

CITY
LIFE
CHURCH

RENEWING CITIES

SOCIALLY,

SPIRITUALLY &

CULTURALLY WITH

THE GOSPEL OF

JESUS

CITY GROUP PRIMER

City Group Primer

Week 1: Gospel

An Introduction

City Groups in City Life Church are where we can be the church to one another and the city.

Some people call them “missional communities.” A missional community is a way to organize the church (that’s you) to gather and send groups of people on a common mission, i.e. to engage artists in the city or to help the homeless downtown.

Simply put, City Groups are a group of people who are learning to follow Jesus together in a way that renews their city: a community of everyday citizens who are devoted to Jesus, to one another, to their neighbors and city.

Christians everywhere are asking big questions about what it means to follow Jesus, how their faith should affect everyday life, and how church should figure into their response to poverty and other social justice issues. “Missional community” is a buzzword.

Some are curious about the missional church; others are inspired, and some are simply overwhelmed. Although buzzwords like “missional community” can be helpful or fun to talk about, many Christians simply don’t know where to begin.

The “CITY GROUP (primer)” is a 4-week guide to help you learn together what it could look like to be a community of people who are devoted to Jesus, to one another, and to our neighbors and city. We believe gospel-centered missional communities are the organizing structure for the church. Miss them and you miss the church.

Our hope is that this discussion will help you move from theory to practice, from good intentions to action, and from talking about “missional community” to becoming a “missional community.”

What to Expect

A “primer” is a book of elementary principles, an introduction to foundational concepts in a given subject. The CITY GROUP (primer) is intended to introduce you and your group to three elementary principles of missional community: Gospel, Community, and Mission. After covering these three principles, we will discuss what it looks like to make a “missional commitment.”

While this is not a full-length treatment of missional community, the primer will introduce you to the three elementary principles, foster reflection through discussion questions, and guide you into making an informed missional commitment.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

Discussion Question: *What comes to mind when you hear the word “gospel?”*

The Gospel is the good news that Jesus has defeated sin, death, and evil through his own death and resurrection and is making all things new, even us.

This definition of the gospel can be broken down into three aspects. The gospel is *doctrinal*: it changes what we believe. It is *personal*: it changes who we are, and it is *missional*: it changes where we live.

The gospel changes what we believe

Key Text:

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.”

1 Cor 15:1-5

History-Making News

The gospel of “first importance” is the historic claim that Jesus Christ lived, died, was buried, and rose from the dead for our sins in the first century A.D. These events were anticipated in the Old Testament, witnessed in the first century, recorded in the New Testament, and attested by contemporary historians. In short, it is history-making news!

Discussion Question: *What does the gospel ask us to believe or “receive?”*

Christ-centered News

The Gospel asks us to believe that Jesus died our deserved death (for our sins) and that he rose from the dead to give us his undeserved life (for our salvation). Jesus said: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” (John 11:25-26). Notice that the “belief” required is not in an idea but in a person: “whoever believes in me.” Jesus isn’t asking us to merely agree with a doctrine, but to trust him for undeserved forgiveness and life. The gospel is Christ-centered.

In summary, the gospel is history-making, Christ-centered news that is so significant it bears believing and announcing. The doctrinal aspect of the gospel makes specific claims, grounded in historical events, which must be believed in order to know Christ and receive his saving forgiveness. The Gospel is not one spiritual idea among many. It is exclusive and unique in its claims because Jesus has uniquely done what none else can do (Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:5-9)! The doctrinal gospel changes what we believe.

Discussion Question: *Do you believe the gospel? What do you find compelling or difficult about it?*

The gospel changes who we are

If we focus on just the doctrinal aspect of the gospel, we will neglect its other aspects. The gospel changes not only what we believe but also who we are. It is doctrinal and personal. It makes all things new, even us!

Key Text:

“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

Beholding Jesus

The gospel changes us into the image and likeness of Jesus. Paul tells us that this gospel change happens by keeping our eyes on Jesus. It does not happen by keeping our eyes on our failure. The gospel frees us to admit our failures, because our worth doesn’t hang on our success. Rather, our worth hangs on Jesus’ success, his life over death. We can confess our sins without fear of judgment because Jesus has borne our judgment for us. As a result, for every look at sin we should look ten times at Christ, where we are reminded that Jesus is our forgiveness and acceptance before the Father. This kind of Jesus is worth beholding.

