

CULTIVATE COMMUNITIES

PLANNING A “NORMAL” WEEKLY MEETING

How can the weekly meeting of your Cultivate Community become more than just an agenda item on everyone’s planner? How is it more than just a ‘thing’ you lead?

Think of your weekly community meeting as the “garden plot” of missional leadership. A weak or disorganized weekly gathering produces similar results. An intense and over structured meeting can suck the life out of what should be a relational time of saints and skeptics with Jesus at the center. The point is not to have a great meeting (“garden plot”) but to leverage the space and time for God to grow a fruitful garden of disciples who make disciples. This meeting is the foundational building block of community. Typically, the life of your Cultivate Community outside that time will flow from this structured time.

This is a simple guide to what a typical community gathering looks like. Within each element, you will find ample room for creativity and intentionality. Begin by praying that the Holy Spirit animates each moment and the gospel is made clear through each activity.

BEFORE THE NIGHT

Believe it or not, there is work to be done before everyone arrives at the host home or gathering spot. Here are 3 crucial steps for each week:

1. Planning

It is important to plan out the purpose of that week’s meeting. What will be the 1 big goal you have for that time? What will be necessary? Who will be leading the discussion? How will you pursue that goal in the limited time your community has together? How can everyone prepare?

This weekly purpose is most easily done by thinking about the entire month. Toward the end of the month, take an evening with your Cultivate Community to plan the next month, week-by-week, and how each week fits with the other, who will lead each week, etc. This really alleviates leadership stress! (**Use the “Cultivate Community Weekly**

Planner” to help)

2. Communication

Tell everyone in the group what the plan is for the evening. What the focus will be, what you will be doing, and what to bring for food. Try to communicate early in the week so no one has to run to the store at the last minute to bring a dish. This is where a good communications person who thinks ahead is really helpful.

Preparation

The person leading the intentional time will need to prepare to lead. The host needs to prepare the home. Each participant needs to prepare their hearts and food to share. The leaders pray. A community has to prepare itself to experience community.

GATHERING & EATING – 1 HOUR

The weekly meeting begins by gathering together. This is the moment when everyone’s individual responsibilities, schedules, and to-do lists collide into an expression of community. The worries, struggles, fears, and happy news of each member comes rushing through the door. Your lives are hurried until this point. Your lives are physically separate until this moment.

A weekly meal is more than a logistic to work out but a spiritual discipline of being united. You are physically united by the table you gather around, the complete meal everyone shares in and contributes to, and under the prayer recognizing God’s grace as you eat.

Furthermore, this is more than a Christian dinner party. It is a gathering of those hungering and thirsting for Jesus. Through the meal, we engage one another as family in Christ and we engage Christ. This is a fantastic space to grow in your love for one another. Let the conversations around the dinner table be focused and important.

Embrace this moment with honesty. As a leader, spark the conversation to be about more than the movies people watch and the latest sports scores.

Tips for Making This Time Meaningful:

- Ask each other how the week is going and expect long honest answers.
- Ask everyone a common question that will lead to deeper understanding of each other: *What is your favorite summer memory from childhood? How do you prepare for the Christmas holidays?*
- Ask about how each person is processing the sermon from Sunday, or about any follow-up to activities you did as a group the week before, circle back to past hardships people have shared or past prayer requests.
- Ask simple things to like: *What are you thankful for today? What was the hardest part of your day today?*
- Have a person or couple in the “spotlight” where they are able to share in more depth their story, current spot in life, and what they are going through with the community having the chance to pray for them.
- Engage the children that are present to make them feel like they are equal members in the family. If kids are older, ask them to come up with a question they could ask others during the meal.

TRANSITION & ANNOUNCEMENTS – 10 MINUTES

After the meal, you will transition to a more focused time that isn’t disrupted by eating and the excitement of getting together. Believe it or not, transitioning from the lively and sporadic conversation of the table to the a more intentional conversation can be the most difficult part of leading a community. This is when your anxiety of pleasing people will come through. This is when the desire to take control takes over. This is when leaders often lose track of time.

One of the best ways to signal a shift in gathering is with announcements. You want to have a time when the community can communicate about life happening outside. This is the time to share about upcoming opportunities to serve others, parties where neighbors may be invited, what’s happening in the church as a whole, and upcoming meal plans. This is also the chance to ask everyone: *What’s coming up with you in the next couple weeks?*

Tips for Transitions: These things may help create a clear marker and shift in the evening.

- Dismiss the children to their activities and time (if this is something your community has decided to do).
- Clean up from dinner
- If necessary, physically move from sitting at the table to sitting in the living room.

INTENTIONAL & FOCUSED TIME – 45 MINUTES

You have gathered from separate lives and brought your lives into unity over a meal. You have discussed how your life together will spill out into other arenas through announcements. Now it is time to do something purposeful together. For a precious 45 minutes your community will share the spiritual practices of learning to follow Jesus. You will do this together. This is special.

Will this be an evening when your community will do something to grow in its identity as the FAMILY of God? In its identity as DISCIPLES of Jesus? In its identity as MISSIONARIES of the Spirit? Here are just a few ideas of things you could do. However, this is a space to be creative and your ideas will be better for you than mine because they will be yours.

Growing together in Our FAMILY Identity (As Beloved Children of God):

- A time of communal prayer.
- A time of reading and reflecting on the Scriptures together.
- A time of confession on where we are with struggles, belief/doubt, mission, relationships, or simply following Jesus. This would be followed by a time of confessing God's faithfulness.
- A time of worship through singing, discussion, or some other creative way to worship God together.

Growing in our FAMILY Identity (As Brothers and Sister in Christ)

- Play games together that engage everyone in the group.
- Celebrate a birthday, anniversary or special event in someone's life. Be sure to share all the ways you see Jesus in them or things you appreciate about the person/people.
- Help with a home or car project at someone's house.
- Go to the park together.

Growing together in Our MISSIONARY Identity (Sent & Empowered

Ones)

- Have a time of prayer for those in your common mission. Consider doing a prayer walk around the neighborhood, asking God to give you eyes to see and feel what he sees and feels.
- Plan a party or event you can invite friends, family, co-workers to join in. Decide what the goal of the event will be, what questions you'll ask, etc.
- Have a conversation about what your community is learning about itself while on mission and about people. What has been challenging.
- Discover a common need within your mission field and serve to meet that need together. (i.e. cleaning a park, painting a school, etc.)

Growing together in Our DISCIPLE Identity (Following Jesus in all of life)

- Discussion on what spiritual gifts, skills, or resources your Cultivate Community has to offer one another and those you are on mission to.
- Discussion of a book or article that addresses a common need in your CC for growth (i.e. marriage, parenting, studying the Bible, listening to the Spirit, Gospel Fluency, etc.) – **See "Cultivate Community Resource Guide" for ideas**

SCATTERING & SENDING – 2 MINUTES

Then comes the moment when the evening is done and it is time to leave and re-scatter.

Close your time together by praying for the lives you will now live physically separated but spiritually unified. Pray a commissioning prayer as your community leaves and goes their separate ways. Pray for your group members to be filled by the Spirit. Pray for the children, parents, students, teachers, and coworkers that will be changed because of His work in you. Pray that they will be reconciled to Christ and discover God and his grace. This is an important opportunity. Don't miss it!

AFTER THE NIGHT

Following the time together it is typically a good idea to have the

“communication” person send out a quick message on what was discussed and planned so people can remember and for those that missed the time.

This is a thoughtful way to include those who are unable to come.

Content for this guide is adapted for Cultivate’s use from “Sent Together” by Brad Watson.