



GRACE COMMUNION  
INTERNATIONAL

# Connect Groups Starter

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Ready • Set • Grow

## Note to Facilitators:

Thank you starting & leading a new GCI connect group! We believe connect groups are the perfect place for a community of believers to grow in their love for Christ and one another. In this kind of context people are transformed by God's love.

Basically, we see this Faith Avenue as place for deeper discipleship & relationship. This six week curriculum focuses on creating a Christ centered community by practicing GCI core values for our church culture. Everything you need to plan and lead is included in this packet. Please read it carefully and prepare before each group meeting. There are printable handouts in the Appendix to help with the facilitation of each session.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

## **Week 1: Introduction (to Acts & one another)**

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### **Welcome:**

To kick off your first gathering, greet the group with a quick & warm welcome!

### **Who we are.**

#### **(Exercise: leader and member intro)**

Break off into pairs and ask the following three questions of each other:

*How would your best friend describe you?*

*How did you hear about this church?*

*What has been your background with faith?*

Share with the group in pairs.

### **Who is GCI?**

Grace Communion International is a worldwide fellowship of churches that are relentlessly committed to living a life transformed by the good news of the gospel.

- Christ has come, uniting us in love with the Father and one another.
- Christ is risen, empowering us with new life through the Holy Spirit.
- Christ will come again, while we await his return we have the joy of participating in his ministry of drawing the whole world to the Father.

In our local congregations and connect groups we are committed to getting to know God and one another by practicing the way of Jesus together. We believe one of the best ways to know Jesus, the living Word, is by studying his words together. Biblical verses will be central during our time together. With Christ at the center, we create GCI's community culture of "High Support, High Challenge - Grace Always". We build relationships by speaking the truth in love to each other while creating safe spaces where each person experiences the freedom to be his or her true self.

It takes time and commitment to create such a liberating community. Ultimately, this group will become what we make it. As we begin the process let's be fully present, humbly sharing our stories, and making space for others to do the same. With Jesus in the center of our time together, we can be the community he describes in his Sermon on the Mount: a group of people who notices the needy and gives to them, a community who prays fervently, and holds one another accountable to following his ways.

### **Hopes and Expectations:**

Have a group discussion responding to the following prompt:

*What are you most hopeful for or most hesitant about in joining this community group?*

### **What will we do during our time together?**

For the first six weeks we will go through introductory curriculum provided by our church. We will outline the values that shape the way we in GCI express being the body of Christ, and how we will embody those values in our group.

The scriptures each week will be from the book of Acts. These verses give us a glimpse into how the first Christians lived in community with one another. They were a passionate and loving group, who quickly became diverse as they took the great commission seriously and shared the good news of Christ with all ends of the world.

Many of the early believers knew Jesus, during his time on earth, was characterized by his compassion, healing, and transformative teaching. When he ascended to return to the Father he promised the Holy Spirit as an advocate and helper. The book of Acts could easily be called “Acts of the Holy Spirit”, as it reminds us that the courageous actions of the early church leaders and members were guided by the Holy Spirit. Almost two thousand years later the Spirit is continuing to move, and we celebrate our passionate, loving, and diverse church communities. We pray that over the next few weeks, we will become this kind of community together.

The content for each session is available [online](#). The facilitators will guide the discussion or ask a group member to facilitate. If there is homework or prep work involved, the leaders will let you know in advance.

After we complete the six weeks, as a group we will discuss the curriculum that will best fit our group needs.

**Prayer:** Wrap up your first meeting with a blessing over the members of your group, and for your journey together over the next few weeks.

## Week 2: Inclusive

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**Welcome:** Give a quick warm welcome. Use one of the icebreakers from the Appendix, or go around the room and have each member share a highlight from their week.

**Opening Prayer:** Have someone open your time together, thanking God for his gift of grace, and asking God to show us how to give grace to one another.