Discussion Question: *Do you tend to look more at your failures or successes? How should the gospel adjust your perspective?*

Becoming Like Jesus

The gospel offers hope because it gives us the eyes to behold Jesus as well as the power to become like him. The power for gospel change is the person of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit turns our eyes away from sin and toward our Savior. Depending on the Spirit, we are transformed into the image of Jesus' glory:

"... 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. 3:17-18). To be sure, becoming like Jesus is a life-long endeavor. This is why Paul mentions that we are changed "from one degree of glory to another." Our change is incremental but progressive. If we continue to look to Jesus, we will inevitably become like him.

The gospel changes who we are by changing what we look at. We become like Jesus because we behold Jesus. In summary, imperfect disciples cling to a perfect Christ while being perfected by the Spirit. Gospel change isn't perfection overnight but perseverance over a lifetime.

Discussion Question: *How have you recently experienced gospel change?*

The gospel changes where we live

If we just focus on the doctrinal and personal aspect of the gospel, we will neglect its missional aspect. If the doctrinal gospel changes what we believe and the personal gospel changes who we are, then the social gospel changes where we live. It makes all things new!

Key Text:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Luke 4:18-19; Isaiah 61

The Gospel Changes Everything

The gospel changes everything. It is not only good news for us, but also for our neighbors, the poor, our city, and the world. It affects the social, cultural, and physical fabric of the universe. In Luke 4, Jesus preached the gospel to the poor, marginalized, and oppressed. It is good news for them because through his death and resurrection he has defeated sin, death, and evil (1 John 2:13; 3:8). The gospel announces the in-breaking reign of Jesus, which is in the process of reversing the order of things. The poor become rich, the captives are freed, and the old become new.

Discussion Question: *How does this aspect of the gospel make you feel?*

The Church Joins the Mission

Those who follow Jesus join his mission by making disciples of all ethnic groups (Matt 28:18-20). We are called “ambassadors of reconciliation” and given the privilege of sharing in Jesus’ ministry of reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:17-20). Those who have been changed by the gospel share its life-changing power with others. We should announce and embody the good news by caring for the poor and rebuilding cities (Isaiah 61:4). In fact, the future for the people of God is an entirely new city in a new creation (Rev 21). The church should be a movie trailer of this grand, coming attraction, when all things will be made new!

Because the gospel changes what we believe and who we are, it should change where we live. We should make great culture, redeem social ill, and share a whole gospel. Christians should be among the most creative, neighborly, compassionate people in the city. If the gospel truly affects everything, then it should affect everything in our lives. It should change where we live.

The gospel is the good news that Jesus has defeated sin, death, and evil through his own death and resurrection and is making all things new, even us. The gospel changes what we believe (doctrinal), who we are (personal), and where we live (missional).

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION:

- Is this different from what you used to think of when you heard the word Gospel?
- Which way of looking at the Gospel are you most familiar with?
- Of the three aspects, which one do you think you could grow the most in?

WHAT ISN'T THE GOSPEL?

The gospel empowers neither religion nor rebellion, but faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

The Gospel is NOT Religious Performance

Religion says “I obey, therefore I am accepted”, but the Gospel says, I am accepted, therefore I obey!” This is great news! You don’t have to perform for God or the church! You don’t have to impress God because Jesus impressed God for you. You don’t have to pretend to be perfect, because all of us are imperfect people clinging to a perfect Christ, being perfected by the Spirit!

The Gospel is NOT Spiritual License

So should we keep on sinning so grace can abound even more? Paul says” by no means” (Rom 6:1-4)! Spiritual license deceives us by saying: “Because God has forgiven me, I’m free to disobey.” The truth of the gospel is: “Because God has forgiven me in Christ, I’m bound to obey.” The gospel points us to Jesus as Christ and as Lord. The religious are bound to keeping rules, and the rebellious are bound to breaking rules. The gospel, however, tells us that we are bound, not to rules, but to Christ.

