

GRACE GROUPS



Launch Study Guide

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Introduction

“You wish to serve God? Remember that you cannot serve him alone. You must therefore find companions or make them: the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion.” John Wesley

God never intended us to live life alone and apart from community. He wants a relationship with us and wants us to share authentic relationships with others. But our fallen nature tends to do just the opposite — we hide and isolate ourselves from others.

We launch Grace Groups to help repair the broken place of isolation — welcoming you into small groups where you can find safety in authentic spiritual community.



This study helps you begin connecting with one another as you launch or re-launch a group. This group may not provide your best friend or your ultimate companions. But we all must start somewhere and risk sharing our lives with a few others on our journey of faith. Your group offers companions you can connect with as you begin to live out Jesus’ command in John 13:34: “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

When we show up for one another, good things can happen. You can be known and replenished by the encouragement of others. When hurt and paralyzed by life, your group can carry you to Jesus for forgiveness, healing and repair. And as you serve together and learn to follow Jesus, you can be re-launched to use your unique gifts for God’s Kingdom.

Ready to get started? Thanks for giving it a try!

Group Connect

Goal: To meet your group members, understand expectations of Grace Groups and discuss your next six sessions together.

Introductions...15 min Go around and share your names, where you live and how you came to Grace. Why did you sign-up for a group at this time?

Open Door 15 min What characteristics of a group make it a welcoming atmosphere? When was the last time you felt “at home” with a varied group of people?

Dave Rod' Video...10 min Watch Dave Rod's video about isolation. What stands out to you about living life in isolation? Why is isolation so costly? Why aren't secondary relationships enough? Fear often keeps us from primary relationships. So why are we afraid of being known?

“See, I really just want to be known. But I’m not quite as strong as the fear.” Jason Gray, How I Ended Up Here

Michele & Richard Videos...5 min Watch the stories of Michele and Richard on the video. How can you identify with each of their searches for a group? What have been your challenges in finding a safe and welcoming community? How did both Michele and Richard benefit from persevering to find a small group?

Next Steps...20 min Exchange contact information. Decide when and where you'll meet next for the group dinner and what everyone will pitch-in for the meal. Plan to get your own childcare if needed. Plan to discuss future logistics, including how to handle childcare for the group. Pray for God to bless your next six sessions. Prepare for Session 1 by reading pages 6 and 7 before the next meeting.

Session 1: Pitch-In

“They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God...” Acts 2:46b

One of the first things we read about the early church was that they met in their homes to share a meal together...“They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God...” (Acts 2:46b).

Sharing a meal was a sacred thing. It engaged the early church in an act of intimacy, breaking down barriers among diverse people. Jesus chose a meal for us to remember His sacrifice and a banquet among friends to look forward to in heaven.

We hope you experience the intimacy of sharing a meal and begin to understand the importance of everyone pitching in and contributing to the group. Without everyone showing up with their part, something will be missing — even when



eating together. Groups are not a spectator sport. Everyone needs to be engaged and participating.

Enjoy your meal together. Use the time to get to know each other and share about your families. You’ll also need to talk more about the logistics of the coming group sessions including when and where you’ll meet, responsibilities for refreshments and how you plan to handle childcare if needed for your group.

Goal: Share a meal together, discuss group logistics and get to know each other better.

Around the Table...60 min

- What were your least favorite foods growing up?
- What does mealtime look like at your home today?
- Describe your favorite meal.
- Where do you eat meals on Thanksgiving and Christmas?
- Tell us more about your family.
- Why do you think the early church had “glad hearts” as they met together and shared a meal?

Group Logistics...30 min Use the Group Calendar (pg. 21) to discuss the time and location of your next sessions. If you need to discuss childcare, use “Childcare Ideas” (pg. 24) as a guide. Also, look at the Shared Agreement (pg. 22) under “group values” and discuss what it means to have confidentiality that leads to a safe environment. What ways do these values help you develop authentic relationships?

Story Sharing...30 min Life is sacred. And sharing significant life events draw us closer with a greater appreciation for each other. In this session, your leader(s) will each take 15 minutes to share 3 people, 3 places and 3 events that have impacted their life.

