



COMMUNITY GROUPS:
A LEADER GUIDE

- 02 How To Use This Guide**
- 03 Groups Overview**
- 06 Purpose 1: Growing Together**
- 08 Purpose 2: Growing Faith**
- 10 Purpose 3: Praying For One Another**
- 11 Gatherings Described**
- 12 Resources**
- 13 FAQ**

I am a firm believer that every Christian needs other Christians to help them live out their faith. We were made by our Creator to live in relationship with Him and with other believers. That is in our spiritual DNA. But I get it. You're busy. You don't need another meeting to attend or anything else added to your plate. But let's not think of living in community with other believers as another meeting to attend. Let's see it as it was intended by our Creator – a time to develop and deepen Christian friendships.

A time to be encouraged
and to encourage others.

A time to laugh or cry
with people that you
trust. A time to grow in
one's faith and a time to

pray with one another. A time to be authentic, real, and accepted. I know that as the potential group leader you are probably a bit nervous, maybe a tad anxious, but also hopeful and spiritually energized at the same time. You are not alone. Most folks feel the same way. I know I did when I started my first group – and I was the groups pastor! Take a breath, grab some coffee, relax, and just read one page at a time of this leader guide. Hopefully this guide will answer most of your questions about community groups here at FBCL.

If you still have questions after you have read through this material, email our groups staff at fbcloganville.org/groups and they will get back in touch with you.

When you are finished reading this material, I pray that you will know that living in authentic biblical community is living in obedience as Christ followers.

I also pray that you will sense God's calling on you to trust Him and become a community group leader.

We are so thankful for you and your desire to start a community group at FBCL. Our staff is praying

for you by name and
praying for the people
who God will bring into
your community group.

A special "thank you" to
the life groups ministry

leaders of Longhollow Baptist Church who answered so many of my questions and confirmed so many thoughts surrounding authentic biblical community.

Thanks to Ashley Ottinger, who has the incredible ability to put my jumbled thoughts down on paper – and have it make sense! Thanks for being a blessing to me and FBC Loganville. And a final thanks to you – for trusting God and taking the next step in becoming a community group leader here at FBCL.

A time to be encouraged and to encourage others.

PASTOR RICK BENE
Adults & Discipleship Pastor

A low-angle, vertical photograph of a modern building with a vibrant pink facade. The building features a large, wide staircase that ascends towards the right. The sky is a clear, bright blue. On the left side of the building, the number '04' is visible. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern, with a strong color palette of pink and blue.

The heart of what we're doing is simple. But if you want in-depth information, this guidebook and the associated resources on the website (at fbcloganville.org/groups) are here to help you.

GETTING STARTED

Brainstorm below:

[illegible]

groups overview

We believe authentic community is critical to the Christian walk. That's why we prioritize groups.

WHAT ARE GROUPS?

Groups are a small collection of believers (3-10 people at the beginning) that meet regularly to discuss God's Word, pray, and live in community with one another. Groups are strategically designed to make disciples through fellowship, Bible reading, and prayer.

Purpose:

- GROWING TOGETHER:** to help believers grow together in authentic community where they can be encouraged, supported, held accountable, prayed for, and live out the "one anothers" of the faith.
- GROWING FAITH:** to help believers grow and mature in their faith through the reading, applying, responding to, and memorization of God's Word.
- PRAYING FOR ONE ANOTHER:** to experience the body of Christ in an intimate way through prayer – bearing one another's burdens and praising the Lord together.

Groups are a small collection of believers that meet regularly to discuss God's Word, pray, and live in community with one another.

WHAT IS A GATHERING LIKE?

Group gatherings are simple. Groups will utilize the church-wide Bible reading plan at each meeting – you'll have fun conversation, share what's on your heart, go over the weekly reading, and pray together.

ARE GROUPS FOREVER?

Because we are called by the Great Commission to go and make disciples of all people, our groups are not designed to last forever. Each group will go through three phases.

CONNECT (0-6 months)

02.

GROW (6+ months)

03.

DUPLICATE (12-18 months)

The third phase is birthed through prayer. The group has doubled, leadership has been developed, and now two healthy groups can be formed. This is the natural outcome of group members having a missional mindset.

