GROUP TIME

Growing Together in a Pursuit of Christ

THE 5G LIFE

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By Greg Vanderleeuw

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Chapter 1: Why Groups?

The Christian life is not one to be lived alone. The overarching theology of Gather Time and Group Time at Hope is this–we believe the Bible is clear on the fact that followers of Jesus connect with other followers of Jesus to gather and be in groups together to stir up one another to love and good works. For the corporate gathered church as the local expression of the body of Christ, there are markers when it gathers, that also are true when believers connect in groups through the rest of the week. This resource will not only highlight why we believe that gathering together in Groups at Hope is essential and commanded in Scripture, but hopefully, it will also build an excitement and longing in your life to do so and to be expectant for how God will use others to encourage you, support you, and help you love Him. But why does Hope emphasize Group Time as something to be intentionally pursued? A few thoughts...

IT'S MODELLED

From its earliest pages, Scripture reveals a Triune God and His desire to create man and woman in His image. According to Genesis 2:18–25, put simply, we are not meant to be alone! We see the example of community, companionship, and covenant expressed by God through His creation. God's initial covenant with Abraham and Sarah was promised not just to them (Genesis 12), but that they would be the parents of a future generation

who would welcome the Saviour of the world. God's people Israel did "life together" all through the Old Testament—whether wandering the desert, making home in the promised land, or returning from exile. The example we see in Israel's history is always as a people, not a person. But in the New Testament the person of Jesus Christ, God the Son, comes (God with us!) and God's people are defined as more than an ethnic family, but now those who find salvation in Christ alone (Romans 10:9; Ephesians 2:8–9). Although faith is a personally accepted reality in one's life, the people of God (reflected through the local church) are united through the oneness they find in Jesus (Ephesians 4:1–6). It is because of this oneness that God's people gather in biblical community (Colossians 4:15). One of the strongest New Testament examples of this is found in Acts 2:42–47. Fellowship and community in the early church was the gathering of God's people to go through life together as they cared for one another as part of the family of God (Romans 16 and the believers in Cenchreae). The bond and unity found in Christ transcends any other relationship we have in our lives.

IT'S COMMANDED

Perhaps the strongest case to gather together in biblical community is found in Hebrews 10:24–25. Here we see followers of Christ are expected to gather together corporately and in community to stir up each other toward love and good works. In addition to this positive imperative, God's people are warned not to neglect meeting together as was the habit of some.

IT'S FOR THE ONE-ANOTHERS

There are over 50 "one–anothers" found and recorded in the New Testament. The purpose to gather in groups in the Christian life is to minister and encourage one another. It's one thing to send a text or email of

encouragement, but there is nothing like in–person ministry to each other through the joy and trials of life. Gathering together in groups gives the church the opportunity to practice the one-anothers. Because, how well can you live these out alone?

"...Be at peace with one another." (Mark 9:50)
"...Wash one another's feet." (John 13:14)
"...Love one another..." (John 13:34)
"...Love one another..." (John 13:35)
"...Love one another..." (John 15:12)
"...Love one another." (John 15:17)
"Love one another with brotherly affection..." (Romans 12:10)
"...Outdo one another in showing honour." (Romans 12:20)
"Live in harmony with one another..." (Romans 12:16)
"...Love each other..." (Romans 13:8)
"Let us not pass judgement on one another..." (Romans 14:13)
"Therefore welcome one another..."(Romans 15:7)
"...Instruct one another." (Romans 15:14)
"Greet one another with a holy kiss..." (Romans 16:16)
"...When you come together to eat, wait for one another..." (1 Corinthians 11:33)
"...Have the same care for one another." (1 Corinthians 12:25)
"...Greet one another with a holy kiss." (1 Corinthians 16:20)
"Greet one another with a holy kiss." (2 Corinthians 13:12)
"...Through love serve one another." (Galatians 5:13)
"But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another." (Galatians 5:15)
"Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another." (Galatians 5:26)
"Bear one another's burdens..." (Galatians 6:2)

"...With patience, bearing with one another in love."
(Ephesians 4:2)
"Be kind to one another..." (Ephesians 4:32)
"...Forgiving one another..." (Ephesians 4:32)
"...Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs..." (Ephesians 5:19)
"Submitting to one another..." (Ephesians 5:21)
"...Count others more significant than yourselves."
(Philippians 2:3)
"Do not lie to one another..." (Colossians 3:9)
"Bearing with one another..." (Colossians 3:13)
"...If one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other..." (Colossians 3:13)
"...Teaching [one another]..." (Colossians 3:16)
"...Admonishing one another..." (Colossians 3:16)
"...Abound in love for one another..." (1 Thessalonians 3:12)
"...Love each other." (1 Thessalonians 4:9)
"...Encourage one another..." (1 Thessalonians 4:18)
"...Encourage one another..." 1 Thessalonians 5:11)
"...Build one another up... " (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
"Exhort one another every day..." (Hebrews 3:13)
"...Stir up one another to love and good works..."
(Hebrews 10:24)
"...Encourage one another." (Hebrews 10:25)
"Do not speak evil against one another..." (James 4:11)
"Do not grumble against one another..." (James 5:9)
"...Confess your sins to one another..." (James 5:16)
"...Pray for one another..." (James 5:16)
"...All of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind." (1 Peter 3:8)

