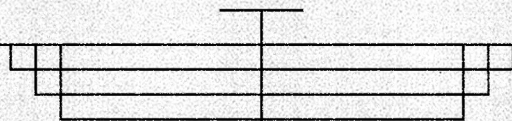


FRONTLINE

BASIC TRAINING



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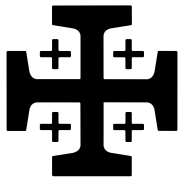




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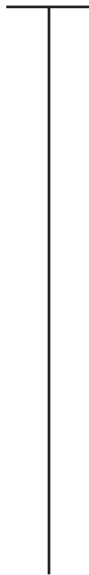
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FRONTLINE MISSION

*Multiplying gospel communities
that love God, love people,
and push back darkness*





INTRODUCTION

Community is a gift from our heavenly Father. Because God knows what's best for us, he generously provides us with a family in the Church. However, despite its beauty and power, community is often broken and difficult. Leading a community group is an act of hospitality, but we can feel inadequate or at a loss when life gets busy or the group is messy. Maybe you are leading a new group and wanting to start off on the right foot. Perhaps you are an experienced group leader who feels God calling your group to renewal. Wherever you are, we hope this guide breathes life into you and your group.

WHAT'S INSIDE?

First, you will find the Group Launch Plan, which is specifically geared toward new groups. This plan walks you through your first six months as a community group, including Basic Training. It is designed to incorporate each of the three community group rhythms, one at a time. We hope this launch plan gives you confidence as you begin to lead.

Following the launch plan, six Basic Training sessions will guide your group through portions of the Community Group Handbook. In addition to this

material, each session includes a group discussion and exercise to take you deeper into the topic.

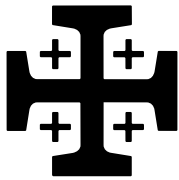
After completing Basic Training, the launch plan will walk you through incorporating all three rhythms. In the appendices, you will find the Discipleship Group Vision Guide and the Missional Gathering Planning Guide. These guides will help you lead your group through the logistics of adding these rhythms.

HOW DO I LEAD BASIC TRAINING?

Work through each session, week by week, until you have completed all six trainings. At the beginning of each session, you will be prompted to pray. You yourself can pray, or you can ask someone else. Be aware that each training includes several sections from the handbook to read aloud. Each reading will take approximately ten minutes. To help keep everyone engaged, go around in a circle and take turns reading a section or paragraph at a time.

At the conclusion of each session, your group will work through an accompanying discussion and exercise. For help with navigating group discussions, refer to the Family Meal FAQ found on pages 55–57 of the Community Group Handbook.







COMMUNITY GROUP BASIC TRAINING

GROUP LAUNCH PLAN

If you are launching a new group, this plan will guide you through your first several months. The launch plan is designed to incorporate each of the three community group rhythms one at a time. In this plan, there are two phases, each of which lasts about three months. Use the sample calendar below as a guide. Before each phase of this launch plan, take time to schedule the events for each month. Share those dates with your community group.

PHASE 1: BASIC TRAINING & FAMILY MEALS

	MONTH 1	MONTH 2	MONTH 3
WK 1	Launch Party	Basic Training 3	Family Meal
WK 2	Story Night 1	Basic Training 4	Story Night 2
WK 3	Basic Training 1	Basic Training 5	Family Meal
WK 4	Basic Training 2	Basic Training 6	Story Night 3

PHASE 2: DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS & MISSIONAL GATHERINGS

	MONTH 4	MONTH 5	MONTH 6
WK 1	Family Meal & Discipleship Group Vision Night	Family Meal	Family Meal & Missional Gathering Planning Night
WK 2	D-Group Prayer & Planning Meeting (Leaders/Facilitators Only)	Discipleship Group	Discipleship Group
WK 3	Family Meal	Family Meal	Family Meal
WK 4	Discipleship Group	Discipleship Group	Discipleship Group

PHASE 1: BASIC TRAINING & FAMILY MEALS

	MONTH 1	MONTH 2	MONTH 3
WK 1	Launch Party	Basic Training 3	Family Meal
WK 2	Story Night 1	Basic Training 4	Story Night 2
WK 3	Basic Training 1	Basic Training 5	Family Meal
WK 4	Basic Training 2	Basic Training 6	Story Night 3

LAUNCH

- GROUP LEADER ACTION STEP. Preparing For Your First Gathering:** Message your core group prior to your first gathering. Confirm with everyone a regular time and day of the week that you can meet weekly going forward. Consistency will be crucial as you launch a new group.
- Launch Party:** The group’s first gathering should prioritize getting to know each other better and celebrating the new group, with no set agenda. Enjoy each other’s presence. Do something fun together (ice-breaker questions, party games, card games, etc.) Set a tone where conversation is encouraged. Be curious and creative with this gathering. Plan out food for the party, including whether to provide an entire meal, desserts, or simply light refreshments. Since this is your first gathering, you may want to pull in a few specific members of the group to help you plan and provide food.
- Story Night (Part 1):** For your next gathering, use the evening as an opportunity to get to know each other better. Depending on what time you gather, you might have volunteers prepare a meal or provide snacks. Spend the night having a few members of the group answer the following two questions: “Who are three of the most influential people in your life, and why?” and “Describe five of your most significant life events?” Don’t feel the need to rush, over the course of the Launch Plan you will have three story nights. Plan to spread people out. For instance, if you have 15 adults, plan for five people to go each night. Make sure everyone receives those questions before the gathering so they can prepare.

BASIC TRAINING

- Basic Training:** After the launch party and story night, work through the Basic Training curriculum found in this guide. Basic Training takes six weekly gatherings to complete.

FAMILY MEALS

- GROUP LEADER ACTION STEP. Preparing For Family Meals:** Prior to your first Family Meal, designate a family or person to do the meal planning and communication. This does not have to be the group leader. More details can be found on page 52 of the Community Group Handbook.
- Family Meals:** After your group has worked through the entire Basic Training, begin meeting twice a month for Family Meals. Follow the guidelines for the format and flow of Family Meals on pages 50–57 of the Community Group Handbook.

- Story Night (Part 2 & 3):** On the alternating weeks of this month, you will have another Story Night. You might still decide to have a meal together, or you could have everyone eat outside of the gathering. Regardless, be sure to plan ahead, communicate with your group, and pull in people to help where needed. Spend the time answering two questions: *“Who are three of the most influential people in your life, and why?”* and *“Describe five of your most significant life events?”* Remember to make sure different people are sharing each night. Make sure everyone receives those questions before the gathering so they can prepare.

A large grid of dotted lines for writing notes, consisting of approximately 20 columns and 30 rows of small dots.

PHASE 2: DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS & MISSIONAL GATHERINGS			
	MONTH 4	MONTH 5	MONTH 6
WK 1	Family Meal & Discipleship Group Vision Night	Family Meal	Family Meal & Missional Gathering Planning Night
WK 2	D-Group Prayer & Planning Meeting (Leaders/Facilitators Only)	Discipleship Group	Discipleship Group
WK 3	Family Meal	Family Meal	Family Meal
WK 4	Discipleship Group	Discipleship Group	Discipleship Group

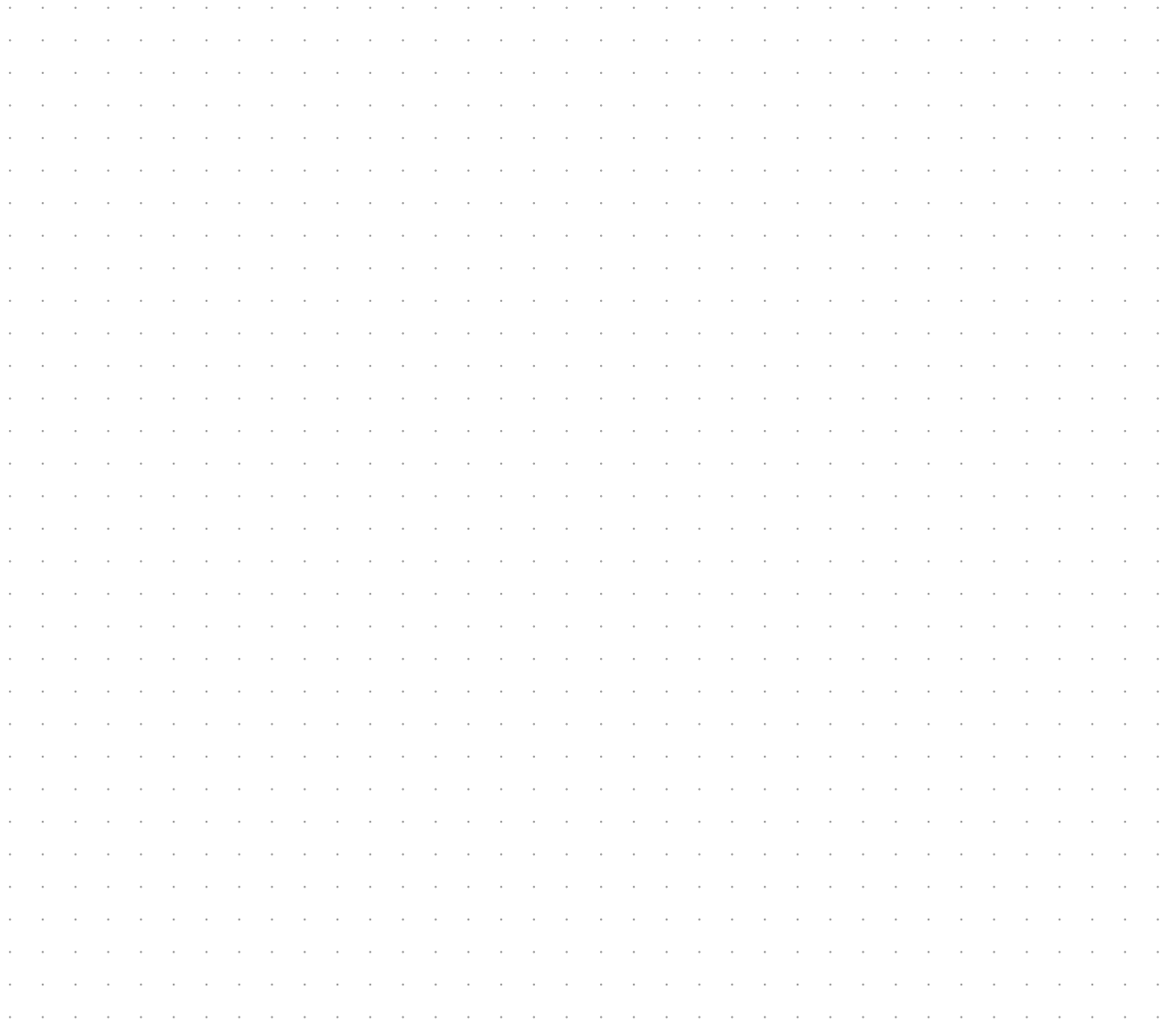
DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS

- GROUP LEADER ACTION STEP. Identifying Discipleship Group Facilitators:** Prior to launching discipleship groups, leaders should take time to consider potential facilitators. Discipleship groups work best when someone takes on the responsibility to facilitate the group. Plan to have enough male and female facilitators to accommodate gender-specific groups of three or four people. At this stage, don't worry about who will be in which group. Just think about who will make great facilitators and invite them to commit to facilitate. For more information, read the section on identifying facilitators on page 46 of the Community Group Handbook.
- Family Meal & Discipleship Group Vision Night:** Begin by carefully reading Appendix A. Once you have had a month of family meals, it is time to begin working toward discipleship groups. At your next family meal, work through the Discipleship Group Vision Guide. The goal is to cast vision for discipleship groups, practice the four movements, and invite group members to participate in a discipleship group. We recommend inviting your hub leader and community director to cast vision for discipleship groups during this family meal.
- Discipleship Group Prayer & Planning Meeting (Leaders/Facilitators Only):** Instead of meeting with the entire group for Family Meal, invite only the facilitators to join you for a Discipleship Group Prayer & Planning Meeting. At this meeting, you will sort out gender-specific groups of 3 or 4, considering things like gifting, geography, and relationship. After the Prayer and Planning Meeting, facilitators will invite participants to join the group they lead. For more information, see the section titled "How Do I Lead a Prayer and Planning Meeting" on pages 33–34 of the Community Group Handbook. For group members who are not at the meeting, encourage them to spend time praying for the health of the group.
- Discipleship Groups Launch:** Once groups have been established, you will begin alternating weeks between the two rhythms: meeting one week for Family Meal, then the next week for Discipleship Groups. Facilitators should work with their groups to find a consistent day, time, and place for their group to meet. Ensure Discipleship Groups are using the guide found on pages 44–45 of the Community Group Handbook. Additional guidelines are found in that section.