### Value: Inclusive

In our communities we seek to create a culture that is inclusive, passionate, intentional, loving, and genuine. We believe that these essential values establish communities where lives are transformed by the gospel. Over the next few weeks we will practice living out these values together. By practicing these values we cultivate deeper relationships with Christ and one another.

Our first value is to be a community that is inclusive. To be inclusive is to create a space where all people are welcomed into the love and life of Christ - regardless of life experience, culture, political affiliation, race, gender, or any other distinctive. The only thing we need in common is our need for grace. In doing so, we reflect the heart of Jesus' ministry - salvation for the whole world. On the cross, Jesus provides a way for us to live in deep relationship with the Father, and with one another. His way is not exclusive, elitist, or easy.

We see the early church argue about inclusivity in Acts 15. Some members of the church wanted to require all believers, whether Jew or gentile to follow the law of Moses, others held that following Christ was the only requirement. Let's see how they resolved the argument:

### **Read Acts 15:7-11**

“Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. <sup>8</sup>And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, <sup>9</sup>**and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.** <sup>10</sup>Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? <sup>11</sup>But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

Ask: According to the passage, what is the determining factor of inclusion?

It is in human nature to compare and create a hierarchy of holiness. We highlight the rules that are easy for us to keep, and hide the ones that we struggle not to break. In Acts 15, Peter reminds the church members that the ground is level at the foot of the cross. There is no earning our way into the Kingdom. The truth is that all of us receive the gift of grace through faith in Christ.

We maintain an open posture giving grace because we remember the grace we have received. This does not mean that we do not hold one another accountable. We remember that the Spirit of God is actively at work in each individual life and the community as a whole. Our response to God's generous grace, is to follow Jesus and the lead of the Holy Spirit. In our communities, we create a safe space where we can challenge and support each other toward our next step of obedience.

*30-60 min on average for 8 people*

For this discussion, we will share in a format called MUTUAL INVITATION (printable handout available in the Appendix).

- We begin by asking the questions below and allowing 2 minutes of uninterrupted silent reflection.
- The leader begins the sharing time by sharing his or her response to the question(s). Then the leader selects another person to share his or her response.
- After that person shares, they then invite another person in the group by name to share. When invited to share, a person may respond by sharing or passing if they are not ready to share. Regardless, they then invite the next person to share.
- Unless you have been invited to share, you should refrain from speaking – unless you need to ask clarifying questions or follow-up questions to dig deeper. This allows people to share uninterrupted while enabling others to ask questions to stay engaged.
- The exercise continues until everyone in the group has been invited to share.

Ask: (Using mutual invitation) What has been your best experience in community? What made that experience so great? What values did that community have? (i.e., hospitality, loving support, accountability)

Debrief: What was it like not being able to speak when one person was speaking? What did it feel like having the opportunity to share without being interrupted and while being asked additional questions?

**Divine Participation:** Every week we want to practice the values we discuss during group to join God in the work he is doing in our everyday lives. We will call this *divine participation*. This week we want you to practice inclusion by engaging in intentional conversation with others. In two conversations you have this week, focus on listening without looking to respond immediately and to ask clarifying questions before offering advice or your own experience. This way we foster inclusion of other people's thoughts and experiences in our lives before trying to express our own thoughts or experiences.

**Prayer:** Close in prayer by slowly reading Psalm 141:1-3 together.

I call to you, LORD, come quickly to me;  
hear me when I call to you.

<sup>2</sup>May my prayer be set before you like incense;  
may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.

<sup>3</sup>Set a guard over my mouth, LORD;  
keep watch over the door of my lips.

## **Week 3: Intentional**

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**Welcome:** Give a quick warm welcome. Use one of the icebreakers from the Appendix, or go around the room and have each member share a three word happy story (ex. "I am loved", "Project is complete.", "Here's some chocolate.")

**Opening Prayer:** Our value this week is to be intentional. Ask someone to open in prayer, asking God to captivate our thoughts and hearts with his true character. May we pursue knowing him better during our time together.

