



2023-24

# CONNECT GROUPS

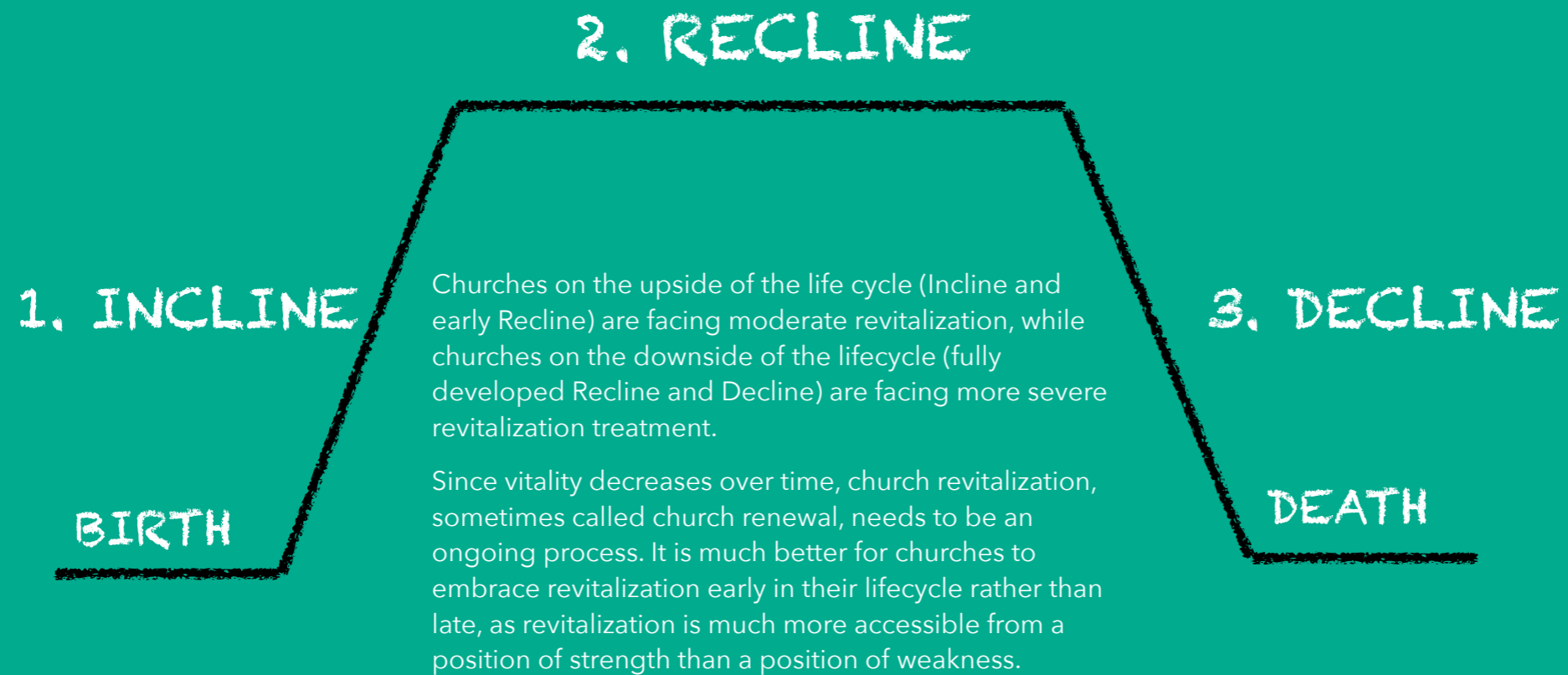
new covenant fellowship | facilitator's guide



# What are Connect Groups?

**Connect Groups are communities of people who seek to tangibly reflect the redemptive love of Christ to one another as they share life together, deepen their faith in Jesus, and engage in service as a small group to meet needs within our community (inside the church or outside).**

# The Church Revitalization Lifecycle: Three Primary Stages



# Core Practices

- 1. Share your Life**
- 2. Share God's Word**
- 3. Share in Prayer**
- 4. Share a Meal**
- 5. Share in Mission**



## **In the world, not of the world, but for the world.**

Connect Groups are communities of people who seek to tangibly demonstrate the grace of the gospel as they share life together, deepen their faith in Jesus, and serve a pocket of people in Mechanicsburg and our surrounding communities. To journey with Jesus is to journey with others. The Christian life is a shared life, a life together, not a life living in isolation. Connect Groups provide opportunities for individuals to lock arms as they incarnate the kingdom life in their neighborhoods