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Another way that community groups will attain authentic community is by living out the “one anothers” of the faith. There are 59 “one another” statements in the New Testament. That’s right, 59. That’s just under 60 exhortations in Scripture to actually do something toward another person. Below are 18 of the 59 “one another” statements in the New Testament:

Purpose 1 Growing Together

**...Be at peace with each other.”
(Mark 9:50)**

to help believers grow together in authentic community where they can be encouraged, supported, held accountable, prayed for, and live out the “one anothers” of the faith.

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47

The Acts 2 believers took the fellowship part of Acts 2:42 seriously. The Greek word for fellowship (koinonia) means something deeper than a friendly association. It describes people who gather under a common idea or purpose. Did you also notice the number of times the words “they,” “everyone,” “all,” and “their” were used in Acts 2:42-47? They shared their possessions and shared their lives with one another. It is our hope that community groups would feel like a group of close friends or family, and that they would reflect the kind of unity the Acts 2 Church had.

“...Love one another...” (John 13:34)

**“...Honor one another above yourselves.
(Romans 12:10)**

**“Live in harmony with one another...”
(Romans 12:16)**

“...Stop passing judgment on one another.” (Romans 14:13)

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you...” (Romans 15:7)

**“...Instruct one another.”
(Romans 15:14)**

“...Have equal concern for each other.” “...Pray for each other.” (James 5:16)
(I Corinthians 12:25)

“...Live in harmony with one another...”

“...Serve one another in love.” (I Peter 3:8)
(Galatians 5:13)

**“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others...”
(I Peter 4:10)**

“Be kind and compassionate to one another...” (Ephesians 4:32)

**“...Forgiving each other...”
(Ephesians 4:32)**

As groups live out these “one anothers” of the faith with each other, fellowship (koinonia) is deepened and authentic community is accomplished.

“Bear with each other...” (Colossians 3:13)

**“...Encourage one another.”
(Hebrews 10:25)**

“Don’t grumble against each other…” (James 5:9)

**“Confess your sins to each other…”
(James 5:16)**

Purpose 2

Growing Faith

Along with the Bible reading plan, we ask members of each community group to start a H.E.A.R. Journal. A H.E.A.R. Journal is a simple way to help you read the Bible with the intention of applying it. By asking the following four simple questions, you can understand and apply any passage.

- **H (HIGHLIGHT):** What is a verse(s) that stood out to you in your reading?
- **E (EXPLAIN):** What is the author's intended meaning in the context of the passage?
- **A (APPLY):** How does this verse apply to me and my life today?
 - » How can this help me?
 - » What does this mean today?
 - » What would the application of this verse look like in my life?
 - » What does this mean to me?
 - » What is God saying to me?
- **R (RESPOND):** How will I respond to the application in my relationships and/or situations this week?

to help believers grow and mature in their faith through the reading, applying, responding to, and memorization of God's Word.

These new believers of Acts 2 devoted themselves to disciplines that would grow their faith. In verse 42, Luke describes how the early Church was devoted to the apostles' teachings. Reading, applying, responding to, and the memorization of God's Word is essential for today's believers to be transformed into the image of Christ. Community groups provide a place where your faith can grow through these spiritual growth disciplines.

READING AND APPLYING GOD'S WORD

We encourage groups to follow the Bible reading plan. This is an intentional 52-week plan that we are following church-wide. It helps our members stay on the same page and journey through the Scriptures together – no matter the age, ministry, etc. You can utilize the reading plan online at fbcloganville.org/bible-plan or in the FBC Loganville app in your mobile app store.

At each gathering, community group members will share a H.E.A.R. Journal entry and discuss how they applied and responded to their highlighted passage. There is not a set amount of H.E.A.R. Journals that one must do each week, but the goal with this discipline is to improve as time goes on. Consider how often you currently journal and do one more. So, if you have never journaled, just try to do a couple a week. If you journal occasionally, try to do three times a week. The hope is that as you get more comfortable with this discipline and experience its benefits, you will want to increase this number throughout the year.

