

Community Groups Leadership

Purpose: These groups will strive to build community at Village as they meet during the week to pray, reach out, provide care and study God's Word together.



What is Community? Building real, encouraging godly relationships that spur us to Christ-likeness, ministry, and outreach. (Acts 2:42)

The Four Key Components of Every Community Group:

1. **Outreach** – I encourage you to have an empty chair each meeting to remind people to think about who to invite. This may include people at Village or in their own communities. Some people will come to a home that will never go to the church building. Also, bring up a discussion from time to time of others you could invite as a group.
2. **Community** – Food, food, food, and food. Seriously though, a time of fellowship with snacks and drinks is often where some valuable discipleship and relationships happen. Please get as many people involved in brining these things as possible. Signup sheets are wonderful!! Some groups plan potlucks and other outings from time to time as well. Community also builds when we share our lives together. Even the “normal” things of life are wonderful to share. Encourage care to happen between all the members.
3. **Spiritual Growth** – A time in God's Word is essential to the success of the group. Growing together in community is powerful. Please read through the study guide beforehand and have preselected several questions. I encourage you to only use the questions as a launching point and use good follow-up questions. We will be digging into the text from Sunday and allowing people to process and apply it.
4. **Ministry / Prayer** – Plan to set aside 15 to 20 minutes for prayer requests and a time of prayer. I prefer a group time of prayer, but some larger groups may want to split into smaller groups of 2 or 3 people to pray. Requests can also lead to times where the group can become the answer to the prayer and care for each other in that way. **These groups should intentionally provide pastoral care to those involved.**

The Four Roles of the Community Group Leader:

Choosing to lead a community group can appear to be a daunting task. We want to help you succeed through support and training. Your primary role is that of a servant shepherd. You lead and care for your group in all 4 areas of Outreach, Community, Spiritual Growth, and Ministry. To better understand how to be a servant shepherd in community groups, it is helpful to break it down to four roles the servant shepherd fills. We will summarize them here and then get into more detail below.

1. **Praying** – This is an intercessory role that is separate from the group's prayer time. We should be praying for those we are shepherding daily. This means we must remember their prayer requests and actually pray for them. Not only are we to be praying for the members of our group, but also that the Holy Spirit would guide and direct our own leadership.
2. **Shepherding** – The role of shepherd involves the aspects of caring, guiding, and reproducing. It is vital that the leader knows and cares for the individual members of the group. Notice when someone is not participating in conversation or has not been there. Be willing to talk and invest in people's lives. The shepherd also guides the group. Someone has to end snack and fellowship time and keep things flowing. In this setting,

that should be done fairly casually, but still done. Also, part of this role is to be reproducing other community group leaders. To do this, we identify those with the gifting to lead and start allowing them opportunities to do so.

3. **Leading** – Your third role is to lead the group time of discussion and prayer. You don't have to be a content expert, but rather be able to ask good questions and use the discussion guide well. As you listen, your follow up questions will be key to engaging the group. It is also important to be sensitive in how we lead a prayer time as this becomes a powerful time of care between group members.
4. **Hosting / Host Home Role** – This role must be filled by the group leader, but also can be shared with a host home. This sharing often creates a wonderful opportunity for another to use their gifts of hospitality while freeing the leader to focus on shepherding. Your objective is to create a warm, inviting place for community group to happen. This most likely includes welcoming, drinks, facilitating snacks, and making sure there are no distractions.

Safe Place: It is vital that the culture of the group is that of a safe place. It is your job to cast this vision. Let people know that what is shared here is just for the ears of those that are here.

1. Choose to be authentic and transparent
1 Pet 2:1 Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.
2. Choose to be vulnerable
3. Choose to be humble
Eph 4:2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Letting the Congregation Know: We will have a weekly listing in the Worship Folder and announce the groups from time to time. All Community Groups will also be listed on the web. However, personal invites from both the leader and members are key!