The early Church as described in the book of Acts followed Jesus' example in the way they lived in community together:

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and 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



# A Heart for Christ and a love for Mechanicsburg!

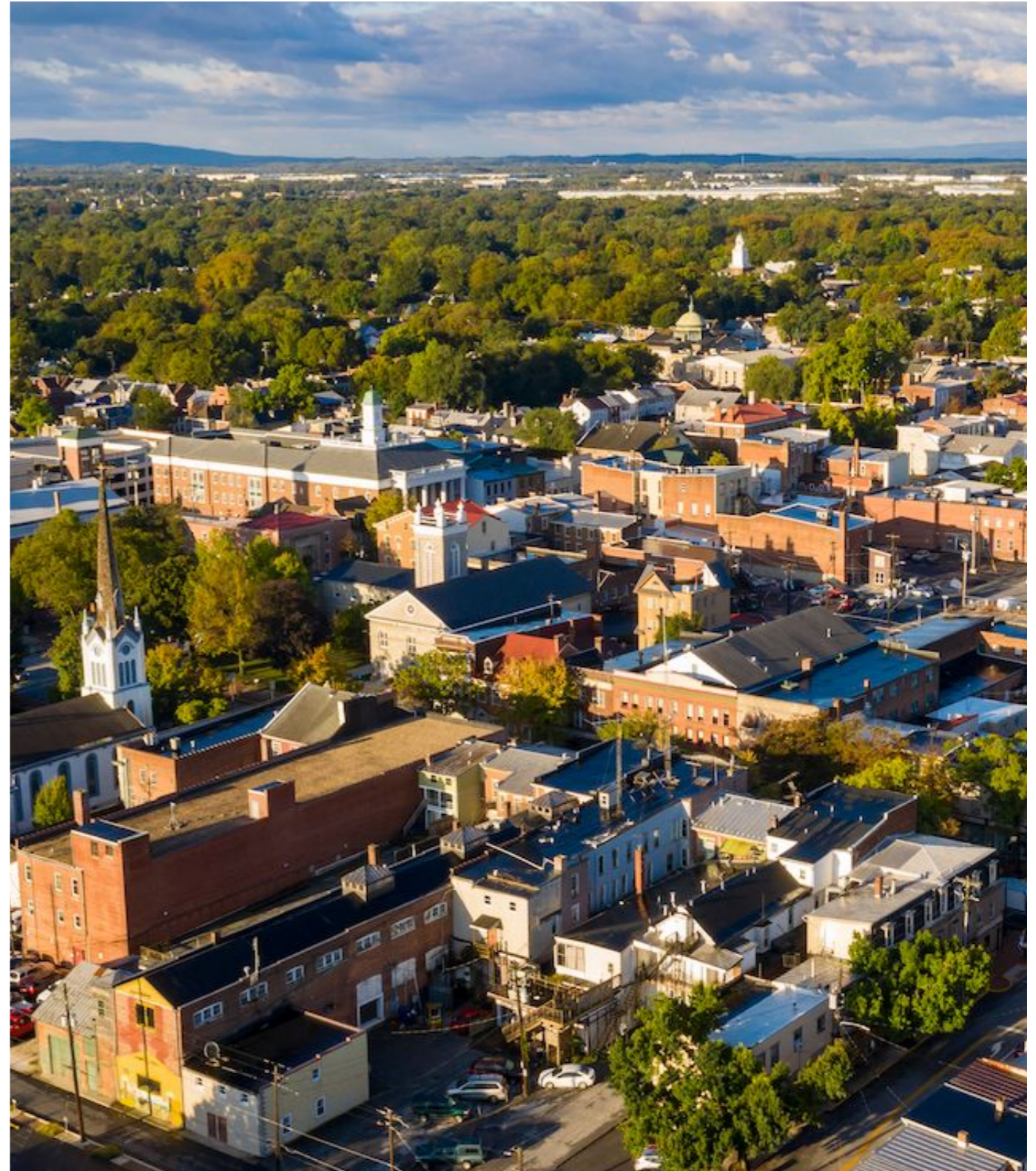
## In Mechanicsburg, for Mechanicsburg

For the **Attractive Missional Model** to truly be lived out, we must realize that the church will operate on two levels.

First, we must have a strong physical presence in the community as a place of rest and refreshment for all who come through our doors. We will celebrate the gospel each week during our corporate time of worship. Our location is at the heart of the city to remind us and to demonstrate to our neighbors our heart for the city.

