



Community Groups at River Valley Church

Mission of Community Groups

River Valley Church Community Groups exist to glorify God by making disciples of Jesus who love one another and impact the world with the Gospel. Community Group members encourage, challenge, and care for one another in both spiritual and practical ways. They both proclaim and demonstrate the power of the Gospel, first in their Community Group, and then to the world around them.

Discipleship in Community Groups

Community Groups are to love God, love His word, and love one another. We see this clearly exemplified in the early church. In Acts 2:42, we see at least **four features** of biblical community:

1. God's Word: "And they devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching."

The Lordship of Christ implies that we hold up God's word as the ultimate authority in our lives. His word is authoritative, it's without error, and it is sufficient for all things as believers. We humbly submit ourselves to it by reading, understanding, and applying it in our lives. For God to be the Lord in our life, we must love His word and obey it. It is life-giving and essential for spiritual growth and maturity.

2. Fellowship: "And they devoted themselves to...the fellowship."

As the church we seek to live life together under the grace and love of Christ. Within the Body of Christ, we find our true family and commonality in the Gospel. We love one another and encourage one another to live lives that honor and glorify God. We care for one another as a true family should. We care for one another both spiritually and practically (Acts 2:44-45). We have all things in common because we have the same Lord and Savior. This fellowship of believers

goes deeper than even our own flesh and blood family. It is God's family—our one true family that we will spend the rest of eternity with.

3. Breaking of Bread: “And they devoted themselves to...the breaking of bread.”

Hospitality should be a trait of all Christians (I Tim 5:10, I Peter 4:8-9). As Jesus became a servant to us, we must also become a servant to others. When we open our homes to others, we are in a sense saying, “what is mine is now also yours.” This could include food, sharing resources, providing shelter, etc. As Christ has shown us hospitality by bringing us into His home, His family, we too, invite others into our homes to love and serve them—especially those in the family of God. Enjoying a meal together is a God-given blessing. In the Jewish culture of Jesus' time, and in the early church, a meal was an intimate gathering where relationships took place. Likewise, Jesus calls all of us to His table, to His banquet. We are one church, one family, one body.

4. Prayer: “And they devoted themselves to...prayer.”

Prayer should be the lifeblood of all believers. When we go to the Lord in prayer we show our faith and dependency upon Him. We recognize that He is the source of all that we need in life. We are dependent upon Him for both our spiritual and physical needs. We show our love to those in the church by praying for one another. As the church we should be continuously praying together. In faith and expectation, we come to the Lord with our thanksgiving and petitions. Our Heavenly Father always hears us when we cry out to Him.

How Community Groups Work at River Valley Church

- **Community Groups** are primarily built around believers in Jesus Christ who are members of River Valley Church. This ideally includes 4-6 couples or a combination of couples and singles. They regularly gather together to pray and discuss and apply God's Word to their lives. This includes a set day and time that they meet. We use what is called a “sermon based model”. We take the passage of scripture that is preached upon on Sunday mornings and develop resources for groups to learn and apply God's Word.
- **Community Groups** are led by Group Leaders. Group Leaders are responsible for the discipleship and care for their Group Members. They

organize, plan, and lead group meetings. Host Home Leaders work directly with the Group Leader to provide the necessary accommodations for their group. This includes a place to meet, snacks or meals, etc. Hospitality is an important part of Community Groups. A Group Leader may or may not host a group in their home. This responsibility could be tasked to another member of the group or you could rotate between homes. Each group needs to decide what works best for them.

- **Community Groups** exist and function in the everyday normal rhythms of life. Doing life together isn't just a formal group meeting. It can also include things like eating together, parties, game nights, going out for coffee, picnics, phone calls, etc. We encourage groups to be creative in this. Much of discipleship happens through just "hanging out". We see how people treat one another, we see how parents love their kids, how others pray, how people care for one another, etc. As we see evidences of grace in one another's lives, we are encouraged and challenged to live lives that glorify God.
- **Community Groups** invite others to experience this fellowship. Groups should always be open to visitors. We encourage groups to invite friends, family, neighbors, co-workers, and new visitors of the church. It should be a part of the everyday normal culture at River Valley to show hospitality to others. Community Groups are an easy way to invite and get to know new visitors in our church. This also includes non-believers. What better way to introduce others to the Good News than in the context of Christian community?
- **Community Groups** exist to eventually multiply—this includes raising up and equipping new leaders to start new groups. As we grow in the grace and knowledge of God we realize that we are a part of a much bigger mission. As we keep God's word central and obey His commandment to make disciples of all people, our focus becomes less *inward* and more *outward*. Groups are not just about us and having our needs met. Healthy disciples produce more disciples and groups should have a vision to birth new groups to reach more people with the Gospel. Therefore, a group is never required to *split* up. Rather, we want to expand and multiply as led by God's Spirit.

Community Groups are NOT...

- **merely** social groups to make friends and have fun together. They exist to build one another up in Christ and to care for one another. They exist to experience true biblical fellowship.
- **merely** for gathering people who look alike and think alike. The church is a diverse group of believers and our groups need to reflect that. At times we need to have relationships outside of our comfort zones. Our common bond is the Gospel and that should supersede anything else.
- **merely** bible studies. We don't just gather to hear a lecture or learn more information. We gather to understand and apply the scriptures to our lives. We gather as Christ-followers seeking to edify and build one another up in the things of God.
- **merely** one more church program to consider. At River Valley Church, Community Groups are a part of our DNA. We gather in groups as a lifestyle—a way of life that seeks to live in fellowship and community with other believers. A culture that makes discipleship a priority.

“You will know that they are my disciples by their love for one another.” John
13:35

If you are interested in leading, hosting, or joining a Community Group then please fill out the Community Group inquiry form located at the welcome center.

For more information contact Pastor Shane McGrath at smcgrath@rivervalley.net