

# SMALL GROUP ESSENTIALS

| SMALL GROUP CORE VALUES

 **GROUPS**

# SMALL GROUP CORE VALUES

Values are ideas, concepts, or things that have merit or great worth. At Rush Creek understanding what we believe has great worth to small groups will help you participate in biblical community in a substantive way. While there are numerous things that are important for healthy biblical community, at Rush Creek we believe these core values serve as guard rails for our groups. As they seek to live the abundant life in biblical community there is plenty in this world that seeks to harm and derail their efforts to follow Jesus. Core values can serve as a north star of sorts for our groups and help preserve health no matter the season of life.

# CORE VALUE: PRIORITY

by Clayton Aker

**Leader:** Priority can be a hot-button issue for groups to discuss. You will want to lead towards unity. Allow group members to express their reflections from the lesson. There are a lot of fill in the blank questions this week which will lend itself well for group discussion. Also, keep your ears and heart open for what's not being said. Many times, what's not being said can be revealing.

**Group Member:** Anytime a group discusses priority it is an opportunity for establishing clear expectations. People vary widely when it comes to what is a priority in life. Some people say family time while watching their favorite show while others say rebuilding classic cars is a priority. As you work through this week's lesson, go slowly. It will take time for your mind and heart to slow down long enough for you to find your authentic responses. Make sure to jot down your answers and reflections and arrive at your group meeting ready to share.

## DISCOVER

"I got last minute tickets to the game tonight."

"We are celebrating our anniversary together."

"I have to take my dog to training tonight."

We've all been presented with the "better offer" when it comes to our group time. It's tempting to let our eyes wander to the next best thing, rather than being faithful to the relationships that God has called us to; to the friendships, spouse, family, or church community. We do not gather as a small group to gain a new network, an extraordinary social experience, learn something new, or mark off a figurative checkbox for our faith, that mindset will easily look for a "better offer." While we will study and learn about God, and make deep friendships, these in and of themselves are not the reason we gather together.

Why should it be a priority for us to gather together as believers of Jesus in small group communities? Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Life Together* said "Christianity means community through Jesus and in Jesus Christ. No Christian Community is more or less than this... We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ." He later went on to say from Tegel prison "The church is the church only when it exists for others."

Small groups are a priority for us because, we have been gathered together by God, through and in Jesus, to each other. It's in a community that we become more like Jesus and learn how to be and be collectively Jesus, to the overwhelmed under-resourced and far from God.

Becoming more like Jesus is the reason we gather together and why it should be a priority. In increasingly busy world, we are bombarded with a "better offer" than gathering together because of the fear of missing out. A study was done of 20,000 Christians by Michael Zigerelli, and his research showed busyness is the #1 distraction to people's lives with God. He said

"It may be the case that (1) Christians are assimilating to a culture of busyness, hurry and overload, which leads to (2) God becoming more marginalized in Christians' lives, which leads to (3) a deteriorating relationship with God, which leads to (4) Christians becoming even more vulnerable to adopting secular assumptions about how to live, which leads to (5) more conformity to a culture of busyness, hurry and overload. And then the cycle begins again."

The great danger is not that we will renounce our faith but that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it. Busyness and "better offers" will see our priorities shift from "seeking first the Kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33), to seeking first the kingdom of myself.

The enemy will continue to try to divide us and distract us, but God has gathered us together to speak His word to each other, to encourage another, bear one another's burdens and become more like Jesus together! Let us dive into understanding how our brothers and sisters in the early church saw community as a priority and how they gathered as a family.

## DEVELOP

READ EPHESIANS 2:11-22

Our right standing with God comes only through Jesus Christ. With that right standing comes a new family, that all those who are in Jesus are a part of the family of God. Jesus has knitted all of us together for God's glory because of his goodness. Gathering together reminds us of his glory and goodness.

