

Ministry Description:



Grace Community Groups

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Introduction

This guide sketches out the purpose and practice of our Grace Community Group ministry at Grace Christian Church Buderim.

Why do we have Grace Community Groups?

Throughout the New Testament, the relational unity of the church is emphasised.

“Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.”

(Acts 4:32–33 ESV)

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

(Ephesians 4:1–3 ESV)

Grace is a church community of almost 250 people, spread across three different Sunday services, living as far away as the Glasshouse Mountains in the South, Cooroy in the north, and Maleny in the west (an area of roughly 1500km²).

We meet every Sunday for a special time of worship as a large body, to fellowship together in the name of Jesus and to hear from the Word of God together. Some might even come twice on a Sunday. But is this really enough? Do we really get to have serious conversations about the Bible and life with Jesus in this short weekly window?



Grace Community Groups exist to meet this need. They accomplish a number of things that a church service can't:

- ▶ getting to know each other in a deeper way
- ▶ praying together in a more focussed and personal way
- ▶ discussing the Bible and asking questions as learning happens together
- ▶ sharing experiences and understanding of the Christian life in confidence
- ▶ inter-personal care in times of need
- ▶ personal encouragement in our individual walks with Jesus
- ▶ being a gospel witness in our own neighbourhoods

What should we do in Grace Community Groups?

Grace Community Groups typically meet once during the week to do a number of things.

Bible Study

Sometimes we refer to these groups as Bible Study Groups. While Bible study is perhaps the most vital component of our time together, gathering together to listen to our Father's voice, it is not the only thing we do. There are other things that should follow naturally from spending time together in the Bible.

Neglecting other aspects of our group meetings (listed below) will ultimately hamper our ability to discuss what we are learning with each other, our level of comfort in praying with and for each other, and our opportunities to put the Bible into practice together.



Grace Community Groups are expressions of our larger church community, scattered across the Sunshine Coast. These groups complement the larger gathering vice versa. For these reasons, we plan to work through the same Bible series both in our services and in Grace Community Groups.

Ryan Kearns serves as a director for community groups at a large reformed evangelical church in the USA, and sees the following helpful points of connection between studying the Bible through a sermon in the larger gathering, and through discussion in the small gathering:

1. Sermons “impress”, and small groups help “process”
2. Sermons unite, and small groups customise
3. Sermons convict, and small groups apply
4. Small groups “live out” what has been “called out”

He says:

It is this tandem that creates life-change, forms us into Jesus’ image, and provokes us to abide and rest in his grace. Through sermons we receive the instruction and truth of God’s Word, and in community groups it is transferred to us through relationship.¹

Each school term, the pastoral team will produce a study guide to aid the groups in working through the passages being preached on Sundays.

Worship

Different groups of people will approach this component differently, but our meetings always ought to start with a reflection on our God: who he is and what he’s done for us. As we approach his word, it’s important to remember that we are approaching a mighty God who speaks that word.

Some groups might like to sing together, some groups might like to read a section of a Psalm together, some groups might simply like to pray a prayer of praise and thanks.

Getting this right will set the tone for your group meetings. After all, aren’t our whole lives meant to be lived in worship to our God?

Prayer

Grace Community Groups provide many wonderful opportunities for prayer that simply aren’t possible in the larger church setting.

- ▶ We can pray for each other’s personal needs
- ▶ We can share in prayer with each other’s personal joys
- ▶ We can pray around the things we have learned in the Bible Study
- ▶ We can pray in focussed ways for the larger church community
- ▶ Prayer needs can be communicated better across the church through the group network (i.e. the Prayer Chain)
- ▶ Every member can have the opportunity to pray
- ▶ Grace Community Groups are a great place to learn to pray!

¹ <http://theresurgence.com/2014/01/13/4-ways-smalls-groups-work-together-with-sermons>

Of course, the greatest challenge is allocating enough time to spend good time in prayer. This requires intention and a value for prayer on the part of the group, and wise leadership from the group leader.