Prep and Prayer In the next two sessions, you’ll get a chance to share and hear from others in your group. Start thinking what you’ll share for your 3+3+3 and sign-up for when you’ll share. Use page 9 to work through your 3+3+3. Read page 10 of Session 2 and pray for God to guide your story sharing.

Sharing Sign-up

*Sign-up for a slot in the next two sessions
to tell your story.*

Session 2

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

Session 3

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

We hope you get to know each other better through these sessions. Don't feel like you need a big presentation. Simply identify three people who have played significant roles in your life, three places special to you, and three events that have affected you. By talking about these nine things, your group will begin to get a glimpse of your story. Please prepare ahead and identify these significant people/places/events before your turn. Feel free to bring pictures or other items for illustration. Be creative.

3+3+3 Worksheet

Make a list of three key people, places and events that have impacted your life and plan to share 10-15 minutes.

Key People

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Key Places

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Key Events

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Session 2: Listen

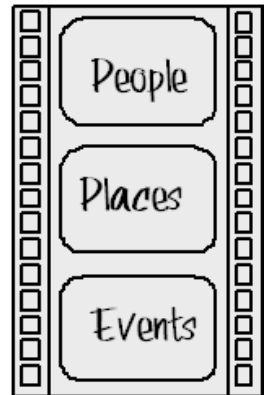
“All of life is a story.” Madeline L’Engle

“Our stories tell us who we are, why we are here, and what we are to do.” Daniel Taylor

“The purposes of a person’s heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out.” Proverbs 20:5

Each of us has a unique life story that matters to God. And since it matters to God, it matters to all of us — especially those companions you travel with on your faith journey.

We may struggle to see the meaning of our stories day by day, but taken as a whole, we begin to see a master theme of a faithful God who shows up along the way. We can miss it unless we look. That’s why we tell our stories in groups. Sharing the drama of our lives – the good, bad and ugly – helps us make sense of a lifetime of people, places and events when we look through the lens of God’s grace.



Telling stories also helps those who listen. According to Hollywood screenwriting teacher, Robert McKee, we go to the movies because we hope to find in someone else’s story something that will help us understand our own. We go “to live in a fictional reality that illuminates our daily reality.” We share. We listen. We reflect. We begin to understand and find meaning.

As a group, we must learn to listen and ask good reflective questions that help clarify and focus. We all play a role — the role of sharing our story, as well as engaging others who share.

Goal: Begin to share about our lives and learn to listen, reflect and appreciate one another's stories.

Welcome...30 min Arrive, chat, mingle and serve refreshments.

Listening...20 min

- Who has been a good listener in your life? Why?
- Based on Proverbs 20:5, what role do we play in helping each other process our stories?
- How do you think someone else's story might help you understand your own?

Group Prayer...10 min Getting to know each other better should give us a growing appreciation for each group member as well as prompt us to pray for their unique life challenges and opportunities. Discuss who might regularly track and distribute group prayer requests, then pray for those sharing their 3+3+3 this session.

Story Sharing...60 min Spend the rest of your group meeting sharing your 3+3+3. Ask reflective questions, but try to keep each story to 10-15 minutes so everyone has a chance to share during these two sessions.

Prep and Prayer In preparation for next time, read page 12 of Session 3 and pray for those sharing their stories next.

Session 3: Encourage

“There is a larger Story. And you have a crucial role to play.” John Eldredge

“He has planted eternity in the human heart.”

Ecclesiastes 3:11

Our life story makes even more sense when we view it in light of a *larger* story – the story of God. It’s not enough to live only for ourselves. God created us to want more. We long to be a part of a bigger purpose because “He has planted eternity in the human heart” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). We begin to satisfy this longing as we see our purpose rooted in God’s eternal purpose that says “Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

God has designed each of us to play a unique kingdom role. Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are God’s masterpiece...created anew in Christ Jesus so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” But we don’t always see our gifts until someone else points them out. As we listen to each other, we can help identify our special strengths and launch them into God’s kingdom revolution.



Hebrews 10:24-25 says: “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds...encouraging one another.” Encourage each other to get involved in God’s mission in the community and the world. Start by identifying what roles different members can take in the group — whether it’s planning service projects, leading worship, organizing schedules or coordinating childcare. No spectators. Everyone helps.

Goal: *Learn to identify and encourage each other in your unique gifts as you listen to one another's stories.*

Welcome...15 min Arrive, chat, mingle and serve refreshments.

