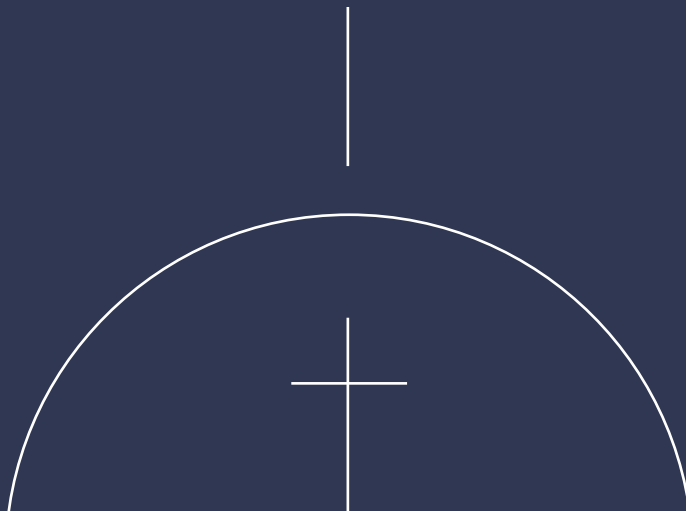


WOODRIDGE COMMUNITY CHURCH

COMMUNITY GROUP VISION



01

COMMUNITY GROUPS & THE BIG PICTURE

What is a community group?	2
Why community groups?	4
What does a community group do?	5
How do community groups accomplish these things?	5
What does a healthy group look like?	9
Community groups and summer	13
	14

02

COMMUNITY GROUPS & MAKING DISCIPLES

Marks of a Disciple	16
Stages of Spiritual Growth	17
	19

CON TEN TS/

03

COMMUNITY GROUPS & PASTORAL CARE

24

Pastoral care	25
Structure of care at Woodridge	27
What is biblical counseling?	28
The goal of biblical counseling?	29
How people change	30

04

COMMUNITY GROUPS & LEADERSHIP DISCIPLESHIP

32

What to look for in a leader	33
Leadership and complementarianism	36
Developing leaders	37
Leadership structure	39
Multiplied groups	40
Expectations of a leader	40
Responsibilities of the leader	41

COMMUNITY GROUPS & THE BIG PICTURE

“AND JESUS CAME AND SAID TO THEM,
'ALL AUTHORITY IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME.
GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS,
BAPTIZING 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.
AND BEHOLD, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, TO THE END OF THE AGE.”

MATTHEW 28:18-20

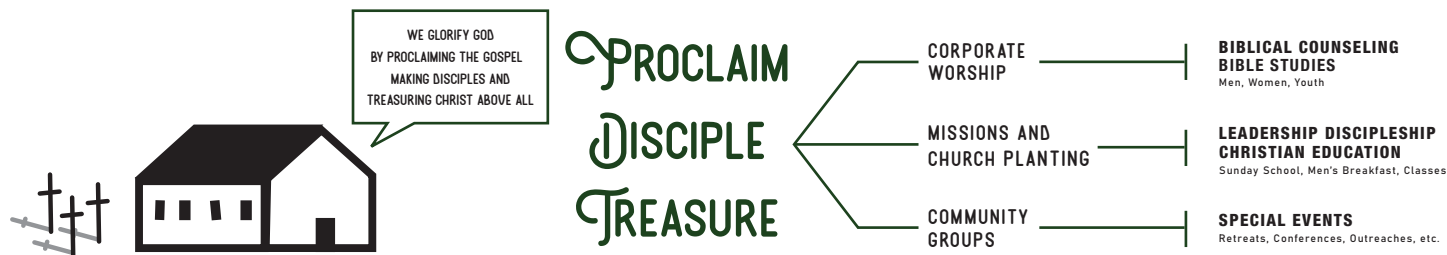
COMMUNITY GROUPS

A Vision for Woodridge Community Church

Our mission as a church is to glorify God by proclaiming the gospel, making disciples, and treasuring Christ above all. Everything we do at Woodridge is for the purpose of accomplishing that mission.

Furthermore, we believe that the greatest resource the church has in accomplishing that mission is not its wealth or its programs. It is the people themselves, image bearers of God, purchased by the blood of Christ and sent to display God's glory to the world around them. We believe community groups are one of the primary means by which we can accomplish this mission at Woodridge.

For this reason, our community groups are people-based rather than event-based. What this means is that our community groups seek to be so much more than a once a week gathering or a Bible study. They are an opportunity to share life together with other believers. They are a place to serve others, share struggles and speak the truth in love. Being a committed follower of Christ requires being with God's people for more time than just corporate worship on Sunday mornings or a separate Bible study during the week.



WHAT IS A COMMUNITY GROUP?

A community group is a group of 10-16 people who are committed to growing as disciples of Christ together and who seek to accomplish the mission of the church with one another.

Our community groups are one of the primary contexts by which we proclaim the gospel, make disciples and treasure Christ above all at Woodridge. They seek to unite mature believers with young believers. They seek to bring together people of different ages, vocations, and backgrounds because of their love for Jesus and their commitment to the gospel.

Our community groups are focused on heart transformation, not just head knowledge. They seek to help people believe and apply the gospel in all areas of life. The goal is that what is being taught from the pulpit on Sunday will reverberate into our daily lives and change how we live.

Each Sunday in our worship gatherings, the Word of God is taught and general application is given. As community groups gather throughout the week, they seek to help one another obey God's Word within the specific contexts of their lives.

In this way, our community groups cannot and should not function apart from corporate worship. Sunday worship is where we gather to hear the truth of Scripture taught, while our community groups serve as the place to learn how to live obediently to that truth.

WHY COMMUNITY GROUPS?