Some Leadership Details:

- The groups will meet on different evenings and times. This will give a better opportunity for people's schedules to fit one of the groups.
 - Please let Sarah Ailes know any changes so she can keep the web page and worship folder up to date.
- We are targeting college and older so that parents feel the freedom to share and have people pray for them. Exceptions will be made at the discretion of the group leader.
- Each group should discuss childcare and how they want to handle this issue. Some may want to rotate a parent watching the kids, or pool resources for a sitter.
- If you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask either by email (to ron@villagebible.com) or comment on the leader's page on the web site.
- Each week, the discussion guide will be posted on the community group leader's web page. The password is "community". This guide is for you to get ideas for questions from! Please let me know what is helpful and what is not helpful. For example, do you need more practical questions or more textual questions? Training materials and documents will also be on the web site.
- Email updates will be sent regularly. Please respond and let us know how things are going and who is showing up.
- Also, the initial signups were just that, "initial." As you look through the signup sheets or talk to people, note anyone that you know is not attending a group. Some will wait for a personal invite

from the leader to attend. Also encourage your group to invite and brainstorm about that. If after several weeks we need to reshuffle, we'll work that out.

- Don't be discouraged with low numbers. Use it as a divine appointment to get to know some specific people better.

Sample Schedule:

- Meet and greet 10-15 minutes
- Bible discussion 45-60+ minutes
- Prayer and sharing of needs 15-30 minutes. This can be done before Bible study as well.
- Snacks and conversation 15-30 minutes

Sample Ground-rules:

- Respect each other even with differences of opinions.
- Confidentiality – this is a safe place to share.
- Pray for each other outside of our meeting.
- What time do you want to start and end?
- How do you want to handle snacks? (beginning or end, signups, etc)
- Others the group comes up with.

First Meeting Hints:

- For the first meeting, the primary goal is community building. Ask questions, let people share about their lives and things others may not know. Even if there is only one new person in the group, this helps them connect and not feel like everyone else knows each other. This is also a great time to pray for each other.
- At your first meeting, please cast some vision as to what these groups are to designed to accomplish. This is a perfect time to go over the 4 purposes that each group should include listed above.
- For the first 3 or 4 weeks, use general opener questions to allow people to get to know each other better.

The Four Roles of the Community Group Leader

1. Praying

Praying is an intercessory role that is separate from the group's prayer time. We should be praying for those we are shepherding daily. It is the power behind our leadership in the group. This means we must remember their prayer requests and actually pray for them. Not only are we to be praying for the members of our group, but also that the Holy Spirit would guide and direct our own leadership. This reminds us as leaders to look to God rather than self for strength.



1 Thes 1:2-3 We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³ remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Praying effectively and pastorally for your group:

- Pray for each member by name every week. You may want to rotate who you are praying for in your quiet time, or devote a time on a day other than when you meet to pray for those in your group. In addition to any specific requests, pray for their spiritual walk, growth, and fruit.

Phil 1:9-10 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

- Pray for your group time before you meet. Our prayer lives as leaders will be contagious to those that come. Pray that God will work through the time together, guide your mind in the discussion, and reveal any needs to you that members may have.
- Remember prayer requests and follow-up with your members. It ministers to them when you can ask about a request the next week or on Sunday. Writing these requests down also allows you to pray for them during the week. I encourage you to keep a prayer list to remember and also to notice answered prayer and celebrate God's faithfulness. The best time to update your prayer list for the group is right after everyone leaves while it is still fresh in your mind!
- You may find out the most important prayer requests in a different conversation than the prayer request time. The time before and after community group is extremely valuable! Be listening.
- After everyone goes home, stop with your spouse and thank God for the evening. Pray that each will apply God's Word.

Eph 1:16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers

- Pray for your ability to lead and depend on God.

The value of your prayer role:

- Prayer is the most important thing you can do for effectiveness and to develop your ability to shepherd. James 5:16 says that the prayer of a righteous person has great power! Through prayer, you can help change lives.

James 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

- Prayer develops your ministry heart towards those you are shepherding.
- Prayer reminds us that we are under-shepherds of the Great Shepherd and that this is His church.
- Prayer reminds us of our dependence on God and combats pride in our lives.

2. Shepherding

As a community group leader, you have the role of lay-shepherd in the lives of those who come. The specific ministries of a shepherd help us understand our role. A shepherd knows and cares for the flock. The shepherd guides the flock to prime feeding grounds and to safety. The shepherd also helps to raise up more shepherds. These roles can be remembered with the words caring, guiding, and reproducing.