MISSIONAL GATHERINGS

- Family Meal & Missional Gathering Planning Night:** Begin by carefully reading through Appendix B. Once you have had a month of Family Meals and Discipleship Groups, it's time to plan a Missional Gathering. At your next family meal, work through the Missional Gathering Planning Guide. The goal is to cast vision for Missional Gatherings and come up with a plan and action steps.
- Missional Gathering:** Sometime over the next two months, execute the missional gathering you planned out during the Missional Gathering Planning Night.

After working through all the steps above, your group is now equipped to engage in all three Community Group Rhythms consistently. Continue to meet weekly for Family Meals and Discipleship Groups, and regularly engage your neighborhood and cities through Missional Gatherings.





WHY COMMUNITY GROUPS?

In this session, we will look at why we have community groups and how community plays a central role in the Christian life. To begin, ask someone to pray for your time together.

BIBLE CONVERSATION

Have someone read the following Scripture and discussion question out loud.

Spend up to 5 minutes in discussion.

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Romans 12:4–8

- **What does this passage teach us about how we should relate to one another in Christian community?**

TRAINING NOTES

Read aloud the following article from the Community Group Handbook section entitled “Why Community Groups?” on pages 9–11.

In April of 1992, after years of withdrawing from society, Chris McCandless hitchhiked to Alaska and started down a snow-covered trail into the backcountry, carrying a bag of rice and a rifle, alone. After managing to survive on his own for more than 100 days, he died alone in an abandoned bus in the Alaskan wilderness. Whatever Chris McCandless was searching for on his own, he didn't think he'd find it in community.

Near his body, they found a copy of the Russian novel *Dr. Zhivago*. In it, he had highlighted a sentence and written a few words of his own in the margin. The sentence read: “And so it turned out that only a life similar to the life of those around us, merging with it without a ripple, is genuine life, and that an unshared happiness is not happiness.” In the margin next to those words, McCandless had written in capital letters: HAPPINESS ONLY REAL WHEN SHARED.

WE WERE MADE FOR COMMUNITY

God designed us in such a way that happiness is only real when it's shared. We were made for community. Deep within us, there is a desire to belong to something bigger than ourselves. This desire is the driving motivation behind every club, team, social group, and even places where we eat and buy groceries. But that desire is more than a mere social construct; it's in our very DNA.

The God who created us has eternally existed in community as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Triune God created us in his image, with a longing for this kind of community and relationship. When sin entered the world, our relationship with God and each other was fractured. But since the beginning, God has been working to redeem and restore what was lost. And one day, people from every tribe, tongue, race, and nation will gather to worship and experience communion with God and each other once again. With our future hope in view, followers of Jesus pursue community in the here and now.

If that's true, why do so many Christians still walk alone? Why is it so hard for us to move toward each other? Some of us are prone to believe the lie of self-reliance: *I don't need you*. Others of us are prone to believe the lie of worthlessness: *You don't need me*. These obstacles to community can at times seem insurmountable. Pride always draws us away from interdependence toward the illusion of self-reliance. If Pride could talk, it would probably say something like "I don't need you, I can do it myself."

As a result, we've become increasingly lonely, and it's even affecting us physically. Doctors are finding that loneliness causes "an insidious type of stress" that leads to chronic inflammation and an increased risk of heart disease, arthritis, and diabetes. Several large studies even claim that loneliness has the same effect on mortality as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day. But the good news is we don't have to walk alone.

WE ARE ONE BODY IN CHRIST

We can move toward each other, despite our pride, because we've been permanently joined together in one body by Jesus. We can move toward each other because we already belong.

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Romans 12:4–5

We do not all have the same function, and we might not feel like we fit in. But in Christ, we do belong. Every Christian is not only unique, but uniquely needed. God has designed community in such a way that when we show up, we're all guaranteed to have something to offer! We are empowered by the Spirit of God to bless and serve others.

*Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. **Romans 12:6–8***

God has designed his Body in such a way that when he acts to give us something we need, he tends to accomplish that primarily by giving it to others instead. When someone needs an encouraging word, God will spontaneously call it to someone else's mind and prompt them to share it. When someone is unable to discern the right choice, God will enable someone else to give them wise counsel. When someone is in danger of falling into sin, God will send others to ask good questions, listen, pray, and offer gentle correction. We all have something for our fellow Christians, and they need it.

LOVING GOD, LOVING PEOPLE, AND PUSHING BACK DARKNESS IN COMMUNITY

The Mission of Frontline Church is *multiplying gospel communities that love God, love people, and push back darkness*. One of the primary ways we do this is through community groups.

As we gather in community groups, we are invited to grow in our love for God. Our love for God is a response to his love for us. Through the gospel, we see the markers of God's overflowing love clearly detailed. God shows the depths of his love by sending Jesus to reconcile us back to him. Our love is always a response to his love. "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins... We love because he first loved us" (1 Jn 4:10, 19).

As we gather in community groups, we are invited to grow in our love for each other. Just as Jesus loved and served us, we love and serve each other. John warns us against merely expressing our love "in word or talk but [not] in deed and in truth" (1 Jn 3:18). In community, we love one another by caring for one another. Our needs are uncovered and met as we walk together.

As we gather in community groups, we are invited to push back darkness around us. We gather, not just for ourselves, but for our communities. God has a mission to restore and redeem this world. And he sends us out to bring the light of the gospel to those in darkness and without hope. Our neighborhoods provide numerous opportunities to advance God's mission in our city.

OBSTACLES TO COMMUNITY

If we have tried community and come away disappointed, it may have been because too many of us were hiding in plain sight. If we've been disappointed, let's not lose heart and conclude that real Christian community is just a pipe dream. Open yourself up to being pleasantly surprised by the possibility of Christian community.

Other times we've tried community and come away disappointed because, in hindsight, we realized we were approaching it passively, like consumers. Paul Miller writes:

The biggest problem people have in searching for the perfect community is just that. You don't find community; you create it through love.

Paul Miller, *A Loving Life*

As Tim Keller has pointed out, the single greatest factor that will determine your experience of Christian community is your experiential knowledge of God's love for you. If you find yourself having a hard time believing his love for you in a real and lasting way, there is an invitation for you to see Jesus in new and fresh ways. For our sake Jesus gave up his community. It's only because Jesus

chose to be forsaken by his community that we can ever hope to have community with each other. In his pain, he hung alone, so that in our pain we might hang together. He willingly suffered alone in the dark in order to make sure that we can always walk together in the light of his love. *Happiness only real when shared.*

If you find yourself tempted to be cynical or dismissive about Christian community, think harder about the cross. We won't see the beauty of this community until we see the ugliness of that cross. Until we see what it cost to create this community, we will either treat it like it's so cheap it's not worth our time, or like it's so fragile it's only a matter of time before it betrays us. But in true Christian community, we have an opportunity to share the joy we find in Jesus.

DISCUSSION

Discuss the following questions.

- ***What common obstacles to community have you experienced in the past?***
- ***What are your hopes and fears as we start this new chapter as a community group?***

EXERCISE

Take 7 minutes to work through the following questions on your own, jotting down answers as they come to mind. Then, after the 7 minutes, if you feel comfortable, share your answers with the group. Then, once everyone has had an opportunity to share, answer the discussion question at the bottom of the page.

What does the ideal community group look like?

What does the ideal community group NOT look like?

How do you think participating in a community group could add value to your life?

How do you think participating in a community group could serve your non-Christian family, friends, and neighbors?

- *How were your answers similar or different to others in the group?*

PRAYER

Finish your time by asking someone to pray. In particular, pray for the community group—that you would experience true community and depth of relationship.



WHAT ARE COMMUNITY GROUPS?

In this session, we will consider what community groups look like and what we hope to accomplish in community. To begin, ask someone to pray for your time together.

BIBLE CONVERSATION

Have someone read the following Scripture and discussion question out loud.

Spend up to 5 minutes in discussion.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. Acts 2:42–47

- According to this passage, how did the early church gather together? What did they do when they gathered? What insight does this provide for us today?

TRAINING NOTES

Read aloud the following article from the Community Group Handbook section entitled “What Are Community Groups?” on pages 12–13.

COMMUNITY GROUPS: *Local, diverse gospel communities that gather regularly for discipleship, care, and mission through discipleship groups, family meals, and missional gatherings.*

LOCAL

Community groups gather in homes around the city throughout the week. As we gather with other believers in our geographical area, we are able to make a deeper impact on the neighbors around us. We don't construct community groups on the basis of age, affinity, or interest. Instead, our community groups are geographical, comprised of people who live in a similar region and context. In his earthly life, Jesus emphasized the importance of offering presence to those around us. In the same way, our community groups are rooted in a local community, seeking to love and serve our real-life neighbors.

DIVERSE

Ideally, community groups contain people from all different backgrounds, ethnicities, and stages of life. They are intergenerational and diverse. Community groups are not merely a Sunday school class, a social action club, or a support group. We don't gather in community because of shared hobbies or interests. Rather, as we gather together with people who are different from us, we are able to see things we've never seen before. In the Church, Jesus has sought to reconcile people who were divided by all kinds of barriers, whether political, racial, or socioeconomic. Our community groups welcome people from all walks of life to experience the transforming power of the gospel.

GOSPEL COMMUNITIES

Community groups, along with our six congregations, our one church, and our church plants, are all “gospel communities.” Gospel communities are distinct from other kinds of groups in that they are committed to the gospel and to one another. Gospel communities are together:

- *Because of Jesus*—gathering because of our hope in Jesus rather than hobbies, stage of life, or culture
- *With Jesus*—being empowered for ministry and mission by the Holy Spirit
- *Under Jesus*—following him in what he has spoken to us through the Scriptures
- *For Jesus*—passionately seeking the good of our city and longing for more people to meet Jesus

Ultimately, Jesus is the one who unites us and gives us meaning as a group.

