

PLANTING NEW GROUPS



A THREE-WEEK COMMUNITY GROUP GUIDE

**TRINITY COMMUNITY CHURCH
COLUMBIA, MO**

Dear Trinity Family,

Participating in a community group is like a microcosm of the Christian life—it's both a blessing and a struggle. One week, you experience deep conversation, passionate prayer, tearful accountability, and life-giving laughter. Community group is the best! But then, the very next week, the group is only half-present, both physically and spiritually. The conversation lulls with silence, the prayers seem superficial, and everyone seems relieved when it's finally over. Community group can be a struggle!

Just like the rest of the Christian life, being a member of a community group is both ordinary and extraordinary, routine and life-changing. If you've been a part of Trinity for a while, you've probably experienced wonderful groups, as well as some seasons of group life that were more of a challenge. But the one thing we've seen time and time again, is that *there is no better catalyst for spiritual growth than participation in a life-giving community group*. To put it another way, participation in a small body of believers is possibly the most critical step you can take for maturity in Christ.

Hopefully, you are experiencing a healthy, life-giving group. It is well led, relationally intimate, and engaged in the neighborhood. As a result, you have had a steady stream of guests and visitors over the months and years, and now your CG is bursting at the seams. Maybe your host home is packed—people sitting four-to-a-couch, on the floor, and in doorways and hallways. But now you're faced with the exciting and terrifying question: What do we do with all these people?

Our model has always been to practice hospitality by creating space for visitors and outsiders and to plant a new group when the room is full and new leaders are ready. We believe this is a biblical model—the point of this three-week guide is to demonstrate that. Throughout the Scriptures, God draws people in to send them out. The command to “practice hospitality” (Romans 12:13) similarly leads us to this open, new-group-planting approach. Lastly, we believe that our simple practice of inviting people into our groups, equipping new leaders, and planting new communities is both participation in and a fulfilling of the Great Commission.

Yet, from experience, we know that planting a new group from an existing one is bittersweet. It may mean not seeing a close friend every week, traveling to a new host home, or even taking a step into group leadership. We don't want to minimize these challenges. Rather, we want to affirm that group planting can be personally painful. After all, we hope you are building real, authentic, devoted relationships in your group.

So, we want to be clear about why and how we plant new groups. We're not just looking for a way to grow the church, and we're certainly not trying to prevent deep relationships. Instead, we hope to practice healthy Spirit-led growth. In fact, we think group planting is basically just church planting in a microcosm.

In this guide, we're encouraging you not to rush through planting a new group, but instead to prayerfully walk together through transition. Similarly, we want to make clear that you don't have to leave your current group. If you are in a season of life where you need to remain rooted with a few particular people, God bless you and stay put!

Our desire is that the mission of Christ would compel us toward an outward-facing lifestyle, demonstrated by open, hospitable, life-giving groups that grow and plant new groups on a regular (12 to 24 months) basis. We hope that this simple three-week guide enables you to multiply in a healthy way, following the biblical pattern of mission and the particular movement of the Spirit in your midst.

Few things are as exciting in the Christian life as seeing your community group grow and plant new groups in order to reach more people for Christ. Congratulations on your fruitfulness in ministry together, and may God bless you richly as you work together to plant a new group! As always, let me or one of your community group leaders know if there's anything we can do to better serve and equip you.

Jeremy Linneman

Blessed to Be a Blessing

Planting New Groups | Week One



READ

Genesis 12:1-9

BIG IDEA

God draws us in to send us out. We are blessed to be a blessing.

OPENING QUESTION

What fears do you have as our community group prepares to plant a new one? How might this go poorly?

READ

Everyone loves a good story. Think of a good story you've heard recently. Maybe it was the birth of a child, the way an elderly married couple met many years ago, or something from a movie or book. Think of how the story drew you in—the characters, the scenes, the conflict, the movement of action, the plot rising to a surprising outcome, and some sort of resolution. The elements of a good story are often similar.

How did you respond to that story? Did you feel the impulse to go out and tell it to someone else? Did you find yourself re-living scenes or moments from the story?

There are two essential marks of a great story: *A great story draws you in*—into the characters, plot, and drama. And *a great story sends you out*—you immediately want to retell it.