- **Important!** To shepherd your group well, always keep in mind that you are an under-shepherd to God's flock. It is not my flock or your flock! We are stewards of God's flock and shepherding on His behalf.



1 Pet 5:2-3 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

A. Caring

- To shepherd, you must know and care for your group. Jesus gave a perfect example of this in John 10:11-14. To effectively lead people into spiritual growth, they must know you care and have compassion. Before they will listen to you, they must be cared for.

John 10:11-14 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,

Caring well:

- Notice each individual and know their names.
- Notice when someone is not participating in conversation or is extra quiet in an evening. Always be scanning the group to discern whether people are being included. Try to include them in conversation or ask them privately later if everything is ok. It is helpful to include them in conversations with others and help them get to know people. If you are talking with someone, open up your stance to include the other person and ask a question. This invites them into the conversation you are having in a non-threatening way.
- Notice when someone is not there. If they miss once, a casual “We missed you” when you see them works well. If it is more than once, be willing to call them or talk with them on Sunday and see how things are going.
- Be willing to talk and invest in people’s lives. A great way to do this is to be available to talk before and after study. People are often very open during these informal times.
- Set the example by talking with newcomers and getting to know them.
- Be sensitive to people. Value and don’t guilt the introvert!

B. Guiding

- The shepherd also guides the group. Your role is to guide the evening through fellowship, into the study, and in prayer. Keep the evening on track! Someone has to end snack and fellowship time and keep things flowing. In this setting, that should be done fairly casually, but still done. Guiding the group may also mean planning a fellowship night, or a care night where you all go to someone’s house and help them when they need it. These are valuable times in the life of a group. We encourage regular times of fellowship, food, and if appropriate games. These kind of things help the cohesiveness of the group and help to include new people.
- Another aspect to guiding is to help the group set expectations and remember expectations. You may want to review the ground rules listed above in the leader’s guide. If you notice some of these expectations being broken such as confidentiality, please address this privately with the person and gently but firmly remind them of the purposes of the group.

C. Reproducing

- Guide the group in remembering that one of the goals of the group is to invite and welcome others. You may want to bring up an empty chair from time to time as a visual for who the next person God may want to bring to the group.
- The role of shepherding includes reproducing other community group leaders. To do this, we identify those with the gifting to shepherd and lead a group and start allowing them opportunities to do so. The best way to do this is to share leadership responsibilities with them in a setting where they can learn and try their gifting. As the group grows, there may be opportunity to form two groups, or have the new leader start their own group. Think in terms of a four step process.
 1. I do, you watch
 2. I do, you help
 3. You do, I help
 4. You do, I watch

3. Leading

A. Discussion in the Word.

- The good news is that you don't have to re-preach the message! You don't have to be a content expert that is able to answer every question. Your role is to facilitate discussion. There may be questions that you do not know the answer to. It's great to say, "let me look into that" or "Let's ask Pastor Ron about that from his message." Don't succumb to the pressure to know all the answers. None of us do!



Using the Discussion Guide:

- Make sure you have read the passage and the discussion guide!
- The discussion guide roughly follows the outline of the passage. There are far more questions than you will get through in an evening! The goal is for you to pick some questions you think will be meaningful to your group before you meet. Perhaps highlight several from each section on the guide. Don't try to get to all of them. If a couple of questions promote good depth of biblical conversation with great follow up questions, it is a successful discussion.
- Usually there are a few questions that bring in another verse or passage. Include these! This will allow for deepening of study and those that were there on Sunday can see how other passages connect. This can keep community group from just being the sermon summarized.
- A good discussion needs structure. Know where you are going. An easy way to do this is to read the text and follow the flow of the outline. Not everyone will have been there on Sunday. This also reinforces what was taught on Sunday.

Leading an Engaging Discussion:

- The key to leading an engaging discussion is learning how to **ask good questions**. For instance, a yes or no question will produce a yes or no answer and very little

discussion. An open-ended question or one that asks the question why, or what do you think will often lead to vibrant discussion.

- There are three types of questions that make a good discussion.

1. Get to know you / opener

The opener question is important even though it may seem unimportant. It gets people talking, getting to know each other and interested in the subject in a non-threatening way. If the one in the guide doesn't work, you can come up with your own.

