

Grow Groups – *helping one another GROW spiritually*

Imagine a group of 8-12 men and/or women. They meet together regularly. They share openly and honestly. They study scripture. They care about one another. They encourage *and* challenge one another deeply. They have fun taking spiritual growth seriously. Would you like to become a part of their group?

We believe that spiritual growth happens best in the context of Christ-centered relationships. Our Grow Groups seek to foster those relationships.

Therefore, it is our desire that...

- Every Covenant Church member steps into a Grow Group.
- Every Grow Group has fun taking spiritual growth seriously.
- Every Grow Group leader is equipped, encouraged, supported, and lead.

Core theological convictions undergirding a Grow Group:

- Clear Purpose: Spiritual Growth which brings glory to God - see Hebrews 10:22-25
- Deep Unity: Followers of Jesus share the same Spirit and the same Lord. see Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:3-6

Four essential elements in a Grow Group:

- Build relational health and support.
- Study God's Word and spend time in prayer.
- Encourage one another toward the personal practice of prayer, reading scripture and other spiritual disciplines.
- Encourage one another to *Go* to the world.

Four important characteristics of a Grow Group:

- A Grow Group is led by a designated leader who is follower of Jesus equipped to lead.
- A Grow Group meets no less than two times each month.
- A Grow Group is committed to be open to new members (if not *always* open than at least intentionally open two times a year).
- Once a Grow Group becomes too large to add more people, they pray about how they may be a part of planting a new group.

Grow Group Covenant

- **Priority:** I will make every effort to attend group meetings.
- **Prayer:** I will pray regularly for the each person in the group, by name.
- **Confidentiality:** I will not pass along to persons outside the group any personal concerns we share within it.
- **No advice giving unless counsel is requested:** I will pray for and encourage persons who share needs. I will refrain from giving advice unless counsel is specifically requested. In cases where confrontation/challenge is necessary I will first approach the person individually.
- **Arguments:** I agree to disagree agreeably ☺
- **Affirmation and Vulnerability:** I will contribute to an atmosphere of affirmation so persons in the group may be vulnerable in sharing personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences. I understand that a person who shares something personal and is met with laughter, ridicule, or criticism may never share deeply again.

Grow Group Essential Elements *Unpacked*

Building relational health and support - Here are a few common characteristics I've heard from groups that are doing this well:

- They talk about encouraging life circumstances *and* difficult life circumstances *and* challenges they receive from God's Word. Healthy relationships include this kind of breadth of conversation.
- They pray together. This means actually praying, not just sharing prayer request.
- They serve one another. I loved hearing about one woman driving another woman from her group to an appointment in Indianapolis simply for moral support.
- They play together. I loved being invited to experience a pizza baking contest with a group. (*It was particularly enjoyable getting to serve as an impartial judge!*)

Studying Scripture together - Here are a few common characteristics I've heard regarding your success in this category:

- **Walk through a book in the Bible** together. While it's fine to do topical books, most groups report studies in scripture having the greatest impact on their group.
- **Good Questions:** Ask questions that go beyond repeating information in the text. Ask questions that connect with the everyday experience of group members.
- **Follow-up Questions:** Be bold and thoughtful in asking follow up questions regarding what group members share.
- **Vulnerability:** When leaders share vulnerably about how scripture is challenging or convicting them, group members will follow their example.

Encouraging one another towards the practice of spiritual disciplines - Here are a few things I've heard from groups doing this well:

- **Ask opening questions like these:** What have you been talking to the Lord about most this week? How has God spoken to you through His Word recently? What's something worshipful you've done on your own this week?
- **Talk about spiritual disciplines:** Look at the summary of spiritual disciplines (on page 4) together and share how you've been experiencing the Lord through these disciplines. Share also about the obstacles that keep you from practicing these disciplines.
- **Pray for one another:** Understanding each person's strengths and weaknesses in the area of spiritual discipline, pray for them during the week.
- **Follow-up with one another during the week:** Send a simple text letting a group member know that you are praying for them as they seek to practice these disciplines.

Encouraging one another to *Go into the World* - Here are a few things I've heard from groups doing this well:

- **Share about how it's going for you:** This means sharing some victories and failures. Invite your group into your journey of being an ambassador for Christ.

- **Ask your group:** This may seem too simple to even mention... but it's quite important. Ask your group this question about once a month: How have you shared your faith with someone outside the faith recently?
- **Involve your group:** A couple from one group invited their non-Christian friend over for dinner along with a couple from their group. Another couple regularly invites their group members along with non-Christian neighbors for their kid's birthday parties.
- **Pray for one another:** I hope you've noticed this shows up a lot in these lists I share with you. Know the names of the non-Christians that your group members are seeking to share with and pray for them by name... expectantly.

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Spiritual Disciplines

Spiritual Disciplines are those activities (or at times abstaining from activity) which Christians over centuries have observed to be activities that draw men and women into the presence of God and nurture spiritual growth. As you meet in your Grow Group setting, consider how you can be encouraging one another along in these disciplines. Often this takes the shape of simply sharing how one of these disciplines has drawn you closer to the Lord recently.

Prayer & Study— Spending time in conversation with God. Conversation with God involves listening to His words in scripture, meditating on their meaning, and then responding to God in prayer. Choose a time and a place to feed from the Word of God regularly.

Worship—Offering praise and adoration to God. His praise should continually be on our lips and in our thoughts. Read psalms, hymns, or spiritual songs, or sing to the Lord daily using a praise tape. Keep praise ever before you as you think of God’s mighty deeds in your life.

Fellowship—Mutual caring and ministry in the body of Christ. Meet regularly with other Christians to find ways to minister to others. Encourage one another.

Fasting—Skipping a meal(s) to find greater nourishment from God. Choose a period of time to go without food. Drink water and, if necessary, take vitamin supplements. Feel the pain of having an empty stomach and depend on God to fill you with His grace.

Sacrifice—Giving of our resources beyond what seems reasonable to remind us of our dependence on Christ. Choose to give your time or finances to the Lord beyond what you normally would.

Small Group Handbook notes