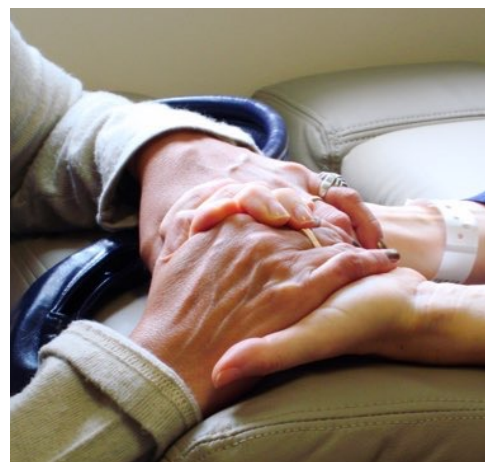
Some members may not feel comfortable praying out loud. However, if you build open prayer times into your group, as people get to know one another and grow in Christ together, more often than not they will begin to dip their toes in the waters of corporate prayer when they feel ready.

Fellowship

A Grace Community Group will function best when all the members are able to relate to each other in a positive and meaningful way. It is important to spend time chatting together and catching up when you meet. Doing this early in the meeting will also avoid it encroaching on the Bible study times!

Care

Groups like these are often the first point of contact when people are ill, or have lost a job, or are struggling with a number of other things. Their friends are usually first to notice when they are not around, and people are most likely to contact their Christian friends in these difficult times.



A group of Christian friends, likely living in the same area, are also ideally suited to being of spiritual and practical help - perhaps in praying with someone, or providing lifts for kids, or making meals.

The group leader is in a pivotal position to ensure that members of their group receive the right spiritual and practical care when they are struggling: they know the people in their group, they have a relationship with them centred around Christ and the Bible and they are in touch with the church leadership.

In a larger church like ours, the care of Grace Community Groups for their members is a vital ministry. These needs ought to be communicated to the pastoral staff and/or elders by the group leaders when necessary to ensure that all our people are adequately cared for.

Connect with the larger church

It's been said often enough already, but there is a vital connection between the gathering of the large church and the gathering of small groups of that same church across the Sunshine Coast. These little groups are extensions and expressions of the ministry of our church.

Make time to remind your group of important notices from the bulletin to make sure the group feels a real connection to the larger ministry of the church.

Outreach

Chris Castaldo is director of the Ministry of Gospel Renewal for the Billy Graham Centre at Wheaton College. He writes:

*"If I had a dime for every email message I receive from former Catholics in a month, I might be able to afford a Grande Americano at Starbucks. Very often they disclose their reason for leaving the Catholic Church in favour of evangelical Protestantism. Among these factors, a friendly Bible study group is at the top of the list."*²

Not just for Roman Catholics, but for all sorts of people in our society for whom our church might be a no-go area, local groups of Christians meeting in homes to discuss the Bible are friends are often the "way in" for them to find a real and living relationship with Jesus Christ.

People in our society are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the cheap imitations of relationships we get through technology, and are longing for real friends. They also have questions, lots of them, and want a place where they can ask those questions openly, be heard, and given a real answer.

² <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/small-groups-that-attract-catholics>

Many also have a huge stigma when it comes to “the church”, and wouldn’t willingly enter one, even ours!

Grace Community Groups are uniquely suited to reaching people in these situations. It will require creative thinking, but it may be as simple as inviting a friend to your group meeting, or making a point to pray for your neighbours as a group and actually approach them to ask what you can pray for.

Discipleship

Grace Community Groups should never be static. Like churches, if they are not moving forwards, they will move backwards.

Joanne Jung, author and theology professor at Biola University, writes:

Participants can become too polite, hesitant to delve into each other's lives. These meetings become more of a support group than one where the Spirit-led life is encouraged and challenged. Some grow quite comfortable with the lack of challenge.³

This forward motion is often called discipleship.

Jesus said:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

(Matthew 28:19–20 ESV)



Discipleship is not up to the leader alone, but is the responsibility of all Christians in the group.

But if we are being disciple-makers, and you are equipping your group to be disciple-makers in the way you lead and teach (perhaps in being willing and able to read the Bible one-to-one with others), our community groups will begin to multiply.

What then? Are you going to eventually have to

³ <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/building-a-better-small-group>

deal with a community group of fifty people? Hopefully not! But this is where a leader needs to focus on a particular focus of discipleship.

It's up to the leader to be praying for and noticing those in the group who display the necessary qualities of leadership. Who is already emerging as a leader among the group? Who is already encouraging others in Christian growth? Who has committed themselves publicly to our church by becoming a member? Who is wrestling with the Bible? Who is dealing with issues of personal godliness? (For a list of requirements, see p.10-11)

The leader then needs to invest in those people, bringing them to the attention of the church leadership, giving them opportunities to exercise and demonstrate their gifts (maybe by letting them lead one discussion question in a study for a start), praying with them and for them, and helping them develop.