Second, in addition to the corporate worship of the church, we also recognize that the church operates, as the church, throughout the week. We do this by sharing life together and intentionally investing in relationships with our neighbors. As an **Attractive Missional** church, we must see the connection between the gospel on Sundays and the gospel for the rest of the week. Sundays we come together as a church. The other days of the week, the Lord sends His church into the world.

Through a faithful presence both corporately on Creekview and missionally in our neighborhoods, we seek to reflect the rest, renewal, and restoration of God's grace to Cumberland County and beyond!





# What Kind of Church Do We Want to Be?

The **Attractive Missional Model** combines an outward focus with a solid sense of corporate identity. We belong to each other and to our neighbors in the city.

The **Attractive Missional Model** is an effort to integrate these two important spheres of life and influence. We desire to be a church with strong community internally, coupled with a deep commitment to our neighbors and our communities.

According to the **Attractive Missional Model**, there should be an ongoing, reciprocal relationship between the church that is built up in the gospel and the church's desire to serve and reach its community with the gospel. We believe that the gospel is good news for New Covenant Fellowship and for Mechanicsburg and beyond.





# What Kind of Church Do We Want to Be?

## What We're Not....

An **Exclusively Attractional Model** is program-based, which can cultivate an inward focus and “professionalize” ministry. Because churches that employ this model are highly event-driven, they leave little room for their members to develop close relationships with unbelieving friends and neighbors.

Instead of developing its infrastructure with solid leadership, worship, and programs, churches that employ an **Exclusively House Church Model** place most of their energy upon many areas of ministry outside of its walls. As a result, these churches tend to lack cohesiveness, accountability, and consistent community presence, because they are spread too thin.





# 01 | Share your Life

Connect Groups provide opportunities for individuals to share life by laughing, crying, and so much more. The goal is to be known well, not simply to be well known. The way “to know” and “be known” is not through a program but through the organic development of wholehearted friendships in pursuit of a common goal of reflecting Jesus’s redemptive love where we live, work, and play.

## CORE PRACTICES

Experience life in genuine community.

Care for one another.

Grow in our application of God’s Word to everyday living.

Live missionally by serving together.





# 01 Share your Life

How often have you been in your group when someone shares, but you are just not sure where to go with it? Perhaps you sense there's more "underneath" their statement or question.

So...

- Do you just stop and pray?
- Do you just move on?
- Do you embrace the awkward silence?

**Facilitating a group and meaningful conversation includes learning to ask good questions. Below are some suggested question to help move someone and a conversation deeper.**

What do you **THINK**? (I think \_\_\_\_\_ about this situation \_\_\_\_\_ in my life)

How does that make you **FEEL**? (I am angry, frustrated, excited, confused, hopeful, weary.....)

What do you **DESIRE**? (I desire to be free from my anxiety. I desire to be obedient to God's Word in this area of my life. I desire to be at peace with this person.)

What will you **DO**? (What would it look like for me to be courageous in obedience? What is the cost if I do nothing?)





### **The Authority of God's Word**

How we approach God's Word forms and shapes us. We believe that the Bible introduces us to the God who is there. In fact it's core tenant is that God the Father wants to develop a personal relationship with each of us. If we keep this in mind as we read and discuss it together then our relationship with God and each other will deepen. The Bible was intended to be read in community and for our formation...to shape us into the image of Jesus and direct us in the way of righteousness.

As we read it together we find life. In the Bible, we find a new, truer, way to be human as God designed. In the Bible, we find a unified narrative of God's unfolding plan to redeem and restore His people and creation. In the Bible, we find the definitive source of Truth and Authority for our lives. Indeed, the Bible is trustworthy and has authority over every area of our lives.

For these reasons, Connect Groups are an excellent place to enjoy God's Word together. The emphasis of our Connect Groups is less academic and more personal and community focussed. The gospel bears fruit, and God's grace is on the move to transform His people and the communities in which they live. These groups provide an opportunity for us to consider how God's Word shapes the image of Christ in us and equips us to serve one another and our communities.



# 02 Share God's Word

Following Jesus involves much more than digesting sermons and memorizing theological propositions. All of us need a place to wrestle with the claims of God's Word and to explore the implications of biblical teaching for life. In our Connect Groups, we have the opportunity to dialogue with one another as we consider how God's Word shapes our lives, relationships, and missions.

## Below are helpful practices to apply the truth of God's Word to our everyday lives:

**Observation** — *What does the text say?* This involves gaining facts and setting the context for correct interpretation and application of the Bible passage.

