



GROWING OUR CHURCH FAMILY: Overview

Pastor Derek Sanford

August 2023

This series reminds us that the picture Jesus gave us of the family of God is not a tribe of people who all look alike, but of a commitment to discipleship in the context of community. We will explore what it means to be the church: devoted, connected, and disciplined brothers and sisters on mission together.

The last week of the series we will learn about how to go from hearing to doing. One way that LifeGroups can do this is through Adopt a Missionary with our mission's team (<https://whoisgrace.com/adoptamissionary>). There are three levels of partnership that could work for different commitment levels in a LifeGroup.

We would love to hear stories of how your group has grown in the last few years, could you share them with us by emailing Jana Burrus (janaburruss@whoisgrace.com)? It could be something as simple as one group who recently shared that a few members feared praying out loud, but they tried it and are committed to growing in prayer over the summer. Thanks so much for sharing what God is doing!



GROWING OUR CHURCH FAMILY: Jesus' Revolutionary Perspective on Family

Pastor Derek Sanford

August 6, 2023

Life Group Discussion

Encouragement: Share about someone who has been instrumental in your faith journey. What is it about your relationship with them that has helped you connect more deeply with God?

Scripture:

Read [Ephesians 2:14-22](#) and [1 Timothy 3:14-15](#). The Greek words translated as 'household' and 'of the household' in these passages mean 'all the persons forming one family,' and 'belonging to a family.' If we are disciples of Jesus, we have two families.

- What does it mean for fellow believers to be *family*, not just common members of an organization? What can we learn about the purpose of God's family from these passages?

Read [Mark 3:31-35](#), [Matthew 10:34-39](#) and [John 19:26-27](#).

- In Jesus' definition of family, what connects or unifies brothers and sisters? What is your reaction to His emphasis on spiritual family over natural family?
- The passage in John shows us that Jesus didn't abandon or disregard His earthly family. How can we reconcile this with His teaching in Mark 3?
- When have you been challenged to choose between an earthly relationship priority and following Jesus? What did you learn about life in God's family through that experience?

Read [John 13:34-35](#), [Romans 12:9-13](#), [Galatians 5:13-14](#) and [1 Peter 4:8-10](#).

- What do the Scriptures teach us about how the members of God's family are meant to relate to one another? How is this different from what our culture suggests?
- What are some ways our Life Group loves each other well? How can we continue to deepen our interactions to look more and more like Jesus' family?

Read [Ephesians 3:6-15](#) and [Revelation 5:9-10](#). Jesus came to unite people from every tribe and nation into one beautifully diverse family. Our human nature tempts us to gather with people most like us, but the Scriptures are clear that it is through His family, His Church, that He will draw all people to Himself.

- What is the difference between unity and uniformity? How can we as a Life Group grow in both unity and diversity?

Prayer:



For the Church: Spend some time praying for unity of Spirit between churches in different communities and denominations.

For our Group: Seek God for guidance on how to delve deeper in relationships with one another, and how to extend His family beyond your current Life Group members.

Next Steps: Challenge each member of your Life Group family to intentionally share the love of Jesus with someone outside of his/her typical circle of friends and family this week.



GROWING OUR CHURCH FAMILY: Devoted: from rows to circles

Pastor Derek Sanford

August 13, 2023

Life Group Discussion

Encouragement: Celebrate your group today! How long have we been a life group? What have been the most memorable moments (serious and funny.) How have we grown together?

Scripture: [Acts 2:42-46](#)

- Verse 42 says, “devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship”. In a LifeGroup setting what does being devoted look like?
- A life group should be more than a social gathering, and more than a place to share our own opinions. How can a group know that they are devoted to the teaching of Scriptures? What are some practices we do/or could incorporate to be sure that our discussions are Scripture centered?
- “What is your reaction to the idea of having “all things in common.” What should that look like for us?
- In this week’s message we were encouraged to devote ourselves to pursuing God’s presence and prayer (vs42- “breaking of bread and prayer). What are ways that we can pursue God’s presence as a group? Is there anything we should change about the way we pray as a group? What change can we take today as a first step?
- In this passage we read things like “awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done” and “the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” If there is anything holding us back from having similar experiences, what would it be? - What could we do this year to be more outward focused? (ie. To add more to our group, to help more people follow Jesus, to meet needs.)

Prayer:

For the Church: Pray for LifeGroups as whole - for new leaders, new groups, those who need to join a group, LifeGroup Leadership, and struggling groups.

For our Group: Ask, “What would we like to see God do in our Group, this year?” After some discussion, have a person or persons pray.

Next Steps: What is one thing we can each do this week that will help our group look a little more like Acts 2:42-46?



GROWING OUR CHURCH FAMILY: Connected: From Believing to Belonging

Pastor Derek Sanford

August 20, 2023

Life Group Discussion:

Encouragement: The Bible says we are put together, joined together, built together, members together, heirs together, fitted together, and held together and will be caught up together. We were made to belong. How have those ideas resonated with you in your time as a Christian?

Scripture:

Read [Hebrews 10: 24-25](#) , [Titus 2:14](#) , and [Acts 2:42-47](#)

God Himself placed within all of us all a deep yearning for true community—a God-given appetite for honest and authentic connection with others. A desire to belong.

- How do we seek that connection in our lives (in and outside the church)?
- How do you each find community and connection (in and outside the church)?
- Other than LifeGroup what other groups do you belong to? (eg. Working groups, volunteer groups, etc.)
- How do those groups fill a need in your life?
- How can our group create a better sense of belonging? How can we invite others to experience this belonging?

Prayer:

For the Church: Pray that Grace Church grows in community and that people join Life Groups for the family to grow.

For our Group: Pray for your group's specific needs; lift up the group members and pray they experience more intimacy in the group.

Next Steps: Have your group think about expanding. Encourage group members to help lead the group in a specific way (think about gifts and passions).



GROWING OUR CHURCH FAMILY: From Hearing to doing

Pastor Derek Sanford

August 27, 2023

Life Group Discussion

Encouragement: What is the difference between someone who *does* God's word and someone who only *hears* it? Who is someone in your life who has been a good example of living out God's word?

Scripture:

Read [Matthew 28:18-20](#).

- These verses are referred to as the Great Commission. This means that Jesus was commissioning (or giving his official charge of what they were to do) them to make disciples. How is our group doing at making disciples?
- Who are the people in our spheres of influence that we can regularly pray for opportunities to have spiritual conversations with?

Read [James 1:27](#), [James 2:14-26](#), [Matthew 25:31-46](#).

- What role does "works" play in our faith? (Hint: works cannot save us, only Jesus can, but works are fruit/evidence of our faith)
- How is our group doing at serving our local community? What is one step we could take in the next year to grow in serving our community? Make sure to encourage everyone to put the dates on their calendar!
- How is our group doing at helping those in need throughout the world? Is there an organization or missionary we could partner with? (Check out <https://whoisgrace.com/adoptamissionary> to consider Adopting one of our missionary partners.)

Prayer:

For the Church: Pray that Grace Church continues to be a witness to our Erie community through the partnerships and service through ServErie. Pray for more churches and organizations to partner with us in meeting local needs.

For our Group: Pray for the opportunities to serve in the fall and for people to learn about Jesus through living out your faith.

Next Steps: What is one thing your group can do right now to serve locally?