Colin Marshall, author of the excellent book *Growth Groups*, writes:

*"Your aim in leadership is to reproduce yourself. That may seem off putting, but it is how you multiply your ministry. It's not that you reproduce clones who copy your personality and mannerisms. Rather, you grow leaders who have the knowledge, skills and heart for the job. And you have seen them in action, so you know their strengths and weaknesses."*⁴

Every leader should be actively looking for potential future group leaders. If you can't see them now, pray for them to appear. The disciples who were on earth with Jesus knew the urgency for this, because their lives were often at risk. We do this because we trust God to grow his kingdom beyond *us*.

⁴ p.121, *Growth Groups*, by Colin Marshall © Matthias Media 1995

Suggested schedule for groups

Here is a suggested schedule for a community group meeting. Depending on your group, you may want to adapt this schedule. Keep in mind that you are not a slave to a schedule or even to completing all the study questions. We want groups to meet to build Christian relationships around God's Word, and to connect with the message preached on the Sunday. This may mean choosing a few of the study questions to discuss, instead of all of them.

Time	Section
30mins	Fellowship catching up over tea/coffee, dessert, dinner
10mins	Worship (singing, reading a Psalms, praying, etc.)
45mins	Bible study
30mins	Sharing prayer items and praying
5mins	Highlight one or two important church notices

Grace Community Group Leaders

To help us do our ministry well, as well as to identify possible future leaders, it's important to have a good idea of what a leader is and does.



Requirements

Grace Community Group Leaders at Grace will

- ▶ be formal church members
- ▶ be living a life of personal and ongoing discipleship to Jesus Christ
- ▶ demonstrate gifting in teaching the Bible and in spiritual leadership
- ▶ attend termly leaders' meetings for review, mutual encouragement, prayer, and accountability (usually the Thursday evening prior to the new term starting)

Responsibilities

Grace Community Group Leaders at Grace are expected to

- ▶ prioritise faithful attendance at Grace Church services
- ▶ pray regularly for the people in their groups
- ▶ bring to the attention of the church leadership any needs requiring special care or attention
- ▶ be aware of potential future group leaders, bringing them to the attention of the church leadership and being ready to develop them
- ▶ regularly review these guidelines to ensure that their group is on the right track for Grace Community Groups.

A word about leadership

At Grace, we believe male leadership in our church ministries follows the correct Biblical pattern. (This is the same reason why we only ordain male pastors and elders in the Westminster presbyterian church.)

“I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve;”

(1 Timothy 2:12–13 ESV)

That said, we believe women can and should exercise a valuable role teaching and leading other women, and in teaching and leading children. So, in a mixed adult group, we believe the leader should be a man; but in a women-only group, it is appropriate for a woman to lead.