THAT GATHER REGULARLY

A community group is more than a weekly meeting. Instead, in a healthy community group, people increasingly live their lives together in order to increasingly pursue Jesus together. In so doing, they resemble the kind of community we see in Acts 2.

THE GOALS OF COMMUNITY GROUPS

At Frontline, our community groups love God, love people, and push back darkness through discipleship, care, and mission.

DISCIPLESHIP

Discipleship is the process where, by the power of the Spirit, we are being made more like Jesus in every area of our life. When we follow Jesus, we are called into a life of discipleship. Through the gospel, we continually work to know and follow Jesus, as the Spirit works powerfully in us (Phil 1:6; 2:13). The more we look to Jesus, the more we’ll look *like* Jesus. The good news of Jesus is both a message we proclaim and a power at work in us.

As we follow Jesus together, we are called to disciple one another (Eph 4:11–16). We are continually in

need of grace. We point one another to the good news of Jesus—that while we are more sinful than we dared imagine, we are more loved than we dared hope. We encourage one another to put away sin and run after Jesus. Discipleship happens in everyday life, as we live in community and on mission together. We get to know one another—our struggles and victories, our fears and hopes. *Community groups help us disciple one another.*

CARE

Care is the practice of loving one another. Jesus calls his followers to love others in the same way he loved us. We care for one another holistically, whether physically, spiritually, emotionally, or relationally. We care for one another as we help our friends and neighbors, deliver meals to new mothers, and pray for one another. We care by being relationally thoughtful and honoring others above ourselves. We care by offering our time and presence to those who are grieving. Sometimes, caring for others calls us to speak truth in love, to rebuke, or to point people away from their sin to Jesus. Where we see the needy, the sick, the hurting, or the struggling, we seek to love them as Jesus loved us.

Care can rarely be accomplished by a single individual. The responsibility of care doesn’t need to fall on one person or leader. We need a community of people who know us and love us to effectively care for us. When we experience seasons of care, we can most often have our needs met within the context of community. *Community groups help us care for one another.*

MISSION

Mission is our calling as a community—to know God and to make him known. Every follower of Jesus is called to be a missionary, to bring the good news of Jesus into the places they live, work, play, and study. God has placed us in our families, our jobs, and our neighborhoods to be the salty brightness of the transforming work of Jesus. When we were in darkness and without hope, Jesus came for us and laid down his life to rescue us. And so wherever we now find ourselves, we seek to bring the peace,

EXERCISE

The following chart lists nine practices that build true community. Read through the list on your own, and then answer the following questions together as a group. (Adapted from the *Gospel in Life Study Guide*, by Tim Keller, Tim Shamas, and John Lin.)

Nine Practices of Biblical Community			
Friends	Affirming one another's strengths, abilities, and gifts (Rom 12:3–10)	Affirming one another's equal importance in Christ (Rom 15:7, 1 Cor 12:25, Jas 2:1)	Affirming one another through visible affection (Rom 16:16, Eph 4:32)
Family	Sharing one another's needs and problems (Gal 6:2, Heb 3:13)	Sharing one another's beliefs, thinking, and spirituality (Col 3:16, Eph 5:19)	Sharing one another's space, goods, and time (1 Pet 4:9, Gal 6:10)
Servants	Serving one another through accountability (Jas 5:16, Eph 4:25)	Serving one another through forgiveness and reconciliation (Eph 4:32, Col 3:13, Matt 5:23–24; 18:15)	Serving one another's interests rather than our own (Rom 15:1–2, Phil 2:3–5)

- Which one of these nine practices do you feel like our community group excels in?
- Which one of these practices do you think we should grow in? What steps can we take to grow in this area?

PRAYER

Finish your time by asking someone to pray. In particular, pray for the community group—that you would embody discipleship, care, and mission, and increasingly practice biblical community.



FAMILY MEALS

In this session, we will consider what family meals look like and how to have one. To begin, ask someone to pray for your time together.

BIBLE CONVERSATION

Have someone read the following Scripture and discussion question out loud.

Spend up to 5 minutes in discussion.

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

Romans 12:9–15

- *What does it look like to have “genuine” love? How could you to implement the ideals from this passage in your group?*

TRAINING NOTES

Read aloud the following article from the Community Group Handbook section entitled “Family Meals” on pages 51–52.

FAMILY MEALS: *Casual gatherings around a common table for the sake of community and gospel hospitality.*

WHAT IS A FAMILY MEAL?

Real-life conversations happen in real-life situations. Some of the best conversations happen around the dinner table or while we’re washing the dishes. For our family meals, we set aside an

entire evening to prepare, eat, and clean up a meal together. As we linger over the meal, we listen, talk, and pray. Slowly, over time, we can become friends, and—on a deeper level—family. As we eat a meal together, we have the opportunity to experience true community. Participating in a meal together is a symbol of our fellowship and relationship with one another. If we are willing, we can learn one another’s stories, vocations, and passions. Quite simply, we become a spiritual family as we practice the “one anothers” of Scripture.

At Frontline, our community groups typically meet for family meal twice a month, on the first and third week of the month. This gathering centers around the meal—preparing, eating, and cleaning up together as a community. A family meal will look different from one community group to the next. We may spend the evening praying for one another. Sometimes, we may talk about what Jesus is teaching us or what we learned from the most recent sermon. And other times, we may just spend time getting to know one another better. However it looks, we pursue the same purpose: to live out our identity as a spiritual family.

One of the great advantages in gathering this way is that it frees people up to be themselves. You don’t have to act a certain way or have a certain knowledge set. You don’t need to have listened to a sermon or have a curriculum. Anyone can join in—even an outsider who doesn’t know Jesus.

At a family meal, we can invite friends, family, co-workers, and non-believers to meet our group and experience God’s grace in a less intimidating setting. In pursuit of the Great Commission, we need other avenues for inviting people to

experience Christian community besides simply inviting them to a Sunday worship gathering. While some people might be hesitant to set foot inside a church building, they are more likely to show up at a family meal and experience the love of Jesus. Mission is best carried out in the context of community. Simply put, we don't grow or go alone.

Family meals afford us a unique opportunity to proclaim the gospel and move out on mission where we live. Whenever someone who doesn't follow Jesus pulls up a chair, our family meals shift to offer hospitality and embrace the outsider. In this way, through the warmth of table fellowship, an appetite for spiritual family may be awakened in those far from God. Our hope is that non-Christians might experience the love Christians have for one another—as followers of Jesus serve and care for each other, people can see gospel community in action. When we share the good news of Jesus with them, they will already have a framework for how the gospel impacts lives and relationships.

We push back darkness better when we push it back together. But that means that our community groups can't just consist of Bible studies and prayer meetings. They must also function as kingdom outposts. As we gather around a common table, we provide a glimpse of the coming kingdom of God. And we invite those far from God to join the feast.

HOW DO WE HAVE A FAMILY MEAL?

A family meal will look different from one community group to the next. What one group does, another may do completely differently—yet hopefully they are pursuing the same purpose. For the family meal, we seek to live out our identity as a spiritual family. While there is not a uniform way to accomplish this goal, here are some practical suggestions:

When should we meet for a family meal? At Frontline, our community groups typically meet for family meal twice a month, on the first and third week of the month. This helps cut down some of the stress of having a weekly large gathering. Find a day of the week that works best for most people in the group, if at all possible. Pick a time that won't put everyone under a time crunch. For groups that have small kids, be aware of how late your group

will meet and have an agreed-upon end-time. But, at the end of the day, no day and time will be ideal for everyone. Use your best judgment, and ask your group to commit to regularly engage this rhythm of community.

How do you plan the meal? For the meal itself, it might work best for one family or person in your community to do the meal planning, but to involve others in the preparation. This cuts down on a lot of the planning and communication that is often necessary to do a potluck-style meal (and also limits the number of leftovers that get left behind). Some community groups may decide to rotate through who is taking point to share the burden over time. As you plan the meal, be aware of any dietary restrictions in your group, or for guests who may be coming. Some easy-to-prepare meals that have worked well for others are homemade individual pizzas, oven-roasted chicken tacos, lasagna and other pasta dishes, or grilling with a variety of salad options. But there are innumerable options that could work equally well.

What does the family meal look like? Again, each community group will look slightly different. But they will all center around preparing a meal, eating together, and having gospel-centered conversations. When the meal is ready, you might consider gathering in the kitchen and inviting the host family to pray for the meal. At this point, you may provide some topic of discussion for the dinner. Depending on the dynamics of the group, you may be able to have a more focused conversation, or you may have several smaller informal conversations going on at once. At the end of the evening, consider inviting people to help with clean-up before everyone heads home. Again, the goal of family meal is to gather around a common table for the sake of community to live out our identity as a spiritual family. How we accomplish this is flexible and will look different from group to group.

What should we talk about at family meal? There are a few different options for how to encourage meaningful conversation at a family meal. It is important to ask the question "Who will be there?" We want to be a community where those who aren't yet following Jesus have the opportunity

to belong before they believe, and part of that is considering what you talk about.

Discussion could be more informal and focused on what Jesus is teaching us, or on simply getting to know one another better. Often, rather than having a standard Bible study, you can simply ask the question “What was a high and low for you over the past week or two?” This is a great opportunity for those who are believers to speak about God, the gospel, and Scripture, and it’s also an accessible question for anyone, regardless of their faith, to answer. Other times, we may have a discussion about the most recent sermon. If you do, consider doing it in such a way that anyone can meaningfully participate in the conversation. Summarize what the sermon was about and ask an open-ended question.

Finally, you may dedicate your whole gathering to checking in and praying for one another. Praying together can be a catalyst for deeper community and love for one another. Regardless of the topic, you shouldn’t feel pressure to lead the discussion every time. If someone in your group is great at leading discussion, let them do so occasionally. You could still help direct the content and focus of the conversation.

DISCUSSION

Discuss the following questions.

- *Why do you think eating a meal is so important for community?*
- *What kinds of things happen in meals that don’t happen in other contexts?*

EXERCISE

The following is a list of ten ways to aim for the heart in our conversations and relationships. Take 5 minutes on your own to read through the list. Mark one or two areas you feel strong in and one or two areas you'd most like to grow in. After the 5 minutes, whoever is willing can share an area of strength and an area of growth.

1. Taking conversations one step deeper. Conversations that stay on the surface will never get to the heart.
2. Knowing others well enough to pray for them. Aiming for a deeper understanding, learning the places they're stuck, hurting, or both.
3. Looking for things you can celebrate, sympathize with, or pray for.
4. Making it personal. Connecting with the person in a way that is neither clinical or "professional."
5. Listening until you are moved. Doing this allows you to be present with the person, and not just thinking of how you should respond.
6. Walking alongside them as a friend. Instead of talking down to them as an expert, sharing in their joys and sorrows as a brother or sister.
7. Editing yourself and keeping your words brief. The more concise you can be, the more you can listen and move toward their heart.
8. Mingling your conversation with words of encouragement and comfort. Even in the midst of sin or suffering, these words can lighten the load and remind us of how God is still working.
9. Being slow to give advice. Instead of "speed counseling," we should take time to fully absorb the person's story.
10. Following up at a later time. Remembering someone's story is a profound way to express care and love.

PRAYER

Finish your time by asking someone to pray. In particular, pray for the community group—that as you feast together, you would experience one another as family.