**Interpretation** — *What does it mean?* This involves understanding the message intended for the original audience and for us today.

**Application** — *How can the truth of this Bible passage be applied to everyday living?* This involves applying the truth in a holistic way, i.e. head, heart, and hands, so our lives are being transformed by the power of the gospel.





## 03 Share in Prayer

### **“Prayer is not an exercise, it is the life.” – Oswald Chambers**

Prayer is one of the greatest acts of faith we can have. Indeed, without faith it is impossible to please God. So, through prayer we demonstrate our reliance on God. Keeping a list of answered prayers is a sure way to kindle faith, reliance on God and on one another. Through prayer, the Spirit reveals that we belong not to a world of success, fame, or power, but to God as His beloved.

#### **Below are some suggestions for focusing a Connect Groups experience in the formative practice of prayer.**

**Keep requests brief and focused** — Prayer requests should be personal, meaningful and relevant to the person sharing. Keep them simple and to a few sentences in length. The group can pray as long as desired and members can pray more than once as long as it remains focused and brief.

**Pray the Scriptures** — Select a Psalm or another Bible passage to frame your prayer time.

**Use the Lord’s prayer** - Jesus taught us how to pray and it’s a great way to structure our prayer time. Praise for God’s direction and **answered prayers**. desire to see God’s kingdom come (**pray beyond your own needs**), provision for daily bread, forgiveness and protection.



### **“Food is our common ground, a universal experience.” - James Beard**

In Connect Groups, we develop a practical theology of the meal and why it is such a gift to share in table fellowship together. We see Jesus sharing meals with people in Scripture, we see a greater reality represented—a new world, a new kingdom, a new outlook.

Meals embody God’s grace and provision, as well as give form to community and mission. Remember that meals help connect people, ease fear, and create space for conversation. Perhaps this is why the Bible is filled with so many different stories, miracles, and occasions that revolve around food. We can all relate to being hungry, enjoying a satisfying meal, and connecting with our dining companions.

Consider a few examples from Scripture:

- God’s sending daily manna and quail to the Israelites as they wandered in the desert.
- The ravens feeding Elijah bread and meat.
- Jesus’ feeding of the multitudes from a few loaves of bread and a few pieces of fish.
- Jesus’ last meal with his disciples, known as The Last Supper, when he speaks of his coming sacrifice.
- After his resurrection, Jesus eats breakfast with his disciples.



## 04 Share a Meal



“Nothing, not a conversation, not a handshake or even a hug, establishes friendship so forcefully as eating together.”  
— Jonathan Safran Foer



“The food we consume, the table around which we sit, and the companions gathered with us have as their end our communion with God and with one another.” — Tim Chester



“Radically ordinary hospitality is this: using your Christian home in a daily way that seeks to make strangers neighbors, and neighbors family of God.” — Rosaria Champagne Butterfield



### What is Biblical Hospitality?

**Christian hospitality is one of the most misunderstood concepts in the church today. So what is hospitality? Hospitality simply is this:** it is meeting the stranger and embracing that stranger as a neighbor, and meeting a neighbor, and by God's power, embracing that neighbor as someone who will be part of the family of God. – Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a Housekey*.

### Hospitality vs. Entertainment

Hospitality is not entertainment. It is not meant to show off what you know how to do well. It is not throwing large parties, having a spotlessly clean home, or being a culinary wizard. Hospitality is living your transparent, Christian life before others.

The key point of this definition is the emphasis on displaying Christ to those whom we welcome into our homes. This is extremely important to grasp particularly in a culture where the outward appearance of stability and success is desired more than walking side-by-side with others in order to make much of Jesus.



## 04 Share a Meal

We seek to fulfill Jesus' command to "*love your neighbor*" (Mt. 22:39) by actually loving our neighbors. Our Connect Groups are invested in pockets of people throughout Mechanicsburg to bring the whole gospel to our whole community. It is through service and fellowship with our non-Christian friends that they will have the freedom to ask questions and experience the breadth, the depth, and the love of Jesus.

### What Hospitality Looks Like?

Hospitality is not about showing off your house, your decorating skills, or cooking abilities. It is not just having friends over to play games or sharing your favorite food. It is not about you or your possessions. Hospitality is about God and how He uses you and your possessions to serve those you come into contact with—both friends and strangers, both believers and unbelievers.