Encouraging...20 min

- What were you good at in grade school?
- Who encouraged you?
- Why do we all need encouragement?
- What might the admonition of Hebrews 10:24-25 mean for this group?

Story Sharing...60 min Spend the next hour of your group meeting sharing your 3+3+3. Listen, reflect and encourage as time allows. Keep each story to 10-15 minutes so everyone has a chance to share.

Group Roles...25 min Take a look at the descriptions of Group Roles on page 23. What part can you take? What role might you encourage someone else to try? Try to find a role for everyone. Feel free to share roles or even add roles, if necessary. If you don't finish in the time remaining, have everyone pray about their role and bring potential ideas for next time.

Prep and Prayer Read Philippians 1:3-6 as a prayer and pray for everyone to find their role in this group. In preparation for next time, read page 14 of Session 4.

Session 4: Replenish

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” John

We all need to be replenished. Our hearts leak, our minds get overwhelmed and our souls grow weak. And God makes a way to replenish us through a small community of faith.

A Grace Group loves like Jesus, selflessly showing up with action. The action may be a phone call, visit to the hospital, help to move, sympathy card, support for a mission trip, invitation to dinner or just a warm greeting. This kind of love and acceptance replenishes our significance, character and spiritual life.



Paul gives this instruction on how to be a replenishing community in Ephesians 5: “Be very careful, then, how you live...making the most of every opportunity...be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” When life gets stormy, a Grace Group seeks God’s guidance, remembers His faithfulness and leans on His truth.

Jesus said, “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” Jesus shows up to replenish us when we show up to love one another in spiritual community.

Goal: Learn how we can be a small group that replenishes each other.

Welcome...20 min Arrive, chat, mingle and serve refreshments.

Getting Started...20 min

- To replenish means to resupply or re-fill. How do you need to be replenished today?
- How are we replenished when we selflessly love each other in the same way Jesus loved? (John 13:34)
- Describe an act of love that replenished your life.

Video...16 min Watch Dave Rod's Session 4 message.

Replenish...40 min

- What does Dave say about our two primal needs? How does loving one another in community help replenish these needs?
- Romans 15:7 says, "Accept one another." What do you think Paul means by this? How can acceptance replenish you?
- Read Ephesians 5:15-21. How can these practices help us replenish our character and spiritual life together?
- How can practicing thanksgiving together replenish us?

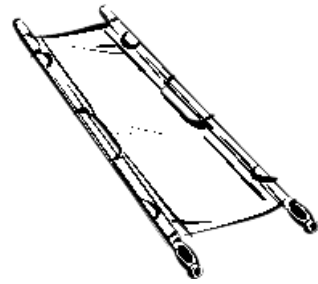
Showing Up...15 min Showing up takes commitment. What are you willing to give up in your busy schedule to enrich this group? Turn to the Shared Agreement on page 22 and discuss your commitments to each other. Will this group and these values be a priority?

Prep and Prayer In preparation for next time, read page 16 of Session 5 and pray for the group to begin to learn how to replenish each other.

Session 5: Repair

“Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them...When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’”

Job loss. Relational conflict. Family troubles. Health crisis. Storms of life can paralyze us with worry, disappointment, doubt and pain. We can't think. We can't pray. We feel alone and drowning in a sea of hurt and confusion. Waves of problems overwhelm us and threaten to sink us. At these times, it becomes more apparent than ever that we need a safe place in a small community where someone else can come alongside us and care for us.



We see this kind of community lived out in Mark 2 when four friends pick up the stretcher of a paralytic and carry him to Jesus – not casually, but with through-the-roof determination and faith that gets him to the Healer. It was because of the stretcher bearers' sacrificial action and belief that led Jesus to tell their paralyzed friend, “your sins are forgiven” and “get up, take your mat and go home.” He was forgiven. He was healed.

We all need these kinds of faithful friends who show up when we're down. We need stretcher bearers who take initiative, stand strong on our behalf, break down barriers and carry us to Jesus with their faith. It may look like a meal. Or a hospital visit. Words of encouragement. Prayers of healing. Whatever the method, this kind of safe community carries broken, paralyzed friends to Jesus for forgiveness and healing. “Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:2)

Goal: *Learn how to bear each other's burdens and create a place of safety, forgiveness, healing and repair.*

Welcome...20 min Arrive, chat, mingle and serve refreshments.