We are all, by nature, story-lovers and story-tellers. It's human nature to want to tell everyone when you've gotten a new job, seen a great movie, or experienced something profound. Stories are powerful because they tap into the richness of our human experience. As CS Lewis wrote in *The Weight of Glory*, we have not fully enjoyed something until we have shared it with another person—and only in its sharing is the experience of it complete.

But it's not just a feature of natural life to be "drawn in" and "sent out" to tell others about it. It's a beautiful pattern woven into the fabric of the great biblical story of redemption.

In Genesis 12, God speaks to Abram, draws him into an experience of his presence, and promises to make him a blessing to all the nations. Then the moment Abram has been drawn in, he is sent out. God says, "Leave your country and your people and *go* to the land I will show you."

In Exodus 3, Moses is a murderer running for his life when God appears to him in a burning bush. Moses falls on his face in worship. The Lord tells him, "I have heard the cry of my people... Now *go*: I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt."

In Luke 5, Simon Peter is a simple fisherman who hasn't caught anything all day. But from the beach, Jesus calls out to him, "Put your nets out one more time." Suddenly, Peter draws in so many fish that his nets break and his boat begins to sink. Peter recognizes Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah! When Peter comes to shore, Jesus says, "*Leave your fish behind; from now on, you'll be a fisher of men.*"

Remember the scene of Jesus's resurrection? In Matthew 28, Mary Magdalene comes upon the empty tomb, and turns to see the risen Lord calling her name. She is overwhelmed with joy and immediately clings to him. But Jesus says, "Don't hold on to me; *go* instead and tell others what you have seen!"

In Acts 13, as the church in Antioch is praying, fasting and worshipping one evening, God gives them a powerful experience of his presence. He draws them in and speaks by his Spirit: “Set apart Paul and Barnabas for me to go to where I have called you.”

Over and over again! This is the pattern of mission: *He draws us in and sends us out*. He draws us in to *know him*, and he sends us out to *make him known*.

In the call of Abram, the pattern is clear: *We are blessed to be a blessing*. Why does God reveal himself to us? Why does he draw us into his presence and move us to worship? Why does he surround us with loving community—as in Acts 13? God always blesses us so that we might be a blessing to others.

Now think of your own story: How has God revealed himself to you over your Christian life? How has he invited you into deeper life with him through this church? How has this community group provided life-giving friendships in Christ? Certainly, we are a blessed people!

See, this blessing is not supposed to end with us. Think of how many more people might experience this blessing through us. Think of how many more people in our city that God has yet to draw to himself. Think of how many more people might be blessed as we create space for others by planting a new community group.

God draws us in to send us out. We are blessed to be a blessing.

RESPOND

How have you experienced the blessing of the Lord during your time in this community group? What has been most life-giving to you?

Consider those that have joined your group in recent months and years. Take a moment to encourage one another in how you've seen Christ and maturity growing in them.

It's never easy to plant a new group from an existing one. In fact, if we love one another, it should be quite hard! Yet how do you envision this group blessing others by creating space for them to experience God and community?

Re-visit the first question. How do you consider your fears in light of the biblical pattern of blessing?

APPLY

For the next seven days, commit to praying for this new group every day. Pray for its leaders to be encouraged and equipped. Pray for the remaining needs to be met and final logistics to come together. Pray for the process of sending out some of your own friends to be a blessing to their neighbors in a new group.

NEXT WEEK

We will continue discussing planting new groups together by looking at the biblical theme of hospitality—the practice of creating space for others to encounter Christ and his community.

PRAY

Let's pray together now that the Father would soften our hearts toward his pattern of mission and toward those who have yet to experience him. Pray that this group multiplication would serve to move us to embrace a more outward-facing lifestyle. Pray also that this process would enable others in this neighborhood to encounter Christ, Trinity, and the members of this great community.

Hospitality as Mission

Planting New Groups | Week Two



READ

Romans 12:9-13

BIG IDEA

Group planting (like church planting) is a means of Christian hospitality—creating space for others.

REVIEW

Last week, we read Genesis 12 and discussed the pattern of mission: “God draws us in to send us out. We are blessed to be a blessing.” The experiences of Abraham, Moses, Peter, Mary Magdalene, and the early church all testify: When God draws us in to know him, he then sends us out to make him known. It is a privilege to join God and the mission of the church by creating space in our lives and groups.

READ

“The Son of Man came eating and drinking” (Matthew 11:19).