Paul reminds us in Ephesians that Jesus is our peace and he has made peace between us. There was discord between man, but Christ became our mediator to bring peace with God and between man. We can now live with another in peace; we can love and serve another; we can become one. But we can only do so by way of Jesus, and we are bound together in him.

We have received the mercy and forgiveness of God, and it's through him that we can learn to extend mercy and forgiveness to others. Having received forgiveness instead of judgment, we too are made ready to forgive. In Romans 15:7 Paul states "Therefore accept one another, just as Christ also accepted you, to the glory of God." Paul is teaching us that God, in Christ, is teaching us to meet one another as he has met us. We have been accepted in him, and when we accept others, it brings glory to God, how awesome is that!

Take 3 deep breaths while reflecting on time when someone encouraged you in a difficult season.

READ HEBREWS 10:24-25

Intentionally or unintentionally we are people who are continually being formed into someone we want to be or didn't foresee becoming. Small groups are a place where we can intentionally become more like Jesus in the context of community. For the early church, and now us, it's the place where we learn how to extend and receive forgiveness, to see each other with compassion and love, and to spur each other on to good works and godliness. Small groups are a priority to us.

List 2-3 you are being intentional about your walk with Jesus?

## DEEPEN

Write down some reasons we need other believers in our lives.

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God has chosen to use people as a means of communicating the Word of life to others. Describe a time when God used someone else to speak to you?

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If someone was to look at your life (and not merely words), what would it be telling that person?

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Where would they say your priorities lie?

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When we are forgiven, we are made ready to forgive. Describe your ability to forgive. Does it match your understanding of how much God has forgiven you? Explain.

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Reread the Michael Zigerelli and discuss, how have you seen this played out in your lives:

"It may be the case that (1) Christians are assimilating to a culture of busyness, hurry and overload, which leads to (2) God becoming more marginalized in Christians' lives, which leads to (3) a deteriorating relationship with God, which leads to (4) Christians becoming even more vulnerable to adopting secular



# CORE VALUE: GROWTH

by Stan Rogers

**Leader:** Growth through relationships is the focus this week. You might have group members who have experienced bad relationships and this could make conversation difficult for your group. You might also have group members that could need help in understanding the “how” of growth through relationships. No matter the situation you find yourself in be prepared to provide gentle yet reassuring leadership.

**Group Member:** Becoming a better version of yourself is popular in our society today. Everyone has an opinion on this topic. In this week’s lesson make sure to jot down any reflections or questions that may arise from your readings. Go ahead and come up with some answers from the deepen section and be ready to share them at group this week.

## DISCOVER

As a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, Scripture is clear about the believer’s need to grow in faith and our depth of spiritual understanding and practice. The Apostle Peter points this out when he writes “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Peter 2:2-3). He later exhorts, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever! Amen” (2 Peter 3:18).

Our heavenly Father desires that we grow in our knowledge and application of His truth. We see His heart for His children in this regard throughout the Bible. Just like an earthly father who wants to see his sons and daughters mature and grow, God, our Father, commands us to claim higher ground, to develop our faith muscles.

Dr. Tony Evans, longtime pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship and author of more than a dozen books, provides the following definition: “Spiritual

growth may be defined as that transformational process by which we allow the indwelling Christ to increasingly express Himself in and through us, resulting in a greater capacity on our part to bring God greater glory and experience His greater good for ourselves.”

When we grow in Christ, we are doing as John the Baptist stated: “He (Jesus) must become greater; I must become less”(John 3:30). As we do this, people see more of Jesus and less of our natural man in our daily life. This is how we glorify God and accomplish man’s sole purpose (Isaiah 43:7) in life. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul writes: “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” As we focus on Christ, we begin to look like Him.

There are a variety of resources that can influence spiritual growth—Bible study, prayer, sermons, worship, an assortment of Christian podcasts, books, and blogs; all these are important tools in gaining the knowledge necessary to live the Christian life. These are all helpful, but Steve Gladen, author of *Leading Small Groups with Purpose*, reflects, “What has made the greatest impact on your spiritual growth? If you’re like me, the answer isn’t a sermon, a lesson, or even a book; the answer is a person who was willing to invest time in you.”

