



GOSPEL COMMUNITIES PRIMER

WHY

“Every Bostonian Jesus gives us loved and gospels really well.”

That is the big why behind everything that we do at Seven Mile Road. Our gospel communities exist to propel us forward by creating regular rhythms of shared life and gospel conversation.

ESSENTIALS

1: GOSPEL

By gospel we mean grace for sinners, or really good news for really bad people because of Jesus. The gospel is our lifeblood, and we need to learn it, relearn it, believe it, revel in it, and live from it. GCs are built to press us gladly and relentlessly with the gospel and all of its beautiful implications for holy living.

2: SAFETY

By safety we mean that there is room to confess sin, ask questions, connect dots, and be respected and loved in the process. We do not allow for gossip, finger-pointing, people-embarrassing, manipulation, or rolled eyes. Instead, we are committed to honest and straight-forward gospel ministry where we can walk in the light together. This requires a commitment to both *confidentiality* and *transparency*.

3: TIME

By time we mean giving ourselves to each other for the long haul. There is urgency and earnestness here, but no rush, because none of us changes quickly. Jesus is patient with us, and we will be that way with each other. This requires a commitment to both *frequency* (being together often enough) and *longevity* (sticking with it long enough).

RHYTHMS

1: GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

A: WORD

Whether working through the most recent sermon text or through another agreed-upon text of Scripture, this is time spent in the Word seeking to understand, believe, and live gospel truth.

B: SOULCARE

This is time spent sharing at the soul-level on gospel wins, struggles, and opportunities as we learn to believe and apply the gospel in the fray of real life.

2: SHARED LIFE

This is unrushed, relationship-building time spent around the table or in other settings.

(OPTIONAL) TIMELINES

This is time spent getting to know each other's story of grace. Timelines are best worked through on the front-end of a GC forming for the year, but space can also be created for newcomers to do timelines during the year.

WORD

Everyone in the group should know beforehand what text the group is going to be working through on a specific night so that everyone can be prepared to engage.

After making sure that everyone is oriented properly to the text, read the words and then work the following triad:

1: UNDERSTAND

Here we engage the words themselves, asking, “What does this text say? What does it mean?” Briefly lead a conversation that gets at the big idea(s) of the text.

2: BELIEVE

Here we assess our hearts in light of these words, asking, “How does my actual life accord/not accord with the truth/implications of these words? Listen for the heart as people share where they are in regard to believing what the text is saying.

3: LIVE

Here we pursue glad obedience, asking, “How can my life look different in response to this truth?” Ask and answer the question: If these words are true, what changes in my life this week?

(Note: Our pastors publish questions each week based on the sermon that was just preached that helpfully move through this progression.)

SOULCARE

Create space for each person to share about:

- 1: a win (something that is going well)
- 2: a struggle (something that is not)
- 3: a gospel opportunity (a space in their life where gospel can shine)

(Note: It's not a rule that someone has to share all three. Doing it this way provides for a focused time where both joys and sorrows can be expressed.)

As sin is confessed, work from the fruit (what they did/are doing) to root (what gospel truth are they failing to believe that is leading them into that sin).

Remember, this is not a time of gossip or of generally sharing life struggles and receiving vanilla, non-gospel encouragement. This is a time for helping people align themselves with the truth of the gospel in a way that births freedom, joy, and holy living.

TIMELINES

Each individual takes 15 minutes (max!) to walk through their gospel story, highlighting:

- 1: Most pronounced season(s) of gospel wakefulness in their lives
- 2: How they found the church
- 3: Biggest hopes for upcoming year

(The in-between relational times of the group will provide space to share the rest of one's background and relevant life history.)

POPULATING GCs

HOW DO WE THINK ABOUT WHERE TO PLACE PEOPLE?

1: RELATIONSHIPS

We want to honor relationships, specifically for unchurched folks. If someone is new and has stepped into the life of Seven Mile Road through a relationship with an existing member, we work to place them in GC together.