MEMORIZING GOD'S WORD

As a part of the Bible reading plan, we suggest key verses for group members to memorize, but we also

When your community group meets, group members will participate in Biblical discussions where they can apply God's Word to their lives and experience life change. Here are four key elements of community group discussions:

CONVERSATIONAL: Life-changing discussion focuses on facilitating a conversation, not teaching a Bible lesson. Better learning and connection are accomplished when people are able to ask questions and share their personal insights and experiences.

AUTHENTIC: Life-changing discussion happens when people are real with themselves, with God, and with others. We foster this authenticity by providing a safe environment where people can be honest and transparent.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slightly aged or off-white appearance.

Purpose 3

Praying For One Another

to experience the body of Christ in an intimate way through prayer – bearing one another’s burdens and praising the Lord together.

12

In Acts 2, we see that the new disciples were committed to prayer – that is, simply talking to God about their needs, concerns, and direction for their lives. And as they prayed together, their prayers were magnified: church leaders became empowered, believers became unified, lives were forever changed, and the Gospel was spread. Praying for others is not only a blessing for us to do, but it is also a vital part of living the Christian life. We are commanded to carry one another’s burdens. We will all reach a point where we stagger and fall – and we need one another. This is one of the purposes of the church. We are there for when our brother or sister staggers and falls. We help carry the weight of their troubles. We can do this in part by taking them to the throne of grace. A prayer on behalf of someone else is called intercessory prayer. Praying for others strengthens our bond with them, and it also strengthens our relationship with the Lord. We pray for others for comfort, for salvation, for healing, for safety – for any number of reasons. God uses prayer to align our hearts to His will. We can pray that someone comes to know God, or that God will allow their lost dog to return home – we can pray for any reason at all. And when prayers are answered, the group rejoices and praises God together.



GATHERINGS DESCRIBED

Our community groups meet on average two to four times a month to hang out, discuss God's Word, and pray together. Whenever you schedule community groups less frequently, it can be difficult to gain traction, and if someone misses, they may go a month without seeing the group members. By meeting regularly, you make the group a priority on your calendar and community forms quickly.

At each group gathering, we intentionally target our three purposes: growing together, growing faith, and praying for one another. The structure below is meant to be a helpful guide, but it is far from an exact science. Ultimately, the pace and content of the conversation is set by the discernment of the leader. The times will vary depending on the length of your community group gathering and the amount of people in your group.

01. FELLOWSHIP (10- 20 minutes)

Spend the first 10 to 20 minutes catching up. Then proceed to a question from the icebreaker pack provided.

02. DEDICATION PRAYER & FORMING SMALLER GROUPS (5 minutes)

Take time to dedicate your gathering to the Lord and ask for the Holy Spirit to guide the group's conversations. To make a larger group more intimate, form several smaller sub-groups. For coed groups, form smaller, same-gender groups of 3-4 members. For same gender groups, form smaller groups of 3-4.

03. SHARING OF HIGHS AND LOWS (10- 20 minutes)

Have each person share his or her "high" and "low" of the week. This will help the group to understand the frame of mind of each member.

04. Sharing of H.E.A.R. JOURNALS and SCRIPTURE MEMORIZATION (25-35 minutes)

As members share from their H.E.A.R. Journals, concentrate on the application and response of each entry. How a person applies and responds to God's Word is vital for spiritual growth. This is also the time for members to share any Scripture verses they memorized.

05. PRAYER (10-20 minutes)

Finish the time by having each person share something specific and personal that the group can pray for.

HANGOUT NIGHTS

About every fourth gathering, community groups plan a hangout night. Hangout nights are simply a time when group members plan a time of lighthearted fun – playing pickleball, a cookout, or a game night. The agenda for this night is to simply laugh, enjoy each other, and deepen group relationships. For more hangout night ideas, go to fbcloganville.org/groups.

WHERE DO I START?

Once you have read through this material, contact our community group staff with any questions you have concerning community groups. When all your questions have been answered and you sense God is calling you to be a community group leader, fill out a community group leader's application at fbcloganville.org/groups. When you are approved as the leader and contact for your group, a staff member will reach out to you with your community group starter kit. They will guide you as you start your group. Don't know anyone? Go over to the community group class to meet more people.

RESOURCES

FBCL STAFF

If you have a question about ANYTHING related to community groups, please don't hesitate to contact our groups staff at groups@fbcloganville.org.