The Gospel calls us to holiness, not legalism, and here is more good news...it is for our joy! There is true joy in learning to turn away from the sin that destroys us, and to turn to Jesus who is the giver of life, joy, and peace.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Do you lean more towards religious performance or spiritual license?
- Have you ever felt like you had to perform spiritually to be accepted by God?
- Have you ever found license, or rebellion, ultimately unsatisfying?

OUR RESPONSE: REPENTANCE & FAITH

When we consider what the Gospel really is, and also what it is not, how should we respond to it?

Key Text:

“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Mark 1:14-15

When Jesus preached the Gospel he demanded a response—repent and believe.

Repentance

You may have heard the words “repent” and “believe” before, but what do they really mean? Many people hear “repent” and they think it means to say sorry, feel bad about sin, and ask God for forgiveness. Many people hear “believe” and they think it means to agree with the fact that Jesus died for their sins and rose again. Both of these definitions are incomplete at best.

Faith

When Jesus said “repent” He was saying to turn away not only from sin, but to turn from the lies that sin deceives us with, and to turn towards something truer and better, to turn to Jesus. We are encouraged to “believe” in Jesus, to cling to his promises, to put our hope, trust, and faith in him.

Take the deceptive promise of pride, for example. Pride says: “Find and cherish compliments and then you will be confident.” But the gospel says, “Instead of trusting in compliments for confidence, believe that your sufficiency comes from God in Christ.” 2 Corinthians 3:4-6: “Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us competent.” The Gospel says: “Your confidence comes, not from your sufficiency, but from God who has made you sufficient in Jesus.” Faith in the person of Jesus, who he is and what he has accomplished for us, is true saving, changing faith.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What do you think about the idea that “repentance is good news?”
- How can we learn to turn away from sin and its lies to Jesus and his promises?
- As a City Group, what would it look like to be people that consistently reminded one another of this good news?
- What would it look like to help one another turn from sin and lies to Jesus, his promises, and true joy?

City Group Primer

Week 2: Community

WHAT IS COMMUNITY?

Discussion Question: *What comes to mind when you hear the word “community?”*

“I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.”

1 Tim 3:15

Paul uses a family metaphor to describe the church—“the household of God, which is the church of the living God.” In fact, he opens almost every letter to churches by addressing them as “brothers and sisters.” In the Bible, community is conceived as family. This family is also called the church, which is created to support and protect the truth of the gospel (1 Tim 2:4). Community, then, is a set of relationships centered on the gospel. The church is made alive by the Spirit to give and receive the gospel as God’s new community. In short, community is gospel-centered family.

WHAT A MISSIONAL COMMUNITY ISN’T

A City Group is not:¹

A Bible Study – centered around “your doctrine”

A Community Group – centered around “your connection”

A Counseling Group – centered around “your needs”

A Social service Group – centered around “your good deeds”

Discussion Questions:

- If a City Group is not centered around these things, what do you think it should be centered around?
- If Christ is truly the center of the community, then how do you think “centers” mentioned above can be addressed?

WHAT DOES COMMUNITY LOOK LIKE?

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.
Acts 2:42-47

Question: *What are the striking elements of community in this description of the church?*

In this passage we see a glimpse of the early church, a community of people who were devoted not only to Jesus, but also to one another. They prayed together, and they ate together. They shared gospel teachings, and they shared their possessions! We see a beautiful picture of a community of people who were so devoted to the gospel that they were devoted to one another. They lived more like a tight family than a loose collection of individuals. They didn't "go" to church because they "were" the church.

At City Life Church we are (imperfectly) trying to recover this biblical pattern of community. We don't want to be a group of individuals who try to follow Jesus on our own, occasionally gathering for a church service or a bible study; rather, we want to be a community of people devoted to Jesus and one another!