2: GEOGRAPHY

While this cannot happen perfectly, having individuals and families in a GC living close to each other is ideal. So we'll always ask, "Where do they live?" and begin the placement process from there.

3: DIVERSITY

We do not organize GCs around affinity (same age or life-stage). A church is made up of diverse people, and it's in gospel community that we benefit from that diversity as we get to love and learn from one another.

HOW DOES SOMEONE GET INTO A GC?

For anyone new or yet to join a GC, here is the process for joining one:

- 1: Go to: sevenmilemelrose.com/gospelcommunities
- 2: Click the "Join a GC" link to fill out a one-minute interest form
- 3: Our Discipleship Director will connect you by email with the leaders of a gospel community that looks like it'll be a good fit
- 4: The leaders will coordinate with you from there
- 5: If one gospel community doesn't work out, we'll repeat the process to connect you with another!

ARE GCs ALWAYS “OPEN” TO NEW PEOPLE?

Yes, with wisdom about seasonal realities exercised in conversation with leaders.

HOW DOES SOMEONE GET OUT OF A GC?

Every June there is a natural time for transitioning out of a GC.

LEADERSHIP

HOW IS A GOSPEL COMMUNITY LED?

Each GC has an individual or a couple who takes primary responsibility for the community's life.

Primary leaders commit to DO the following:

- Serve as the point person for communication with the pastors
- Attend quarterly syncs with other gospel community leaders
- Establish schedule expectations for the year
- Communicate with and welcome new potential members
- Identify future leaders

Primary leaders commit to DO OR DELEGATE the following:

- Manage communication within the group
- Lead the actual gospel conversations
- Coordinate hospitality (meals, childcare, etc.)

WHAT ARE THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR LEADING A GC?

Potential leaders should:

- Be members-in-good standing of Seven Mile Road
- Have spent at least 1 year as a life-giving presence in an existing GC
- Have the recommendation of their existing community's leadership
- Be willing and able to fulfill the requirements of leading

HOW DOES SOMEONE BECOME A LEADER?

- Potential leaders are recommended by existing leaders
- In March, potential leaders apply (Application: bit.ly/2RuljYB)
- Discipleship Director follows up with interested parties

HOW ARE GOSPEL COMMUNITY LEADERS SUPPORTED?

1: NEW LEADER BOOTCAMP

All new GC leaders participate in a bootcamp in the Spring to walk through the basics of leading.

2: QUARTERLY SYNCs

4x a year pastors and gospel community leaders gather over a meal to:

- Share and celebrate gospel wins of the most recent season
- Share and troubleshoot leadership/operational challenges
- Train on best practices

3: OPERATIONAL SUPPORT

Discipleship Director will:

- Manage connections process for welcoming newcomers into GCs
- Provide content for working through most recent sermon text

4: PASTORAL SUPPORT

- Ad hoc support is given to leaders as necessary

FAQS

WHEN DOES A GC MEET?

GCs are free to set their own schedule, as long as there is enough frequency of time together for the gospel to take root in the community. Some of our GCs meet the same night every single week (i.e. every Monday night). Others stagger meeting times throughout the month.

WHERE DOES A GC MEET?

In a home is ideal, but a public space or the church can work if needed.

WHAT IS THE ANNUAL FLOW OF A GC'S LIFE?

Form in August, flow from September through June, off in July.

WHAT HAPPENS WITH LITTLE CHILDREN?

Each GC figures this out on their own. There are no easy solutions. While children are a highly valued part of the community's life, we also recognize that it is difficult to have an extended/focused gospel conversation with tons of little ones in the room.

DO GCs HAVE TO HAVE A "SHARED MISSION?"

While our GCs are not required to identify a "shared mission" that every member of the community must be involved in, as the community believes the gospel together, natural opportunities for loving outsiders together will arise and are encouraged.