Getting Started...20 min Describe a time when you were paralyzed by the storms of life and a friend came alongside to carry you. What did they do? How did you feel?

Video...22 min Watch David Bell's message "Repair."

Carried...40 min

- What stood out most to you from what David said?
- Read Mark 2:1-12 and discuss your reaction to this event as:
1) Paralytic; 2) Friend; 3) By stander; 4) Jesus
- Why do you think these friends showed such determination?
- What does it take to be a friend like this? Have friends like this?

Rick and Julie...15 min Watch the five minute video about the Santiago's, then discuss it. What acts of selfless action on each other's behalf would you like to see characterized in your group? Review the Group Value of "Safe Environment" in the Shared Agreement on page 22. Can everyone agree to this? What other values can make your group a safe place of repair where you carry each other to Jesus for forgiveness and healing?

Prep and Prayer Pray that the group can become a place of forgiveness, healing and repair. In preparation for the next meeting, read page 18 of Session 6.

Session 6: Relaunch

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.” Hebrews 10:24

It's easy to quit. We have good intentions to meet in spiritual community. But we find a hundred different reasons to drift back into isolation. We're too busy. Too tired. Too distracted. Overwhelmed with life. Sapped by kids.

Disillusioned by over-talkers and extra-needly members. Losing interest and questioning your group's value.



In Hebrews 10, Paul addressed a similar issue that arose in the first century church and resulted in a bad habit of people giving up meeting together. Paul goes on to say there never was a worse time for isolation as they faced tough times of injustice, pain, hatred, unrest and persecution. With that day approaching, he said re-up your commitment to spur each other on to love and good deeds.

The idea of “spur” means both to encourage like a cheerleader and to exhort like a coach. We need both kinds of encouragement to find our true calling and destiny. We need each other to see what we can't see alone. We may journey into our harbor to be replenished and repaired. But ultimately God wants to spur us on through our spiritual community and re-launch us to accomplish His Kingdom purpose. In a harbor, we can come to understand Ephesians 2:10: “...for we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.”

Goal: *Learn how to spur each other on toward love and good deeds.*

Welcome...20 min Arrive, chat, mingle and serve refreshments.

Getting Started...20 min

- Why does it seem so easy to quit meeting in spiritual community?
- What's the biggest issue for you to guard against drifting back into isolation?

Video...10 min Watch Dave 'Rod's message "Relaunch."

Spur One Another...10 min

Read Hebrews 10:24-25. What was it that Paul wanted to spur on in this community? According to Dave, why was this so important then and now? How can a group impact your calling and destiny? How can this group be involved in helping members find their calling and serve God's Kingdom?

Committed to Serving...15 min How might we serve one another inside this group for the common good? How might we serve outside this group at the Care Center or with a Grace Frontline partner? Commit in your Shared Agreement to ways you will serve inside and outside this group.

Partnering with Grace...Invite your Coach to your next session to celebrate theses last 6 weeks, review your Shared Agreement and talk about next steps. See page 25 for more information about partnering in ministry with Grace Groups.

Next Steps As Disciples

“The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them.” Matthew 21:6

We believe making disciples of Jesus is our primary goal at Grace and groups should learn to engage in the following 11 practices of an ordinary disciple. We organize all our group curriculum by these practices. To determine what curriculum to focus on next in your group, ask members to circle three of the following practices that they would like to work on. Compare your results and try to find similarities. Then choose a study for that practice from our Grace Groups’ Curriculum Guide available on our website.

1. Practices surrender and trust
2. Practices disengagement from their routines and distractions in order to commune with God
3. Practices self-denial
4. Seeks the call of God on their lives
5. Practices moral integrity
6. Engages in lifestyles of justice and mercy
7. Practices material generosity
8. Engages the Word of God and good Biblical teaching that will transform their lives
9. Leads others to follow Jesus
10. Loves others appropriately
11. Committed to living in community through the local church

As we connect with each other in a group, we hope you can grow deeper into a Way of Discipleship relationship where a group member invites another member to explore these 11 practices in-depth. You can learn more about The Way of Discipleship on our website.