We believe that through Jesus' work on the cross we have been brought into the household of God and now function together as a spiritual family (Ephesians 2:11-22). As such, we are now called to live out the implications of the Gospel together. This is best done within the context of a community group.

We believe that Jesus modeled this method of ministry by intentionally investing himself into twelve men during his earthly ministry (Luke 6:12-16). In Mark 3:14 we find that Jesus devoted himself to these men, "so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach." Jesus spent much time investing in his disciples for the purpose of sending them out to make more disciples.

We understand that this cannot be done through the Sunday morning worship service alone. This is not to depreciate the value of corporate worship by any means. However, the purpose of corporate worship is the exaltation of God through singing, the preaching of the Word, and sharing in the sacraments. While corporate worship is central at Woodridge, it does not and cannot fulfill all that it means to be a disciple of Christ.

WHAT DOES A COMMUNITY GROUP DO?

Now that we know what a community group is, we need to look at what a community group does. Because everything we do at Woodridge is for the purpose of accomplishing the mission God has for His church, our groups seek to accomplish three things; proclaim the gospel, make disciples and treasure Christ above all. As we do these things, our aim is for the glory of God to shine brightly through us as individuals, as community groups, and as a local church.

PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL

The first way in which we seek to glorify God is through sharing the gospel with others. We want our community groups to be focused on the proclamation of the gospel as a group, but also holding one another accountable to share the gospel with friends, family, coworkers, etc.

1 Peter 2:9-10 tells us that as a community of believers, we are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

God has made us into a spiritual family for the purpose of proclaiming the excellencies of Christ to those around us. Each community group seeks to do this. However, as we proclaim the gospel, Peter calls us to display the gospel to the unbelievers around us as well.

“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” (1 Peter 2:11-12)

Although evangelism should always be the primary ministry the church has towards unbelievers, Scripture also calls us to imitate the character of God to those around us as we seek to call them to repentance and faith in Christ (Luke 6:35-36).

MAKE DISCIPLES

As we proclaim the gospel and people come to faith, we have an obligation to “present every man mature in Christ” (Col. 1:28). Ephesians 4 pictures a church that is committed to growing in maturity.

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” (Ephesians 4:11-6)

It is important to note that every believer is to be equipped for the work of ministry. As we think about our community groups at Woodridge, our hope is that every member of a group is growing in his or her ability to minister the gospel to others. Although our community group leaders may lead in discipleship within their group, they are by no means the only disciple makers in their group. Each member has a responsibility to build up those within their group to maturity.

TREASURE CHRIST ABOVE ALL

What does it mean that we seek to treasure Christ above all?

“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the

surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:7-8)

In other words, we display the worth of Christ in our lives by valuing Christ more than anything. We use our money in such a way that shows that Christ is more valuable than our money. Our time is spent in such a way that shows that our own time is not our treasure, Christ is. Food, houses, cars, computers, and our own energy is used to show that Christ is more valuable to us than those things. The choices we make, reveal to others where our allegiance truly lies. "You cannot serve God and money" (Matt. 6:24).

"Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?" (Matthew 16:24-26)

Any moment we face in life presents us with a decision between loving God and others or loving ourselves and the things of this world (1 John 2:15-17). We make the choice about whether we are going to live for God in that moment or live for our own desires. We reveal what is most important to us. Am I going to worship and enjoy God or am I going to live for myself? Through Christ we have been given new affections and a new purpose. The choices we make should no longer depend on what is most convenient for us, but on how we can love God and love others best.

HOW DO COMMUNITY GROUPS ACCOMPLISH THESE THINGS?¹

Our groups focus on three main rhythms to help us accomplish our mission as a church; Fellowship, Accountability, and Outreach.

FELLOWSHIP

Acts 2:42 describes the early church as devoting themselves “to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers”.

Nothing about this description implies individualistic Christianity. The early church was consistent and intentional to gather together for the purpose of discussing God’s Word, eating together, and prayer.

At Woodridge, our community groups function as a spiritual family. We share meals together. Men and women are growing in discipleship with one another. God’s Word is being discussed and applied. We share our lives with one another and pray for one another.

We desire that our groups be a place for us to exercise hospitality with one another and others. Having one another into our homes on a regular basis for the purpose of encouragement and fellowship. We desire our groups to be a place to grow in how we serve one another, using the gifts that God has given us for the benefit of others. We desire our groups to be a place where we intentionally live life together with other believers that God has brought us into community with at Woodridge.

ACCOUNTABILITY

James 5:16 states, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another..."

Our community groups are also marked by confession of sin and gospel application. What others can see in our lives only hints at the things taking place in our hearts. Our groups are a place where accountability and prayer for one another can take place.

Although we recognize that most accountability can and should happen within the context of the entire group, having gender specific accountability is an additional chance for men and women to separate for the purpose of getting at the gender specific matters of the heart.

Both general confession and gender specific confession are a time marked by resting in God's grace together as we seek to kill sin in our lives. It is a time where our members are able to work out the implications of the gospel in those areas of sin and begin to forsake them in obedience to God's Word.

"Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy".
(Proverbs 28:13)

Prioritizing accountability within our groups is also a way for us to grow in prayer as a community. It is a time to make war against the desires of the flesh within us and run to the Lord for help. It is a time to grow in our ability to bring sin and struggles into the light and allow the truth of God's Word to inform how we respond in those situations. It is a time for the other believers in our group to love us by walking with us through the difficulties of life.

This may look different within each group. For example, each time a group meets is a time for general confession. Many times, the community group questions will encourage people to confess sin. However, one group might choose to separate men and women for the last 15 minutes of the group in order to talk through more gender specific struggles. In another group, the men might meet one Saturday morning per month to talk more openly about specific sin struggles while the women meet on a different day in the month. Each group is free to hold one another accountable according to what works best within their group. The important thing is that accountability is taking place.