Jesus’ public ministry began with his miracle at Cana—turning barrels of water into wine at a wedding reception. He spent his time eating with “sinners and tax collectors,” receiving gifts from marginalized women, encouraging widows, playing with children, and attending all major cultural events and parties. Even though he didn’t own a home, Jesus was the most hospitable person to ever live.

The apostle Paul recognized the importance of hospitality for true community and sincere witness. What is hospitality? It’s *the distinctly Christian practice of creating space for outsiders*. True hospitality goes far beyond entertaining people in our homes. Hospitality, in a biblical sense, includes:

- Creating space in our homes for our brothers and sisters in Christ
- Creating space in our schedules and hearts for those who don’t know the Lord
- Creating space in our groups for our neighbors and co-workers
- Creating space in our lives for the poor and marginalized
- Creating space in our city for people to be broken, vulnerable and genuine
- Creating space in our souls for the Holy Spirit to move within us

Just as Christ came to us who were once outsiders, so the Church can open its heart and doors to those who don’t know him. For Paul, in Romans 12, practicing hospitality is a mark of a healthy Christian community—alongside love, honor, passion, service, joy, hope, patience, prayer, and generosity. Today, hospitality is an important concept for reaching those outside the church. As writer Henri Nouwen put it:

“In our world full of strangers, estranged from their own past, culture and country, from their neighbors, friends and family, from their deepest self and their God, we witness a painful search for a hospitable place where life can be lived without fear and where community can be found.... That is our vocation [as Christians]: to convert the enemy into the guest and to create the free and fearless space where brotherhood and sisterhood can be formed and fully experienced.”

Consider your own story. At one point, you were a visitor to Trinity and probably didn’t know more than a person or two. How might your life be different at this point if every community group had been closed? How might your life be different if a loving Christian—perhaps now one of your closest friends—hadn’t invited you into his or her home or group?

Every one of us has been the recipient of the hospitality of others, and now we extend that same hospitable spirit to the next generation of Trinity visitors—and to our own neighbors, co-workers, and friends.

Planting a new group from an existing one is like a microcosm of church planting. It's difficult, it's costly, and it takes time, energy, and intentionality. It refuses to accept the status quo while others are far from Christ. It requires a few bold souls to invest themselves in the lives of others. But within a short amount of time, it's one of the most effective ways to connect with non-church-attending people, get them connected to community, and raise them up to maturity in Christ.

Of course, group planting is hard. Most worthwhile transitions in life are exceedingly difficult! But remember, your relationships in your group don't end with the planting of a new one. Instead, let's take some time now to pray and work through the particular vision and goals of this group planting process. Consider who we might be able to make space for, how we can support and encourage one another in this transition, and when we'll get back together as new groups for fellowship.

RESPOND

Who was it that first invited you to this community group—or to your first Trinity group?

If you have been through a new group planting before, share what was positive and negative about it. What suggestions and reminders do you have for the group as we prepare to start a new one?

APPLY

Take 15-20 minutes to work through this simple Group Planting Plan. Fill out the Information at the top, discussing any decisions that need to be made.

Discuss why you're starting a new group, who might be good candidates to go with the new group, and who might want to stay in the sending group. Specifically, who are you creating space for? Write out the names of friends, co-workers, and neighbors you might invite into the new or sending group.

Sending Group Members (staying):

New Group Members (being sent):

Leaders, Hosts, and Apprentices:

Location of New Group:

Mission Focus of New Group:

PRAY

Let's take as much time as we need to pray together that our Father would strengthen our relationships even as we experience growth. And let's pray that the Father would soften our hearts toward those currently outside his church, move us to embrace a more outward-facing lifestyle, and enable us to "practice hospitality" in this neighborhood.

NEXT WEEK

Next week, we'll read and discuss the Great Commission and finish the Group Planting Plan. We'll also plan our final gathering (2 weeks from now)—a big celebration party!

Discipleship and the Kingdom of Heaven

Planting New Groups | Week Three



READ

Matthew 28:16-20 and Acts 1:1-11

BIG IDEA

As Christ sends us, he also goes with us.

REVIEW

First, we discussed Genesis 12 and the pattern of mission: *God draws us in to send us out. We are blessed to be a blessing.* The experiences of Abraham, Moses, Jesus's followers, and the early church all testify: When God draws us in to know him, he then sends us out to make him known.