Question: *Do you find this kind of community attractive or intimidating? Why?*

The hope of the gospel is that we don't have to be a perfect community since Jesus was perfect for us. When we let one another down, we point to Jesus who lifts us up. The gospel, not religious rules, unites the church. Religious community, however, says: "If I keep the community rules, then people will accept me." but Gospel community says: "We are already accepted in Christ, therefore, we love, forgive, and accept one another." This is great news! The gospel frees us from performing for God or for the church! You don't have to impress God because Jesus impressed God for you. You don't have to pretend to be perfect, because all of us are imperfect people clinging to a perfect Christ, being perfected by the Spirit!

Question: *What would it look like for you to become this kind of community?*

Community Rhythms¹

What does gospel-centered community really look like? We certainly can't be family to one another if we settle for just being together once a week, but we also live busy lives with lots of commitments. How could we ever find time to be the church this way?

One way we try to share life together is through ordinary, everyday rhythms of life. We encourage one another to do things you already do, but to do them in community. Here are five rhythms of life that, when shared, will help us grow into a people that are devoted to Jesus, one another, and our neighbors and city.

CELEBRATE & SUFFER:

We regularly gather to celebrate God's grace and encourage those who are suffering. Celebrate grace, birthdays, anniversaries, births, baptisms, and much more. We suffer together in hard times, praying and encouraging one another as we encounter suffering.

EAT:

We regularly share meals and practice hospitality with one another and our neighbors. We all eat, so why not eat together? We regularly share meals, our homes, and practice hospitality with one another and our neighbors.

RECREATE:

We take time to rest, create, and play in ways that honor God and renew the city. We create in our work and in our hobbies, as well as rest from them. We love our city and enjoy the best of its culture, inviting one another into our vacations, downtime, date nights, concerts, sports, grill-outs, family time, and great city events.

LISTEN:

We set aside regular times to listen to God and others through his Word and prayer. Listening to God and one another enables us to be a community that serves one another in the strength that God provides. We read Scripture and pray together in order to remind one another of God's great grace.

SERVE:

We serve our city and neighbors through our action, speech, and generosity. Jesus himself came not to be served but to serve. As we become more like him we hope to live as some of the most serving, loving, self-sacrificing, generous people in the city.

Discussion Questions:

- Which of the five rhythms are you most excited about?
- What are some ways we could grow in living out these rhythms together?

¹ The rhythms are adapted from www.wearesoma.org

I'm Too Busy for Community

You may be asking: "Is being the church going to make me busier than I already am?" We understand this concern. Many of us have lots of responsibilities with our jobs, school, families, hobbies, and the ordinary demands of everyday life (laundry, cleaning, cooking). How do we find time to be together more than once a week?

Many of the rhythms are ordinary, everyday things that you already do, just do them in community. Remember, church isn't something you attend; it's something that you are! You are the church as you work, go to school, participate in sports, enjoy hobbies, and do ordinary things. So, do ordinary things but with gospel intentionality. In other words, do the everyday things of life, but do them in a way that shows your devotion to Jesus, one another, and your neighbors and city!

Questions:

- Do you ever find yourself "too busy" to be the church? What happens when parents are too busy to be family to their kids?
- Why are you so busy? What is so important that it draws you away from your family?

Messy Community

Now don't get me wrong, this picture of the church is a beautiful one, but in real life it's messy. There is a problem with community—it's full of people, people who sin. We will inevitably snub, gossip, disregard, and complain about one another. It's an imperfect community.

In order to enter into true community, our ideal community must be surrendered. We need to recognize several things about gospel-centered community. First, conflict and tension in relationships does not take God by surprise; in fact, he appoints it as a grace for our Christlike change (James 1; Romans 8; Colossians 3)! Second, imperfect community also creates the opportunity to give and receive the gospel of grace by forgiving and forbearing with one another. Because God extends forgiveness and grace to us, we can extend grace and forgiveness to one another (Eph 4:32). Third, the mess of community helps us become a maturing community that speaks the truth in love to one another (Eph 4:15). This is good news because we all need love, and we all need truth! As we mature, we learn how to remind one another of God's love and his truth in our everyday.