Finally, as we encourage confession within our groups, we also want to protect against betraying peoples trust. As people share the deep struggles of their lives with the group, groups are encouraged to remain committed to fight against gossip.

OUTREACH

John 17:14-18, "I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one...As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."

As a church, we have been called by God to proclaim the gospel in New Berlin and the surrounding area. What this means is that our groups seek to pray for unbelievers and encourage one another in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with them. We have been sent by Christ into the world to shine as lights in the darkness. We have been called to proclaim the gospel to a lost and dying world. Our community groups seek to obey and encourage Christ's command to proclaim the gospel to those around us.

Because of this, our groups will benefit from engaging with unbelievers together. As unbelievers are exposed to Christian community, they experience the power of the gospel at work in the lives of God's people (Jn. 13:35, Jn. 17:22-23). Sharing our lives with unbelievers can often lead to gospel opportunities in the future.

Groups are encouraged to think creatively about how they might do this. Having a cookout and inviting unbelievers is one of many ways that our community groups can engage the lost together. Inviting a non-believing friend to a get together with a few group members or even inviting the members of your group to your child's birthday party where you know there will be unbelieving family and friends present.

Each group is free to do this whenever and however they want. The important thing is that the members of each group are beginning to think strategically about how they can evangelize the lost. In fact, as groups pursue fellowship and accountability with one another, outreach will more naturally occur because we are in one another's lives more frequently and holding one another accountable to obey Christ's command to proclaim the gospel to the lost.

WHAT DOES A HEALTHY GROUP LOOK LIKE?

TRADITIONAL SMALL GROUPS	DISCIPLE-MAKING SMALL GROUPS
Goal is knowledge	Goal is obedience
Focused on head	Focused on head, heart, and hands
Leaders teach	Leaders train
Attendees are receivers of the Word	Attendees are doers of the Word
Success is measured by numbers and by information that is transferred	Success is measured by life transformation and gospel impact
Spend 1-2 hours a week together	Spend life together
Members decide "if they have time" for community	Members determine "they must take time" for community
Inconsistent level of participation among members	High level of participation among members
Members attend to be served	Members attend to serve
Sacrificial care is rarely needed	Sacrificial care is necessary
Little is accomplished for the mission of Christ	Much is accomplished for the mission of Christ
Evangelism is rarely emphasized	Evangelism is central
Leaders are directors	Leaders are equippers
Leadership discipleship is accidental	Leadership discipleship is intentional
Gifted members are disciple-makers	Every single member makes disciples of one another

A healthy group is focused on spiritual transformation. Take, for instance, a small group discussion on James 1. The text should prompt the leader to press the group members to consider a personal trial in their own lives and to humbly share that with the group. The goal is to spark a spiritual discussion that moves beyond surface level conversation. Leaders might ask their group, "Looking at verse 2, what difficulty or trial are you personally facing right now in your own life?"

After listening to people share, a follow-up question might be, "What has your experience of joy been in the midst of this trial?" As these questions are asked, the community group leader is providing an opportunity for the group members to examine whether they are submitting to God's Word in their lives. In this case, their level of joy would be an indication of how they are pursuing the Lord in the midst of their trial.

Community group questions are provided each week as a guide to the discussion. However, leaders should feel free to move into the pressing matters that arise within the group. For example, the above question about what trials people in the group are personally facing should spark follow-up questions as we seek to care to those within our group. As the members of our groups express personal trials that they are facing we desire for our groups to be a place where they are cared for well.

In fact, we want this kind of discussion to naturally lead into a meaningful time of prayer for one another. Prayer that flows from the discussion should be the priority within a group. We need to be asking the Spirit to help us “put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24).

Ultimately, we are not in community groups to simply become more knowledgeable, but to become more godly. The knowledge we gain from the preaching of God’s Word on Sunday must move into life transformation. We don’t want people just answering questions. Instead, we want people asking questions, seeking to understand how this passage helps them obey and submit to Christ. On Sunday, the preacher has already unpacked the meaning of the text. In our community groups we want people wrestling and asking questions about how they can obey and confessing where they aren’t. Community groups are the place where we don’t just wrestle with the text, but we wrestle with how the text connects to life.

COMMUNITY GROUPS AND SUMMER

While we recognize that summer is often a time for families to break from their normal routines and enjoy various activities, we should never break from God’s people (Heb. 10:24-25). We understand that many families travel or have different commitments during the summer, but these should not be an excuse to remove ourselves from the blessing

of being in community with other believers.

With that being said, summer is often a unique time for our groups and we should seek to take advantage of this. This may be a time for groups to do more social activities together. Group members might invite other members to join them in their summer activities. This may be a time for groups to think about how they might be more strategic with sharing the gospel together.

There is greater flexibility during the summer and members should not feel guilty for missing a meeting if they are out of town that week. However, our desire is for groups to continue to meet throughout the summer.

COMMUNITY GROUPS & MAKING DISCIPLES

"AND HE SAID TO HIM,
'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND
WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.
THIS IS THE GREAT AND FIRST COMMANDMENT. AND A SECOND IS
LIKE IT: YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'"

MATTHEW 22:37-39

MARKS OF A DISCIPLE²

In order to understand how to make disciples, we must understand where we are heading. Below is a list of six changes that God produces in the lives of His people. It is important to note that apart from being given a new heart, which takes place the moment of salvation, these changes take place throughout the life of the believer. They are progressive. "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18). So, what are the marks of a disciple?