"...Keep loving one another earnestly..." (I Peter 4:8)
"Show hospitality to one another without grumbling."
(I Peter 4:9)
"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another..."
(I Peter 4:10)
"Clothe yourselves... with humility toward one another..."
(I Peter 5:5)
"Greet one another with a kiss of love." (I Peter 5:14)
"...Love one another." (I John 3:11)
"...Love one another." (I John 3:23)
"...Love one another." (I John 4:7)
"...Love one another." (I John 4:11)
"...Love one another." (I John 4:12)
"...Love one another." (II John 5)

IT'S FOR YOUR GOOD

Being in a group with other believers is a wise and important community of accountability in your life. The reality is, living a life as a follower of Jesus is a spiritual battle every day (Ephesians 6:10–20). Going through this life with a biblical community means you have surrounded yourself with others who care to keep you on the straight and narrow road that leads to life. Additionally, a biblical community helps encourage, support, pray for, correct, rebuke, and equip you to live faithfully for Christ. This type of blessing needs to take place in addition to corporate gatherings as the church, hence Group Time.

IT'S FOR GOD'S GLORY

When God's people gather to know Him and grow in their love for Him, God gets the glory. As the early church gathered in Acts 2, it wasn't for

personal gain, more social media followers, someone to tell them how wonderful they were, it was to study, know, and love the Lord Jesus Christ in their lives. When Groups at Hope remain focused on going through seasons of life together with the conviction that Group Time is necessary because the Bible clearly commands believers to be connected with other believers for the purpose of helping each other become more like Christ, God is glorified.

Chapter 2: What is a Group?

A Group at Hope Oakville, quite simply, is multiple believers coming together to help each other grow in their faith, to practice the "one-anothers" (see previous section for complete list), and use our Spiritual Gifts for each other (1 Corinthians 12, Roman 12; 1 Peter 4:10).

AM I IN A GROUP?

The best way to answer this question is to examine the purpose and format of your current group. What does your group do together when you gather? What is the purpose of your gathering? Is your current gathering format something that is encouraging or provoking you to grow in your faith? The answers found in this resource might help you answer these questions.

AM I IN A HOPE OAKVILLE GROUP?

At Hope, in order to help support, encourage, and equip group leaders, we desire for official groups of Hope to be registered. This can be done simply by contacting the Group Life team (Groups@HopeOakville.ca). As part of the process of registering your group, our team will gather a few points of information regarding your group and communicate our desire to help support your group as you gather together. If you are in a group with individuals from Hope, but haven't registered your group with us, it can be hard for us to care and support you and your group leader through seasons of trial, resourcing, and clarity.

Chapter 3: What Kinds of Groups Are There?

Depending on the type of church you are part of, there may be different types of groups available. At Hope, we believe that it can be helpful to offer different types of groups to the congregation as a way of helping each other connect in community based on availability, interests, and purpose of the group.

GROUPS BY GENDER

Groups by gender can be helpful for individuals who are looking to be connected with other men or women so as to receive and benefit from godly relationships of believers who can speak into their life. At Hope, because we believe that God's Word is clear that God created men and women in His image (Genesis 1:27–28), we offer groups of men, of women, or men and women.

GROUPS BY SEASON OF LIFE

In addition to groups by gender, there can also be value in offering biblical community for those in specific seasons of life. While the goal of biblical communities are not to isolate each other so specifically, specific seasons of life are important for community (ex. Post-Secondary, Seniors).

CHAPTER 3

GROUPS BY COMMONALITIES

As a way of helping connect individuals into biblical communities, there are times and strategies where gathering people by common interest or vocations can be helpful as a way of forming communities (ex. Educators, Physicians, Work and Faith, Neighbourhoods, Praying Parents). Similar to the challenges with stages of life, the goals of groups by commonalities is not to segregate and divide the body of Christ, but to establish biblical community with individuals that naturally connect well in life as they pursue life together in a group setting.

Chapter 4: Group Leadership

As a way of caring for groups at Hope Oakville, we desire to care for the leaders of groups. Having care and oversight is important for a number of reasons. In Exodus 18, Moses' father-in-law shows up in Israel's camp. Jethro is concerned with not only how the people are being cared for but also for Moses' health and longevity to lead well. In the New Testament, the model for church governance as the church is established in Acts is through the local shepherds and elders (pastors, staff, lay leaders) to help accomplish the same sort of care and oversight for the congregation. All groups at Hope have access to ministry leaders and staff to ensure they are supported, equipped and encouraged in their discipleship of group members.

WHO CAN LEAD GROUPS?

At Hope, only members in good standing may lead groups. Members leading groups ensures a level of care and oversight that is healthy for group members connected in these communities. As a member, we can ensure that our group leaders agree and adhere to Hope's doctrinal statements, policies and bylaws, and are committed to life and community in the local church. Requiring membership for leading also ensure that group leaders are modelling for their group members an intentional pursuit of the 5G Life in their own lives.