Group Calendar

Use this worksheet to plan when and where your group will meet during your launch sessions.

Meeting Date	Location	Session
		Session 1: Pitch-In
		Session 2: Listen
		Session 3: Encourage
		Session 4: Replenish
		Session 5: Repair
		Session 6: Re-launch
		Celebrate & Next Steps

Shared Agreement

"...and they were all with one accord..." Ephesians 5:12

Expectations met by good planning can make all the difference in a group having a good long-term experience. Start now to discuss your Shared Agreement with these suggested topics.

Purpose

Do we agree that the primary purpose of our Grace Group is to be a safe community where members can be replenished, repaired and re-launched into the mission of God through care and prayer for each other, studying the practices of an ordinary disciple of Jesus and living out the mission of Grace?

Values

Do we agree to create a safe place to be heard and feel loved, keep everything in the group confidential, give permission to help each other live a healthy spiritual life and make our gatherings a priority, calling on the rare occasion when we can't attend?

Logistics

Do we agree to work through our meeting logistics, schedule, location and curriculum so we can commit to showing up and participating regularly?

Roles

Do we agree that every member will serve a role in our group — no spectators? Do we agree what role each member will serve?

Group Roles

Every member counts in a group. So start now to discuss what each member can contribute. Remember — no spectators!

Role	Description	Group Member
Leader	Primary shepherd and contact with the church	
Co-Leader	Share responsibility for leading	
Organization	Schedule meetings, plan special events	
Prayer	Track and distribute prayer requests	
Worship	Lead group into praise and adoration	
Service	Plan and coordinate service projects	
Administration	Update group information with online database	
Relationships	Champion sharing times, life stories and socials for men,	
Childcare	Coordinate care and involvement of children	
Discipler	Leads another member through The Way of Discipleship	

Caring for Children

If you're like most groups, deciding what to do with your children during the time your group meets can be a challenge. But it can also be a great opportunity for your children. As your group works through childcare, here are a few things to keep in mind. First, work together. This is a great opportunity to practice listening to one another and working together to come up with a solution that works for everyone. Second, every solution will be as unique as the makeup of the group. What works for one group may be a complete disaster in another. There is no right answer for every group. Finally, what works right now won't necessarily work always. The situation keeps changing as the kids continue to grow and change. Be flexible and keep assessing your situation.

Top 4 Ways Groups Handle Childcare

1. Each couple arranges their own childcare.
2. Bring children to the group and get a sitter.
3. Involve the children in the group time.
4. Meet periodically as men-only or women-only so spouses can stay home with kids.

Questions for Your Group to Discuss

- What's our general approach to handling childcare?
- How often will we involve the kids? What's our schedule?
- At what age should parents no longer bring children with them to the group?
- If we're handling childcare as a group:
 - ◊ Where should the childcare be provided?
 - ◊ How will we handle the money?
 - ◊ What training should the childcare providers have?
 - ◊ What resources or schedule should the children have, if any?

Grace Groups Support Structure

Grace Groups provide the first line of support and pastoral care for adults at Grace. The care structure begins with those in the group. Members of the body care for themselves and show up for the ups and downs of life. When situations need extra care, your Coach can help you access the many resources available at Grace. Coaches function as your first connection to our Grace Groups ministry. As you invite your Coach to your group, they can get to know your members, pray for your group, make curriculum suggestions, work with you to keep your members known in Grace's pastoral care database and overall, help you make the most of your Grace Group.

In addition to your Coach, the Grace Groups ministry has a staff, including a Director of Operations and Associate Pastors that oversee campus teams of Coaches and over 150 groups that meet in Hamilton County, the north side of Indianapolis and in surrounding communities.

Grace Groups also provides information, support and resources on the Grace website online at gracechurch.us/groups.

Contact for More Information

Coach: _____

Director of Operations — Linda Flatt (x345): lindaf@gracechurch.us

Pastoral Staff:

Kevin Roth, Fishers (x253): kevinr@gracechurch.us

Lisa Telford, North Indy (x218): lisat@gracechurch.us

Brian Daily, 146th Street (x342): briand@gracechurch.us

GRACE
GROUPS

*5504 East 146th Street
Noblesville, Indiana 46062
(317) 848-2722
gracechurch.us/groups*

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