DISCIPLESHIP GROUP

In this session, we will consider what discipleship groups look like and how to have one. To begin, ask someone to pray for your time together.

BIBLE CONVERSATION

Have someone read the following Scripture and discussion question out loud.

Spend up to 5 minutes in discussion.

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:1–2

- *What responsibilities does this passage place on us in community? What would it look like for you to embrace these responsibilities in your community?*

TRAINING NOTES

Read aloud the following article modified from the Community Group Handbook section entitled “Discipleship Groups” on pages 41–43.

DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS: *Gender-specific groups of three or four who gather regularly to know and encourage one another in their walk with Jesus.*

WHAT IS A DISCIPLESHIP GROUP?

If community doesn't draw us deeper into discipleship, it will become just another way to hide in plain sight. A discipleship group is ideally formed from within a community group, though there are some exceptions to this. As we grow in trust and safety with one another, we will more effectively be able to disciple one another.

Jonathan Dodson, in his book *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, warns us about the common pitfalls that discipleship groups may face. Our discipleship groups should be centered around the gospel and avoid the ditches of “religious” and “irreligious” groups. Religious discipleship groups traffic in “cuss jar” accountability, where the members can only offer one another shame and punishment. Instead of trusting by faith that Jesus took our punishment on the cross and atoned for our sin, we try to atone for our sins through what Dodson calls “mutual punishment.” As a result, religious discipleship groups tempt people to either start lying or stop coming. Religious discipleship groups don't last long because eventually everyone gets bled to death.

“Irreligious” discipleship groups traffic in “confession booth” accountability, where we confess our sins and pat each other on the back. We leave feeling better, but with little changed or challenged. Instead of passionately pursuing “the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14), irreligious discipleship groups devolve into false peace, where we get things off our chest, but never take steps to grow in obedience. Our confession stops short of repentance as we confess the same sins over and over, but refuse to take violent action against them. Irreligious discipleship groups don't last long because eventually everyone gets bored to death.

On the other hand, in a healthy, gospel-centered discipleship group, we remind each other that while we are more sinful than we dared imagine, we are more loved than we dared hope, because of Jesus' death in our place. Together, we confess our sins, we

point each other to Jesus, and we encourage each other to live in line with the gospel.

WHAT DOES A DISCIPLESHIP GROUP DO?

When a discipleship group gathers together, it typically includes four movements that help a group become more balanced, biblical, and fruitful.

1. Scripture. Briefly check in on your engagement with Scripture since your last gathering. As David Powlison puts it, what's one bit of Scripture you are applying to one bit of your life? One bit of Scripture can lead you to adore God, see and hate your sin, or ask for grace. To apply one bit of Scripture to one bit of your life requires at least meditation, if not memorization. This will be the most difficult of the four movements to practice outside of your group, but it will be the single greatest determiner of the quality of what happens in your group. Consider the sobering reality that many of us do not consistently spend time alone with God—connecting with him through Scripture and prayer.

It is likely that most members of any given group may not know how to meditate on Scripture or pray in a meaningful way. Even if they do, they are probably doing it no more than one or two days a week. In light of this normative cultural reality, expect to spend the first six to twelve months of a newly-formed discipleship group repeatedly returning to the discipline of spending time alone with God, and patiently, practically equipping each other to read, meditate on, memorize, and pray Scripture.

If multiple of you are repeatedly showing up not having read your Bibles, make a shift in your discipleship group. Instead of continuing to answer the Scripture question in the negative, take 20 minutes at the beginning of your gathering to read Scripture together over the next several weeks. You can use the alternate Discipleship Group Guide, which outlines how to have a discipleship group in this way. You can find this guide online at frontlinechurch.com/discipleship.

2. Sharing. Briefly check in personally. How is God changing you for the good (sanctification)? What are you facing that's hard (suffering)? What sin or temptation do you need to confess (sin)? David

Powlison points out that covering each of these areas allows us to look at the whole picture. This approach is informed by Scripture and is full of love and compassion, while at the same time preventing imbalance in several directions. In other words, some groups dive deep into confession of sin, but neglect to encourage each other by pointing out growth they see in each other—however small. Other groups dive deep into what's hard, but neglect honest and specific confession of sin.

In his book *Side by Side*, Ed Welch points out that many of us don't even know how to talk about sin with others. When someone confesses sin, we shouldn't simply commiserate. Instead, we should aim for the heart, work to develop a plan, and recognize the messy nature of growth and change. We should always consider which of us might be particularly vulnerable in the present moment (traveling, suffering, loneliness, etc.). We should feel concerned if we can't identify our own temptations, and blessed if we can. For all of us, our goal should be to bring our sins out into the open and grow in saying "no" to sinful desires (Titus 2:11–12). And in every situation, we should thank God for any good fruit we can spot.

3. Spread of the Gospel. Remind the group of the names of your "three," and briefly check-in. How is it going pursuing and praying for them? Your goal should be to prayerfully name three people who don't follow Jesus within your sphere of influence. You will then commit to pray for and engage them in intentional gospel relationships. These people could be your children, family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, or others. Whom would you most love to see become a disciple of Jesus? Who is your heart best shaped to reach for Jesus? Alan Hirsch suggests that we continually ask: (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?

Naming and praying for your "three" every time you gather will guard your group against spiritual navel-gazing and self-obsession. If you haven't identified your three, use this time to write down your three, and then pray together, right on the spot, for God to give you the opportunity to: (1) build a deeper relationship with them, (2) introduce them to

Christian community, and (3) share the gospel with them. Pray together that God would save them by opening their eyes to the beauty of Jesus (2 Cor 4:6).

4. Spirit-Filled Prayer. After someone has shared, respond with Spirit-filled prayer. Make sure that your gatherings don't descend into Christianized "talk therapy." In mutual discipleship, sharing that does not pivot to prayer is quickly headed toward self-effort fueled by self-will. No one changes apart from the transforming power of the Spirit. Consider three common barriers to prayer. First, *presumption*. It has been well said that we should not presume that God will do for us apart from prayer what he has explicitly promised to do for us only through prayer! Second, *unbelief*. In the words of an old British missions pamphlet, if our prayer is meager it is because we regard it as supplemental rather than fundamental. Third, *boredom*. Often we don't pray because, if we're honest, we find prayer boring. This will be the most difficult of the four movements to practice in the group, but it will be the single greatest determiner of the quality of what happens outside of the group.

How do you create an effective, God-glorifying, life-transforming discipleship group? In the words of Ed Welch, pray one minute longer than you talk!

Far too often, when Christians gather, prayer is tacked on at the end and rushed through hurriedly in five minutes or less, after the "real work" of talk therapy and unasked-for advice-giving has dragged on for hours. Strive to put heart-centered, Spirit-filled, Scripture-infused prayer at the center, and you will never leave a gathering with a sense of having wasted your time.

DISCUSSION

Discuss the following questions.

- *Have you ever been a part of a discipleship group that was either religious or irreligious? If so, what was your experience like?*
- *How do you envision a gospel-centered discipleship group standing apart from these other kinds of groups?*

EXERCISE

The following exercise will lead your group through listening prayer. To give you direction, have someone read aloud the following guidelines.

An important way we will regularly engage each other in discipleship groups is through Spirit-filled prayer. Most Christians are familiar with praying their own thoughts for others. However, one of the best ways we can serve each other is through listening prayer. In listening prayer, we do not merely pray our own thoughts, but also allow God's Spirit to prompt and guide our prayers (1 Cor 14:3–4, 29–33, 39). If listening prayer is new for you, don't worry—it's probably new for others in the room as well.

Here are eight guidelines:

1. Start by asking if anyone would like to receive prayer. If no one volunteers, invite someone. (Are you yourself facing something hard? Take a risk and request prayer!)
2. Place a chair in the middle of the room, and then ask permission to lay hands on the person. As a general rule, when laying hands on someone of the opposite gender, keep your hands on or above the shoulders.
3. Pray briefly to invite the Holy Spirit's presence to bless, speak, and act. Then quietly listen to the Lord together for at least 60 seconds.
4. After you have taken time to listen, if any Scriptures, pictures, thoughts, or gut impressions come to mind, share them with the person, and then pray briefly in light of what you shared.
5. Share tentatively and humbly. Avoid grand pronouncements or definitive language like "God is telling me..." Instead, you might say, "I have a sense..." or "I felt prompted to pray for..."
6. Encourage those who might be feeling reluctant to share. You might quietly ask each other, "Are you getting anything?" Pastor and author Sam Storms reminds us to "make room and time... for people to express what God has laid on their heart... [I]t's okay to fail or to miss it... [N]o one will be judged or excluded or laughed at if they don't always hit the nail on the head."
7. Take a moment to debrief with the person who received prayer. You might ask, "Did any of that particularly stand out to you?" or "Did any of that feel particularly meaningful or accurate?" You might then ask each other a similar question as a broader group.
8. Finally, as a rule, what you share should be encouraging or comforting. Avoid sharing anything negative or critical. If you feel that God has brought something corrective, sensitive, or potentially life-altering to your mind, find a time to share privately with one of your leaders and let them decide on the appropriate response. To be clear, refrain from sharing about "mates, dates, babies, or moves" or other potentially life-altering circumstances.

Set aside 10 minutes to pray for at least one person, using the guidelines above. A leader will take the initiative to offer a concluding prayer when they sense things are drawing to a close.

PRAYER

Finish your time by asking someone to pray. In particular, pray for the community group—that as you disciple one another, you would grow in your love and obedience to Jesus.



MISSIONAL GATHERINGS

In this session, we will consider what missional gatherings look like and how to have one. To begin, ask someone to pray for your time together.

BIBLE CONVERSATION

Have someone read the following Scripture and discussion question out loud.

Spend up to 5 minutes in discussion.

So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. 1 Thessalonians 2:8

- *What do you think it means to share not only the gospel, but our own selves with others?*
- *How should this inform our understanding of mission?*

TRAINING NOTES

Read aloud the following article from the Community Group Handbook section entitled “Missional Gatherings” on pages 61–63.

MISSIONAL GATHERINGS: *Gathering intentionally for the sake of people far from God to proclaim the gospel and demonstrate the kingdom.*

WHAT IS A MISSIONAL GATHERING?

In addition to our own growth and development, community groups exist so that others might come to know and follow Jesus. Missional gatherings help us push back darkness through both gospel proclamation and kingdom demonstration. Missional gatherings give us the opportunity to build relationships with those who don’t follow Jesus and tell them about the one who has rescued

us. They also give us the opportunity to care for the spiritual and physical needs of those in darkness around us.

Recalling his time living among and ministering to the believers in Thessalonica, Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 2:8, “...being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.” According to this passage, we see a beautifully balanced “both-and” of pushing back darkness through gospel proclamation and kingdom demonstration. It corrects the tendency to only share the gospel abruptly with strangers—answering questions they may not even be asking. But it also corrects the tendency to view evangelism as arrogant and self-righteous.

None of us naturally drift into mission. It takes great intentionality to make time for people outside our community. Obedience means gathering for the sake of people who don’t know Jesus. Mission is ultimately about people, not projects. We must think through ways we can integrate people into our communities, and not just serve them at arm’s length. At Frontline, we repeatedly proclaim (and rightly so) that we are A Church For the City. The more we serve our city, participate in the life of our city, and proclaim the gospel to our city, the more we will fulfill the promise embedded in that statement.