### **Value: Intentional**

Last week, we discussed our shared value of having an inclusive culture within our communities. We hold onto the common thread of our need for grace, and that the grace we have received shapes how we interact with one another. In loving relationship together we provide support and challenge as we live out our calling to be the body of Christ.

Understanding grace not only draws us closer to one another, but also draws us deeper into relationship with God. This week we will discuss our value of being intentional in our pursuit of knowing our Triune God. From the beginning in the Garden of Eden, humanity's struggle has been forgetting we are made in God's image, and thus we attempt to create a god that images our own desires and longings, a god who meets our appetites for acceptance, and works for our personal success. In reality we serve a God whose plans for us are better than anything we can imagine on our own, and works not just for our personal good but the good of the world.

To seek the true God, and not make a god in our own image, we must be intentional in our pursuit of knowing him. We desire to cultivate an appetite for his Word, his love story for us and the world. We prayerfully look at the patterns of presence in our lives, to understand his character. To intentionally develop a true understanding of God, our posture is one of submission, putting God first. Where we would have hungered for more acceptance, power, or success - we instead hunger for more of him.

### Reflection: Meditation & Silence

What are ways we are currently seeking out God with the intent of understanding him for who he is and not who we want him to be? What are some ways we wish to be more intentional in the way that we interact with God? Reflect in uninterrupted silence for 3 minutes.



We are not only intentional in pursuing our individual understanding of God, our understanding is sharpened in living and sharing the gospel in community. Let's note that the early church was truth conscious in representing God's character. In the book of Acts 18:24-28. We see a new leader, Apollos, passionately sharing the good news. However, seasoned leaders Priscilla & Aquila noticed that he did not have full understanding of the gospel message, & approached Apollos.

### **Read Acts 18:24-28:**

Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. <sup>25</sup>He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit,<sup>24</sup> he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. <sup>26</sup>He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. <sup>27</sup>And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, <sup>28</sup>for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

#### Ask:

- How did Priscilla & Aquilla, provide support and challenge to Apollos?
- As we switch from examining the scripture to examining our own lives, we want to introduce a framework for intentional sharing. (Introduce CARE, printable available in Appendix)
- Which comes more naturally to you, to provide support or challenge? How do you calibrate balance between the two in your relationships?

#### CARE

##### *Clarifying questions*

Ask questions to better understand what the person has shared.

- What was the first thought or emotion that came to your mind?
- Can you give an example of what you described?
- How can we best support you through this? How can we pray for you?

##### *Affirmation*

Reflect back what you have heard, affirming what the person stated.

- It sounds like what you are saying is...
- That is so difficult/stressful/painful or wonderful/joyful/fun.
- I want to affirm that what you are feeling is valid.

##### *Response*

As a community, express any offers of solidarity or commitment you are able to make.

- You are not alone in this. We are here for you and will support you through this.

- You said you want prayer for \_\_\_\_\_, and I am committed to praying for that with you. Is there anyone else who would like to commit to praying with me?
- Thanks for letting us know that \_\_\_\_\_ would be helpful. Is there anyone else who would like to commit with me to follow up with (person) next week?

### *Empathy*

Share in the experience with the person by expressing how you feel.

- I am so sorry that you are going through this.
- It makes me sad to hear that you are having a hard time.
- I am encouraged by what you are doing in this situation and feel hopeful that...

Debrief: What was it like using the CARE model in discussion? Did you find yourself wanting to jump in and say something, but waiting in order to ask more questions? Did you feel like you were heard or cared for when people were asking you additional questions and affirming your experience?

### **Divine Participation:**

Spend 30 minutes with God three times this week with the intention to see him reveal his character. This can be in many forms including silent meditation, a nature walk, serving someone in need, creating or building something in God's honor, or praying. The point here is spend time that is not self-serving or convenient for us, but rather to serve God and seek him out for who he is. Take note of how you experience God, his attributes, or how he has revealed something new to you about himself. Come prepared to share at next week's gathering.

