

Opening: Open Each Community Group Meeting by Reading the Community Grp Summary

What is a Community Group at Trinity Presbyterian Church?

Community Groups are basic Christian communities. Believing that getting to know Jesus and falling in love with him are activities best carried out in a community context, Community Groups provide that context. They are gatherings of 6 to 12 people meeting in homes and apartments throughout the city during the week. In Community Groups, people come to know God and to experience His presence, community is developed and fostered, and people are nurtured, equipped and released for God's work in the world. They provide an opportunity for intimacy, mutual support, practical love and service, learning about the Christian faith, prayer, and sharing of what we see God doing in our midst.

What is the Purpose of Community Groups?

A place to meet and experience Jesus Christ in our midst through mutual ministry

A place for fellowship and friendship

A place where gifts are exercised

A place to discover Christianity

What happens during a Community Group Meeting?

Worship – Experiencing the Worth of God and freely giving ourselves to Him

Sharing – Learning to tell the story of our journey with God

Sermon Application – Reflecting together on what God has given us from His Word during Corporate Worship

Prayer – Talking with God

Mission – Having experienced God's love, we now go to love our neighbor with the love we have from God

How do they fit in at Trinity as a whole?

Community Groups are the *primary place for pastoral care at Trinity*. Churches do one of two things: They either practice systematic care and encouragement of the congregation or systematic neglect of the congregation. Our network of community groups is the means through which we seek to practice the former. While some congregations may have small groups, *our congregation is small groups*. Our network of Community groups serves as the nervous system of our church. In them, the gospel is used to motivate people towards a richer relationship with God. In them, the gospel is used as a balm to apply to the wounds we incur in this broken world. In them, the gospel is used to call and motivate people into the service of God's kingdom: In response to God's grace, people are urged to develop lives of moral beauty, integrity and other-centeredness and to discover and use their gifts to carry out ministry both within the congregation and to the world.

The Context of Change: The Worshiping Community

Worshiping God enables us to see the beauty of God and the beauty of godliness. When we worship, we find that our love for God deepens and the hold that other things have on us loosen. When we worship, we find that it changes what we want: we want God and we want to please him more than we want and desire other things. Regularly worshipping God with the larger church, in small groups and on a daily basis as an individual is indispensable if our lives are to change.

Growth by Multiplying New Groups

Trinity's primary vision is that by multiplying groups we are able to increase our capability as a church to care for people. When people are not involved in significant Christian relationships, like Community Groups, it greatly inhibits Christian maturity. Currently many of our friends at Trinity fall outside this kind of caring and encouraging community. For this reason, we consider it imperative to develop new leaders and expand the number of groups. We are not concerned with multiplying groups as an end in itself. We want to increase the number of groups because we want to provide quality personal care and community life for those who are part of our network of friends. As long as we have too few groups, Trinity, Lakeland and Polk County will fail to be as effective as we might be. If we are going to be successful at multiplying groups, then we will need to cast a vision that will make people enthusiastic and committed to these things. If this vision casting is neglected, the resistance to multiplying groups will prove too strong to overcome.

Warm Up (OPTIONAL) - Read Sermon Passage and Corporate Worship Themes

We read the sermon passage, storyline and themes to warm our hearts and minds to remember what God has spoken to us in our time together Sunday morning.

The Storyline – The Virgin shall be with Child – Faith in God’s solution to OUR problem

Ahaz has a problem. He and Judah are under threat of destruction. Ahaz solves the problem by looking to the aid of his neighbor Israel, as he communicates his need and weakness to them. His solution, his neighbors, decide instead to attack him and his people. Ahaz and his people are petrified with fear. So, God calls them to faith in him as their foundation by allowing Ahaz to ask for a sign as high as heaven but also as deep as hell. Ahaz makes no request. Ahaz has never perceived of a problem that big or that grand. So, he does not ask for anything. Ahaz makes an excuse and quotes scripture back to God. Even when commanded to ask for the global, eternal problem of man’s rebellion against God our creator, Ahaz is mute.

