

Why Gospel Communities?

At Redeemer Church of Abilene we have groups that meet weekly in homes across our community. We call these groups, Gospel Community Groups. In some ways, these are typical small groups where we meet together to pray, sing, study God's word and fellowship together.

So why not call them small groups? Why not just call it a Bible study or prayer meeting or simply a get together? Why *Gospel* Community Groups? All of those terms would be accurate in some sense. But we believe that the last thing Abilene needs is another Bible study group. There is certainly nothing wrong with a Bible study or prayer meeting, but we believe followers of Christ are called to much more.

The Purpose of GCG's

Here is what we hope to accomplish in these groups and why we choose to call them Gospel Community Groups:

1. Regular, Deep Community

Taking a cue from the early church in Acts 2 we see that it is necessary for believers to regularly meet together for studying the word, prayer, fellowship, meeting needs, encouragement, and accountability. Some might say, "Shouldn't all of this happen in the weekly gathering or 'worship service?'" We do hope that much of it does, but the reality is that you cannot accomplish in one hour what the early church did *day by day*.

We need regular community together. And we believe that it is possible to go deeper, be more open, vulnerable, and honest in a smaller group than it is in a large group. We hope that everyone in the church has a relationship with everyone else in the church. But if we simply rely on a Sunday one hour meeting for this we end up with a group of people with a plethora of shallow relationships. Shallow relationships do not lead to encouragement or accountability. This kind of regular, deep community happens in small groups.

2. Regular, Deep Study

The second thing we desire to see in these groups is a commitment to study the word in a deep way. Right now we take the Scripture from the sermon preached the previous Sunday and simply walk through it. This is not an opportunity to dissect the sermon that was preached, but to take the same text that was preached and spend some time discussing it and going deeper.

John Frame rightly says, "Theology is the application of God's revelation to all of life." The goal is not simply to walk away with a greater knowledge of the Bible. We do want that, but that is not the main goal. The main goal is that as we read and study the Scriptures together we will apply it to our lives and be changed by it. The goal is not to master the Bible but have the Bible master us. These groups allow us the time and setting to let the word of God sink deeply and change radically.

3. Regular Gospel Application and Demonstration

There is a fad in the evangelical world wherein we attach the word 'gospel' in front of everything to make it sound more spiritual or cool. Is that what we are doing here? Why not just call them Community Groups?

To answer that we have to ask another question. Is the gospel simply the story that gets us saved or does it have implications for day to day life? The answer of course is that the gospel not only moves us "out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9) but it is also "bearing fruit and increasing" in our lives (Colossians 1:5,6). The gospel not only saves us (a glorious truth!) it also continues to transform us every day. We need the daily reminder that our favor with God is not found in our own performance but in the work of Christ. We need the reminder that our sin makes us nothing before a holy God and so even our best works are of no value before him. We need the reminder that our growth as a believer is not dependent on us but on Christ working in and through us. We need a daily reminder of the gospel so we can rejoice in it and desire to share it with others.

The hope of our groups is that the gospel will be demonstrated as we share together. A few weeks ago in the group I attend many of us shared how we often try to earn God's merit and sometimes feel as if our salvation and growth in Christ is dependent on us. We were then able to remind one another that the true King, Christ Jesus, has won us salvation based only on his performance and sacrifice. This truth allows us to worship and serve this King freely because of what he has already accomplished for us.

These may seem like basic simple truths that Christians should know and remember. But the reality is that we, like God's people of the past, have a short memory. Our prayer and great hope is that these groups serve as a regular 'Ebenezer' and reminder of God's grace to us in Christ Jesus.

This also means that we can freely call one another out on sin and make ourselves open to such examination. Why? Because my sin being revealed has no impact on my security with Christ. I am secure in him because of the gospel. So, we encourage openness and honesty about sin because our response to sin should not be shame and a desire to hide it lest others "know the truth about me." Rather, our response to sin is repentance, confession, and a reminder of the glorious truth of the gospel.

Don't do it alone

We need each other to help make these things a reality. We were not intended to do the Christian life alone. When Jesus taught us to pray he said, "Our Father..." Not "my Father" but "our father." We work out our salvation together. Praying together, studying and applying the word together, fellowshiping together, and applying and demonstrating the gospel together.

We want everyone at Redeemer Abilene to be a part of a Gospel Community Group. It will be messy, it will be difficult, at times it will be awkward but we pray ultimately that it will lead to greater dependence on Christ and that God will be glorified.