To engage our city on mission, we must introduce people into the daily life of the church—into Christian community. The gospel message must be adorned with the conduct of the gospel community. As onlookers see the power of the

gospel with their own eyes, it will often provoke curiosity. Many of us view mission in isolation from community—such that we end up living on mission individually, with little crossover. This puts unbelievable pressure on each one of us to be an expert in mission. Instead, those who don't follow Jesus should be invited to hang out with Christians who are hanging out with other Christians. This has always been Jesus' vision for melting hearts. "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35). The interpersonal love of the Christian community is, in the words of Francis Schaeffer, "the ultimate apologetic." Missional gatherings make these kinds of encounters possible.

WHY DO WE ENGAGE MISSION?

In the Church, it is popular to talk about living on mission and being a "missional" church. But often, we don't explain what we mean by mission, which leads to general confusion. For some Christians, "mission" is synonymous with evangelism. For others, "mission" has more to do with serving the needy in our communities. Still others see "mission" as the Church's work internationally, to bring the gospel to unreached places. While all of these capture an aspect of the Church's mission, none of them fully encapsulate what the Bible teaches about mission.

Mission isn't first and foremost grounded in Matthew 28, as important as the Great Commission is. Mission is grounded in Genesis 1, and it permeates the whole Bible. The mission of the Church finds its roots in the very mission that God has been actively working toward through all of history. In the beginning, God created the universe with a mission: to fill all creation with his blessing and presence. To this end, all of creation was designed to reflect the heart of God—his goodness and character and attributes.

As the pinnacle of his creation, God uniquely created man and woman in his image. They were royal representatives of God on earth, charged with a special mission: to rule over creation and fill it with God's blessing. Yet even as his original intention for creation seemed to be unraveling because of our sin, God set to work to fulfill his

mission through redemption and restoration. He would redeem humanity from their sin, and he would restore his blessing to his creation. And he was going to accomplish this mission through his people. In short, we engage in mission because we were created for it.

If we only discuss strategies and techniques for reaching people far from God, and skip right over the motivation required to sustain that mission, we will never overcome the inconvenience and sacrifice required to gather for the sake of people far from God. Identity precedes action. If we don't have a settled sense in our hearts that we are adopted sons and daughters of the Father, we will never be able to keep our hand to the gospel plow. We have been called into a spiritual family, and we have been called out on God's mission. Paul says "we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (2 Cor 5:20). We have been called and commissioned to "implore" our friends and neighbors "on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" because of the great good news that "for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (1 Cor 5:20–21)!

WHAT DO MISSIONAL GATHERINGS LOOK LIKE?

First, we gather missionally to host. We gather with the expressed intent of showing gospel hospitality to those outside of Christian community. Hospitality builds trust and encourages conversations to go deeper. Acquaintances might even become friends. Hosting could be as simple as throwing a block party or engaging some cultural event, such as Halloween or the Super Bowl. Or it could look like inviting one of your neighbors to your next family meal. Whatever it looks like, we hope that through hosting, our presence would begin to be felt in our neighborhood.

Second, we gather missionally to help. We prioritize serving with our city partners, which are organizations thoughtfully chosen by each congregation on the basis of their impact. As we serve the poor, marginalized, and needy in our communities, we build relationships with our community. Since many non-Christians also have a

EXERCISE

One of the most common barriers to living a life on mission is that many Christians simply don't have meaningful relationships with non-Christians. To prepare yourself and your group for effective gospel mission, you each need to grow in engaging the unbelievers and unchurched in your own lives. God often uses ordinary relationships with ordinary Christians to draw an unbeliever's heart to him. If you can be a friend, you can be on mission.

As a first step toward that end, we invite you to identify and engage your "three." These are three people within your sphere of influence who do not follow Jesus or are not connected to a local church. We ask you to commit to pray daily for your "three" and engage them in intentional gospel relationships. To help you identify and begin praying for your "three," work through the following exercise together in your group.

Part 1: Identify Your "Three"

Take 3 minutes to prayerfully select and write down the names of three people in your life who do not follow Jesus or are not connected to a local church.

Whom would you most love to see become a disciple of Jesus? Who is your heart best shaped to reach for Jesus? Although someone in your "three" could be a family member, try to think outside of your immediate family first. If you are having trouble identifying three people, just write down as many as you can.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Part 2: Engage Your "Three"

Once you've each identified your "three," pick just one of those three people to share with the group. Take up to 10 minutes to each answer in turn, out loud, the following questions posed by missiologist Alan Hirsch:

- Am I in close proximity with this person to whom I feel called?
- Am I spending regular time with this person? If not, why not?
- Am I too busy to develop a meaningful relationship with this person? If so, how could I create margin for mission?

Part 3: Pray Together

Conclude your time together by praying out loud for the people that you named. Pray especially that your relationship with them would grow, that God would give you creativity in how to spend regular time with them, and that your community group would have opportunities to collectively love and serve them.

Let's commit to praying for and pursuing our three! Pay attention to ways that you can support one another in community as you seek to live missional lives. Remember to invite your three to your group's missional gatherings.



MULTIPLICATION

In this session, we will consider what multiplication looks like and why it matters. To begin, ask someone to pray for your time together.

BIBLE CONVERSATION

Have someone read the following Scripture and discussion question out loud.

Spend up to 5 minutes in discussion.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, signing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:12–17

- **How would our church look different if we embodied the characteristics described in these verses? What kind of effect would it have on our relationships and even our conflicts and disagreements?**

TRAINING NOTES

Read aloud the following article from the Community Group Handbook section entitled “Missional Gatherings” on pages 61–63.

MULTIPLICATION: *The process of making one healthy community group into two groups for the sake of discipleship, care, and mission.*

WHY DO WE MULTIPLY COMMUNITY GROUPS?

Frontline exists to multiply gospel communities that love God, love people, and push back darkness. Through multiplication, we are able to better make disciples, care for others, and advance the kingdom. We multiply so that we can proclaim the gospel and demonstrate the kingdom to more people who desperately need it.

We don't aim to multiply as an end in itself. In other words, our goal is not to launch as many groups as possible. Rather, our community groups multiply for discipleship, care, and mission. If we are to form and sustain healthy groups, multiplication will play a crucial and necessary role.

Multiplication is a very big deal in itself, but *what* we multiply really matters too. As you prepare for multiplication, do some soul-searching and ask yourself if your community group is faithfully committed to our vision, goals, rhythms, and, ultimately, the gospel. Talk with your hub leader about how you can point your group back toward health as needed.

We multiply for discipleship. When disciples are making disciples, they grow. When community groups increase in number beyond a certain threshold, participation and growth begins to waver because human relationships are inherently limited. We can't know everyone. Leaders can't be everywhere for everyone. Conversations can begin to center around the most vocal people in the

group. As a result, mission shrinks, and discipleship is stifled. But through multiplication, we can create room for deeper discipleship and greater intentionality. Multiplication can and should be a means of helping us grow as disciples. We multiply so discipleship can thrive.

We multiply for care. Community groups are responsible for much of the care at Frontline; therefore, it is crucial to be sensitive to group size and its impact on how we care for one another. When groups grow too large, people can begin to fall through the cracks. Needs might go unknown and unmet. We can easily become overwhelmed and exhausted. The ability to effectively care for one another becomes restricted. But through multiplication, we can keep groups to a reasonable size so that we may know and care for every member. We multiply so care can thrive.

We multiply for mission. Jesus commissioned us to go, and the Church has been committed to multiplication since its inception. We ourselves are recipients of the gospel because Christians throughout history have multiplied and spread the gospel message throughout the world. In the same way, community groups should be reaching out in order to welcome in. We should regularly see new people join our group—both from our church and through relationships in the community. If we are hospitably creating space for others to join us, it will naturally lead to multiplication. When we are on mission, our groups have the potential to grow. When a group is too large, visitors can feel overwhelmed, neglected, and even go unnoticed. We multiply so that mission can thrive and more people can come to know and love Jesus.

HOW DOES SIZE FACTOR INTO MULTIPLICATION?

The size of our groups must be taken into account when thinking about multiplication. The ideal size of a community group is about twelve to eighteen adults. If there are lots of young children in a group, that number might be less. There are exceptions to the rule, but overly-large groups are not our desire and are not usually the best environment for effective discipleship, care, and mission.

When a group is too small, it might turn inward and become less effective at mission. On the other hand, when a group is too large, people might struggle to know and be known in community. The larger the group, the harder it is to shepherd well. It becomes more difficult for everyone to be heard; it becomes harder for everyone to remain organized and accountable. Multiplication should be the objective of a large group sooner rather than later.

WHEN SHOULDN'T WE MULTIPLY?

Don't multiply just because your group is large.

Group size should not be the primary determining factor for when a group multiplies. While size is incredibly important, what matters most is leader health and readiness. If your group is currently larger than the ideal, we definitely recommend you start having conversations around multiplication. But don't let your group's size dynamics dictate what is wise or rush you into an unhealthy situation.

Don't multiply without trained and qualified leaders. Before any community group multiplies, we should aim to have leaders who have been trained and equipped to lead a healthy community group. We should avoid rushing someone into leadership so that we can multiply faster. We can't create a shortcut to healthy leadership. If you feel the need to multiply and don't have leaders in mind, talk to your hub leader about ways to develop the right leaders.

Don't multiply to solve relational problems. Conflict is inevitable in relationships. As we live in community with one another, there will be times we might experience tension, frustration, and anger. We should never use multiplication as an antidote to conflict. Instead, we should encourage healthy, gospel-centered conflict resolution. If a problem persists, contact your hub leader for the best way to move forward.

Don't multiply without a clear sense of mission. If our reason for multiplying has more to do with convenience than the kingdom, it's just not a good enough reason to multiply. This kind of multiplication is often driven by the felt needs of the group members. *We need to multiply because Thursday nights aren't convenient for me... We*

need to multiply because I don't "click" with Susan... We need to multiply to alleviate _____.

Whatever the reason, this is more like division than multiplication, and often reveals a consumeristic heart. The appropriate response is not to multiply, but to patiently lead your group to live in line with the gospel over time (Gal 2:14).

HOW DO WE PREPARE FOR THE LOSS OF MULTIPLICATION?

We have to acknowledge that multiplication will be accompanied by pain and loss. And we must not minimize that. It will be hard for people to let go of something good and real, even if it is for the right reasons. The sense of loss we experience around multiplication should not only be acknowledged, but in a real sense, embraced. It will be very difficult to celebrate multiplication unless we feel and experience the pain of gospel goodbyes.

Through multiplication, many of us will feel instability as the ground shifts beneath us. For those who have never experienced a multiplication, it will be normal to feel fear about the unknown and what losses might come through this. On the other hand, for those who have already been through a multiplication, it will be normal to feel multiplication fatigue and wonder if they will ever have stability. For both groups of people, it will be important to acknowledge fear, while also recognizing what Jesus is doing in us and for us through multiplication.

In multiplication, we often have to say goodbye to something good. Relationships might look different as we establish new rhythms and enter a new season. The pain of loss points to the reality that we experienced something beautiful. But we can recognize it as a *gospel* goodbye, because we have hope that transcends our grief—that Jesus will use this for his glory and our joy.

