



Community Group Study Notes

Spring 2016

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WHAT IS A COMMUNITY GROUP?

A Community Group is a group of (ideally) 8–15 people who live life together on mission. Every Community Group meets regularly throughout the week to unpack and apply God’s Word to their lives, pray, and simply do ordinary life together with gospel intentionality.

A Community Group is the intentional organizing of the scattered church, the people of WPC. This means that we define what a Community Group is and does according to how God defines what His Church is and does. Therefore, the best way to understand a Community Group is to understand a biblical, gospel-centred definition of the Church.

FOUR COMPONENTS OF A HEALTHY COMMUNITY GROUP

1. DEVOTED TO THE WORD AND PRAYER

Community Groups are more than Bible studies, but the Scriptures are central to our life together. What we study in Scripture leads us to worship Jesus, to love one another, and to live missionally.

Prayer is a gift from God to us. It is an opportunity to communicate with the Creator of the universe. We have the ability to praise Him, confess our sin, ask for His provision and listening for His response. Our Community Groups should be marked by a praying culture.

2. DEVOTED TO MISSION

Mission among those who are yet to come to Jesus often looks like simple acts of engagement and service within our neighbourhoods for the glory of Jesus and the advancement of God’s Kingdom. This is the outward focus of your group: to love people and share the truth of the gospel through the witness of your life together. This should be a consistent focus of your Community Group in both prayer and action.

3. DEVOTED TO COMMUNITY

Community Groups are places where we can know others and in turn allow ourselves to truly be known. In our devotion to pursuing community as a church family, we will grow more like Jesus.

4. DEVOTED TO REPLICATING

God has tasked His Church with the job of discipleship, which means multiplication. We believe that if the previous three components are put in place and faithfully followed out, our Community Groups will grow fruitfully. But we aren't merely talking about numerical growth; we are talking about growth in depth in the life of each disciple. When individual Community Groups grow in number, we have the need to start new ones - which we love to do!

IF YOU ARE NOT A MEMBER OF A COMMUNITY GROUP PLEASE EMAIL STEVE (33 CAMPUS), CURTIS (SOUTH) OR DOUG (CREEKSIDE).

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COMMUNITY GROUP LEADERS INSTRUCTIONS

In preparation for each study, take a few moments to read through the instructions below and listen to the message online and take some notes. The message can be found online at willowparkchurch.com

Before the Group Meeting

As you prepare for the CG, work through the questions and consider how you might answer them.

1. Take notes from the message connected to the CG session. Take special note of any extra scriptures that you may want to refer to in your group.

2. Spend time in prayer asking God to help you as lead.
3. Think through ways you can help your group apply what is being taught instead of simply knowing what's been taught. Write down two or three ideas that might be helpful.
4. Ask the Lord to move powerfully in the personal lives of each CG member and also in your time together.

At the Group Meeting

1. Begin with prayer. Confess your need for the Spirit's help.
2. Attempt to summarize the week's lesson in a few quick thoughts. Spend some time asking your group about the personal study and what they found interesting, convicting or encouraging.
3. Assign readers for the sections of Nehemiah and supplemental passages that week.
4. Walk your group through the questions. Use the Leader Guide to help facilitate the discussion. Don't feel obligated to cover every single question. At times, there will be healthy digression. At other times, you will need to keep the group on track. Be sensitive to the flow of conversation and keep it moving in a healthy direction.
5. Share your thoughts on how you and your group can apply the lesson. Help the group formulate ideas for reading, studying and meditating on the Scriptures.
6. End in a time of prayer. Ask God to strengthen you to obedience, increasing your depth of life, experience and enjoyment of Him

BACKGROUND TO PHILIPPIANS

What is Paul's purpose for the letter to the church in Philippi?

In this series we'll examine this heart-warming letter, written whilst Paul was imprisoned (*circa* 61-63 C.E.). Where he was awaiting a life verdict is unsure. Most commentators agree he was in Rome, but a few argue for Caesarea (a very weak argument; recall his 2 years in prison under Festus in Acts) or Ephesus (very strong argument). Regardless, Paul waits for his sentencing, has some light freedoms, and is able to write various letters to the churches that he established throughout Macedonia (Eastern Mediterranean area).

Philippi was named after Philip of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great, who seized it in 356 B.C.E. Later developments saw the Romans take it over in 168 B.C.E., eventually establishing it as a military city, distinctly Roman with full rights and privileges granted to its inhabitants, yet not large enough to support a synagogue. Thus, we can better understand why Paul, about 11 years earlier, met Lydia (Acts) near a popular water place that also served as a place of prayer and congregation by the few Jews who lived in the area.

An established church at this point, with leadership in place (note that the Greek terms used in this letter capitalize on the Roman military influence in the city), Paul already has endeared himself to the Philippian church and vice versa.

This is a letter borne out of compassion and concern as much as out of brotherly love for the church. Indeed, Epaphroditus' situation turned grave because of a physical illness that nearly killed him.