A small group enhances a person’s walk with the Lord because of the personal, consistent influence. We need each other to “spur one another on to love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24). The word spur is defined as “a thing that prompts or encourages someone; an incentive” and “a device with a small spike or a spiked wheel that is worn on a rider’s heel and used for urging a horse forward.” The accountability and encouragement of meeting regularly together with a group of growing followers of Christ can be a “device” used by God to urge us forward to greater heights on our Christian pilgrimage.

When the Church was established in Acts 2, the gospel was presented, people listened, and hearts were convicted, resulting in about 3,000 people

coming to a saving faith in Jesus. In the days that followed, believers were devoted to the apostle's teachings, fellowship with each other, sharing meals together, meeting in homes with one another, and prayer. The result of this togetherness was praise of God and enjoying the good will of each other. What a beautiful description of the purpose and function of the Church. One of the best ways to model this kind of personal interaction with one another can be demonstrated in the life of a small group.

## DEVELOP

READ HEBREWS 3:12-15

In Hebrews 3:12-15 we find a stern warning against an "evil, unbelieving heart." Why such a stern warning? This kind of heart leads a person "away from the living God." Too often, when facing a crisis, doubt creeps in. No matter how many times God has proven He is faithful, the tendency is to pause and wonder, will He do it again? Notice what verse 13 says about fighting against "sin's deception" of unbelief—"encourage each other daily."

Surrounding one's self with other Christians who are an encouragement in the faith is a huge advantage. A small group of believers has the opportunity to both give and receive encouragement for protection against drifting away from the presence and power of God. Together, a group of Christ followers can strengthen one another to hear and obey the Spirit of God as He moves in their lives, creating an obedient heart resistant to rebellion.

Many years ago, I was asked to participate in an illustration to point out that there is strength in numbers. The teacher of the class had me stand in front of my classmates. She proceeded to tie my hands with a single strand of yarn. After securing her knot, she asked me to break free. This took little effort to accomplish. She asked me how strong a strand of yarn was, to which I responded—"not very strong." She repeated this visual by wrapping my hands not just one time but several times, once again securing her knot and asking me to break free. I could not break free no matter how hard I tried.

We have greater potential to remain strong in our faith when we are in a community of believers. The

relationships in a small group can produce layers of strength in our faith that add protection from a heart hardened by sin. A committed small group can hold each other accountable, being used by God to fortify a heart prone to wandering.

READ HEBREWS 10:23-25

As the Spirit of God moves through the writer of Hebrews, He promises hope through the faithfulness of God, and the ability of Christian believers to make a positive impact on the lives of other believers. The NLT translates verse 23 this way, Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Believers are to cling to the hope found in God's unending love (Romans 8:31-39). Hang on to the hope God will never abandon His own (Hebrews 13:5-6). Embrace the hope found in a God who listens, helps and protects those who are righteous in Him (Psalms 34:15-19). The hope all believers can rest in, no matter what their circumstances in life, is an eternal home with God as our future (Revelation 21).

With the hope found in God in this life and the one to come, believers everywhere are to "stir up" on another. Other translations say let us spur one another on, motivate each other, stimulate one another, provoke one another, encourage each other, and help one another. In other words, we are to come alongside other believers with words and actions, expressing God's love in us and doing good works in the name of Jesus.

Notice in verse 25, Scripture tells us the best way to impact the lives of others Do not neglect regularly meeting together. So often, when I attend a small group, I walk away encountering God through the lives of others. This takes place through the study of God's Word, talking about the challenges and victories of life, and by allowing others to actively take part in my life. Believers truly are better together!