**Prayer:** Close your time praying a blessing over each member's intentional time with God this week.

## Week 4: Passionate

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**Welcome:** Give a quick warm welcome. Use one of the icebreakers from the Appendix, or go around the room and have each member share one “God wink” (or place they saw God show up in their lives) this past week

**Opening Prayer:** Ask someone to open in prayer praising God for who he is, and asking God to give us the strength, wisdom, and courage to passionately follow him.

### **Value: Passionate**

Last week we discussed our value of intentionally seeking relationship with God. To do this we must spend time in his Word and prayerfully reflect on his presence in our lives.

Ask: How did you intentionally cultivate your relationship with God over the past week? (Go around the room and describe your experience in three sentences or less)

We are passionate because the deeper our relationship with God, the deeper our understanding of our need for grace. Jesus chose to enter our mess and experience our trials, to take away the guilt, shame, and death caused by humanity choosing our way over God’s way. In response we offer our whole selves back to God, trusting that his way is better.

A passionate posture is courageous and boldly proclaims the good news of Christ. We see his transforming love as a central part of our personal story, and freely share how he is actively working in our lives. Practically speaking, Jesus becomes the filter through which we see the world. We see his provision and hand moving in our day to day circumstances, and we bring our questions and longings into his presence to speak truth. He plays a central role in our lives, and just as our coworkers, friends, and family would know the name of our parent or spouse, people in our lives know how important our relationship with Jesus is.

Our passionate posture is not just an individual one; overwhelmed by God’s generosity we do not hold onto what he has given us, but we freely share all he has given us with those he has placed around us. We trust God’s character, knowing that if the Father is willing to offer up his beloved Son for us, that he will lavishly provide for our needs.

In Acts chapter 4, we see the early church experience persecution for following the way of Jesus. They do not respond by asking God for comfort and ease. Instead they trust God and pray for boldness in their sharing of and participation with Jesus. The Holy Spirit answers, empowering them to courageously share the good news of the gospel and to generously share their very lives with one another.

### **Read Acts 4:29-35**

And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, <sup>30</sup>while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” <sup>31</sup>And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. <sup>32</sup>Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. <sup>33</sup>And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup>There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold <sup>35</sup>and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

The early church considered having faith in Christ in common a sufficient foundation to having everything in common. They let go of everything else that gave them a false sense of security or control.

**Reflect:** The believers in Acts saw Jesus as a better than anything and everything else. The process of holding onto Jesus involves letting go of things that block us from trusting him fully. As we spend 3 minutes in silent reflection, is there something you are holding onto that serves as a “better” comfort or protection than Jesus in your life? That could be success, fear, acceptance, possessions, money, etc.  
(Silent reflection for 3 minutes then discuss using mutual invitation)

After discussing some of the things that we hold onto in place of Jesus, it is important to re-center and consider who Jesus really is. Let’s reflect for another 2 minutes and ask, who is Jesus? Who is God? Remember truths about God and his character. If you love Jesus, what about who he is stirs your affections toward him? If you are still discovering who Jesus is, what is drawing you closer to want to learn more about him?

(Silent reflection for 2 minutes then discuss using mutual invitation)

**Debrief:** What was it like doing mutual invitation for a second time? Was it hard to not speak when someone else was sharing? What was it like to be able to share without being interrupted.

**Divine Participation:** Often what keeps us from passionately proclaiming Jesus in our daily lives is not a lack of opportunity, but a lack of love. Experiencing Jesus' love for us is not the result of a one-time decision. We need to be deeply affected by the love of Jesus on a daily basis. Reflecting on the questions below is a practice that can help us develop a filter for seeing God at the center of our lives, and can help us remind one another that he is actively working for our good.

During your time with Jesus this week. Reflect and write down your responses to the following questions. Come prepared next week to share and discuss your reflections and self-examination.