Anyone can show hospitality to those around them. It doesn't take fancy china or exquisite food. Hospitality is about investing in other's lives and learning how you can best serve those around you. It is about being vulnerable to invite someone into your "mess" to share the hope you have in Christ, the One who calms our chaos.





## 04 Share a Meal

In addition to enjoying the benefits of everyday life together in a neighborhood, Connect Groups are encouraged to host **dinner parties**. We refer to them as “dinner parties,” because they should be open, fun, and accessible to all types of people. These dinner parties might have a brief centralized “announcement time and/or welcome,” but for the most part, it’s a time to relate and catch up with one another. This could be a dinner party with or without children based on the group’s input.

### Who are our “neighbors”?

We define our “neighbors” as those within a geographic neighborhood, people with shared interests, or just pocket of people from a similar demographic. These commonalities help the Connect Group shape its identity, focus its service, and encourage intentional investment.

“Hospitality from a Biblical perspective is to recognize that God is more interested in caring relationships than the mold behind the shower curtain...It need not matter if we live in a single-room apartment or a split-level ranch, the only requirement is allowing God to use our lives and our possessions.... Our homes and our lives are indeed the most powerful combination of ministry to our world.” — Grace Pittman, *Hospitality with Confidence*





**“Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission—God’s mission.” — Christopher J. H. Wright**

We strive to embody our faith, locally and around the world, as we reflect the redemptive love of Jesus to our neighbors with words of grace and deeds of mercy. The Bible teaches us that by the intentional stewardship of our time, talent and treasure, Christians bring nothing less than a foretaste of the Kingdom of God into reality within our given community.

We want to be a church that does more than simply invite our friends and neighbors to services. Our Connect Groups provide a space for friends and neighbors to connect with real people and wrestle with the claims of the gospel. It’s through our Connect Groups that we develop and implement plans of service in our neighborhoods as well as throw great parties!

There is no better way to forge deep friendships in an authentic community than to lock arms in mission together. As we intentionally spend time together in our Connect Groups, we have the opportunity not only to prayerfully engage our neighborhoods but also to enrich our friendships by “doing life” together.

## 05 Share in Mission

As the gospel transforms our lives, the body of Christ will more fully reflect the glory of God in all aspects of life. We are committed to tangibly expressing God's care for the world by seeking wholeness for the poor, justice for the oppressed, offering fellowship to the lonely and so much more. Connect Group facilitators are encouraged to identify service opportunities and creatively design project such as helping a neighbor build a deck or cleaning elderly people's homes. Find creative ways to bless others where you work, live and play.

### Community Outreach?

**Block parties** are meant to get neighbors relating to one another, and could be organized around holiday events. A Connect Group should be the catalyst for the block party but not solely responsible for it. Neighbors can be involved in the planning. These outreach events are also a great way to partner with Christians in our neighborhoods who belong to other churches.

As you entertain the idea of a **block party** consider normal opportunities to gather like holidays, sports events, celebrations, etc. Rather than inviting *only* close friends, pray about inviting someone from your sphere of influence to experience fellowship in community.





# Recommended Studies - Fall '23

1. **Dustin Willis and Brandon Clements, *The Simplest Way to Change the World: Biblical Hospitality as a Way of Life* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2017).**
2. **Bethany Ferguson, *The Mission-Centered Life: Following Jesus in the Broken Places* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2019).**
3. **Robert H. Thune and Will Walker, *The Gospel-Centered Community* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2013).**
4. **Timothy J. Keller, "Gospel Christianity I: Gospel & the Heart" (<https://gospelinlife.com/downloads/gospel-christianity-i-gospel-the-heart-group-study-product/>).**
5. **Timothy J. Keller, "Gospel Christianity II: Gospel & Community" (<https://gospelinlife.com/downloads/gospel-christianity-ii-gospel-the-world-group-study-product/>).**
6. **Alan Purser, *Mission: Your Place in God's Plan for the Nations* (The Good Book Company, 2019).**



## How Do I Engage Others Without Scaring Them Off?

Starting the conversation with your neighbors about your relationship with Christ can be intimidating. Perhaps you're not sure how to introduce Jesus into their lives without drifting into a "bait-and-switch" model or just awkwardly one day blurting out, "You need Jesus!" Here are a few suggestions for having those conversations:

Always be clear with your friends and neighbors that it is the gospel that motivates you to love others and the city. Explain how Jesus' death and resurrection shape your perspective. Don't hide your commitment to the gospel, explain it

Our investment in our community is motivated by our love for the gospel, not by the response we receive. Our love is not conditional. We want to give our friends time and space to wrestle with the gospel.