A few years back, my family lived on a 23-acre property in Mansfield, Texas. This place had all the beauty of a country setting in the middle of a big city. There were tall trees, open fields, walking trails, a creek and a lake. Many hours were spent exploring the vast openness of this gift from God. One of the things I loved most was the fire pit down by the

creek. Many a night were spent in this quiet space with dozens of friends or by myself. There were a few times I built a fire and really piled on the wood. For the next 3-4 days, you could go to the fire pit and stir up the ash and find a hotspot of coals. It always amazed me how long coals could stay hot enough to restart the fire if left undisturbed and together.

In drier times of the year, I did not want to keep any coals burning when our evening fellowships ended, so I would separate the coals. Within just a few short hours, the coals would cool. What a picture of how the Christian life is supposed to be lived. By ourselves, we tend to cool off pretty quickly no matter how hot the fire for Christ burns within us. This cooling has a negative effect on our worship, study in the Word, prayer life, and our service to others. But together, believers stir up and encourage one another to unconditional love, fully displaying Christ in daily living.

Let me encourage you to think about the question from Steve Gladen quoted earlier. “What has made the greatest impact on your spiritual growth? If you’re like me, the answer isn’t a sermon, a lesson, or even a book; the answer is a person who was willing to invest time in you.” I cannot think of a better way for a person to grow in his or her walk with the Lord than to engage in the lives of others around the Word of God and the regular interaction that takes place in a small group.

**DEEPEN**

- Take time to read and further discuss Hebrews 3:12-15. What are some characteristics of an unbelieving heart? What are some warning signs someone is deceived by sin and turning away from God? If warning signs are present in someone’s life, should they be confronted? Why or Why not?
- Read Hebrews 10:23-25 before continuing on to the final discussion questions.
- Make a list of 3 or 4 people who have had the most spiritual influence on your life. Discuss the characteristics of these individuals?
- What are some ways others in your small group have been an encouragement to you?
- This study has focused on how God can use a small group of people to interact in each other’s lives, to spur one another on in the faith. Discuss

the various ways your small group can make a spiritual impact on one another.

**DREAM**

Take a few moments to pray about how you, as an individual, can encourage others in your small group to grow in their faith. On a piece of notepaper, write down the things God reveals to you from your prayer. Make it a point each week to intentionally engage with someone from your group from the list you have created.

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# CORE VALUE: COMMUNITY

by Barry Parker

**Leader:** Growth through relationships is the focus this week. You might have group members who have experienced bad relationships and this could make conversation difficult for your group. You might also have group members that could need help in understanding the “how” of growth through relationships. No matter the situation you find yourself in be prepared to provide gentle yet reassuring leadership.

**Group Member:** Becoming a better version of yourself is popular in our society today. Everyone has an opinion on this topic. In this week’s lesson make sure to jot down any reflections or questions that may arise from your readings. Go ahead and come up with some answers from the deepen section and be ready to share them at group this week.

## DISCOVER

The topic of standing together through storms is an important conversation because life is constantly advancing with an unending line of problems; and only with the help of Christ and others will we stand a chance to weather these storms without being spiritually harmed. Proverbs 18:1 gives us a warning about facing life alone when it says, “One who isolates himself pursues selfish desires; he rebels against all sound wisdom.” Clearly, isolation can be detrimental to our lives.

## DEVELOP

READ ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12

In the movie *Castaway*, Tom Hank’s character, Chuck Nolan, finds himself in a plane crash and marooned on an uninhabited, tropical island. For many of us this would seem to be the perfect vacation. The island is abundant in sunshine, has beautiful palm trees and a tranquil sandy beach. However, very quickly into the film, we see Chuck get hit with an onslaught of problems that seem to be insurmountable due to his aloneness.

*Castaway* allows us the opportunity to experience the incredible tragedy, misery and difficulty of isolation. Whether or not the creators of *Castaway* knew about the passage in Ecclesiastes, the movie ironically proves the essence of the scripture to be true. How much easier would it have been if Chuck would have had 2 extra hands to help? How much better would his emotional health have been if he would have had one other set of ears to listen to his pain or just one other voice to speak encouragement into his despair?