Who is God/Jesus?

- Remember truths about God and his character.
- If you love Jesus, what about who he is stirs your affections toward him?
- If you are still discovering who Jesus is, what is drawing you closer to want to learn more about him?
- What has he done/What is he doing?
  - Take time to look for and consider how he is currently working in your life.
  - What truth about Jesus do I need to remember right now?
- Who are we in light of that work?
  - How have I been transformed through my relationship with Christ?
- How should we live in light of who we are?
  - What is my next right step of obedience?

**Prayer:** Close slowly and boldly proclaiming the Nicene Creed together, the core of our faith. (adapted version by Trent Sheppard)

We believe the ancient creed:

That Jesus is the only Son of God  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
Begotten not made,  
Of one being with the Father  
through him all things were made

For us and for our salvation  
He came down from heaven

was incarnate of the Holy Spirit  
born of the Virgin Mary, and was made man

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.

## Week 5: Loving

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**Welcome:** Greet each other with a high five or hug. Use the prayer frame below as an icebreaker and opening prayer.

**Opening Prayer:** Allow members 2 minutes to silently reflect on the prayer frame below. Then go around the room and share your completed prayer. If members do not wish to share they can say Amen and it will move to the next person.

- O how \_\_\_\_\_ you are!
  - (characteristic about God)
- You....
  - (specific example of general quality you named)
- Oh how I \_\_\_\_\_ you!
  - (appropriate verb)

### Value: Loving

In our previous gathering we practiced passionately proclaiming the good news of Christ, and sharing how the gift of grace has significantly affected the way we see and approach life. Because of the generosity we receive from God, an overflow of sharing our time, talent, treasures, and very self with those he has placed in our lives becomes a natural response.

Deepening our relationship with God stirs our affections toward him, and we also intentionally share his love with our communities. The Bible tells us that God is love. It is not something he does but a crucial part of his character. Because we experience unconditional love from God, loving one another well is a key value of our community.

Through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, he demonstrated that God's love is generous, so much so that he gave all of himself for us! We are incapable of loving this way on our own. It is through our transformation in relationship with Jesus that we can love lavishly. We see throughout the Bible that God's economy is one of abundance. During a drought a widow's one day worth of oil multiples over and over again to sustain the widow, her son, & God's prophet Elijah. Jesus multiplied the lunch of one boy to feed over 5,000 people. Scripture is filled with many more examples of God's generosity and provision for his people.

To love one another well we must humbly live out of the security of God's faithfulness. We maintain a posture of dependence on him and an assurance that he is in control working for our good. To maintain this posture we must fight the scarcity mentality of not enough that is so prevalent in our culture. That when we share our bread with others, instead of being multiplied we will be left with crumbs.

Reflect: Take a moment and write down some “not enough” lies you are believing. How can you speak truth to the lies you are believing about God or yourself today? Think over scriptures you have read or experiences you have had with God - how are they different than what you are believing? (Silent reflection and journaling for 3 minutes)

If we look closely at scripture we see God’s economy of multiplication never happens when God’s provision is hoarded - multiplication always happens when his love is shared. To be loving in this way requires trust & vulnerability. We must rely on God as our source for all our needs and all we share. We also must be open with our needs, so that others have the opportunity to meet them.

We see a culture of loving generosity in the early church. As the early believers were more intentional about knowing God and one another, their love grew as well:

**Read Acts 2:42-47**

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup>And awe<sup>ca</sup> came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup>And all who believed were together and had all things in common. <sup>45</sup>And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup>And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup>praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Ask: What about this type of community is appealing? What are some of the benefits in living in this type of community? What are the risks or barriers that prevent us from living in community this way?

**Divine Participation:**

Share with the group one practical need you have this week (ex. Moving to a new house, need a ride to the airport, need a baby-sitter)

How can we as a group or individually offer practical help this week?

Debrief: What was it like to identify and share a need with the group? Was it uncomfortable to share something you are lacking? What did it feel like to be able to offer help to someone in the group?