Questions:

- Do you see conflict and tension in relationships as a way God is trying to change you to be more like him?
- Do you have a hard time forgiving others that let you down or sin against you? Why?
- What are your expectations from other people in this community?
- What would it look like to be a community that deals with conflict with the Gospel?
- What would it look like to speak the truth in love to one another?

City Group Primer

Week 3: Mission

The Mission of a “Missional Community”

Discussion Question: *What comes to mind when you hear the word “mission?”*

“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

Parting words are a big deal. In Matthew we get to overhear Jesus’ parting words to his disciples, who were the beginning of the first “missional community.”

So what was their mission?

When I say “mission” many things may come to mind: some may think of a trip to Africa, or a day of work at a soup kitchen, or even mentoring students at a low-income apartment community, and all those are great things to do and can be a great way to “show and share the Gospel,” but ultimately the mission of the first disciples was to make more disciples of Jesus.

Re-Defining Discipleship

Discussion Question: *What do you think discipleship means?*

When we say our mission is to “make disciples” most people think of two things: winning people over to Jesus (evangelism) or helping a follower of Jesus learn to obey him (discipleship). But when we look at Mathew 28, we don’t see an either/or discipleship; in fact we see both “evangelism” and “discipleship.”

“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.”

Looks like “evangelism...”

“teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you”

Looks like “discipleship...”

The Great Commission is neither evangelism nor discipleship centered. It is gospel centered. The command to make disciples is described three ways: 1) being sent in the power of Jesus 2) baptizing into the name of Jesus 3) teaching the commands of Jesus. The mission of the church is radically Jesus-centered!

If the gospel is truly at the center of the church and her mission, then both discipleship and evangelism will reflect this focus on Jesus Christ. Belief in Jesus changes what we believe, who we are, and where we live. We will go, baptize, and teach Jesus wherever we live.

The most succinct statement of the gospel is: “Jesus Christ is Lord.” Disciples of Jesus are committed to sharing and showing that “Jesus is Lord” in every area of life and in every domain of society: work, family, government, education, entertainment, and all of culture. Therefore, we aim to make disciples of Jesus who do the same: disciples who make great culture, redeem social ill, and share the whole gospel!

Discussion Question: *How does this description of discipleship change or challenge your perspective?*

A Missional God

God is missional. The *missio Dei* is a Latin phrase that classically referred to the “mission” or “sending” of God—the Father sending the Son, and the Father and Son sending the Spirit. As a missional God, the Father, Son, and Spirit, create and send a missional people or church.

- The Father sent the Son
- The Father and the Son sent the Spirit
- The Father, Son, and Spirit send the Church

A MISSIONAL COMMUNITY

The result of the church being sent is that we live as a community of disciples who are not only devoted to Jesus and to one another, but are also devoted to our neighbors and our city. When we come to Christ, we are sent on his mission.

Mission is not an option for followers of Jesus, or something reserved for “super-spiritual Christians;” mission is for everybody! The mission of making disciples who make good culture, redeem social ill, and share a whole gospel is the joy and responsibility of every Christian.

A missional community (City Group), then, is a group of people who are devoted to Jesus, to one another, and to their neighbors and city! They are disciples of Jesus who are committed to making more disciples of Jesus! Therefore, mission is not merely a monthly trip to feed the homeless or a trip to Africa to serve in an orphanage (although those are great things to do!). Mission is something that happens in our everyday lives as we follow Jesus. Mission is not merely an activity; it is our identity!

Being missional is being yourself. It is making disciples where you live with your community as you collectively follow Jesus.

Discussion Question: *How does your City Group need to grow in order to embrace Jesus’ call to mission?*

SENT LIKE JESUS

”Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”

John 20:21

If the way the Father sent Jesus is the way that Jesus sends us, then it is important to ask: “How did the Father send Jesus?”

The answer to that question is shocking!

God sent Jesus to become human! The God of the universe became a man, experienced hunger, thirst, pain, and betrayal. He lived among us, as one of us. Notice God didn’t ask people to come to him; he went to people.

Most of us have experienced the opposite when it comes to “church.” The church builds buildings, plans services, and asks people to “come to church.” Jesus sends the church.