2. Digging into the Word

These questions seek to understand the text better, and also bring in other passages and thoughts not shared on Sunday. The members of your group may have questions that came to mind from Sunday.

3. Application

These questions and discussion points explore how the application points from Sunday work themselves out in our lives. These also may include sharing and prayer for each other to put these applications into practice.

- **Follow up questions are essential.** It is usually the second question that digs deeper and spurs discussion. Follow up questions are often not in the discussion guide. Watch people and see where people are passionate in their answers, then dig a little deeper there. Follow up questions often are “why?” or “how does that work out?” questions. Keep asking yourself what difference it makes and then you will go down the path to better follow up questions. Follow up questions are not usually confrontational, but rather dig deeper into what has just been said. Also watch for when the well is dry and move on. ☺
- Asking good questions takes practice – don't be discouraged if you ask some that no one responds to! People may be thinking and reflecting. They also may not understand the question. Rewording it often helps generate a response. Some weeks, people are just tired and don't have much to say. Don't take that personally, but seek for other ways to draw them out.
- Be gentle and understanding when someone answers a question in a way that makes no sense. Often I have found that clarification helps to clear things up. Ask follow up questions like “Can you explain what you mean a little more?” Make sure you understand them before concluding they are in error. If someone is in error, you may want to start by asking the group what others think about the question. Then go back to God's Word and gently point out what it says. The key is to lead people to God's Word so that they come to understand truth and their own conclusions rather than simply adopting someone else's conclusion.
- Don't feel the need to break the silence. It will be tempting to answer the question or go into teaching mode. Let silence go for a little bit. Then try restating the question rather than answering it. You can also ask if they know what the question is asking. The key is to not be anxious about silence. People will feel your discomfort.

- It may be helpful to afterwards ask an individual or two what questions they found the most helpful to discuss. As you hear their responses, you are training your mind the direction of questions that are beneficial for your group.
- Here is an interesting article on why Jesus never answered questions.
<http://michaelkelleyministries.com/2012/01/why-didnt-jesus-ever-answer-questions/>

Avoiding Pitfalls:

- Be sure that everyone has a chance to share and one member does not dominate discussion. You can do this by asking a follow-up question like, “are there any other ideas?” If the person continues to dominate, talk to them privately before the next meeting and share the goal of discussion and how they can help by allowing others to participate. Be sure to make eye-contact with those not participating so they feel invited to contribute.

B. Prayer Time

- You will want to allow 15 to 20 minutes for prayer within the group. This usually is at the end, but some groups have enjoyed beginning their time with this. That is up to you. Depending on the size of the group, you may want to pray together or split into smaller groups.
- Allow an open time for prayer requests, but keep it focused and moving. It is important for people to share, but if it turns into a life story every week, you will need to move the time along. You can say something like, “We need to have enough time for all the requests, but maybe we can talk afterwards.”
- Then have a time of prayer open to anyone. Please do not force people to pray that may not want to. Encourage people to pick one or two requests to pray for.
- Sometimes prayer requests can expand far beyond the group. If this is happening frequently or consuming a lot of time, you will want to re-focus this time on how we can pray for each other personally.
- Be thinking of ways the group can be the answer to prayer! Also be sure to celebrate answered prayer and thank God and give Him the glory.

4. Hosting - Hospitality

Hospitality is an essential skill for the group leader, but it can also be shared with a host home. This often creates a wonderful opportunity for another to use their gifts of hospitality while freeing the leader to focus on shepherding.



The Host Home's Role:

- Your objective is to create a warm, inviting place for community group to happen. If you would like, you can provide snacks, drinks, and cups/napkins/etc. Groups may also make a signup sheet for snacks and/or drinks so that the burden does not fall on only one person. Work to welcome each person and make them feel comfortable and at home. The host also works to create an environment free of

distractions for the discussion and prayer. Have the room setup where you will be meeting and make sure you have enough seats for everyone.

Fostering Relationships:

- Greet each one when they arrive.
- Remember something about them – family, needs, work, etc.
- Offer something to drink and help them feel at home.
- Notice when someone is not interacting.
- Help members relate with each other.