GROUP PODCASTS

In 10-20 minute episodes, we tackle some FAQs about Community Groups, such as:

- How to Celebrate the Lord's Supper at Community Group
- Your First Four Sessions of a Community Group
- What to do if You Don't Know 2-5 Couples/Individuals to Help You Start Your Community Group
- Helping People Belong in Your Community Group
- How to Share Responsibility within Your Group and Equip Members to Lead
- Understanding the Three Phases of Community Groups
- How to Start New Groups from an Existing Group

COMMUNITY GROUPS RESOURCE PAGE

Access group resources like the ones below at any time at fbcloganville.org/groups

- The Bible Reading Plan
- How to do a HEAR Journal
- The "One Anothers" of the Faith
- Hangout Night Ideas
- Childcare Reimbursement Form
- Community Group Member Guide

WEEKLY UPDATE

Each Friday, we will send out a community group leader email. In this email, we will share with you one or two things that are important to focus on to grow a healthy group.

FAQ

Q: What if our group is too big to meet in a home?

A: If your group is too big to meet in a home, we suggest you secure a community group venue here on our FBCL campus. We have several rooms and meeting areas where your group can meet. Simply go online, fill out a calendar request, wait for approval, and begin meeting!

Q: What do we do about childcare?

A: If your group has small children and preschoolers, childcare is an issue as your group meets. We suggest you talk this over as a group – see what your options are. Maybe these small children and preschoolers can stay at a relative's house while you meet. Maybe there is a responsible teenager amongst the siblings that could watch the younger children while you meet. Feel free to look for more information at fbclloganville.org/groups or reach out to our staff for help. We will work with you to find a solution!

Q: What is the community groups class and who is it for?

A: Our community groups class is designed to help people understand our community group model and to help them start a community group of their own. This class is very interactive – we laugh together, share from the heart, and pray together. Our prayer is that as you connect with other believers, you will form your own community group. This class is not designed to be your ending point, but a launching point for you to start your own community group.

Q: How long does a typical community group gathering last?

A: Most groups meet from 1 ½ to 2 hours during each gathering. We highly recommend groups stay within this time frame. Groups that consistently meet longer than 2 hours run into childcare issues and group member frustration. Having a set start time and end time works well for groups.

Q: How do I start my group?

A: First, make a list of people you know that are looking for community – friends, church members, neighbors, people you

work with, etc. Contact them and let them know you are starting a new community group and that you would like for them to be a part of it. Give them the community group Member Guide that will help them understand the key components of group life and answer questions they might have concerning groups. If you have at least 3-5 couples or individuals, select a launch date and start your group!

Q: What does a typical group gathering look like?

A: Typically, a group begins each gathering with small talk – catching up with each other and discussing anything from sports to politics to dinner recipes! After about 10 minutes of catching up, the leader will introduce a fun, get-them-talking question from the Group Starter Question Deck. After everyone has shared, a group member dedicates their time to the Lord through prayer. At this point, groups get smaller. In coed groups, men branch off and meet with men while women meet with women. If your group is made up of the same gender and has more than six people in it, you will want to branch off into two smaller groups of 3-4 each. In these smaller groups, you will ask each other to briefly share their highs and lows from the week – this gives the group an understanding of where that person is emotionally, physically, and spiritually. After everyone has shared, have individuals share an entry from their H.E.A.R. Journal – pay close attention to how they applied the Scripture and how they responded to it. When finished, share prayer needs and pray for one another. Encourage each other as you leave and pray for the group's needs until you gather again.

Q: Do we have to memorize Scripture according to the Bible reading plan?

A: No one has to memorize Scripture, but know that memorizing Scripture is a really good thing for one's faith! You can memorize the verses that are set apart in the Bible reading plan – or you can memorize a verse that stands out to you as you read. Either way, you are memorizing Scripture. Memorize verses at your own pace – but do your best to push yourself in this spiritual discipline. The best way to memorize Scripture is to write them down and put them in a place where you will see them often – like a bathroom mirror or kitchen refrigerator.

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Blank lined paper for writing.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



FIRST BAPTIST
LOGANVILLE