In the book *Side By Side* Edward Welch writes “We were meant to walk side by side, an interdependent body of weak people. God is pleased to grow and change us through the help of people who have been re-created in Christ and empowered by the Spirit. That is how life in the church works.”

In addition to Welch’s wonderful book of encouragement to utilize the natural abilities God has given to every believer, we find that Jesus also addresses the importance of walking side-by-side.

READ JOHN 13:34

Love is a popular force in our world today. While it may be misunderstood and distorted by many, Jesus was clear that those who love one another give evidence that they follow Jesus.

READ JOHN 17:11

On Jesus’ final night before his crucifixion, His major concern centered on leaving His disciples and He prayed for them, and all who would come to faith because of the testimony of the disciples.

READ GALATIANS 6:2

Our God in His infinite wisdom has given us to each other, all of us broken, all of us weak, But all of us have been equipped with the Holy Spirit to help each other in our weakness, in fact because of our weakness and our experience of brokenness this makes us perfectly qualified to help others in their weakness and through their storms of life.

## DEEPEN

- Describe a time when you experienced a storm in your life and others helped you weather through it.
- Describe your key insights from this week's lesson in one sentence. Why was it impactful for you?
- What was most challenging about this week's lesson?
- How would you explain to someone the importance of having a group of people around when going through the difficulties of life?

## DREAM

During your group meeting break up into groups of 3's and 4's and write down three ideas to the following question and then rejoin and discuss as a group how the group could implement the top 3 best ideas.

- How can we as a group become more open and transparent about our problems?

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# CORE VALUE: ACCOUNTABILITY

by Cole Guidroz

**Leader:** In this lesson there is a new activity for your group to try. You will find it in the dream section. Also, keep watch on body language and facial expressions such as smirks, raised eyebrows, the color changes in the face and neck of group members. The topic of accountability can be sensitive. Use your best judgement on which questions to ask and which to leave out.

**Group Member:** Accountability can be a blessing but in our culture it is often seen as a snare. During the lesson this week jot down any reaction you have. Perhaps underline statements that stand out to you. Why do those statements cause a reaction? What does that reaction reveal about what is going on inside you? Bring your notes to your group meeting this week. Also, prepare your heart for a new activity (found in the dream section) at your group meeting.

## DISCOVER

When we think of the core values Rush Creek holds for small groups accountability can sometimes fade to the background. This could be due to many reasons; however, a main reason could be because of the feelings the word itself invokes. We think of accountability as Big Brother watching over us at all times to make sure we stay in line with the law. We may get nervous thinking about people seeing our flaws and pains life has given us, and we picture our small group as a non-confrontational environment where everyone just comes in, enjoys one another's presence, and grows together by talking about the Bible until next week. While these reasons may hold some weight depending on past experience, if we're not careful we can let our past experience override Biblical teaching on how we as followers of Christ grow into His image bearers.

If we look at experience, we all know we need accountability. Think about your last New Year's Resolution. Do you remember what it was? Do you remember how motivated you were that this time

you were going to lose the weight, break the habit, talk to this person more, learn this new trade, or make a wiser financial decision? How did that work out for you? If you are like 80% of the United States, you abandoned or forgot about this goal by February 1st. Almost all of these resolutions are abandoned because there was no measure of accountability to hold you to the goal you wanted to achieve.

It can be hard to accept but we have all experienced lack of follow through on our goals. At Rush Creek we want you to live a vibrant, life-transforming, relationship with Jesus Christ. This requires group members holding one another accountable to pursuing Jesus above all else, not for a check list to mark off during group time, but for life to be experienced with your small group as you grow together towards Christlikeness.