**Divine Participation:** Reach out to someone during the week and offer help where you can, help that is based on their need.



**Conclusion:** As we approach the close of the introduction to this community group next week, we will be discussing as a group how we want to shape the culture of this group going forward. This next week, we want you to prayerfully consider how you would like to continue to journey forward with this group as we follow and explore Jesus together. Next week we will focus on discerning our next steps of how we as a community group will express the core values we have learned and discussed so far.

**Prayer:** Praise God for how he lavishly loves and abundantly provides for us. Ask that he may show us how to love one another well.

## **Week 6: Genuine**

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**Welcome:** Give a quick warm welcome. Use one of the icebreakers from the Appendix, or go around the room and have each member to describe their week with a song title or share their theme song for their past week.

**Opening Prayer:** Ask someone to open in prayer, asking for God's direction in your next steps as a group. May your community reflect the heart of Christ and be salt and light in your community.

### **Value: Genuine**

The desire for our community group is to create space where the good news of Jesus transforms lives. In order to facilitate that transformation, we need to create genuine community. To be genuine we seek to have our actions align with our values. Since our values are a reflection of the heart of Christ, we must look at his approach to community life. During his time on earth Christ's behavior can be characterized as humble obedience. Throughout his time on earth, the King of heaven served broken humanity and sought the Father's will. Even facing death with a final prayer, "Not my will but yours be done."

Just as Jesus submitted to the Father, in genuine community we submit to God and one another. We remember how powerful God is, that our very breath depends on him, yet he sustains us and provides for our every need. Pride causes us to have either overestimated or underestimated views of who we are. But when we humbly submit to the Father we are being genuine to the truest version of self - God's beloved child.

Part of genuinely living out our identity as God's beloved children means that we are a family in Christ. We are called to rejoice in each other's celebrations and shoulder each other's burdens. In genuine community with Christ and each other, our joys are multiplied and our sorrows are cut in half. We will end our time today by participating in a unity prayer (provide handout from appendix).

We will wrap up our time today with an exercise called a Unity Prayer. This is a kind of corporate prayer exercise aimed at giving space to care for one another in a priestly way by lifting up to God the emotions and experiences which you heard expressed in your time together

With the unity prayer in mind, focus on listening to other people with the intention of praying for them at the end of our time together. With that said, did anyone follow up on offering help to someone during the week to meet their need? Take some time to share and discuss briefly.

## Divine Participation:

As we also mentioned last week, we will be focusing on the next steps of the group and how we wish to express the core values we have discussed the past few weeks. We are going to create some guidelines as a group for how we want to embody and practice our core values of being inclusive, intentional, passionate, loving, and genuine. To do so we will use this structure:

We believe God is (core value) so we will practice being (core value) by (practical action)

Spend 30 minutes creating some guidelines as a group. Write down each one as you go, so that your group can hold each other up to these standard that you all set together. It can be helpful to revisit these guidelines as needed as your group grows. Make sure everyone is in agreement before moving forward. For the practical action portion, focus on specific actions or behaviors you want to limit or encourage, rather than using vague generalities.

### Examples:

We believe God is inclusive, so we will practice being inclusive by not interrupting people when speaking and asking clarifying questions to go deeper.

We believe God is intentional, so we will practice being intentional by not looking at distractions at our phones during group time

We believe God is loving, so we will practice being loving by expressing care for one another through forms of encouragement.

We believe that God is united Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so we commit to practicing unity by making amends with one another as soon as conflict arises in the event of relational discord.

What was this process like for you? What did you find challenging about making guidelines for the group? What was helpful in creating guidelines everyone could agree on? When doing this exercise with your connect group, how will you facilitate this?

### Unity Prayer

(handout in Appendix)

Close your time together with an exercise called a Unity Prayer. This is a kind of corporate prayer exercise aimed at giving space to care for one another in a priestly way by lifting up to God the emotions and experiences which you heard expressed in your time together. Take turns praying short prayers in the format of "Lord, hear our \_\_\_\_\_."