MARK #1: TRANSFORMED HEART

Through Christ's work on the cross, disciples have been brought from death to life. They have been forgiven of their sin and given a new heart (Ez. 36:25-27; Jn. 3:1-8). This is completely a work of God in which he graciously overcomes our condition of spiritual death by bringing our dead hearts to life (Rom. 5:6-11; Tit. 3:3-8). Having been brought from death to life, disciples are now entirely new creations with new identities (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:1-10; Rom. 8:16-17). Through the work of the Holy Spirit within them, disciples are also continuing to be transformed into the image of Christ from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3:17-18).

MARK #2: TRANSFORMED MIND

Disciples are grounded in Scripture. They believe what God's Word says (Jn. 15:7-11). They trust God's Word and view the world around them through the lens of God's Word (Jn. 8:31-32; 2 Cor. 10:5). As disciples read, study, memorize and meditate on God's Word, Christ conforms their minds to become like His (Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 2:16). This knowledge of God through His Word shapes the disciple into the image of Christ (Col. 3:1-10).

MARK #3: TRANSFORMED AFFECTIONS

Disciples are also satisfied in Christ. They desire what Jesus desires (Jn. 4:13-14). Disciples are no longer content to pursue the things of this world, but their joy is continually growing in Christ (Jn. 6:35; Phil. 4:4). Disciples, therefore, seek to walk with Christ, not out of a sense of duty, but out of a sense of delight in God. They enjoy worshipping God, they crave communion with God through prayer, they hunger for God's Word, and they seek to glorify God in all they do (Ps. 42; Ps. 63:1-8; Matt. 4:4; Matt. 6:5-15; Matt. 22:37). Such a delight in God pushes out any delight in this world (1 Jn. 2:15-17). Disciples are daily fighting the desires of their flesh as they pursue the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-24).

MARK #4: TRANSFORMED WILL

Not only are disciples grounded in God's Word, but disciples are obedient to God's Word (Jn. 14:15-21; 15:14-17; Matt. 28:19). Disciples of Jesus do not only hear the Word; they also seek to do what it says (Jas. 1:22-25). They see the commands of God in Scripture as an opportunity to experience the joy of obedience to Christ (Rom. 6:17-18; Jn. 14:23). As they do so, Jesus conforms their ways to His will (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 10:5).

MARK #5: TRANSFORMED RELATIONSHIPS

Disciples are sacrificial and loving. They serve others as Christ has served them (Mk. 10:43-45; Jn. 13:35). Having been reconciled to God through Christ, disciples now work towards reconciliation with others as well (Matt. 6:12-15; Rom. 12:3-21; Eph. 2:14-16). Disciples of Christ are willing to lay down their lives for one another by serving one another with the gifts God has given them (1 Jn. 3:16-18; 1 Cor. 12:12-27). This transformation of relationship extends outside the church into the world as disciples care for their families, the lost, and the poor (Eph. 5:22-6:4; Rom. 9:1-5; Jas. 2:14-17).

MARK #6: TRANSFORMED PURPOSE

Finally, disciples are engaged with God's mission for the church. They are active in proclaiming the gospel, making disciples, and treasuring Christ above all (Matt. 28:18-20). Compelled by the grace of God, disciples now have a new reason for living (Acts. 20:22-24). Disciples live (and die) in order to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others, to make more and better disciples, to show that Christ is worthy of all our worship (Ps. 67; Rev. 7:9-10).

CONCLUSION

This is what we aim for as believers. As we seek to grow as disciples and make more disciples, understanding what a disciple should look like helps us to trust the Spirit's work in our lives as we pursue who we are called to be. As we continue to pursue Christ, the Holy Spirit is faithful to transform every part of our being into the image of Christ

STAGES OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH³

Another valuable tool as we seek to make disciples at Woodridge, is to identify the stage of spiritual growth of each believer. This allows us to invest in them in a way that is helpful and fruitful. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:1, "But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it."

In saying this, Paul identifies that the "brothers" he was addressing were not ready for the deep things of God because they were still infants in the faith. His understanding of their spiritual maturity allowed him to address them appropriately.

SPIRITUALLY DEAD

The spiritually dead are sinners who have not repented of their sin and trusted in Christ for salvation. They are characterized by unbelief and rebellion against God. They may or may not be aware of their need for a Savior or they may assume they are saved when they actually are not (Eph. 2:1-3).

How do we help the spiritually dead?

Ultimately, we look for ways to share the gospel with them. They cannot turn from sin and trust in Christ if they have not heard the good news of Christ (Rom. 10:14-17). We need to be willing to ask questions about what they believe and why, and truly listen to them. As we share the gospel with them, we need to be sure to explain the difference between knowing facts about God and truly knowing Him as Lord and Savior.

We also seek to build relationships with them and genuinely care for them. We must live a life in obedience to the Scriptures so that they can see the power of the gospel at work in your lives (Phil. 1:27. Phil. 2:14-15, 1 Pet. 2:12).

Finally, we need to pray for them! We cannot change their hearts. It is completely a work of God that a dead heart is brought to life (1 Cor. 3:5-7).

SPIRITUAL INFANTS

Spiritual infants are characterized by dependence and ignorance. They are generally very new Christians and although

they are often excited to walk with Christ, they lack the knowledge of Scripture and an understanding of what it looks like to follow Christ on a daily basis. Their view of God and the world tends to be a mix of worldly and cultural beliefs with biblical Christianity. They often do not understand their need for the body of Christ and may often still live according to the ways of the world in many areas of their life.

How do we help spiritual infants?

As an infant needs its parent, a spiritual infant requires the personal attention of others who can provide care, instruction, and protection through their process of spiritual growth (1 Cor. 3:1-5, Heb. 5:11-14, Eph. 4:14).

Spiritual infants need to be taught to develop new habits such as prayer and the study of Scripture that will help them follow Christ. They need to be taught how to share the gospel with others and shown from Scripture what God expects of every believer. Finally, they must also see mature believers live these habits out in daily life as an example to follow (Matt. 28:19-20).