If we are to be sent like Jesus, then we should stop expecting people to come to church, and we should start taking church to people! After all, the church is not a building or a service; it is the people of God on the mission of Christ. The Church is us. We just need go with one another into our neighborhoods, places of employment, kids' schools, and favorite hangouts to make disciples.

Discussion Question: *How might this change the way you approach non-Christians?*

MISSION IS FOR EVERYBODY

(and happens in the everyday)

“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.”
Ephesians 4:11-12

There is no such thing as a spectator Christian; we are all in this together! God didn't give these five leaders to the church in order for them to do missional community. Rather, he gave them as gifts to equip everyday people for missional community.

Where can you begin? Look around! You live next to people, work with people, and are friends with people who do not know Jesus.

Mission happens in the everyday things of life: backyard grill-outs with the neighbors, lunch breaks with your co-workers, attending concerts, watching films, play dates, and happy hours. The missional church is not about adding activities to an already busy life; rather, it is a matter of being yourself in the everyday with gospel intentionality.

- How can you begin to live your normal life with greater gospel intentionality?
- Who can you begin to disciple into Jesus?

LET'S GET SPECIFIC

If being “sent” is part of our identity, then it would be a good idea to know who we are sent to. A great starting place is your group of friends, the people who live in your neighborhood, apartment complex, or dorm room, your co-workers, people you share a passion or hobby with, or the other regulars at your favorite hangout.

If we are going to know how the Gospel is “good news” for the people we are sent to....we also need to know them! Here are five questions to help you get specific about discipling others with the gospel:

1. **PEOPLE:** What people is God sending you to? Where do they live and hang out? How could we re-orient our lives to be with them?
2. **LANGUAGE:** What “language” do they speak? Are these people young families, business professionals, hipsters, etc?
3. **VALUE:** What is most important to them? Success, money, relationships, independence, etc?
4. **GOSPEL:** How is the Gospel good news to them? How does it address their values? How is the Gospel better than what they value most right now?
5. **NEEDS:** What are their needs? How does Jesus meet those needs? How can we be a part of meeting their needs in a way that “shows” the Gospel?

Discussion Question: *Take some time to work through these questions for your identified mission as a City Group.*

Come back to these questions regularly. We should never stop asking them so we can meaningfully communicate the gospel to others and make disciples of Jesus.

City Group Primer

Week 4: Missional Commitment

WHY MAKE A MISSIONAL COMMITMENT?

The purpose of this primer, as stated up front, is that we would move from theory to practice, from the classroom to the city, and from talking about “missional community” deeper into being a missional community. James says it this way: “be doers of the word, not hearers only” (James 1:22).

Many of us are convinced that missional communities are the way to be the church, to really be devoted to Jesus, one another, and our neighbors and city. We also realize that this doesn’t come easy as we rub up against our own sin, individualism, consumerism, as well as anything else we may be trying to unlearn from “church experience.”

If we “hear” missional community but don’t “do” missional community, with a clear sense of how it applies to our everyday lives, we’ll be like the person who looks in the mirror but forgets who he or she is. We want you and others to be “blessed in your doing,” which is why we want to make a missional commitment.

A COUPLE DISCLAIMERS:

1) WE WILL FAIL

We won’t perfectly live out what we commit to, we never do. The good news is that when we fail in loving one another and our neighbors, we have the gospel through which God freely forgives us! We don’t “do missional community” to earn God’s favor; rather, in Christ we have God’s favor to be a missional community, imperfections and all!

This commitment will not serve as a legalist document to judge one another’s performance; rather, it will be something we can revisit every couple months, to see how we are progressing in living out our devotion to Jesus, one another, and our neighbors and city.

2) THIS IS NOT “IN or OUT”

If you sat through these discussions but are not ready to make a missional commitment, that’s okay. Although we want you to be challenged and encouraged to be a faithful disciple of Jesus, we are not here to twist your arm. We’re glad you are here. In fact, please don’t stop coming to our gatherings; we want you with us. The Missional Commitment is not intended to create an “in or out” dynamic, but rather, to clarify a common commitment to being a community that lives out what we believe in everyday life. This commitment will help shape a core of committed people that will benefit our whole community and city.