## DEVELOP

READ HEBREWS 10:23-25

As you have learned already, Christ has not called you to be alone, but to live the Christian life with one others. This means you were not saved to be a CIA Christian, undercover and on your own. Jesus has created a body of believers to reflect His character and Kingdom values to a lost world. This is how we grow, we gather with our small group to push us forward in our faith and relationship with Jesus. Three of the "one another" commands are found in these Hebrew verses alone! It seems the author of Hebrews really wants us to listen up and take our relationship with one another seriously.

The author states that we are to stir on one another, not neglect one another, and encourage one another not discourage or ignore each other. The word for 'stir on' means to "irritate or provoke". The writer of Hebrews is trying to make a point here about being a type of third eye for your brother or sisters spiritual health. We are to care so much for one another just as an irritating person keeps coming back and adding to the irritation. We want members to feel so cared for that they expect their group members to come to them and ask them how their day has gone and how they can help. Words are powerful and have the ability to sharpen one another and build each other up. How great would it feel to have a relationship where you can share your deepest burdens and know

you are loved, valued, and have an expectancy to be helped overcome the burden. So, irritate one another for the love of Christ!

The author of Hebrews also makes a point that group members should not neglect the meeting with one another. Why? To hold our confession of hope...As the Day is drawing near. It seem like in today’s world we tend to change our minds rapidly. Consider how often we want to have a better relationship with God, yet choose to miss church, find an excuse to miss group time, fail to share the gospel with that person God puts on our heart because of our job, family engagement, comfort, tiredness, a “better” offer came up that seems more enjoyable. Now, some of these things are not wrong. A thriving marriage is a good thing and encouraged. Building a successful career for the security for your family is a blessing to your family. Prioritizing your health honors the Lord. However, all of these things require a right relationship with God transforming you into His image to be a better spouse, more integral worker, and enjoying the simple things in life as a gracious gift from God. To do this, as the author of Hebrews states, comes from gathering with the people of God so they can stir you on and encourage you to keep pursuing God. We need a third eye watching us so that we may confess sin quicker and choose God sooner. We want the deepness of a relationship where we know not only are we watching over our souls, but other loved ones are watching over me for my uplifting. What a freeing thought!

How this accountability actually happens? It requires a group to trust its members care deeply for their betterment. This will cause group members to confess their struggle with sin they may have never been able to fix. You will experience the benefit as well. The lust you struggle with, the laziness in your job, the tendency to gossip about others for your reputation, the addictions you can’t shake, your temper towards your loved one, or the lack of spiritual development achieved. These struggles begin change when we look to one another as our third eye, given by God, for our advancement in relationship with the one who changes everything.

**DEEPEN**

How important is having one another encouraging you to choose God’s way?

What are some hinderances to true accountability?

What are some hurts you have felt from accountability done wrong?

How can you help create a loving accountability environment within your group?

Are there struggles you have never beaten in life that you want release from?

**DREAM**

Accountability never happens on its own. It requires planning, sacrifice, and care on the part of each member. Therefore, together as a group start accountability off in small steps by forming a trust between members in the group. Have each of the members divide up into pairs as small term accountability partners. Plan to have a meet up, or some form of communication with one another, each week, to get to know one another and deepen the relationship for trust to form. This will require sacrifice on everyone’s part, but remember no growth ever happened without sacrifice. Remember, being accountable means hearing the struggles and pains of another and helping push them forward by taking some of their burden. Expect to hear things you never expected and pray for God’s love to pour out through you for one another.

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# CORE VALUE: CONFIDENTIALITY

by Clayton Carver

**Leader:** Work through this lesson with an eye toward potential issues group members might have with the concept of confidentiality. Trust is a sensitive word nowadays. You will want to spend time in prayer this week leading up to your group meeting. Pray for a discerning heart.

**Group Member:** Spend time this week working slowly through this lesson. The words 'grace' and 'truth' can invoke reactions in people. Jot down your reflections from the readings, underline statements that stand out, and go ahead and answer the questions for yourself in the deepen section. Be prepared to share your responses at your group meeting this week.