SPIRITUAL CHILDREN

Spiritual children are typically characterized by self-centeredness. Although they have an increasing knowledge of God and His Word, they tend to still filter everything through their own preferences and what is convenient for them. They lack consistency between what they say they believe and how they live, often being consumers within the church rather than contributors.

Spiritual children must reach a point where they decide to move beyond spiritual mediocrity and be willing to die to

themselves in order to follow Christ. Until they get to this point, spiritual children tend to remain spiritual children (Matt. 16:24-26).

How do we help spiritual children?

Spiritual children require consistent guidance, instruction and accountability in how to walk with Christ. Much like a spiritual infant, they need to see mature believers lead by example. They need to be shown how to apply what they are learning in the Bible to their lives and how to pursue Christ and flee temptation. They need to be taught about who they are in Christ and shown what it looks like to have a relationship with other believers. Ultimately, you want to help them grow more independent in their ability to walk with Christ and other believers (Eph. 4:11-14).

SPIRITUAL YOUNG ADULTS

Spiritual young adults have learned to turn to Christ for help and guidance in their lives. This does not mean they no longer need the church, but instead they are actively loving others and their priorities are beginning to reflect that Christ is their greatest treasure. They have an increasing desire to proclaim the gospel and make disciples but they may still need guidance in how to do this (2 Tim. 2:1-2).

How do we help spiritual young adults?

As they continue to grow in their understanding of God's Word, they also need to grow in their understanding of how God has gifted them. They need help identifying how they can be used to strengthen the body of Christ. As they serve, it is important to continue to guide and equip them by giving them further opportunities to serve and providing godly

counsel and discipleship throughout the process.

Spiritual young adults must also grow in their ability to not only understand, but explain basic Christian doctrine and discern between primary and secondary issues. They must also grow in their ability to recognize false doctrine.

SPIRITUAL PARENTS

Spiritual parents are Gospel-centered believers who identify Christ as their greatest treasure. They have learned to die to self and are concerned with making disciples. Spiritual parents are actively displaying the fruit of the Spirit in their lives (Gal. 5:22-25).

Spiritual parents don't necessarily have all the answers. They will sin and make mistakes. They will face struggles and will need ongoing relationships to continue to encourage them and hold them accountable. However, their lives are marked as examples for others to follow.

CONCLUSION

Community groups are a wonderful place for us to live life with one another to an extent that we are able to identify what stage of discipleship each believer is in and minister to him or her accordingly.

Ultimately, as we begin to identify people's spiritual maturity, this will help us know how to move people from one stage of spiritual growth to the next. This is clearly a work of the Holy Spirit, and yet we have been given the privilege of ministering God's Word to others for their personal growth and God's glory.

COMMUNITY GROUPS & PASTORAL CARE

RATHER, SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE, WE ARE TO GROW UP IN EVERY WAY INTO HIM WHO IS THE HEAD, INTO CHRIST, FROM WHOM THE WHOLE BODY, JOINED AND HELD TOGETHER BY EVERY JOINT WITH WHICH IT IS EQUIPPED, WHEN EACH PART IS WORKING PROPERLY, MAKES THE BODY GROW SO THAT IT BUILDS ITSELF UP IN LOVE.

EPHESIANS 4:15-16

PASTORAL CARE

A common issue that churches must think through is how to spiritually care for all the people that God brings through their doors. Pastors equip the saints for the work of ministry, but they cannot do it all. Furthermore, the work of ministry for laypeople should be more than just taking care of the physical aspects of local church ministry (cleaning, scheduling, administrative work, etc.); it should include caring for the souls of others (Gal. 6:1-2; Rom. 15:14). The integration of biblical counseling within our community groups allows us to follow the model that Paul lays out in Ephesians 4:11-13.

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-13).

Our leaders are effectively caring for the 10-16 people that make up their group. And the members of that group also have a responsibility to care for the other members of their group. According to Ephesians 4, our elders and pastors care for the church by equipping the saints for the work of ministry. One of the specific ways this takes place is by investing in the community group leaders so that they might care for the members of their group well. As more leaders are equipped for ministry and begin caring for those that God has placed within their group, the church is built up in love.

In this way, community groups become a place where the members of Woodridge are discipled and cared for. This does not mean that the elders are never personally involved in the lives of the members, but that they are also seeking to care for the members by investing in and equipping leaders who are able to care for others as well. This is why

everyone is expected to be active in a community group.

EXAMPLE

Because our community groups are focused on more than head knowledge, a question might be asked at group about whether someone struggles with trusting God. One member confesses that this has been a recent struggle of theirs and they have even begun to doubt their salvation.

This is an opportunity for pastoral care to take place within the life of this group. The group might pray for this person and then a few members might follow up with them throughout the week to encourage them and point them to Christ. Many times, this is exactly what the person needed to continue to pursue Christ.

Let's say, for example, that it becomes clear that the struggle is much deeper than originally anticipated. The members begin to struggle to know how to help. This is where the community group leader might take more of the responsibility in caring for this person. They have more training and experience using God's Word to speak to the struggles of the heart. And so, they begin to minister more intentionally to the struggling member in their group.

As time goes on the leader discovers deeper struggles and sin issues and feels like this person's struggle is beyond their ability to handle as well. At this point the person might need the help of a pastor or trained biblical counselor at Woodridge. The person begins formal counseling, and yet, they are not disconnected from the life of their group. The members and leader of their group continues to pray, encourage, and walk with this person through their struggles.

In this way, the body of Christ is active in caring for the person who is struggling, whether it be sin or suffering. As we seek to care for the members of our church, we must remember that there is no replacement for the body of Christ.