Every group multiplication leads to gospel goodbyes. Gospel goodbyes can be tearful and sad, yet they are ultimately tinged with hope and joy. We can even find ourselves celebrating in the midst of loss because we know that we are making room for more people to be discipled, to receive care, and to meet Jesus. Even as our relationships change, we can rejoice that we are still united together in Jesus by the Spirit.

DISCUSSION

In community, conflict is inevitable. Sometimes, multiplication is seen as an answer to conflict, rather than seeking healthy habits of conflict resolution. Read aloud the ten points of healthy conflict resolution listed below, and then answer the discussion questions at the end.

1. If I sense tension with someone, I will go to the person and clear the air, asking, "Is everything okay between us?"
2. If I am hurt by or angry with someone, I will go privately to that person and talk about it directly.
3. When someone sins against me, I'll do my best to follow the conflict-resolution guidelines in Matthew 18:15-17.
4. I commit not to blindly accept or believe any negative report—no matter who gave it—until I have gone to all parties concerned and asked to hear their perspective.
5. When I need to pass on another's concerns or complaints, I will name the person who gave that information or who felt that way.
6. I will ask others to take their concerns directly to whomever he or she is criticizing or complaining about.
7. I will pursue the unity of the communion table by going to others I have offended—before the meal—and seeking reconciliation.
8. When I am hurt by another person in this church, I will work to forgive the person fully.
9. I will focus more on how I need to change than on how others need to change.
10. I will regularly confess my sins, both in public worship and in gospel community.

- ***How have you experienced healthy conflict resolution in the past?***
- ***When it comes to conflict resolution, what are one or two ways in which you would like to grow?***

EXERCISE

Part 1: Identify Your “Fallen Instinct”

In conflict, we are often dominated by our “fallen instincts” rather than “redemptive responses.” Fallen instincts are the sinful desires, motivations, and tendencies that hide under the surface, driving our words and actions. We often need help to identify what fallen instincts are at the root of unhealthy patterns of conflict in our lives. Once we do so, we may be able to chart a clear path toward godly resolution.

The table below describes three “fallen instincts” which we commonly turn to in the midst of conflict: appeasing, ignoring, and winning. Start by taking 3 minutes to read the table on your own. Then spend 5 minutes together as a group answering the discussion question below.

Appeasing	Ignoring	Winning
<p><i>Pacifying others to end conflict quickly.</i></p> <p>Signs of Appeasing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You tend to misrepresent your true thoughts and feelings. In the moment, you might say things you don’t really mean. You usually agree to resolving a conflict before fully sharing your own concerns. You often capitulate to others in conflict, without considering whether it’s the right thing to do. In conflict, you might feel misunderstood, frustrated, disregarded, or bitter. 	<p><i>Pretending the conflict doesn’t really exist.</i></p> <p>Signs of Ignoring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You tend to only engage in conflict if it’s unavoidable. You might go great lengths to avoid entire topics of conversation. You often resist sharing your opinion or voicing any sort of disagreement. You might resist agreeing to any solution, putting it off indefinitely. In conflict, you might feel guarded, anxious, stubborn, or overwhelmed. 	<p><i>Prevailing in conflict is prioritized over resolution.</i></p> <p>Signs of Winning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You tend to focus on winning the argument more than mutual understanding. You tend to be energized by combat. You might use anger, fear, sadness, or manipulation to win the argument. You usually refuse to drop an issue until you have pressured others to agree with you. In conflict, you might feel judgmental, combative, impatient, or resentful.

- Which fallen instinct do you tend toward? How do you usually express that instinct in the midst of conflict?***

Part 2: Contrast with Redemptive Responses

The grace of God enables us to respond to conflict in light of redemption. Below are three redemptive responses that contrast with our fallen instincts. Along with each response, there are steps for growth in those areas. **Have someone read aloud the following, then answer the accompanying question. Circle one or two growth points from the lists below that you feel called to grow in. They don't have to come from the same list.**

Yielding In Faith.

When we see our own limitations, weaknesses, and sins in light of the gospel, we are free to let go of our stubborn defensiveness. Instead, we can choose to yield to one another in love—not cowardly folding under pressure, but courageously committing to maintain relationship. Sometimes, the right response is to humble yourself, trust the Lord, and let love cover a multitude of sins.

Steps for Growth:

- Becoming aware of when you feel defensive, which can become a major roadblock to resolution.
- Recognizing the situations where you should bend to the desires or preferences of others, even when you think you're right.
- Taking the initiative to confess your sin and pursuing reconciliation in conflict.

Waiting In Hope.

If God were to confront us in every moment of our sin, we would break under the burden of our wrongdoing. In this sense, God postpones challenging us until we're ready for it. We can choose to take a step back in order to consider how God would have us respond in wisdom and love. Waiting gives us an opportunity to shape our posture and words with prayer. Waiting implies that a time will come to reengage and that we are committed to doing so, hopefully with greater understanding and grace.

- ***What is one step you can take this week to begin moving from fallen instincts to redemptive responses?***

Part 3: Prayer

Finish your time by asking someone to pray. In particular, pray for the community group—that God would grow you in numbers and in maturity.

Steps for Growth:

- Avoiding unnecessary conflict by overlooking minor offenses for the sake of love.
- Postponing conflict for a short time when you or the other person aren't in the right frame of mind to engage graciously.
- Focusing more on God's power to work in others than on your ability to change them.

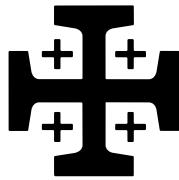
Confronting In Love.

God himself lovingly confronts sin throughout the Bible, and he calls us to do the same. But consider God's motivations in confrontation—he has nothing to prove. He is seeking our good rather than his own gain. There are times we must speak directly and honestly about a problem, disagreement, or sin. Rather than being motivated by a desire to score points, we can choose to humbly confront our fellow believers for mutual growth and deeper relationship.

Steps for Growth:

- Resisting the impulses to entertain gossip, to harbor grudges, to stew silently, or to seek revenge.
- Speaking honestly, openly, and graciously about concerns you may have with another person.
- Refusing to rationalize passivity or silence when you know you should speak up.

Much of the content from this exercise comes from the work of pastor, author, and counselor Winston Smith.





DISCIPLESHIP GROUP VISION GUIDE

The following guide will help your community group understand the importance and goal of discipleship groups. *Discipleship groups are gender-specific groups of three or four who gather regularly to know and encourage one another in their walk with Jesus.* You can find a full description of discipleship groups and frequently asked questions in the Community Group Handbook on pages 39–48. To help you understand our vision for discipleship groups, take time during a family meal to work through the following:

STEP 1: PRAY

Goal: Pray for fruitful and healthy discipleship groups.

Spend about *2 minutes* asking for God’s favor and grace as you talk about and prepare to launch discipleship groups. In particular, pray that God would mature your group and help you all to better disciple one another.

STEP 2: CAST VISION

Goal: Explain what discipleship groups are and why they matter.

Take up to *10 minutes* to consider the “what” and the “why” of discipleship groups. Your group may read aloud the Community Group Handbook sections entitled “What Is a Discipleship Group” and “What Does a Discipleship Group Do?” on pages 41–43. Or the leader might summarize these sections for you in their own words. Regardless of how you talk about discipleship groups, you should remember the following big ideas:

- Discipleship groups are gender-specific groups of three or four who gather regularly to know and encourage one another in their walk with Jesus. By keeping our discipleship groups small and consistent, we are able to go deeper together in discipleship and friendship.

- Instead of “religious” or “irreligious” discipleship groups, we want to have gospel-centered groups. These kinds of groups confess sins, point each other to Jesus, and encourage each other to live in line with the gospel.
- Discipleship groups work through a weekly guide that includes four movements: Scripture, Sharing, Spread of the Gospel, and Spirit-Filled Prayer. These movements help a group become more balanced, biblical, and fruitful.
- Discipleship groups are an important rhythm within our community groups. They are an essential tool for how our church develops and equips you for Christian maturity.

STEP 3: REVIEW

Goal: As a group, review the Discipleship Group Guide.

Hand out the Discipleship Group Guide and take *5 minutes* to walk through it together. This guide will be used with each discipleship group gathering. Be sure to take note of the following elements:

- Discipleship groups will invite one person at a time to share for up to 15 minutes. Once they have finished, the group should take 5 minutes to respond with Spirit-filled prayer for that person. Then repeat for the remaining members until everyone has shared and received prayer.

Setting a Time Limit. By having a set time-frame for sharing, each person has the opportunity to work through the guide at each gathering. While using a timer might feel insensitive, nothing is more disruptive to a group than a person who consistently dominates the conversation. Of course, facilitators should be sensitive to moments in which a person needs more focused attention and prayer. But these situations should be the exception, not the rule.



MISSIONAL GATHERING PLANNING GUIDE

The following guide will help your community group plan and execute a missional gathering. *Missional gatherings are intentionally hosting, helping, or hanging out together with people far from God.* You can find a full description of missional gatherings and frequently asked questions in the Community Group Handbook on pages 61-66. To help your group plan out their next missional gathering, take time during your family meal to work through the following:

STEP 1: DEBRIEF

Goal: Learn from previous missional gatherings.

If your group has already done a missional gathering before, take *5 minutes* to work through the following questions to help you debrief before you begin planning another gathering:

- What wins we can celebrate from our last missional gathering?
- What could we have executed better? What could we have done to be better prepared?
- How did the gathering help us engage the “three strands” of mission: building relationships with others, sharing the gospel with others, and introducing others to community?
- Is there anything we can learn from that gathering to apply to future gatherings?
- Most importantly, were any lost people present at this gathering?

STEP 2: BRAINSTORM

Goal: Come up with two or three potential ideas.

Take up to *15 minutes* to brainstorm how your group can gather for the sake of people far from God. Don't worry about all the details at this point. Simply make it a goal to get two or three good ideas you can do in the next three months. Consider the

different types of missional gatherings. You could **host** a gathering to show gospel hospitality to your non-Christian friends and neighbors. You could **help** those far from God by meeting a need in your neighborhood. You could **hang out** in the city to build friendships with those who don't follow Jesus.

For **hosting** ideas, be sure to ask:

- When and where could we host this gathering?
- Who could you invite? Who lives nearby? Would your three be interested in coming?
- What could you serve? What does your group have to offer?

For **helping** ideas, be sure to ask:

- Who could we reach out to and offer our support? Neighbors? Schools? Non-Profits?
- How can our group reasonably meet a need for this person or group?
- Would we need everyone to pitch in? If not, how could others in the group be involved?

