means. The more wood you gather—the wood being a metaphor for what you learn about their hopes, fears, and idols as you grow in friendship with them, as well being a metaphor for Scripture that you “hide in your heart”—the more fuel you provide for the Spirit to kindle a fire.

*We must
ruthlessly
eliminate **hurry**
from our lives.*

Suggested minimum monthly rhythms

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
WEEK 1				6:30 AM Men's d-group			Corporate assembly
WEEK 2			Flex Night 7:00 PM Prophetic prayer ministry & Bible study	6:30 AM Men's d-group			Corporate assembly
WEEK 3				6:30 AM Men's d-group			Corporate assembly
WEEK 4			6:30 PM Monthly meal	6:30 AM Men's d-group			Corporate assembly

 There are things we do 1) every day, 2) every week, and 3) every month... Let's constantly and prayerfully ask which of them we can do 1) with someone from our community, 2) with someone far from God, or 3) with greater gospel intentionality.

Alternate and expanded monthly rhythms

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
WEEK 1				6:30 AM Men's d-group		10:30 AM Play at the park & invite neighbors	Corporate assembly
WEEK 2				6:30 AM Men's d-group			Corporate assembly 4:00 PM Prophetic prayer ministry
WEEK 3				6:30 AM Men's d-group		10:30 AM Play at the park & invite neighbors	Corporate assembly
WEEK 4				6:30 AM Men's d-group			Corporate assembly 6:30 PM Monthly meal

MISSION IS BEST ACCOMPLISHED IN THE CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY

In pursuit of the Great Commission, you need other avenues for inviting people to experience the Christian community besides simply inviting them to the corporate assembly. *What consistent, monthly rhythms does your group have that can serve as on-ramps for people far from God, that will allow them to belong before they believe? Or can they only attend a Bible study? We need to gather in discipleship, true. We need to gather for fellowship, true. But we also need to gather for the sake of mission, for the sake of the lost in ways that are natural, neutral, and regular.*

Here at Bridgeway we have wrestled to the ground the biblical truth that change—discipleship—is best accomplished in the context of community. But by and large we haven't wrestled to the ground the biblical truth that *mission* is best accomplished in the context of community. The gospel community adorns and gives off a fragrance of the gospel message. We've got to get to the point where we're not Lone Ranger missionaries armed only with our short list of particular spiritual gifts. The toe has to stop standing in for the whole body. We need all the gifts in the change process, and we need all the gifts in the cause of the Great Commission. We've got to get to the point where non-Christians are hanging out with Christians hanging out with Christians. Then the gospel community can increasingly adorn the gospel message. But that means that our community groups can't just consist of Bible studies and prayer meetings—we must not do *less* than those things or we'll be disobedient to Jesus—but if we *fail* to do *more* than those things, we may find ourselves being disobedient to Jesus in another direction. He's commanded us to go across the ocean, and across the street, and across the hall, and it's for our joy and his glory.

That doesn't necessarily mean increasing the *amount* of stuff we do in our community groups, as much as it means increasing the *variety* of stuff we do in our community groups. A community group that is being and making disciples of Jesus in the context of community on mission is more than an event that happens on Wednesday nights. Rather it is a group that gathers intentionally in a variety of ways throughout a given month. Think "spiritual family" rather than "event."



OUT WITH COMMUNITY GROUPS AND IN WITH D-GROUPS?

A natural question that arises when someone hears all this is, "Are we doing away with community groups and replacing them with d-groups?" No, not at all! We're seeking to place an increased emphasis on d-groups as an expression of a healthy community group because of the danger we've seen of people "hiding in plain sight" as it were—faithfully attending a weekly or bi-weekly community group gathering, and participating in the group discussion, but persisting in unconfessed sin and failing to love their spouse well. By all means, keep your current group rhythms of meeting as a whole group, as long as the frequency of those whole group meetings does not squeeze out healthy variety—the necessary time and space for deep discipleship and outward-moving missional living.

Our prayer is that everyone at Bridgeway would increasingly move deeper into discipleship and farther out on mission. In examining how you are walking out your Christian life in the context of community, first ask yourself if there are consistent, intentional missional on-ramps into the life of your group, and secondly ask yourself if there are consistent, intentional places to live out Hebrews 3:13 at the deepest level, where you are sharing the fine china of your lives with each other and exhorting each other in very specific and personal and consistent ways to not be "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

Q: As a group, what practical steps can we take to move deeper into discipleship and farther out on mission?

Suggested steps	Explanation
Facilitate The Gospel-Centered Life (TGCL)	<i>Facilitate in whole group, or in men's and women's groups separately, depending on space and parental needs.</i>
Teach and practice the prayer model	<i>Make this a prerequisite to sharing your stories. Bring in prophetic team and/or pastors and elders to train group during one of your gatherings. Put a volunteer or two in the "hot seat" and add action to reflection.</i>
Share stories/testimonies and pray	<i>Share in whole group, if possible. Alternately, share as whole group of men, or whole group of women, depending on parental needs. Optionally combine with monthly meal and/or insert a second monthly all-group gathering just for prayer and stories to speed up process of completing all the stories. Combine best of story and testimony by using framework of sanctification, suffering, and sin—which will also prepare you for how to share in d-groups. Teach basic prayer model prior to stories, and then model it and invite each other into it.</i>
Share monthly meals	<i>Consider eating together at least once a month, especially at the beginning, to foster relationship and to spend time in each other's homes.</i>
Identify and pray for persons of peace	<i>Have someone briefly share on the concept, and/or read a brief article together out loud. Have everyone go around and identify two or three people of peace, or invite the group to process with them who they might identify. Close in a time of prayer for those who are identified. Institute a weekly rhythm of continuing to pray for them and share about them in d-groups.</i>
Build and launch weekly d-groups	<i>After TGCL lays a theological foundation and facilitates healthy, open sharing, and after eating, sharing stories, and praying together helps build meaningful relationships, you can begin discerning how to construct d-groups that will be balanced, healthy, compatible, and anchored by safe, gospel-centered facilitators.</i>
Begin asking the "three questions" and thus gradually interweaving the "three strands"	<p><i>Think of all the activities, however mundane, that make up your life: (1) daily routine; (2) weekly routine; and (3) monthly routine. You should have a long list of activities.</i></p> <p><i>For each one, ask whether you could add: (1) a community component by involving another member of your Christian community; (2) a missional component by involving an unbeliever; and (3) a gospel component by identifying opportunities to talk about Jesus.</i></p>