STRUCTURE OF CARE AT WOODRIDGE

In the example above, we described the care structure of Woodridge. The members of Woodridge are on the front lines of ministry, and the community group leaders, trained counselors, pastors and elders all work to support those on the front lines.

As discipleship takes place within our groups, we should not be surprised when significant personal issues arise as we confess sin and share struggles. Typically, community group leaders and members will be able to handle many of the issues that come up in their group, but not all of them. Those who might need more intentional discipleship or what is commonly referred to as “biblical counseling,” may need to be cared for by others. For many community group leaders and members, there simply isn’t enough time available to also do long-term biblical counseling. Many members and leaders may not yet be equipped with the tools necessary to disciple someone struggling with a debilitating struggle or sin.

Fortunately, there is still a way to care for these people. Those who need additional care are referred to either trained biblical counselors or the pastors and elders at Woodridge. This means that a community group ministry is dependent upon a biblical counseling ministry to care for the people requiring more intensive discipleship.

However, this does not mean that the individual needing counseling should be removed from their community group. In fact, this is a time, more than ever, for the group to come alongside him or her in love. These are the people who know them best. In most cases, the community group leader will be working with the person counseling the member of their group and will be able to continue walking with that person outside of the counseling sessions.

Even if one of the members of the group is being counseled outside of the group, the community group leader should still seek to remain involved. Counselors may be necessary, but they are best seen as a support to the care of that person taking place within the group.

WHAT IS BIBLICAL COUNSELING?

We have talked about the integration of biblical counseling as a support to the discipleship of the members within our community groups. But what is biblical counseling?

Biblical counseling can be defined as ministering to the struggles and sins of others through God's Word. Woodridge seeks to be a Word-centered church. We believe that "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16).

On Sunday morning, God's Word is proclaimed publicly through the preaching of God's Word. At home, God's Word is read privately through personal or family devotions. Biblical counseling is the conversational aspect of the ministry of the Word.

What this means is that because our community groups are focused on gathering together to discuss God's Word, fellowship with one another, live life together; counseling is taking place in our groups as we speak God's truth to one another in love.

We often think that counseling must be a formal meeting in a room with a trained professional who asks us questions

and then helps us with our problems, but counseling can also take place informally through day-to-day conversations. And while formal counseling is sometimes necessary, it is always strengthened through the informal counseling that takes place within the life of the church.

THE GOAL OF BIBLICAL COUNSELING

As we think further about biblical counseling, the goal is worship. There are many reasons why someone might need counseling: sin, suffering, weakness (1 Thess. 5:14). However, in every case the goal is for that person to draw near to Christ in worship in the midst of his or her struggles.

One of the misconceptions of biblical counseling is that the goal is to prevent suffering, to never struggle with a particular sin issue again, or to find strength instead of weakness. However, Paul speaks of his thorn in the flesh quite differently than we tend to approach our own struggles. "Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 8-10).

Biblical counseling is not just about fixing a problem. It is an opportunity to lead people to worship Christ in the midst of their struggles. This does not mean that we should not call people to repent of sin, or seek to alleviate suffering. But it does mean that our goal is always worship that leads the person back to Christ, even in the midst of suffering and sin.

HOW PEOPLE CHANGE

We recognize that we cannot change someone's heart. Yet we also believe that "the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

We believe that God's Word is relevant to the sins and struggles within our lives. Culture changes. Our circumstances change. Our experiences change. But the truth of God's Word remains the same.

Biblical counseling seeks to relate God's Word to a person struggling under the weight of personal sin and/or suffering. As the Word of God reveals the thoughts and intentions of the heart, the person is able to trust God as they seek to change more into the image of Christ through their struggles.

We also believe that change is completely a work of the Holy Spirit through the truth found in God's Word. For this reason, we recognize the importance of depending upon God through prayer as well as the importance of continually relying on the authority and truth of Scripture as we seek to minister to struggling people.

CONCLUSION

What the above means is that all group members, whether they are male or female, young or old, are called to intentionally minister to others. They are qualified to do so because their authority does not come from themselves, but from the Word of God.

When Christ brings us into the family of God, we are never alone again, no matter how big our struggles may be. Yet many Christians fall prey to the individualistic leanings of our culture. Many struggling people fail to realize the blessing of moving deeper into the life of the church. They may think that it's none of anyone's business. And yet, Christ has called us to Christlikeness in the context of community.

However, for a community group to be focused on intentional discipleship and life transformation, we must make selecting and training our community group leaders a top priority. Why? Because our community group leaders need to be equipped to carry out the vision of Woodridge within their groups. This brings us to the final section.

COMMUNITY GROUPS & LEADERSHIP DISCIPLESHIP

"NOW WHEN THEY SAW THE BOLDNESS OF PETER AND JOHN, AND PERCEIVED THAT THEY WERE UNEDUCATED, COMMON MEN, THEY WERE ASTONISHED. AND THEY RECOGNIZED THAT THEY HAD BEEN WITH JESUS."

ACTS 4:13

COMMUNITY GROUP LEADERS

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A LEADER⁴

Determining who might make a good leader is often a difficult task. Churches can often be too quick to put others in a position of leadership while other churches might be too cautious.

As we identify leaders within the church, there are three primary things we want to look for: character, conviction, and competence. As these three things are described below, keep in mind that we want to identify potential leaders primarily based on their character, followed by their conviction and competence.

Too often we are quick to put individuals in a position of leadership because they display tremendous skill, and yet they do not have the character to lead by example, nor the sense of conviction to own the position.

CHARACTER

As we continue to look for potential leaders within the church, the first thing we want to look at is their character. At what level of spiritual maturity are they? It may be helpful to refer back to the stages of spiritual growth section in order to help identify those within your group that have the maturity to lead others.

