

A General Vision for Home Groups at GBC (09-08-2024)

One of our goals at Grace is to create an environment where making disciples is normal. Jesus said, “As you go, make disciples.” In the end, a disciple is one who follows Christ. A disciple is one who obeys the commands of Christ both in motive and in actions. A disciple is one who takes the Word of God, and by the grace of God, tries his/her best to do everything it says. Also, a disciple of Christ is one who obeys the command to make disciples. In other words a disciple is a disciple maker, which is clearly the point of Jesus’ words, “*As you go.*”

Disciple making includes all relationships in pre-evangelism (meeting a person, hanging out with a person), to evangelism (sharing the good news of the Gospel in a way one can understand), to teaching all that Christ has commanded. We must not separate discipleship from evangelism as if to say we share the gospel, and then do discipleship. I would argue that all of this process from beginning to end is discipleship. Today, I would like to focus on a crucial part of how we create an environment where disciple making is normal in the life of GBC. I would like to consider our Home Groups as we begin a new term together. I have three questions. The first two questions will serve mainly as explanations and the last question will be heavy on application. So let’s begin.

1. Why do we meet in homes?

- It is biblical. There are many examples. I will give one. In Paul’s letter to Philemon he writes, “*To Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house.*”
- Church history attests to churches in homes. I am not saying there were no buildings or rented spaces in the early church, but until the 4th century we don’t have evidence of buildings, at least in the way we have them today.
- Being the church is easily accomplished in simple and uncomplicated settings. In other words, if the church is the people of God, we are most like ourselves when we are at home.
- Homes are the best place for meaningful relationships. Home groups cause us to “be the church,” sharing life together as a body in a way that we could not do at a building.
- Homes are the natural place for our children to learn discipline.

- Meeting in homes fosters relationships between young and old that is not the norm at the “church building.” Instead of segregating, we do the opposite.
- It provides accountability, especially as we fight against sin.
- It allows us to choose deacons and elders based upon biblical qualifications.

2. What is the model for our home groups? There are many places in the NT (OT as well) we could find clear expressions of what to do when we meet together. But, Acts 2:42-47 serves as our best model. Let’s look at it together. **“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”**

What are some characteristics we see of these home groups with the very first Christians?

- They taught (v. 42). **“They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching.”** The examples from the NT focus on the Gospel and its applications.
- They had fellowship (v. 42) They were united in Christ through the Holy Spirit and when they came together they had fellowship.
- They shared a meal (v. 42). In those days they actually observed the Lord’s Supper, remembering Jesus’ death and what he had done for them. We do this today as a full congregation in our main meeting. But, in our homegroups we still have a meal together as we are able to share and spend time together as God has provided for us.
- They prayed (v. 42). Prayer was essential in their meetings. This is why we have prayer time. This is a great time for all. We actually find that our children share just as much (even more) than the adults. This is where we make our requests to God. This is where we share our hearts with the group. This is also a time we share confessions.

- They met each other's needs (v. 44). They had all things in common. They even **“sold their possessions and belongings, distributing the proceeds to all.”** Their motive in their giving was a “generous heart” (v. 46).
- They met in homes (v. 46). See above.
- They praised God (v. 47). I believe this was a general attitude of praise to the God who gave His Son for them. We do the same! We are the most blessed people in all the world.

These verses give us a general picture of some of the things we should be doing our groups. At this point, I would like to say that home groups are not the same as our Sunday School classes. Sunday school class is primarily a “teaching time.” Home groups are so much more. We meet in homes, making it very personal. We have a meal. We have time for fellowship. We sing. We share our burdens. We are not segregated by age. We have fathers. We have mothers. We have children. We have siblings.

With these things in mind, it is important that we stress ALL parts of this model.

3. What Can you do personally to be a healthy home group member? It is important to note that our earthly rewards as Christians are best displayed in the family of God. Jesus said, **“Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life”** (Mark 10:29-30). With this in mind, consider these applications.¹

¹ Some of the applications for this section come from C. J. Mahaney's booklet called *Why Small Groups*.