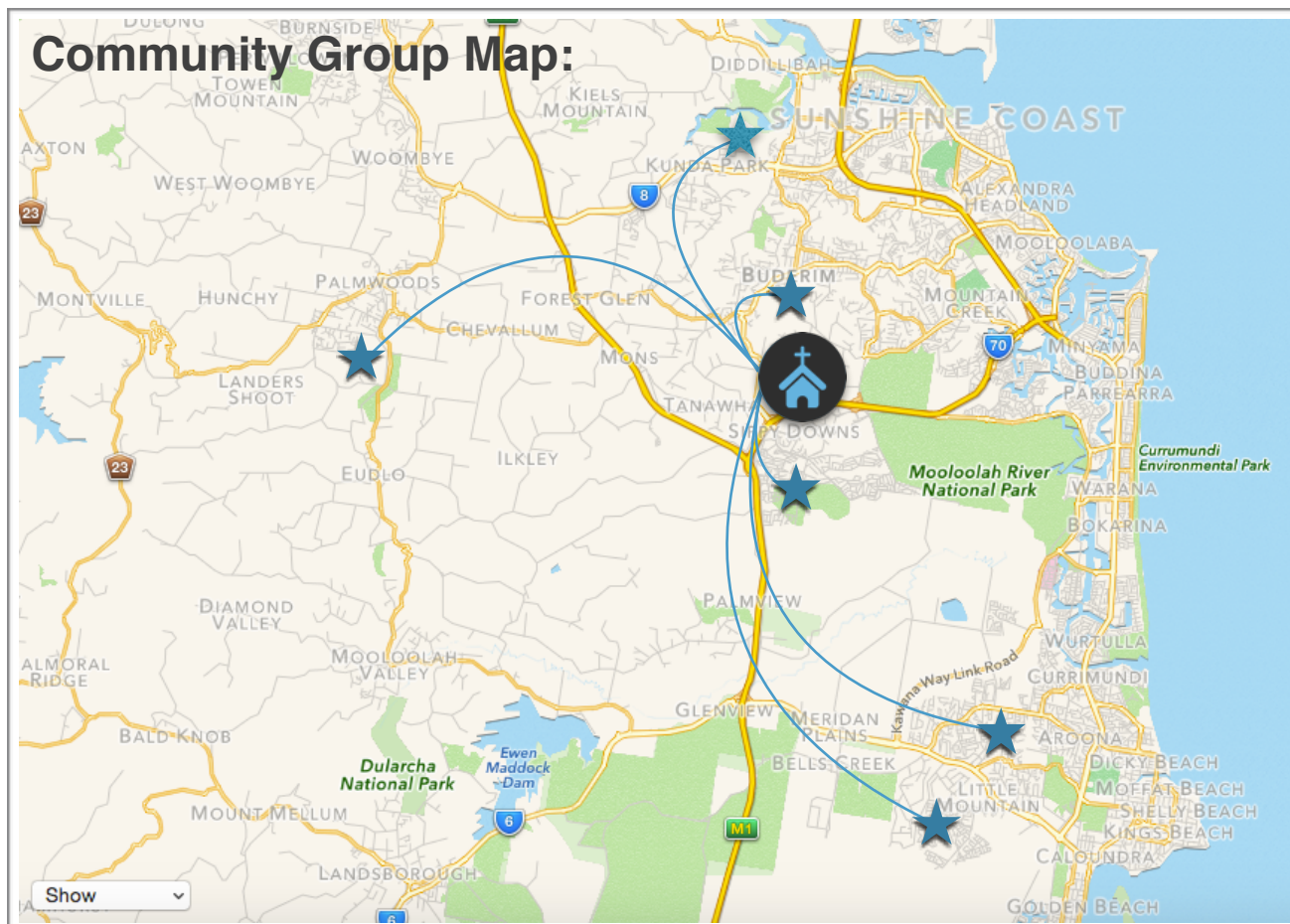
“BY THIS ALL PEOPLE WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YOU HAVE LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER.””

(JOHN 13:35 ESV)



Current Groups

Area / Focus Group	Leader	Meeting	Location
West Caloundra	Tim Richards	Fortnightly on Mondays, 6.30pm	8 Joshua Place Little Mountain
Palmwoods/Woombye	Mark Porter	Mondays 7.00pm	23 Rimmel Place, Palmwoods
Buderim	Col Weston	Mondays 7.00pm	9 Bairnsdale Street East, Buderim
New Mums	Jean Bowen-Jones	Tuesdays, 10.30am	Grace Church 2-4 Toral Drive, Buderim
Young Adults	Callum Lewis	Wednesdays, 6.30pm	603/25 Chancellor Village Blvd, Chancellor Park
Currimundi	Roger Anderson	Wednesdays, 7.00pm	Unit 72, Oasis Village, Currimundi
Ladies	Janne Evans/Alison Sheldon	Thursdays 09.45am	Grace Church 2-4 Toral Drive, Buderim
Buderim/Sippy Downs	Clint Lombard	Thursdays, 7.00pm	Grace Church 2-4 Toral Drive, Buderim
Diddililah	Cameron Blue	1st and 3rd Thursdays, 7.00pm	22 Brookfield Court Diddililah



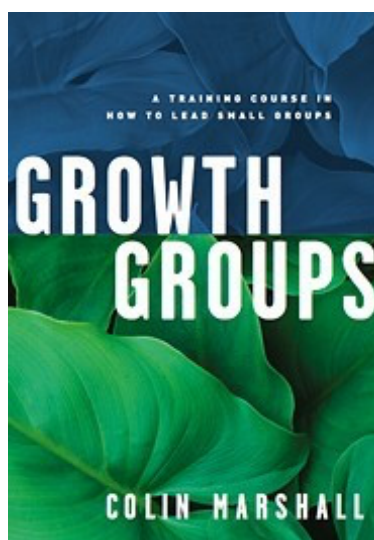
Recommended Resources:

Keep training!