Fill in the blank with a feeling that you noticed someone else feeling. You could also fill in the blank with a desire or need that someone expressed. For example: "Lord, hear our discomfort being vulnerable with strangers," "Lord, hear our grief at losses and wounds we've experienced in our past," "Lord, hear Allison's gratitude for her family." When there is a long enough pause that it seems fit, have one person close the time of prayer.

We will do this Unity Prayer exercise often as a closing to our time together. Not only does it help us connect intimately with one another before leaving the gathering but it also reveals how well we've really listened to others - which over time, encourages better listening and connection.

### **Beyond week 6:**

Congratulations on starting your group & completing this curriculum. We pray that your group has formed deeper connections with Christ and each other in your time together! Your journey is just beginning. Take a week to celebrate as a group and have a special meal or outing together during your usual meeting time. Use the two weeks to meet with your pastor and discuss selecting your next curriculum that will meet the needs of your group and connect with the congregation. Additional GCI Connect Group resources can be found by clicking on the "believe" tab at <https://resources.gci.org/pathway>

### Mutual Invitation

- We begin by asking the questions below and allowing 2 minutes of uninterrupted silent reflection.
- The leader begins the sharing time by sharing his or her response to the question(s). Then the leader selects another person to share his or her response.
- After that person shares, they then invite another person in the group by name to share. When invited to share, a person may respond by sharing or passing if they are not ready to share. Regardless, they then invite the next person to share.
- Unless you have been invited to share, you should refrain from speaking — unless you need to ask clarifying questions or follow-up questions to dig deeper. This allows people to share uninterrupted while enabling others to ask questions to stay engaged.
- The exercise continues until everyone in the group has been invited to share.



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Practice inclusion by engaging in intentional conversation with others. In two conversations you have this week, focus on listening without looking to respond immediately and to ask clarifying questions before offering advice or your own experience. This way we foster inclusion of other people's thoughts and experiences in our lives before trying to express our own thoughts or experiences.



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*Clarifying questions:* Ask questions to better understand what the person has shared.

- How did that make you feel?
- Can you give an example of what you described?
- How can we best support you through this? How can we pray for you?

*Affirmation:* Reflect back what you have heard, affirming what the person stated.

- It sounds like what you are saying is...
- That is so difficult/stressful/painful or wonderful/joyful/fun.
- I want to affirm that what you are feeling is valid.

*Response:* As a community, express any offers of solidarity or commitment you are able to make.

- You are not alone in this. We are here for you and will support you through this.
- You said you want prayer for \_\_\_\_\_, and I am committed to praying for that with you. Is there anyone else who would like to commit to praying with me?
- Thanks for letting us know that \_\_\_\_\_ would be helpful. Is there anyone else who would like to commit with me to follow up with (person) next week?

*Empathy:* Share in the experience with the person by expressing how you feel.

- I am so sorry that you are going through this.
- It makes me sad to hear that you are having a hard time.
- I am encouraged by what you are doing in this situation and feel hopeful that...



## Divine Participation Week 3

Spend 30 minutes with God three times this week with the intention to see him reveal his character. This can be in many forms including silent meditation, a nature walk, serving someone in need, creating or building something in God's honor, or praying. The point here is spend time that is not self-serving or convenient for us, but rather to serve God and seek him out for who he is. Take note of how you experience God, his attributes, or how he has revealed something new to you about himself. Come prepared to share at next week's gathering..



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## Divine Participation Week 4

During your time with Jesus this week. Reflect and write down your responses to the following questions. Come prepared next week to share and discuss your reflections and self-examination.

Who is God/Jesus?