- Take Ownership of Your Home Group. What do I mean by this? Let me give an example. With all of our travels around the world, we have often rented cars. And, I have never gotten an ugly or worn out rental car. When I get behind the wheel, I usually think, “*Wow, this is great. What power. What cleanliness. What a beautiful design or paint job.*” And, before returning it, I don’t mind stepping on the gas pedal to take off quickly. I don’t question the quality of low grade gas. I break harder than normal. When I return it, I don’t normally vacuum. The reason I do these things is because it is not my car. And no matter how old or ugly my cars have been, they are mine. I change the oil. I buy new tires and rotate them. I vacuum all the dirt and clean all the spills. I listen to the motor and notice when it is not running right. Why? It is mine. The rental car was not. (I still treat it well, but it is not the same as “mine.”) So, do you think of your home group as “your group?” Or, do you simply show up because it is something the elders require of you? Are the people in your group the special group God has placed in your life for the next year and a half. Or, are those in your group simply tolerated for your time together?
- Have realistic expectations. Don’t expect too much from you leader or those in your group. Your leader will let you down. He may not do something like you think he should. Other members from your group will let you down. Remember, we are sinners, struggling with many of the same things in life. Life is messy. And love covers a multitude of sins.
- Meet outside your home group. I would encourage you to get together with those who are in your home group outside the normal meeting (when possible).
- Open Your Home. Whether it is nice or not so nice, big or small, I would encourage you to open your home for home groups. With this said, I would like to remind us also to be respectful in other people’s homes. Kids shouldn’t jump on the couch or be allowed to run through the house. I know this has been a point of difficulty for some through the years. Let’s be considerate to the host. Also, help clean. This is simply another way to serve.
- Be Constructive, not destructive in your comments. In some groups there may be those who usually ending up twisting discussions into debates. In Paul’s letter to Titus he warns against those who engage in “unprofitable and useless” controversies and arguments (Tit. 3:9). There should always be time for some discussion, but try to keep from unhealthy questions you know will lead down paths that may not be helpful in the home group setting. Your home group leader will not always know the answers. There is always time for these discussions after.

- Pray on your way to home group. Make it a habit to pray with your children/spouse before home group, whether in the driveway or car. Ask God to speak to you and your family. Ask God to help your leader and those who attend.
- Consider the discipleship of our children. Even if you don't have small children, you are still a part of their discipleship. We can encourage all our children to take part, in our catechism, in the way we teach, the way we engage them. We must never think that home group is just for the adults. It is not. It is just as much for the kids (maybe more). What about discipline? What does it look like in our home groups? The Bible says, "**Children obey your parents in the Lord. For this is right**" (Eph. 6:1). I hope all our parents are expecting our children to obey us 100% of the time and we are being consistent to discipline when they do not (this goes for both parents). Any parent here knows that inconsistency is always our problem in this regard. Well, home groups are a place to reinforce what we are teaching in the home. I realize it is difficult for small children to sit. But, it is not impossible with the right training. We must understand that there will be times when the small children have to be taken out for longer periods. Husbands, don't think your wives must always do this part. Remember, parents with small kids, by the grace of God, this time will pass. For those of you who do not have kids, be patient. Do your best to show grace, remembering when you had small kids. Do your best to also take part in the discipleship of these precious ones.
- Use your gifts. 1 Pet. 4:10-11 says, "**As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies--in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.**" If you are a Christian, if you have the Spirit of God dwelling in you, you have a spiritual gift (maybe more). Maybe it is giving, or faith, or mercy. I could go on. Maybe you have talents, like singing, or playing an instrument, that can be used in the group. Use it.

- Keep our goal in mind. We want to create an environment where making disciples is normal. It doesn't take a gifted leader to make a great group. It takes you. You must own it. You must pray for your group and invest in it. God is responsible for building his church, and He is using home groups at GBC for this purpose. The world is starving for this kind of fellowship. The "Church" is starving for this kind of fellowship. What an opportunity we have to show the world what true Christian fellowship is in the life of Grace Baptist Church as we create an environment where making disciples is normal!

Expect Great Home Groups This year.