BY GOD’S GRACE WE WILL GROW IN OUR DEVOTION TO CHRIST BY:

In this first section, we want to come up with ways you will practically grow in your devotion to Jesus this year.

Some groups may commit to reading the Gospels together, attending Sunday gatherings to hear the Gospel, discussing sermons over a meal on a weeknight, starting fight clubs or initiating 1-1 discipleship times. Others may commit to developing their prayer life, memorizing scripture, attending a conference together, or reading books on Gospel marriage or parenting.

The idea is that you as a community answer these questions yourself. Be honest about where you need to grow in your devotion to Jesus this year, and be creative and faithful with how you plan to do that. Get honest and get specific!

3 AREAS OF COMMITMENT:

1) BY GOD’S GRACE WE WILL GROW IN OUR DEVOTION TO ONE ANOTHER BY:

This should be fun as you look around at one another and ask: “How would we treat one another differently if we are family?” Since you are family in Christ, why not live like it?!

In this section you may commit to share more meals, help one another in employment search, help one another financially, with childcare, with transportation, and the list goes on and on.

This section may also include a commitment to sharing in the rhythms of church life: Celebrate (and suffer), Eat, Recreate, Listen and Serve. Here you can get real specific on how you can grow in sharing these rhythms.

This is exciting because no two groups are the same. There are unique ways in which your community can be devoted to one another, and this is where you get to commit to those things!

2) BY GOD'S GRACE WE WILL GROW IN OUR DEVOTION TO OUR NEIGHBORS AND CITY BY:

Here is where you get to think like a missionary, you get to look around, pray, and ask God to show you who he is calling you to make disciples of.

Don't just stop at identifying your mission, but get specific on a plan to engage the mission. How can you orient your lives to spend time with the people you are called to? How is the Gospel good news to those people?

Some groups may be called to a specific neighborhood or apartment community. Other groups may be called to make disciples among a specific people group (i.e. East Austin artists, urban professionals who hang out on Rainey Street, the neglected kids of Booker T Washington.) Other groups may feel called to make disciples among the homeless, the working poor, or refugees.

Be sure you get specific, we have found that the more broad a mission field, the harder it is to get going. For instance, if you say "our group is called to make disciples of people who live in East Austin," that very well may be true, but where are you going to begin?

There are tons of different communities within East Austin: urban hipsters, high-tech entrepreneurs, the working poor struggling with displacement, young families, Spanish speaking communities, and those in government housing projects. Your community will spend your time and energy based on whom God is specifically calling you to make disciples.

This section will also include ways that your group wants to serve the city and love the poor: volunteering at The Austin Children's Shelter, feeding the homeless with Mobile Loaves, and Fishes, getting involved in a local Big Brother-Little Brother mentoring program. So go do it! Pray for wisdom, get specific, and get a plan!

3) COUNT THE COST

Following Jesus will cost you something, and that is actually good news in the Kingdom of God as it is more blessed to give than receive! We often see that as a result of God's grace everyday people begin to be radically generous with their time, their creativity, and their finances.

It is important to "count the cost" in making a Missional Commitment, and to get specific on how you plan to give. Some good questions to ask are:

- How can I be generous with my time?
- How can I be generous with my creativity?
- How can I be generous financially to see the Gospel go forward in our community, our church, our city, and beyond!

Since Jesus Christ is the head of the church and the center of our community, he should be our primary focus. Every single issue in our life has an answer in Christ. As a community, we have the wonderful privilege of joining together to explore, through the ups and downs, how Christ is central and meaningful.

In this section you are committing to being a community that “speaks the truth in love” to one another. You are committing to be a confessing, counseling, repenting community, which continually reorients one another to Christ and his promises.

This section may include a commitment to Christ-centered study of the Scriptures in Fight Clubs, sermon discussions, memorizing Scripture together, inviting counsel from the community on a whole range of personal issues, doing a personal change project in community (see, *You Can Change* by Tim Chester), and much more. You may want to cultivate better listening skills in Spirit-led decision-making or devoting entire nights to prayer for one another and the city.

Make Christ your all in all.