Be humble.

Ask good questions (e.g. one that require more than a "yes" or "no") and then actually listen.

Be transparent. Be willing to be known by your neighbors. Letting your neighbors in on your journey and struggle to believe the gospel will make your encouragement for them to trust Jesus more real.

The gospel is about more than heaven and hell. Jesus' mission was concerned with more than what happens when you die, so we can talk more about our future state. Explain to people the relevance of the gospel to every aspect of life. Explain the fullness of Jesus' promises of rest, renewal, and restoration. One of the best opportunities is to share how Jesus shapes your life and how He might transform theirs.

Embrace the awkwardness! We want our neighbors to hear about Jesus and wrestle with the implications of potentially believing. This is more likely to happen in the context of you being an unconditional, abiding, and faithful presence in their lives than their coming to an event, like worship, and having to process all their questions either with strangers or on their own.



# Appendix | Questions

## **Can my neighbors from other churches be involved with my Connect Group?**

Though the primary focus of a Connect Group is to cultivate genuine community around God's Word within our particular local church, we strongly encourage relationships with other Christians in the service of our neighbors. It is our commitment as a church to clearly exemplify the unity of the body of Christ by co-laboring with others in our city. Two of the easiest ways to partner with other Christian neighbors is through coordinating ***block parties*** and ***community service projects***.

## **Will I still have opportunities to socialize with friends at New Covenant outside of my Connect Group?**

Though Connect Groups will likely present you with new friends to spend time with, they are by no means exclusive or designed to monopolize all of your time. In fact, we encourage you to pursue relationships with friends from other City Groups, to learn and grow together.

## **How will Connect Groups do more than simply offer a fun way to interact with our neighbors?**

As you live intentionally in your neighborhood, "fun ways to interact" will naturally lead to deeper relationships between you and your neighbors. These connections will cultivate opportunities to share your stories and point of view. In time and as God leads, we pray you will share the hope you have in Christ with them and/or invite them to NCF.



# Appendix | Group Relational Health

## Unity: One Anothering

1. Be at peace with one another (Mk 9:50)
2. Don't grumble among one another (Jn 6:43)
3. Be of the same mind with one another (Rom. 12:16; 15:5)
4. Accept one another (Rom. 15:17)
5. Don't bite, devour and consume one another (Gal. 5:15)
6. Don't boastfully challenge or envy one another (Gal. 5:26)
7. Gently, patiently tolerate one another (Eph. 4:2)
8. Be kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving to one another (Eph. 4:32)
9. Bear with and forgive one another (Col. 3:13)
10. Seek good for one another, and don't repay evil for evil (1 Th. 5:15)
11. Don't complain against one another (Jas. 4:11; 5:9)
12. Confess sins to one another (Jas. 5:16)

## Peacemaking

**Peace Faking:** someone who sees that there is a problem, but is conflict avoidant and will not say anything. They will have peace at all costs, this is not biblical. This is not true, real peace. Relationships may be void of conflict, but they are cold, distant and fake.

**Peace Taking:** failing to pursue the peace, purity and unity of the Body of Christ in word and in deed.

**Peace Making:** to be at peace means that there must be honest, humble and loving discussion surrounding the present issue(s). There must be ownership and repentance on the one hand, and grace and forgiveness on the other. Each and every party should own what they need to own and be gracious in their response to one another.



# Appendix | Connect Group Covenant

## CONNECT GROUP COVENANT

*CONNECT GROUP PURPOSE: To experience authentic fellowship and community in a small group environment as we care for and serve the needs of others. As we share life together, we covenant with one another in the following ways.*

1. **PRESENCE:** To give priority to the group meeting. Please notify the leader when absent or late.
2. **SAFTEY:** To create a safe place where people can be heard. No quick answers, fixing or judgments.
3. **CONFIDENTIALITY:** To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential. What's said in the group stays in the group.
4. **ACCOUNTABILITY:** To give permission to group members to hold you accountable to spiritual growth and obedience to God's Word.
5. **SCRIPTURE:** While everyone's thoughts and opinions are valuable and encouraged, we will ultimately rely on the truth of God's Word as our final authority. Where two or more parties may disagree with a specific interpretation, the goal will be to display grace and love.
6. **GROWTH & MULTIPLICATION:** Healthy communities grow as they extend invitations to others. At a designated time and date, we will seek to multiply the group's experience by empowering new leaders and starting new groups.

I covenant together with the other members of this Connect Group to honor this agreement.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_