## DISCOVER

Perhaps the most crucial aspect of a strong community is trust. Community, true connection and relationship to other human beings, is built on trust. Am I able to be vulnerable and honest with you without fear of judgement or condemnation? People desire community. They desire a place to be known, loved, and accepted. This cannot happen if trust is not built. And this is no easy task. We all know how hard it is to build trust with another person; we also know how quickly that trust can be shattered forever.

In his book *The Irresistible Community*, Bill Donahue lays out two key factors for a community to build trust with each other. The first factor is "welcome." He writes, "Welcome is one of the signs that community is alive. To invite others to live with us is a sign that we aren't afraid, that we have a treasure of truth and of peace to share. If a community is closing its doors, that is a sign that hearts are closing as well." The second factor is "truth." Truth is something that can be hard to share, even if we know it to be true. The key to sharing truth in community is authenticity. Donahue writes, "Authenticity - being truth to self and others - matters when Jesus is at the table. He never shies away from declaring truth about himself, his Father, or life in the world." Jesus was never

afraid to speak truth to those who needed it, so we shouldn't be either.

If these two realities are present in our groups, trust can begin to be built. "Trust comes as a result of 'welcome' and 'truth' working together. Welcome (grace in action) and truth (reality revealed) form the backbone of trust. We welcome one another in grace, offering forgiveness, hope, acceptance, and belief. We see and embody the truth about God, self, and the world. When these two join forces, truth thrives."

At Rush Creek, we believe one of the most practical ways this can be played out in our groups is through the practice of confidentiality. The 'truth' aspect of trust can apply to speaking truth about what God's Word says about ourselves and our lives, but it can also mean the ability for a person to be open and honest about what they feel or are experiencing. The members of a group want to know that when they are in the group, they can feel safe expressing themselves, with all the pain and dirt that may come with that. They also want to know that their moment of vulnerability will stay within this tight circle of people that they have entrusted this information to.

## DEVELOP

READ JAMES 5:16

A community of faith is a place where we are to be able to be open and honest with one another. Not only when we want to, but when we need to. James tells the early Christians that part of being obedient to Christ is confessing your sins to fellow, trusted believers. He says there is healing that is involved when this happens. Have you ever had something weighing on your mind and heart? Some mistake you made or wrong that you have committed? But then, you confess it, and admit your wrongdoing. Isn't there relief that comes with that? Now it's no longer a secret that is eating at your soul. Now the trust is out there, and the healing can begin.

READ JAMES 4:11-12

However, as much good as having a community that confesses to one another their sins, it cannot and will not occur if there is no trust that what is spoken in the group will stay in the group. There also cannot be fear

of judgment or criticism. James is teaching us that our communities need to be places that are free of criticism and judgment. After all, Jesus teaches that we cannot remove the speck in someone's eye while we have a log in our own. Each of us have things we are struggling with and none of us are sinless. We are to humble and loving to all in our group; it is God's job to judge.

**READ PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4**

Why do we gossip? Why would someone feel the need to listen to a fellow group member pour out their heart, air out their dirty laundry, and then proceed to tell people who have nothing to do with the situation? It could be their own selfish ambition. Sharing information like that can make a person feel important; it can give them attention perhaps they didn't have before. At the end of the day, whatever the reason may be, it is a selfish one that has no regard for the person that is being spoken about. And any time an action is done with a selfish motive, there is so much risk of damage. It can take weeks, months, and even years to build true trust among group members, and yet it can be completely destroyed in a matter of minutes.

**DEEPEN**

What does it take for someone to gain your trust?

Would you say you are a naturally trusting person? Why or why not?

What types of attitudes should we as a group fight for and against in order to gain each other's trust?

What are some practical ways we can consider others as more important than ourselves in this group?