For **hanging out** ideas, be sure to ask:

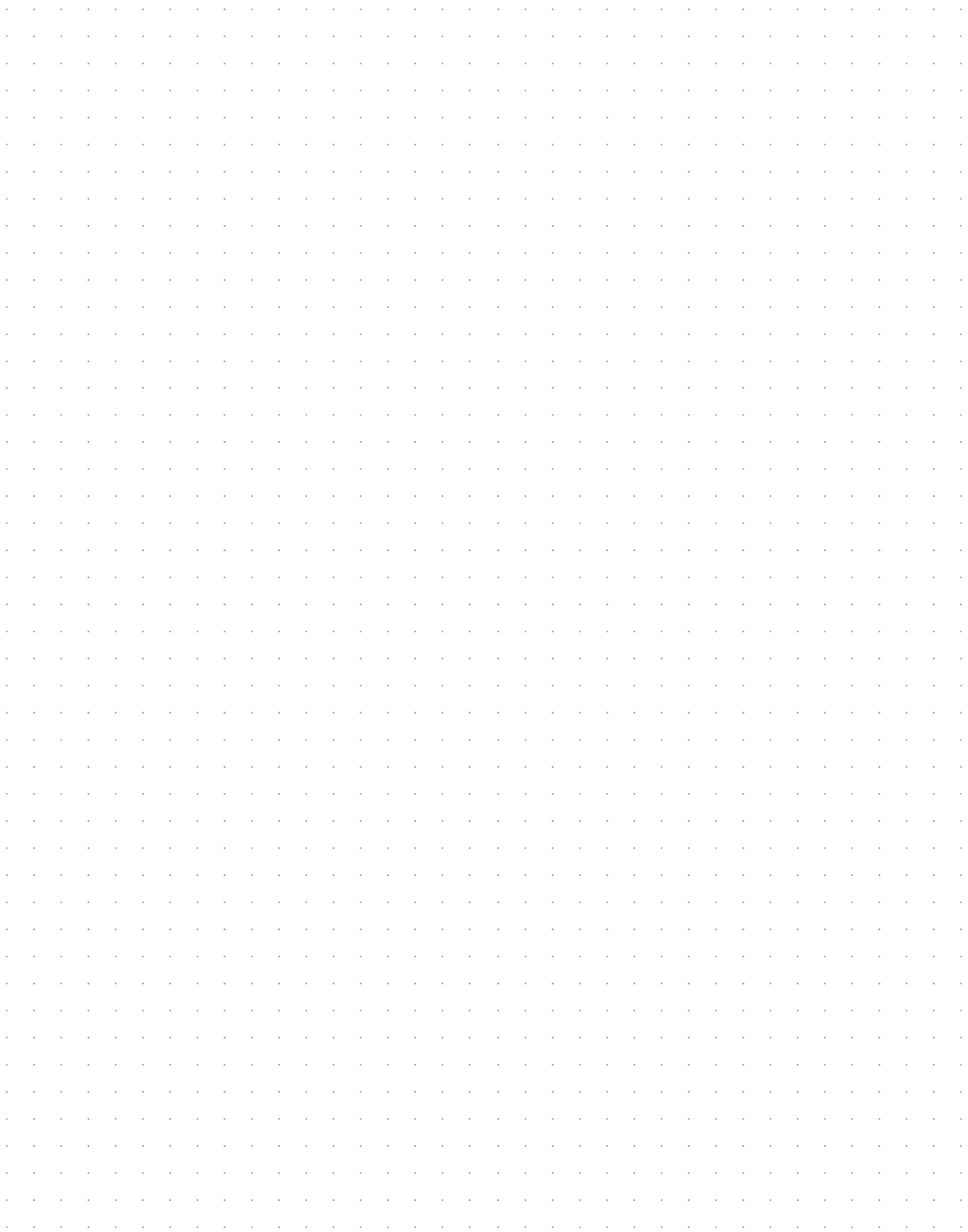
- Where do people in our city already gather and spend time naturally?
- How could we gather in that place as a group in a way that opens gospel doorways?
- Who could we invite to join us as we hang out in the city?

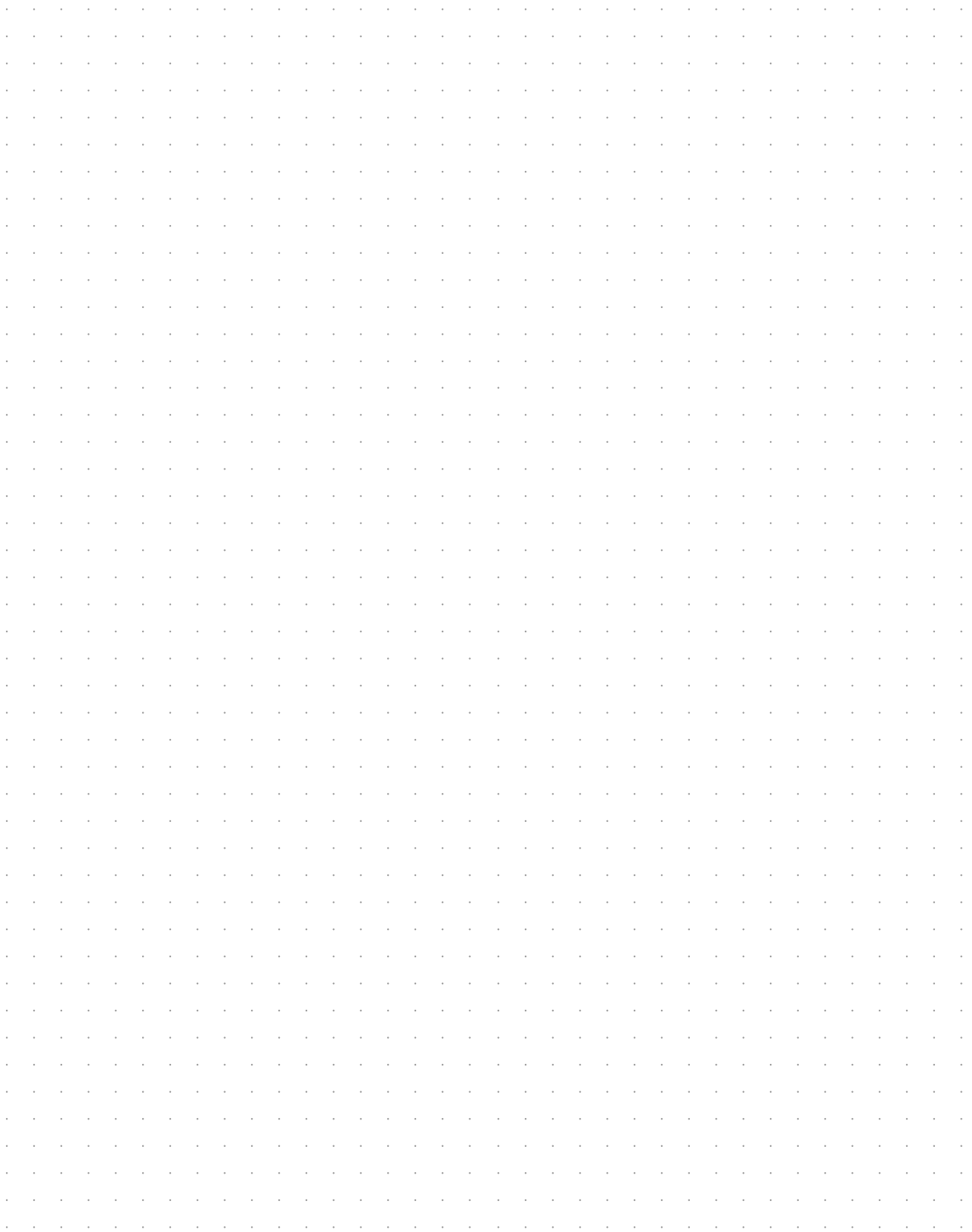
Designate someone to write out ideas. If you already have immediate ideas, feel free to jump in and share. If you need help, use the following questions to get you started:

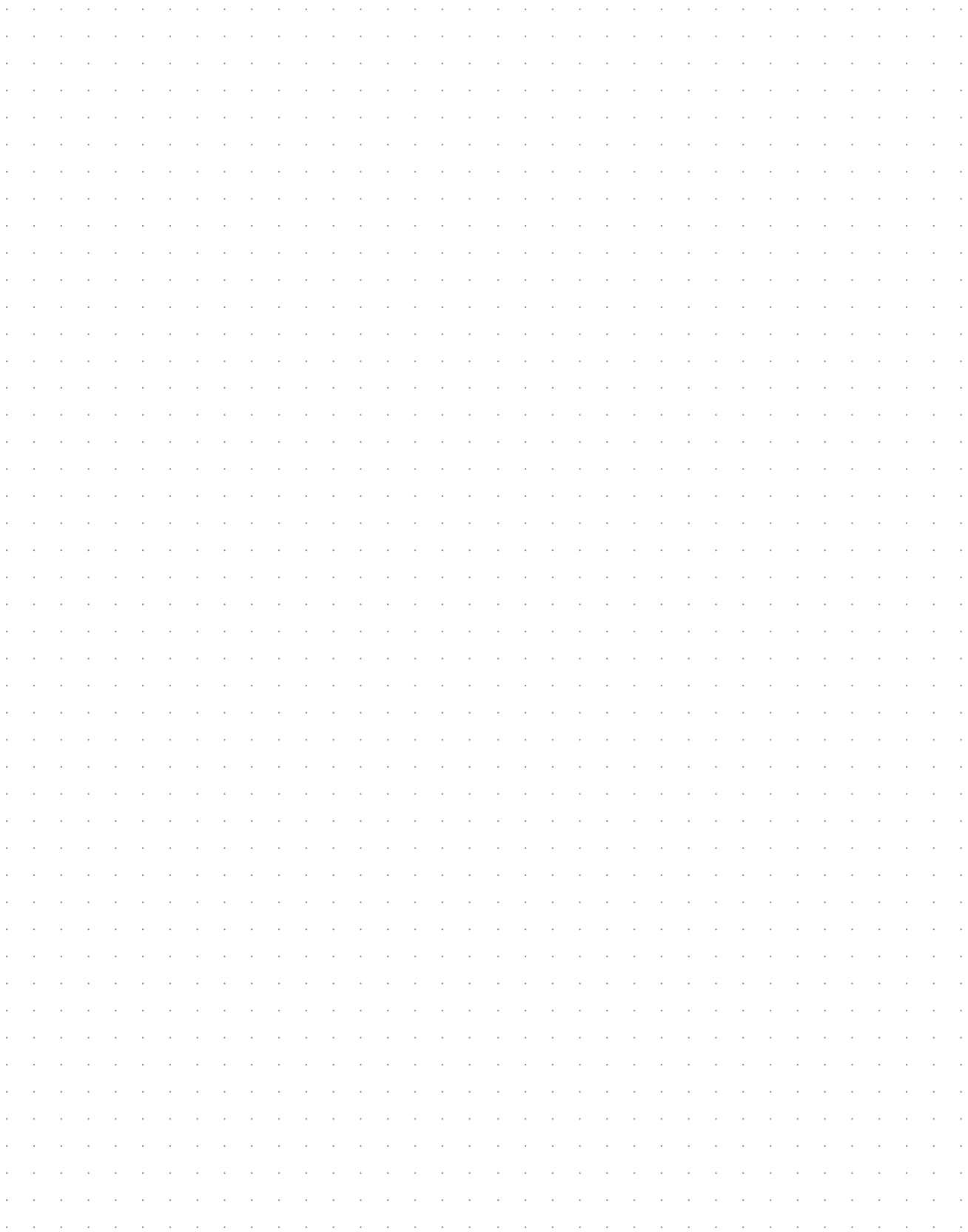
- Are there any significant holidays, events, or moments coming up in the cultural calendar? (e.g., Halloween, Easter, Back-to-School, sporting events)
- What is everyone in the group already involved in which the rest of the group could join in?
- Are there any ideas from previous planning sessions that we could do this time around?