As you read the letter, referred to by some commentators as the "epistle of joy," consider the apostle as a man who has a deep affection for this small church and for this young man whose life was momentarily and harrowingly in the balance.

JOY Part 1

Title: Stopping the leaks

Reference: Phil 1

Big Idea:

There is a great challenge we face in both our life and journey of faith, to live first and foremost for the living God. The challenge is to stay focused, concentrated on Him for everything.

1. Take a few moments and reflect on your own personal faith experience. What were those moments that brought you joy?
2. Make a note of the times along your life journey that could be designated as events that robbed you of your joy. In other words, what events took you “off the rails,” “on a roller coaster ride,” or left you “flat-lined,” etc.? How or why did they steal your joy? What got you “back on track?”
3. The apostle Paul speaks generally about knowing the mystery of Christ. How specifically can you “stop the leaks” that distract you from knowing Christ and thereby rob your joy?
4. Some writers will argue that we have all been wounded and that those wounds play a big part in our behaviour and walk in the Spirit, and can be linked to ongoing joy robbers. What are some recurring leaks or thieves of your joy? Why do they persist? How do these leaks tie in with an event or events in your past?
5. What could you believe and do (e.g., act on) that could mitigate, if not release you from, those leaks and to enjoy walking in continuous joy as the apostle Paul?

JOY Part 3

Title:

Staying Focussed

Reference:

Phil 1:12-26

Big Idea:

With so many things all around us that vie for our attention and desire, it can be a struggle to return to our first love either regularly or consistently.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Paul summarizes some key events concerning existence. What are they?
2. What would you say is the purpose of Paul's summary of those events?
3. How do you see these verses in connection to mission work, both locally (the Okanagan) and further abroad?
4. Discuss or consider the impact, or lack thereof, of these verses on your life?
5. What practical habits could you start to form that would enable you to keep Jesus as your main focus? How could you keep one another accountable in those things? How do these habits produce joy in our lives?

JOY Part 4

Title:

Being in the Fight

Reference:

Phil 1:27 - 30

Big Idea:

It can be difficult to appreciate the extent of the spiritual battle that surrounds us 24/7. And that spiritual battle actually spills out into our world. Without the Holy Spirit as our strength and the Word of God to direct us, the battle can be exhausting. Yet, there's a joy that the apostle Paul speaks of even in the midst of battle.

Questions for Discussion:

1. The apostle Paul's comments in 1:29 – 2:8 allude to battle and combat. What's that talking about?
2. As you consider the battle terminology for those verses and take in the whole picture, what other passages in the Bible come to mind? Compare and discuss.
3. "Battles" in human life abound and seem to vary from person to person. Notice in the New Testament there isn't a record of wars as in the OT times. The 21st C seems to be more concerned with personal battles, afflictions, or psychological issues. What are some of the battles that you've come across in your life?
4. What are ways and means of dealing effectively with our battles and how are they joy producing??
5. What do we need to believe?

JOY Part 5

Title:

Having the right mind

Reference:

Phil 2:1-11

Big Idea:

It's hard to be humble or to have steady, clear thoughts when there are conditions and events in our lives that either work against us or fan the flame of self-centeredness. Nevertheless, there's joy to be had as we seek humility.

1. What is your understanding of humility? In other words... what does humility look like to you that you believe others ought to practice? What does humility look like to you for yourself?
2. There's something unifying to the body of Christ in these verses. What are some other verses in the scriptures that speak about humility and pride? Consider making a list of verses for each of those two, contrasting elements. What are the positive statements and what are the descriptive, negative statements? (CG leaders - be ready with some examples.)
3. Where do pride and humility come from? What is the root of these two attitudes?
4. How could we combat pride and foster humility without becoming proud of your humility (!)?
5. What is the kind of personal attitude that God tell us in His Word He wants?
6. How do you "get it?" And how does it result in joy for us?
7. What is the role of the "right mind" in this? In fact, what does it mean to have "the right mind"?

JOY Part 6

Title:

Working out Regularly.

Reference:

Phil 2:12-30

Big Idea:

We live in a workout culture as a kind of cult of the body. Even self-help books and YouTube videos pander to improving self as though it is all about My Self. We see something different in Philippians about what it means to work out with the Lord as our focus instead.

1. Phil 2:12 - One of the more misapplied and misunderstood English translations in evangelical Christianity is that our salvation really comes down to works. You get saved and then you have to “work it out.” What does that mean to you?
2. Now consider the whole of verse 12 and 13 as a unit, which they are intended to be. How do you make sense of “working *at* (a truer translation of the Greek) your salvation with fear and trembling... [continuously], because it is God who produces in you both the will and the action, according to His good pleasure”?
3. What does trying harder or following lists do for you (7 tips, tricks and techniques to having a better Christian life)? Do lists work? Why and how, or why not?
4. What’s at the heart of this “working at...” and how do we do it?
5. How does working out our salvation bring true joy?
6. What can you do this week to work out your salvation?