**DREAM**

Revisit the first question and share with each other ways that people can build your trust. Then discuss together as a group about some and way you can begin to use these ideas to build trust among your group.

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# CORE VALUE: CONTAGION

by Clayton Carver

**Leader:** This lesson contains a great opportunity for group members to interact with the text in revealing ways. Encourage group members to share what words/phrases they highlighted. This can give you an idea of what is really going on in their walk with Jesus or lack thereof.

**Group Member:** The reading in this lesson is heavy and personal. Use a highlighter to highlight the phrases/words that stick out to you and then jot down why they stick out. Work through the assigned scripture verses slowly and then in the deepen section engage the state of your heart. Spend time in reflection and be ready to share your reflections with the group at your next group meeting.

## DISCOVER

I once heard a story of a group of men who decided that they were going to start a football team. They organized weekly meetings, they gave each other different roles, and most importantly, they each bought a rule book. Once a week, they would all meet and discuss the rules of football. They came up with plays and strategies that best fit what they say in the rule book. After a time, there were even certain members of the team that could recite parts of or even the entire rule book.

Logically, they decided that the next step would be to hire a coach. Every great team needs a great coach, right? So, they went out and found the best football coach they could find and convinced him to be their coach. At their next meeting, the coach came and introduced himself. His first question, "Alright, boys! When do we start practicing and playing?"

The team looked at their coach in shock. Practicing? Playing? Why would they do that? "Guys, until you get out on the field, you're not really a football team."

So it is with our groups. Meeting weekly is great. Encouraging, praying for, and fellowshiping with your group members is great. Diving deep into the riches of Scripture and seeing what God's Word says is always beneficial. But until those words are put into practice, we are not really being obedient.

## DEVELOP

READ JAMES 1:22-25, 2:14-26 AND MATTHEW 25:31-46

Slowly work through these passages. Grab a highlighter and highlight words and/or phrases that stick out to you.

As one can read from these passages Scripture reveals saving faith demands obedience. Jesus says in John 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commands." If we are going to say we are Christians, it must be true by our both in our words and our actions.

While it is true that there is nothing we can do to earn God's favor or salvation, it is also true that after we are saved there are things we are commanded to do. Our lives after coming to a saving faith in Jesus must look differently than our lives before Jesus. And as both individuals and a community, this means reaching out and making an impact on the lives of those around us.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul calls the Church "the body of Christ." By this, he means that we are all to take our gifts, talents, and interests and leverage them to make an impact on the lost people in our midst. Everything we do in life is meant to glorify Jesus and point people to Him. Some of us may think that we are so small and insignificant that we have no role to play in God's story.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:14-24 WHERE PAUL REFUTES THIS IDEA.

As a Christian, your life is always sending one of two messages: Either God matters or He doesn't. We all have a role to play, and we all can make a difference. At Rush Creek, we use the term "contagious" to describe the type of followers of Jesus we want to be. We want to make such an impact on our neighbors that they are attracted to the difference they see in us, so that they are encouraged to come and follow Jesus right along side us.

## DEEPEN

Use the space below to write down your reflections in the lesson? Below are some prompting statements to help get you started.

- As I think about Jesus' metaphor of sheep and goats I feel.....

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- I desire to help those in need but sometimes I.....

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- I have a strong desire to introduce my friends to Jesus but somehow....

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## DREAM

Take a Spiritual Gifts assessment. You can do this on your own time or at your next group meeting. Afterward, share your results. Make a chart of all the gifts present in your group. Once the chart is complete, discuss ways you can utilize these gifts to serve the lost around you. It could be a non-Christian family member of someone in the group or perhaps someone in the neighborhood where you meet. It could be partnering with a local non-profit organization. The options are limitless. Simply find your gifts and start using them for the Kingdom of God.

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## | End Notes

1. Tony Evans, *Life Essentials*, Moody Publishers, 2003.
2. Steve Gladen, *Leading Small Groups with Purpose*, Baker Books, 2012.