

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 discipleship and evangelism 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. They are led by trained lay-leaders from the congregation who are given on-going support.

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
Sharing – God working in our lives
Sermon Application – God Speaking to Us
Prayer – Speaking to God
Mission – Bearing the burdens of those around us

How do they fit in at TPC as a whole?

Community Groups are the *primary place for pastoral care at TPC*. 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.

Though the Bible does not command us to organize community group ministry, it does presuppose that a significant relational life exists within the church. Where this does not happen naturally, the church must cultivate it. Community groups are TPC's chosen means of cultivating that relational life. Because of their foundational role in the life of our church we hope that a great majority of TPC's attenders will be involved in Community Groups

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.

The Christian Community provides a context where others can remind us of the gospel and give us support for the enduring battle of smashing our idols and becoming followers of Christ with undivided hearts. It also provides a context in which sin and idolatry can be exposed and where others can "speak the truth in love" to us. Involvement in a rich network of Christian relationships is similarly indispensable to producing changed lives. In fact, the quality of one's relationships within the Christian Community is a key indicator of a person's spiritual maturity.

Warm Up - Read Sermon Passage and Corporate Worship Themes

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

Proclamation of God's Word

Text: Matthew 2:1-12 (ESV)

Title: Eternal Hope In The Midst of War: The Desire & Dread of Christmas **Teacher:** Tim Rice

¹ Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ² saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." ³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ⁶ "'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" ⁷ Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." ⁹ After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹ And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

The Storyline

The storyline of Jesus' coming and his birth narratives caused quite a stir. Reactions are as broad as imaginable from worship to murder, gift giving to life taking. The leadership of Jerusalem both, the government, Herod and his minion and religious leaders, the scribes and Pharisees are unnerved, on edge and out of sorts. Let the seeking begin. The wise men come to worship. Herod comes to seek and destroy while the religious don't seem to care. Jesus comes to seek and save those in shame and guilt, under wrath and the threat of death by rescue, taking their place. Now, as a follower of Him, he draws you into same. Whom do you seek? What do you seek? Unto us a child is born, what does this gift indicate about God, the giver, our need and our new mission?

Themes:

- Conflict – Between the Kingdom of Man/Satan and the Kingdom of God/Jesus
- The battle lines of the Kingdoms are drawn – whom do you seek?
- Our seeking reveals our priorities. The gifts given reveal the recipient
- Jesus' coming brings 2 reactions - Repentance vs Resentful
- Knowing God requires seeking
- Suffering – He suffered for our good and God's. Now we suffer for our neighbors good and God's Glory.
- Standing before Jesus what will you do? – Fearful hostility, neglect, or faithful worship
- Jesus' kingdom is eternal. Satan's is overthrown.
- Whom or what do seek?

1. Get Acquainted: Gifts Given (10 min)

- Who consistently, year after year, gave the best gifts to you at Christmas? Worst?
 - TimO's example: Best Mrs. B (Mrs. Boutwell) far and away delivered the best and worst gifts year after year. The best – Munsingwear pull over shirts. No question. Every school picture in my life was wearing a Mrs. B Munsingwear shirt. Worst: Mrs. B made some toffee/chocolate candy that I could not stomach but you take the good with the bad.
- What Christmas did you get the best bunch of gifts that were just what you needed?
 - One year Tina and Christin hit it out of the park with every gift like 10 of them where spot on. Examples: an extra-long blanket, a toiletries bag with my initials, slippers, Family size box of Cinnamon Toast Crunch, a watch

2. Worship: One Solitary Life – a seeking summary (10 min)

Reflect on how you have lived your life. What have you sought? What is the measure of your influence on your family, neighbors, state, nation and world? What is God calling you to do with YOUR one solitary life.

One Solitary Life **Author Unknown**

He was born in an obscure village, The child of a peasant woman.

He grew up in still another village where He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty.

Then for three years He was an itinerant preacher.

He never wrote a book.

He never held an office.

He didn't go to college.

He never traveled two hundred miles from the place where he was born.

He did none of the things one usually associates with greatness.

He had no credentials but Himself.

He was only thirty-three years old when the tide of public opinion turned against him.

His friends ran away.

He was turned over to His enemies and went through the mockery of a trial.

He was nailed to a cross between two thieves

While He was dying, His executioners gambled for His clothing, the only property He had on earth.

When He was dead, HE was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen centuries have come and gone, and today He is the central figure of the human race and the Leader of mankind's progress.

All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned put together have not affected the life of man on earth as much as that one solitary life.

3. Kingdom Centered Prayer: (10 min)

1. Adoration: Worship the LORD, God Almighty for His wisdom and faithfulness. Praise God for His plan to save us through such a stunning reversal of expectations, and His trustworthiness that He kept His word.
2. Confession: How have you busied your life with building your own kingdom and neglected Jesus, the true King? *Confess to Jesus your willful neglect, and ask Him to have mercy on you and change your heart to truly hunger after Him as most worthy.*
3. Thanksgiving: Give thanks to Jesus for His work to save us, even as He was required to suffer. Thank Him for being God in human form, atoning for our guilt by His death, and being raised to conquer even death and hell.
4. Supplication Personal: Ask the Holy Spirit to grow you in your insight into Jesus as the promised Savior (Messiah) and the good news of His coming. Pray for understanding so that you would also grow in your love for Him
5. Supplication Others: Who do you know that is indifferent to Jesus and His kingdom? Pray for them asking the Father to help them even as He sent something brilliant and stunning into view for the wise men.

Bonus: Read again Isaiah 53:4-6, 12. Ask the Holy Spirit to bear in you His fruit of love and faithfulness to Jesus, the True King. Pray that He would grow you in your understanding of God's power and wisdom and how His purposes are not undone by suffering, but rather accomplished through it.

4. Sermon Reflection: (10 min)

Introduction: What we seek reveals our desires! What have you sought and what does it reveal about you?

The Coming Conflict: The coming of Jesus – Divisive, Revealing our hearts

What did the coming of Jesus reveal about the characters in our story?

The Wise Men

The Government – Herod

The Religious – Scribes and Pharisees

Potential Affliction: Following Jesus being pulled into suffering

Jesus as rescuer – dove into our shame, pain, suffering, affliction, and death to save us!

Which one in the previous list causes you to worship him most this Christmas Season?

God's Sure Guarantee: Jesus can't be dethroned

Jesus as King invites us to come to him

Empty handed

Weaponless

Humble hearted

Those who are trying to dethrone Jesus are:

Exhausted – His Reign is Eternal

Discouraged – They are working on an unwinnable task

When God intervenes

Agendas are crossed

Hope abounds

Assurance fills our doings and beings

Works of the Devil are destroyed

What are you going to do as you stand before Jesus? Worship or War

5. **Mission:** Our mission this week – Enter IN (10 min)

As you think about this week and the rest of this Christmas season spend some time reflecting on the folks God has sent to enter into your pain, shame, suffering, exploitation, poverty, humility, and “been there for you” like Jesus has for us. Now think of who God may put in your path for you to “enter in” and walk this stretch of the journey with them.

- Who has “entered in” to your struggles and “been there for you”?
- Think of the week ahead and the holiday season to come, who is God sending you to love and walk this stretch of the journey with by “entering in” to their struggles and troubles with hope and assurance?

6. **Jesus From Others (10 min)**

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?