HOW ARE GROUP LEADERS SUPPORTED?

Group leaders at Hope are cared for primarily by the Group Life staff team. Under the staff leadership there are also experienced, equipped, and commissioned leaders who help care for other leaders at Hope–we consider these individuals leaders of leaders. Through regular meetings and connections all of these leaders have the opportunity to be encouraged, prayed for, equipped, and resourced as to help them lead well and grow in their leading ability

WHO ARE GROUPS ACCOUNTABLE TO?

Ultimately, under the entrusted leadership and oversight of the elders and pastors at Hope, Groups are accountable to the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ.

Chapter 5: What Do Groups Do?

Every group looks different because every group is composed of different people. However, when prospective group members are interested in knowing more about what happens during group gatherings we can find it helpful to consider how the early church gathered in Acts 2:42–47. The following sections will specifically answer the question as to what groups "do."

PURPOSE

The purpose of Groups at Hope is to help individuals know Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour, or grow in Christ through biblical community. Therefore, with this goal in mind, there are intentional and fruitful ways our groups are structured and spending time together. Group Life at Hope is often composed of two helpful terms as we grow in Christ.

Life Together refers to the regular gatherings of groups through different seasons of life. This might include a group's normal gathering time during a weeknight or early on a morning before work. This might include frequent times of serving together or enjoying a meal together to encourage relational equity. But as we consider the goal of Groups at Hope, and see in Acts 2 as one of the best descriptions of what believers do when they gather together, we understand that life together is much more than just a

social gathering. While each group at Hope is unique because of its leaders and group members, all groups are encouraged to keep Word, Prayer, and Fellowship active aspects in balance when the group spends time together. It is up to the leaders and members for how these three main arteries present themselves as a group gathers.

Learn Together refers to the regular time annually where groups enroll for a class through the Hope Institute. These seasons allow the group leaders a chance to break from group facilitation and also foster a season of learning through course content. The purpose of this season is to allow the group to grow together intentionally through their knowledge of the Word, a doctrine, or topic in the Christian life. Learn Together seasons are encouraged when groups feel they are able and desiring classroom learning throughout the year.

PLACE

Groups meeting together and participating in Life Together meet onsite at the church or offsite. Historically, our Men's, Women's, Seniors, and Twenties ministries have gathered during set times at the church during the week. Home Groups and D-Groups regularly meet offsite in coffee shops, public locations, and homes.

PEOPLE

Hope Groups are gatherings of people who call Hope Oakville their home church. Additionally, these Biblical communities are primarily seen as regular gatherings of believers. Within these groups, believers gather to study the Word, pray, and fellowship together as a way of helping each other personally grow in their love for God's Word and Christ. But these groups can also include those who are exploring the Christian faith or are new to it in

their own lives. Within these groups, interested or new believers have the chance to be led and discipled by other believers to know and grow in their knowledge and love of Christ together.

PROXIMITY

Groups are often encouraged to be gatherings of people who live in close proximity to each other. For groups at Hope who gather at the church, the church becomes their central gathering place. For groups who meet in a home or in the community, focusing on proximity as a goal of building groups allows for groups to missionally reach their neighbourhoods (Matthew 28:18–20), cities, or regions as they pray, serve and do life together.

Chapter 6: A Group's Life Cycle

Healthy things always grow. While a central goal within Groups at Hope is to help members grow in their love for God and His written Word, a byproduct of healthy, biblical, community through deep and fruitful relationships is often achieved. But do these communities exist forever? What if someone wants to join this group? Or leave this group? What if we aren't growing spiritually as much anymore? Let's start a conversation about a Group's Life Cycle.

LAUNCH

Launching groups is always exciting as new group members begin to get to know each other. Often in new groups there is excitement to grow, commit, and learn together through seasons of Life Together.

MULTIPLICATION

As groups mature and grow together, there can be the desire for group members to want to be part of providing this type of community for others at Hope by launching new groups. At Hope, we believe that the only way for more groups to launch, so as to help connect more individuals into these biblical communities, is to be encouraging existing groups and mature believers to be open to God's leading for them to multiply. This goal

might sound counter-intuitive, find biblical community and then leave biblical community? We see the healthy multiplication of groups not only part of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20), but also a fulfillment of the church in Ephesians 4:11–16, as the church matures and is equipped for growing ministry, maturity and growth in Christ. As this is accomplished, additional individuals experience the blessing of gathering together and stirring up each other toward love and good works as they meet together (Hebrews 10:24–25).

CONCLUSION

There are also seasons when a Group comes to the end of its life cycle by transitioning its members into alternate group options at Hope. At Hope, we believe that each group and format benefits individuals differently. Therefore, there are seasons when groups long to be connected within the church in new ministries through different seasons of life. The goal is not to "stop pursuing Group Time" rather, to find new ways to connect with other believers through Group Life at Hope, because when we do that, we are truly blessed.

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