- Remember truths about God and his character.
- If you love Jesus, what about who he is stirs your affections toward him?
- If you are still discovering who Jesus is, what is drawing you closer to want to learn more about him?
- What has he done/What is he doing?
  - Take time to look for and consider how he is currently working in your life.
  - What truth about Jesus do I need to remember right now?
- Who are we in light of that work?
  - How have I been transformed through my relationship with Christ?
- How should we live in light of who we are?
  - What is my next right step of obedience?



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Closing Prayer:

We believe the ancient creed:

That Jesus is the only Son of God  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
Begotten not made,  
Of one being with the Father  
through him all things were made

For us and for our salvation  
He came down from heaven  
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit  
born of the Virgin Mary, and was made man

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.



## Divine Participation Week 5

Reach out to someone during the week and offer help where you can based on their need.



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### Unity Prayer

Close your time together with an exercise called a Unity Prayer. This is a kind of corporate prayer exercise aimed at giving space to care for one another in a priestly way by lifting up to God the emotions and experiences which you heard expressed in your time together. Take turns praying short prayers in the format of “Lord, hear our \_\_\_\_\_ .”

Fill in the blank with a feeling that you noticed someone else feeling. You could also fill in the blank with a desire or need that someone expressed. For example: “Lord, hear our discomfort being vulnerable with strangers,” “Lord, hear our grief at losses and wounds we’ve experienced in our past,” “Lord, hear Allison’s gratitude for her family.” When there is a long enough pause that it seems fit, have one person close the time of prayer.

We will do this Unity Prayer exercise often as a closing to our time together. Not only does it help us connect intimately with one another before leaving the gathering but it is also reveals how well we’ve really listened to others – which over time, encourages better listening and connection.



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# Appendix

## Icebreakers

### **This or That?**

**How to play:** Players take turns asking and answering questions in the form of “this or that?” Examples:

- Mountains or beach?
- Sushi or tacos?
- Day or night?
- Plane or road trip?
- Hotel or Air BnB?
- Comedy or Drama?
- Harry Potter or Lord of the Rings?
- Book or E-reader?
- NBA or NFL?

Each member asks a short question, and then indicates their preference. It’s easy, simple, and a great way for players to get to know each other. It’s fun to compare likes and dislikes, too. “What?? Sushi? Ew! Tacos all day, everyday.”

### **Chart Your Week**

**How to play:** Think back and draw a line graph to represent your past week. Consider the high points, the low points, moments of inspiration, moments of despair, leveling off times, and where you are now. The line will probably be a mixture of straight, slanted, jagged and curved lines. After you’ve drawn it, share what it means to you with the group.

### **Ten Things in Common**

**How to Play:** Find ten things the group has in common with every other person in the group. The commonalities must have nothing to do with work. (You’ll want to tell the people that they may not select body parts in common (we all have legs; we all have arms) and they may also not count clothing as commonalities (we all wear shoes, we all wear pants).

### **Who Has?**

**How to play:** This icebreaker helps connect groups get comfortable communicating with each other; this game requires everyone to speak with everyone else. Create a list of questions. Discuss as a group to find out Who has...

- Who has the most unusual job?
- Who was born the farthest away?
- What is the weirdest thing anyone has ever eaten?
- Who has had the most embarrassing experience?
- Who has the most children?

### **Pictionary Telephone**

**How to play:** First set up the game by sitting all of your players in a circle indoors. This game might be hard to play around a table because each player needs to keep their paper secret from their neighbors, so playing in a living room on couches and chairs works great.

Then hand out paper and writing utensils to all the players. Have everyone write his or her name in small print at the bottom right of the page.

Everyone starts by writing a sentence at the top of his or her paper. It can be something random, true, abstract, from a song lyric, or about someone in the room.

Once everyone has a sentence at the top of his or her paper, everyone passes their paper to the player to their right.

Then everyone illustrates the sentence give to them with a small picture right underneath the sentence.

Once everyone has finished drawing their sentences, everyone folds the top part of the paper over so it covers the first sentence, but not the picture. Then again, everyone passes their papers to the right.