Last week, we read Romans 12 and considered biblical hospitality—the distinctly Christian practice of *creating space for outsiders*. By multiplying our group, we are making room for new Trinity folks and for our disconnected friends, neighbors, and co-workers.

READ

In the “Great Commission,” Jesus’s well-known words at the end of his earthly ministry, we are sent to our neighborhoods, our cities, our enemies, and to the nations to make disciples. What a huge task and responsibility! But since as Jesus doesn’t send us out (to make him known) until he has first drawn us in (to know him), he doesn’t send us out unequipped.

In fact, Jesus doesn’t even send us out alone. He promises to go with us! “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” And according to Acts 1-2, Jesus is with us by giving us his Holy Spirit.

This, then, is the full pattern: God draws us into his presence to dwell with him deeply, then he sends us out through Christ to make him known, *but he also goes with us by his Holy Spirit.*

From the first movement to the last, God is with us!

Plus, think of how new group planting fulfills the Great Commission. According to Jesus in Acts 1:8, the mission of the church is to make disciples in our own neighborhoods (Jerusalem), around our region (Judea), amongst those we previously have been at odds with (Samaria), and among those farthest off from Christ (the ends of the earth).

Perhaps more than anything else, new group planting enables believers and churches to more comprehensively reach our neighbors in a particular city or region. Imagine how Trinity might be able to plant new groups in different neighborhoods, amongst different peoples, all over Columbia and Central Missouri in the years to come. Now, imagine how those little communities of salt and light might bring renewal to the places where they’re serving.

Of course, planting a new group is no small task. Sending some of your closest friends out to another group is a very difficult change. But we must remember that, in planting a new community group to reach more people, we are both *participating in* and *fulfilling* Jesus’s Great Commission!

Can you believe that? It seems too simple to be true—that planting a new community group is part of God’s eternal plan to glorify Christ, restore a broken world, and push back on the darkness of Satan, sin, and death.

But it's true: God uses ordinary people and ordinary means to accomplish his extraordinary mission—deepening and advancing the kingdom of heaven.

Before finishing our planning and preparations, let's discuss this great truth and take an extended time to pray together for the upcoming changes.

RESPOND

How have you specifically seen God invite us into and fulfill the Great Commission through this group over the months or years?

How do you now see God fulfilling the Great Commission through our group's multiplication?

How does it change your perspective that God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—is intimately involved in the sending and starting of this new group? How does his ongoing presence with us change this process?

As we move closer toward our last gathering, what final questions, fears, or reservations do you have?

PRAY

Let's pray together, as we have the last two weeks, that our Father would strengthen our relationships even as we plant a new group. Let's also pray that the Father would soften our hearts toward his Great Commission and toward those currently outside his church and to make us a more outward-facing and hospitable people.

APPLY

Take 15-20 minutes to finish Group Planting Plan (see Week Two). Review the progress you made last week and make any final decisions that need to be made. Take as much time as you can to prayerfully and strategically consider the missional focus of each group.

Sending Group Members (staying):

New Group Members (being sent):

Leaders, Hosts, and Apprentices:

Location of New Group:

Mission Focus of New Group:

NEXT WEEK

Our next gathering—a celebration of the new group will be on/at:

Then, our first week of meeting as two community groups will be:

Lastly, we will get back together as two groups on the following dates for fellowship:

Resources

Planting New Groups



ON COMMUNITY GROUPS

Jeremy Linneman, *Life-Giving Groups: How to Start and Multiply Healthy Community Groups*

Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community*

Jeff Vanderstelt, *Saturate: Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life*

Brad House, *Community: Taking Your Small Group Off Life Support*

ON SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND HOSPITALITY IN COMMUNITY

Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*

James Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community*

Randy Frazee, *The Christian Life Profile: Developing Your Personal Plan to Think, Act, and Be Like Jesus*

ON MISSION AND MULTIPLICATION

Tim Keller, "The Cost of Mission." Sermon: October 30, 1994. <http://www.gospelinlife.com/the-cost-of-mission.html>

C. John (Jack) Miller, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church*

Michael Green, *Thirty Years that Changed the World: The Book of Acts for Today*

Robert Banks, "Going to Church in the First Century." Article available as PDF online or in *Paul's Idea of Community*

Jeremy Linneman, "How Personal Renewal Fuels Mission." Article: March 1, 2019. <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/renewal-driven-mission>

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