JOY Part 7

Title:

Chasing the Dream

Reference:

Phil 3:1-11

Big Idea:

Being in the culture has its benefits for God’s people. Recall God’s communication to Israel when the people were sent into exile, in essence to carry on living there (Babylon, Susa, etc.) and to prosper. Life, for about 70 years, was good (in the Babylonian exile at least). And it also had many drawbacks or challenges. We hear of the “American dream” while in Canada, as perhaps throughout the rest of the world, the “dream” is to achieve something worthwhile in one’s life, which varies from person to person. In the past few decades the Christian community, beginning in the USA then spreading northward, has got caught up in the pursuit of wealth and the promise of divine blessings by “naming” and believing. Is that what God really wants both for us and from us?

1. What is the magnetism of earthly riches or things?
2. Larry Crabb, a Christian psychologist, counselor and author, told a story of having come upon a Buddhist monk on a park bench. As he chatted with the monk, Crabb asked him how his meditation was going. The monk replied that it wasn’t going as well as he wanted because he kept having troubling thoughts; he found his thoughts kept returning to things. He wanted more stuff. Living in Canada, especially (?) in the Okanagan, it’s easy for some people to get caught up in “wanting more stuff.” How do you deal with that? Do you struggle with wanting more stuff, more riches?
3. How do you understand the counter-cultural teaching of the Bible about where real wealth lies?
4. What vital verses speak to spiritual wealth and chasing a higher dream? (CG Leaders - have some ready:)
5. How does having your focus and treasure in Jesus produce true joy?
6. How can you apply them in your life this week?

JOY Part 8

Title:

Being on the winning team

Reference:

Phil 3:12-16

Big Idea

The apostle Paul capitalizes on a sport analogy (not too far from the home of the original Olympic games) about having a higher goal for our lives. Setting higher goals requires working towards them, incrementally perhaps, but with focus, effort and determination. There is a colossal difference between goals for living on earth, and living with heaven in mind. Our culture encourages highly successful goal-setters to prepare for a life of eventual retirement, comfort and enjoyment. However, eternity requires a different kind of internal preparation. Earthly goals are good - even the apostle Paul agrees with that, but it's only for a "short time".

1. What is the point of setting any goals for our lifetime if it's all covered with the "dust of death" anyway?
2. What do we need to keep in mind as we both set and pursue lifetime goals?
3. How do you understand the encouragement about winning the race set before us?
What is that race?
4. Why is it a race?
5. What areas in your life, that you're aware of, are in need of reworking to bring them in line with Paul's race analogy? That is, what needs to change so that you're constantly in training? How does this produce joy?
6. How can you sustain a level of training that adequately prepares you for the life to come? Or are you satisfied with your training regimen?
7. What are some pitfalls of focusing on training and running the race?
8. How can you guard against falling into the temptation of *doing over being*?

JOY Part 9

Title:

Looking to the future

Reference:

Phil 3:17-21

Big Idea

Following on from part 8, winning the race set before us, this session ties in with a greater focus on the purpose of our life. This life constantly presents us with a host of challenges and attractions, many of which are very enticing.

1. The “now” has a lot of positive benefits. How do you guard against getting caught in the now so that this life becomes the main focus?
2. Does this life “happen” for you and you find yourself being carried along as a kind of default activity? Discuss how it does or doesn’t (for the encouragement of others).
3. What do you have in place in your daily living that helps you to stay focused on heaven, on spiritual things?
4. How does this produce joy for you?

SOURCES

As with any Bible study and drawing from resources online, numerous sites offer commentary but not all of them are worthwhile, whether because they are simplistic or they're associated with aberrant or questionable theology or because they provide little substance. Hence, many more readings are available and have been assessed but not listed here:

Philippians. *The Bible Study App (Version 5.4.3.1)*. Olive Tree. ESV.

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Guthrie, Donald (1979). *The Epistle to the Philippians. New Testament Introduction*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity.

http://executableoutlines.com/ph/ph_01.htm (accessed March 23, 2016).

<https://bible.org/series/teaching-outlines-book-philippians> (accessed March 23, 2016).

<http://www.believersweb.org/view.cfm?ID=814> (accessed March 26, 2016).

<http://www.expositorysermonoutlines.com/textual/four-points-of-philippians.pdf> (accessed March 26, 2016).

<http://floralheightschurchofchrist.org/Class%20-%20Bible%20Books/Philippians.pdf> (accessed March 26, 2016).

http://lakesidechurch.com/docs/mens_studyguide.pdf (Accessed March 27, 2016).

http://www.grace-bible.org/uploads/publications/Philippians_web_13.pdf (accessed March 27, 2016).

<http://www.jesuswalk.com/philippians/philippians-inductive-questions.pdf> (Accessed March 27, 2016).

http://preceptaustin.org/philippians_commentaries.htm (Accessed March 27, 2016).