Our lack of awareness of our global, eternal, personal, defiance to God makes our solutions small and unimaginative. The object and the amount of our faith is reflected in the solution to the problems we have. The gift of the greatest threat is when we realize the solution is God and God only. If we choose to define our problems as earthy then our solutions will be earthy. But if our problem is as high as the heavens and as deep as hell then our solution is Jesus, the virgin born Son of God who is also Son of Man. Jesus is the unimagined solution to the unperceived problem. So, God size your problem then you will look to God for your solution. Man-size your problem and you will man-size your solution. Our sin is our nature, so our need is a new nature. Our pride self-solves. Our unbelief is “God suspect” and man confident. Our faith hopes in God. Our belief in God’s provision, Jesus, satisfies our deepest fears and provides our greatest joys.

Themes

- Virgin Birth
- Ahaz
- Unbelief
- Pride
- Problem
- Solution
- Ask
- Foundation
- Sight
- Faith
- Sign

1. Launchers:

- How is unbelief wearisome, both to you and your friends?
- How does faith restore, renew, and build up, both you and your friends?
- How does the virgin birth add to your faith?

2. Worship God – The Impossibility of the Human Condition is met by God

Read our call to worship from Matthew 1:18-23 and Tim's Sermon quotes. Leave some room for silent reflection. Then read them silently. Reflect. End your time together praising God for his goodness to save and bear the load of our sin and ruin.

Matthew 1:18–23 (ESV) ¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).

Quotes

C.S. Lewis, Miracles: "Miracles are not a series of disconnected raids on Nature but the various steps of a strategically coherent invasion – an invasion which intends complete conquest and occupation."

C.S. Lewis, Miracles #2: "In the Christian story, God descends to reascend. He comes down; down from the heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity; down further still, if embryologists are right, to recapitulate in the womb ancient and pre-human phases of life; down to the very roots and seabed of the Nature He has created. *But He goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world up with Him.* [You can] picture a strong man stooping lower and lower to get himself underneath some great complicated burden. He must stoop in order to lift, he must almost disappear under the load before he incredibly straightens his back and marches off with the whole mass swaying on his shoulders."

Fleming Rutledge describes faith as, "the moment when the impossibility of the human condition is met by the possibility of God." The very first part of faith is coming to the place where – there is nothing possible that can save. Only the impossible. But that's exactly what we believe – that the impossible has happened. The [promised] child was God in the flesh. Christmas is the moment when the impossibility of the human condition was met by the possibility of God.

3. Sermon Reflection:

Intro: Why does Jesus born of a virgin get you a security you can't lose?

FIRM FOUNDATION

- Why is the LORD trustworthy, even in threatening times?
- What can quell your fears?

WALKING BY SIGHT AND NOT BY FAITH

- What is tragic and foolish about unbelief?
 - Where are you stubborn refusing to ask for a sign?
 - Where are you afraid refusing to trust God for a good outcome?

AN UNLIKELY SIGN

- How is the Virgin birth an unlikely sign for an unlikely deliverance?
- How good are you at “*weakness*”?
- What role does weakness play in your strength?

▪ In your confidence?	▪ In your joy?
▪ In your prayers?	▪ In your love?

4. Kingdom Centered Prayer: YOU CAN PRAY WITH US...

1. Worship God for His wisdom and faithfulness. Praise and adore Him for His amazing ways (that are not our ways) and thoughts (which are not our thoughts), especially to love us through our folly and faithlessness.

2. How have you lived in unbelief (like Ahaz) trusting people, resources, or your own cleverness instead of trusting in the LORD? Confess your pride and fear to Jesus, asking Him to forgive you and heal your heart.

3. Give thanks to Jesus for his willingness to trust His Father and give up His throne in heaven; that He actually did perish and die, *but what we seek (real security) only Jesus gained – a security that believers now can never lose.*

4. Who do you know that is afraid to trust God? Pray for them asking God to show them mercy and persuade them of His trustworthiness.

5. Ask for growth in wisdom and insight into God's ways, especially His steady pattern of working through lowliness, weakness, sorrow, and even death. Pray for wisdom and ask God to deepen your confidence in Him!

5. Mission: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to Encourage the fainthearted.

The Holidays can be a tough time for our friends. So, let's start this week asking God to give us friends to encourage in their faith and trust in Him this holiday season.

4. Who do you know that is afraid to trust God? Pray for them asking God how you can show them mercy and persuade them of His trustworthiness.

6. Jesus From Others

Close your time together in letting each person share something they came to love about Jesus from something someone in the group shared during your time together.

- What do you love more about Jesus from what someone shared during our CG tonight?