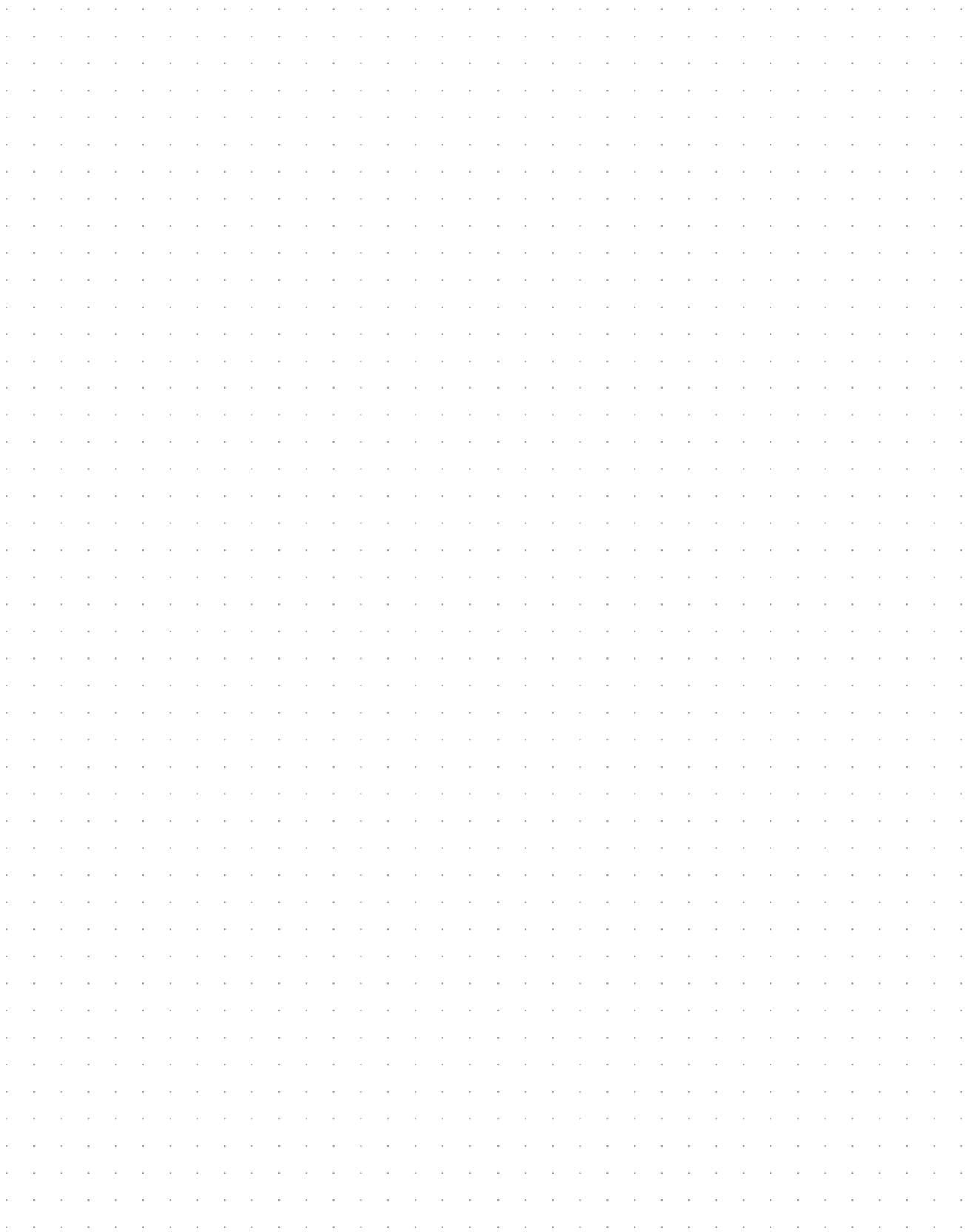
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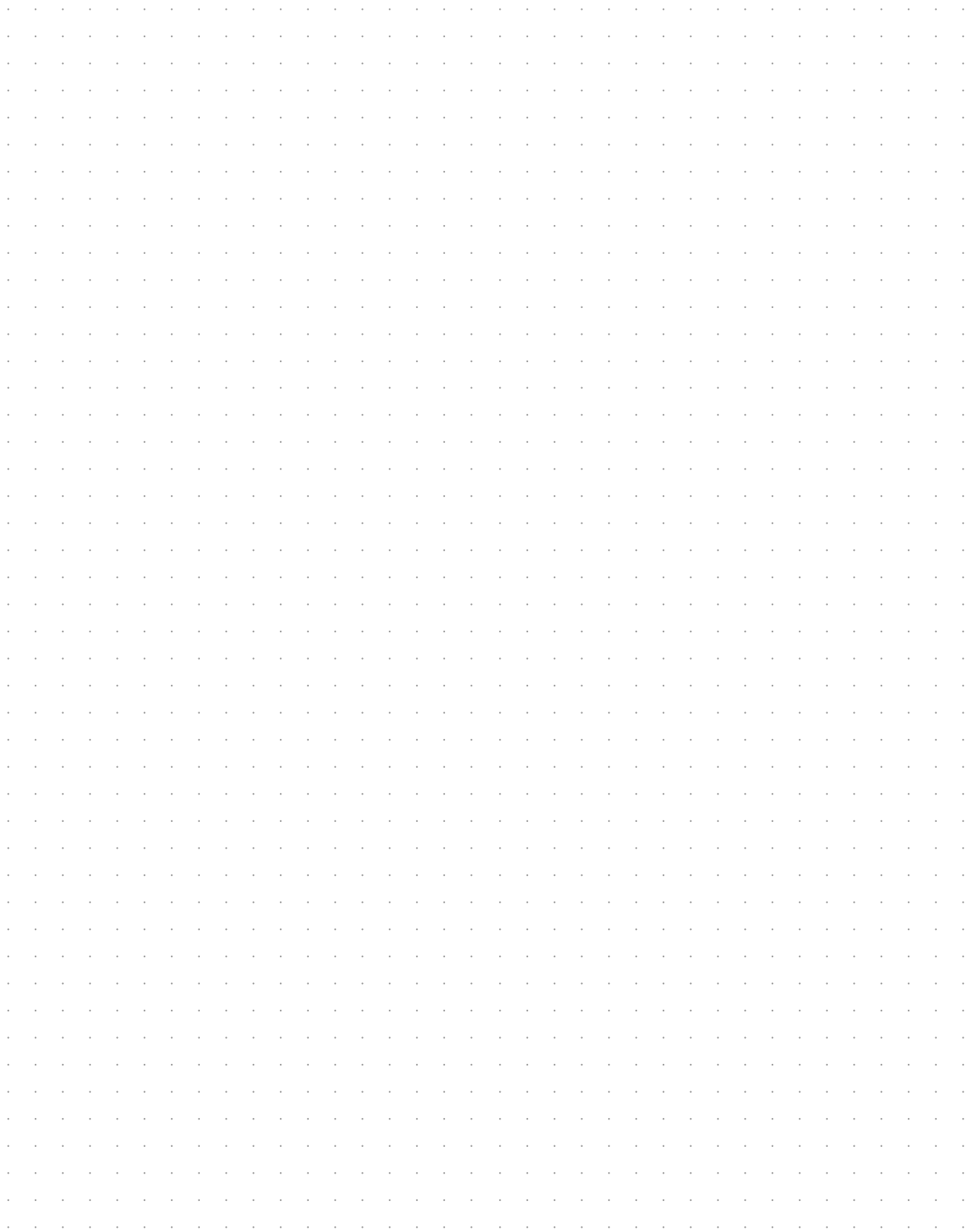
A large grid of small dots, intended for taking notes. The grid consists of approximately 25 columns and 35 rows of dots, covering most of the page area below the title.

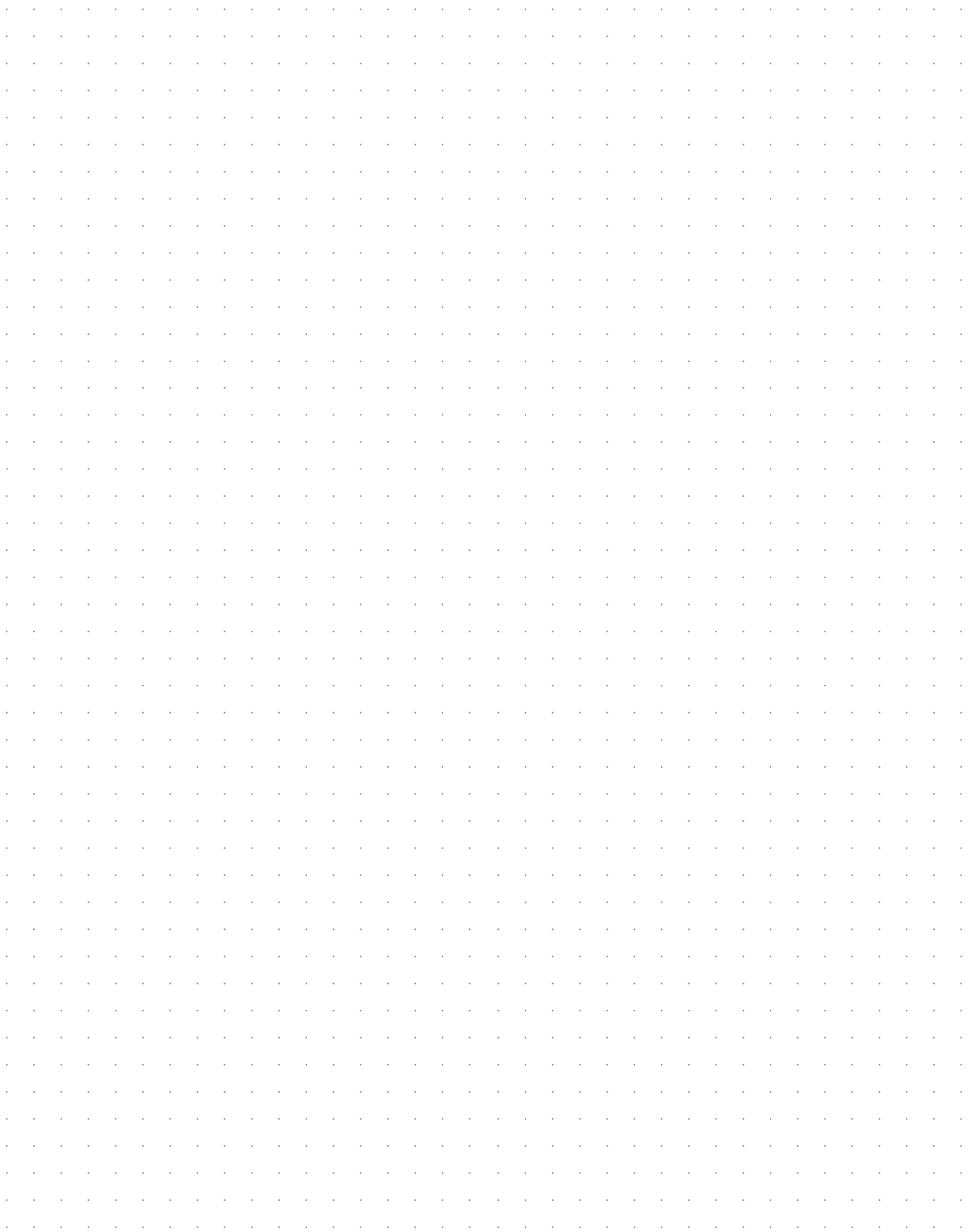














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