Are they an example of godliness to those within the group? Perhaps they still need to grow in certain areas, but does their character prove themselves to be humble and teachable? Are they willing to serve rather than be served? These are the leaders that we want to identify as we seek to start up new groups.

CONVICTION

After identifying potential leaders within your group that have the character to lead, it is important to identify whether they feel called, or convicted, to lead as well. Leading a community group will require a level of responsibility and perseverance. Community groups can be messy at times and require a lot of energy as the leader seeks to love and serve others throughout the week. Knowing that a leader feels called to lead will provide confidence that they will not quit at the first sign of hardship or discouragement.

Although this is not always the case, leading a community group may also require potential leaders to prioritize where they serve in the church. Leading a group is one of the most hands-on serving opportunities at Woodridge. If potential leaders are serving in many other areas of the church, it may not be wise to add such a time and energy intensive responsibility to their plate unless they are willing to let go of other responsibilities.

COMPETENCE

Competence refers to the person's ability to lead others. Are these potential leaders gifted at leading a discussion without turning the group into a teaching session? Can they cast vision for the group and point people to the gospel? Are they able to understand and protect sound doctrine within their group? Someone who is able to lead others well in these areas may be a perfect candidate for future leadership within community groups and an example for others to follow.

Interestingly enough, competence is only the third thing you should consider as you identify potential leaders within the group. This is not to say that competence is unimportant, but that character and calling are always a priority. This is because we believe that a person with godly character and a strong conviction to care for the people in their group will naturally lead by example what it means to live a godly life. We also believe that sound doctrine can be taught, but

character can't. Although potential leaders may be highly competent in leadership, if they do not have godly character, they may lead the group to wrongly reproduce the example of their own life.

CONCLUSION

As new leaders are raised up, we never want to take a risk on character. If you are unsure about their character, then they should not be considered for leadership. It may be helpful at times to spend time getting to know the person on a deeper level. Don't be scared to ask direct questions. Potential leaders should be open about their life and also willing to receive counsel.

Conviction is more difficult to discern at times. We can never truly know whether a person will get into the role and then lose interest or fail to take on the responsibility. If they seem unsure about the role of leading a group, this may indicate that you should wait to hand them the responsibility. Perhaps the best thing to do would be to allow them to co-lead another group until they can determine whether they are willing to take on the role.

Competence, however, may require various levels of consideration. How aligned are they with the church theologically? Are they willing to grow theologically in the areas where they might not be aligned? Often, someone may simply need to be given the responsibility in order for them to rise to the occasion. Allowing someone to lead within an existing group may also provide clarity on whether they have the gifting to lead a group. This is not to say that competence is unimportant, but that people with godly character and a sense of conviction will often grow in their ability to lead others.

LEADERSHIP AND COMPLEMENTARIANISM

Woodridge is complementarian in our view of gender roles within the life of the church. We firmly believe that both men and women are created in the image of God and are therefore equal in value and dignity; we also believe that God has created men and women distinct in the roles and responsibilities each is to fulfill in both church and home. Because of this, men are called to be leaders within the life of the church and within the home.

The Bible affirms that authoritative teaching positions within the church are reserved for men (1 Tim. 2:11-14; 1 Cor. 14:33-34). Likewise, in marriages, husbands are called to exercise their authority by sacrificially loving and leading their wives as an example of Christ's love and authority over the church (Eph. 5:23-25). While women are not called to submit to all men, they are called to submit to their husbands as an act of willing obedience and love for Christ. In turn, both men and women are called to submit to the elders of their local church.

Our community group leaders are asked to work closely with the elders as they faithfully teach and lead with authority in their groups. While they do not have the same spiritual authority as elders, they do indeed hold a position of leading, shepherding, and teaching as tasked by the elders. For this reason, community group leaders are men.

However, we recognize that many women have God-given spiritual gifts of leading, shepherding and teaching, among others. The elders at Woodridge take seriously the duty of encouraging women to put these valuable gifts to use, both as members in their community groups, and in other areas within Woodridge. Community group leaders should seek to enable all group members to exercise their gifts appropriately during the times they meet. This means expecting both women and men to contribute to the group discussion and to the overall well-being and care of the group.

For this reason, a married couple will often be referred to as the leaders of a group because we do see opportunities for the husband to lead men and the wife to lead women within the group. Our desire is for mature women to be ministering and leading women who are less mature in their faith and see community groups as a place where this can happen organically. The same is true for the men in our groups (Titus 2:1-8).

Ultimately, we want to provide both men and women with opportunities to exercise their gifts within the life of the group while seeking to be obedient to God's design for men and women within the life of the church.

DEVELOPING LEADERS

After we have identified a potential leader, how should we go about developing them? There are many things involved in training a potential community group leader. It is also important to note that while we have committed to developing leaders, this does not guarantee they become one. As training continues, it may become clear that they require more time to grow, or that their passions and giftings may be better used in other areas of the life of the church. This is a good thing, as it allows the members of the church to identify and serve in the ways that God has gifted them.

TRAINING MATERIAL

We want leaders to be aligned with the overall vision and doctrine of our church so that they can lead others in these areas as well. Therefore, one aspect of training is to provide potential leaders with resources that challenge them theologically as well as spiritually. They will be working through material which teaches them what Scripture has to say about doctrine as well as godly character. This is a great time for them to learn and grow not only in a knowledge of God's Word, but also to search their own hearts and seek to grow in godliness. This material will also be paired with

regular meetings to discuss and wrestle with the material together. Potential leaders will also be working with their current community group leader during this time. We turn now to the second stage of developing leaders.