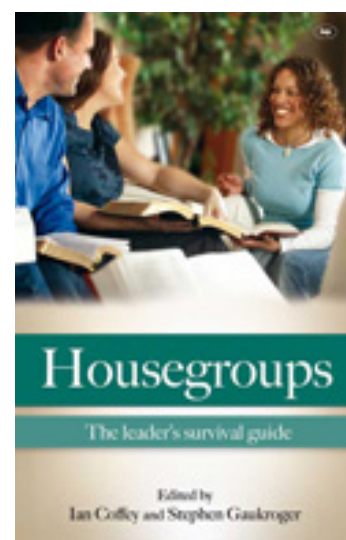
Books



Pastor Brad House helps us to re-imagine what gospel-centered community looks like and shares from his experience leading and reproducing healthy small groups. With wisdom and candor, House challenges us to think carefully about our own groups and to take steps toward cultivating communities that are able to glorify Jesus, bless one another, and participate in the mission of God.

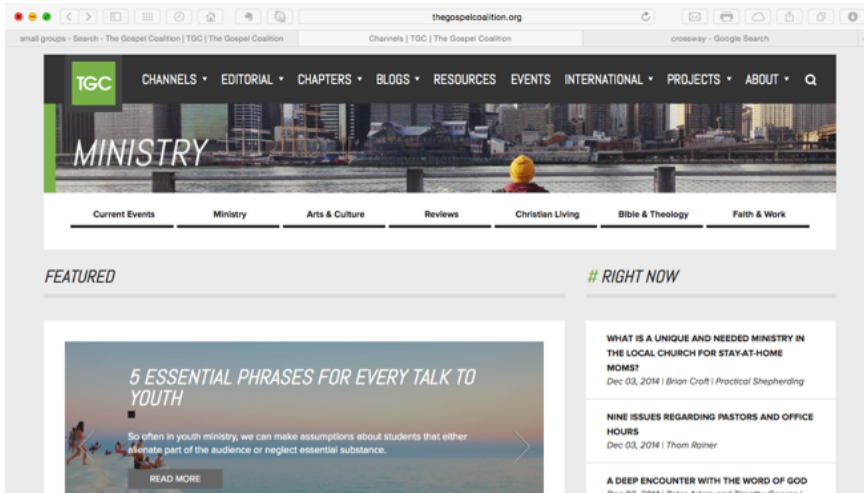


Growth Groups is for any Christian or group of Christians committed to equipping leaders of God's people. It is designed to train leaders who can teach the Bible and pray with other Christians. It will prepare leaders to gather together fellow-believers in evangelistic enterprise. In short, it will equip leaders to grow Christians and grow the gospel. The course is for anyone who wants to pursue these ends.



Ever since New Testament times small groups of Christians have met to learn, to worship and to grow together. An effective group enables its members to thrive in their Christian life and make an impact in their world. This guide equips small-group leaders to steer a group with confidence and competence. Written by experienced authors with much wisdom it will give you the vision you are looking for.

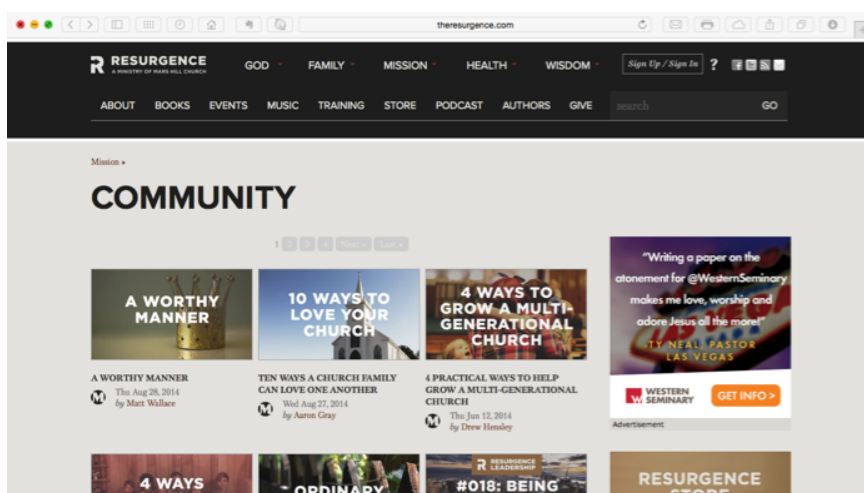
Websites



www.thegospelcoalition.org/channel/ministry



www.effectiveministry.org/discipleship-groups/



<http://theresurgence.com/categories/community>

Notes