APPRENTICESHIP

Current community group leaders need to take ownership of developing new leaders within their group. They should always be thinking about who might be able to lead if they weren't at group that week. The group should not have to cancel if the leader can't make it. In fact, it may be beneficial for the leader to feel free to be out of town one week for vacation knowing that there are others in the group that can take responsibility that week.

We must remember that leadership development is not disconnected from discipleship. It is the responsibility of the leader to be involved in the process of discipling new leaders.

One simple way of thinking through the process of developing a leader is to follow the steps outlined below.

1. The group leader leads while the apprentice watches
2. The group leader leads while the apprentice helps
3. The apprentice leads while the group leader helps
4. The apprentice leads while the group leader watches

As potential leaders grow in their ability to take more ownership within the group, give them more responsibility and allow them to function within their own gifting. They may not do everything how you would do it, but that's ok. The goal is for them to be equipped to lead and disciple others.

ACBC TRAINING

Finally, we want to offer yearly training in biblical counseling through ACBC (Association of Certified Biblical Counselors). All leaders are expected to go through a 10-week course that covers the fundamentals of biblical counseling. By taking this course, leaders are better prepared to disciple the people in their groups through the struggles of life whether sin or suffering.

When an issue arises in the group, leaders have a greater confidence in their ability to provide hope and help from the Scriptures. In this way leaders will be able to more effectively care for the people in their group.

Our desire is for this training to be completed before, or soon after a leader begins to lead their own group.

LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

Elders are ultimately responsible for all the members of the church. However, to best care for all the members, our elders are committed to investing in the community group leaders in a special way. This doesn't mean the elders aren't seeking to personally know and care for all the members, but that they equip the church to care for itself by investing in other leaders within the church.

As community group leaders remain committed to leading those within their group, this also allows us to make sure that the leaders are cared for as well. Much of their care can take place within the context of their own group. However, as they seek wisdom and counsel in how they lead, we want to provide them with support and help so that

they can lead confidently.

Because of this, each community group leader will be overseen by a specific elder at Woodridge. Each elder will invest in a few group leaders, providing accountability and care for the leader. In this way members are cared for by the elders as they seek to care for the leaders of each group.

MULTIPLYING GROUPS

We want to multiply our groups regularly. Sometimes a new group will form as a new leader is raised up to start a new group. Sometimes the group might split in half in order to provide room for more people within a certain location to join a group near them.

Whatever the form, we are committed to multiplying and we believe this should naturally take place as we raise up new leaders within our groups. This will also mean that we need to be comfortable with getting to know new people as they come into our groups or as we leave our group to start a new one.

Many people often state that it takes years to get comfortable with the people in our groups, but we believe that if we are committed to living life together with the people in our community group (having them in our homes, serving together, caring for one another), the intimacy that normally takes years can take much less time. After all, we have Christ in common.

EXPECTATIONS OF A LEADER⁵

Although many of our leaders are gifted teachers, leaders are not required to be highly gifted in teaching. Instead,

they are expected to be gifted question askers. The passage was already taught on Sunday and so it is the job of the leader to ask questions about how the passage interacts with the lives of the people within their group.

Although leaders should understand sound doctrine, they are not expected to know all the answers to any question that may arise within the group. Instead, they should know where to go to find answers or help those in their group find the answers to some of the more complex questions that may arise.

Finally, leaders are expected to know the people in their group. They should know the struggles and trials that the members of their group are facing and they are also expected to be godly examples of Christian maturity to the group members.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LEADER

There are three basic roles within community groups for which the leader is responsible. These three roles include, shepherding, vision casting, and administration.

This does not mean that leaders must personally function in all three roles, but that they are expected to make sure these roles are filled within the group. A good leader may have one member of the group own the administration role and rely on another member to think strategically about how the group can live out the gospel together. But in the end, the leader is responsible to make sure these things are taking place within the group. Let's look at each one more closely.

SHEPHERDING

Leaders are expected to care for and protect the members of their group by leading them into a deeper relationship

with Christ and a greater obedience to God's Word. Leaders need to have a heart for the people in their group and the patience to lead them. They are responsible to make sure that each member of their group is being cared for. This does not mean that they must care for each individual personally, but that they are equipping the group to care for one another. They may also need to step in when sin or struggles within the group require special care.

VISION CASTING

Leaders are also expected to help the members within their group pursue the mission that God has for His Church. They have a responsibility to help those within their group glorify God by proclaiming the gospel, making disciples, and treasuring Christ above all. What this means is that they are looking for ways to help the members of their group grow in these areas. This could be something the group does as a whole, but it would also include personal encouragement to live out the mission of the church in the homes, schools, jobs, of the members of their group.

ADMINISTRATION

Finally, Leaders need to organize and plan so that the group is better prepared to grow as disciples and make more disciples. This might include meal planning for the groups that share a meal together each week or event planning for the groups that might get together outside of their normal night to spend time together. A leader that lacks gifting in administration skills will benefit from finding someone else in the group to oversee the administrative tasks within the group. This is often an excellent task to delegate and allow others in the group to take further ownership of their group.

CONCLUSION

As a church, we seek to glorify God by proclaiming the gospel, making disciples, and treasuring Christ above all. We

believe that community groups play a vital role in allowing us to accomplish this mission. It is our desire that every member of our church would become passionate about glorifying God in all that they do. In order to continue to pursue this mission together, we need to be in community with God's people.

Christian, will you commit to pursuing the mission that God has for His church? Will you commit to joining a community group and caring for the people in your group? Leaders, will you commit to identifying and training up new leaders from within your group? Will our groups commit to living life together?

As we make these commitments, God is glorified and God's people experience the joy and blessing that God intends for His people. If you are not currently in a community group, please visit our website or talk to a pastor for more information on how to join.

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WOODRIDGE
COMMUNITY CHURCH

