

Vision for community life

Nate

I want to read a story from Genesis about motives...

Genesis 11:1-9

1 At one time, the whole Earth spoke the same language. **2** It so happened that as they moved out of the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled down.

They moved to the east to this area – moving east is not a good thing in the book of Genesis. It often means something bad has or is going to happen.

- When Adam and Eve left the garden they went east
- When Cain killed Abel he headed east
- Later, in Genesis 13, Lot settles to the east of Sodom
- So stay away from Kansas – it's east.

3 They said to one another, "Come, let's make bricks and fire them well." They used brick for stone and tar for mortar. **4** Then they said, "Come, let's build ourselves a city and a tower that reaches Heaven. Let's make ourselves famous so we won't be scattered here and there across the Earth."

What pronouns stand out in the verse? "Us, ourselves, we, ourselves"

This plan was all about them, what they could do.

5 God came down to look over the city and the tower those people had built. **6** God took one look and said, "One people, one language; why, this is only a first step. No telling what they'll come up with next - they'll stop at nothing!"

God came down": that doesn't mean He wasn't there. When Scripture says that it means God was well aware of what was going on. He had firsthand knowledge of their plans and schemes.

7 Come, we'll go down and garble their speech so they won't understand each other." **8** Then God scattered them from there all over the world. And they had to quit building the city. **9** That's how it came to be called Babel, because there God turned their language into "babble." From there God scattered them all over the world.

At first glance I ask, "What was so wrong here?" The people were building a community. They had one vision, they had passion, and they were doing it together. What could be better? Isn't what we are all about as small group leaders: community.

But what was the focus of their community? To reach heaven through their own work, to make themselves famous, to not be scattered across the earth. Each one of these things stood in opposition to direct commandments from God. Community that lives up to God's desires is not human focused, it is God-honoring.

As you reflect on how your groups went this last fall, how they will go this next session, remember to check your pride at the door. These groups are not about us and our ability to be great leaders, even though that is important. These groups are about drawing people closer to God's dream for their lives and helping every person who calls ACC home engage with the Kingdom of God. Let's keep working toward that end.

"The Benefits of Leading Community Life" Doreen

Here are five benefits to leading a small group:

1. You are countering the trend of biblical/theological illiteracy

- Dallas Willard: It's become commonplace for Christians to believe that one can be a follower of Christ without being a disciple of Christ.
- ECC: Where is it written? Or What do the Scriptures say?
- Rock Solid reflection: "I appreciated the section on atonement. The connecting of the Old Testament passages to the New Testament. The fact that atonement is not free but has/had huge cost, the cost of one life for another. This fills me with gratitude beyond measure that Christ would do this for me because I know that I do not deserve it and can in no way earn it. My life is without worth apart from this." AND ANOTHER: "Ephesians 1:15-23 – These verses have become very special to me. Just to know Christ better so that I can be more like him. To know his great power and to realize he uses it to help me. Thank you for this study."
- What is the level of biblical/theological literacy in your group? (thumbs up, side, down)

2. You are creating safe space in which we can be known

- Parker Palmer, To Know As We Are Known: to teach is to create a space in which obedience to truth can be practiced
- That space is characterized by hospitality, clear boundaries -> safety
- How might such a space be created in small groups? Your small group covenant contributes to this.

3. You are using/refining your God-given gifts

- ECC prioritizes concept of the priesthood of all believers. Not only pastors. We are each called – first to God, through Jesus; then to the church/world
- Are you aware of the gift/s you've been given?

4. You are facilitating growth in others

- Environment of grace is best soil for growth
- Common question – How goes your walk with Jesus? Or Are you yet alive in Christ?
- Have you seen growth in others?

5. You are facilitating your own growth

- It's a lifelong journey.
- Early in my tenure, heard profound truth – You can't lead where you won't go and you can't teach what you don't know.
- Another challenging statement – We don't want to be like travel agents, passing out glossy brochures for places we've never been.
- These sentiments compel me to keep leaning into the transforming work of the Spirit so I can lead/teach with integrity.
- "The only evidence of life is growth."

THANK YOU for using your God-given gifts to encourage/equip the church!

Break into groups and share**All**

1. **What was the greatest joy of the session?**
2. **What was the greatest pain of the session?**
3. **What worked well? Didn't work well?**
4. **What were the key things you learned to help you be a better leader?**

Next Session plans/Wrap-up**Nate**

Thanks for your time today. We are going to finish up by talking about the future. Our next session starts the week of January 3rd and runs until the week of March 21st. That is 12 weeks. The plan is to have 11 group meetings during that time. The reason for 12 weeks is because the week of March 7th we are going to ask all of the groups to meet for the Ash Wednesday service at 6:30 PM on March 9th, 2011.

Not everyone in my group goes to church here! Bring them anyway.

I want to remind you of this experiment we are in the middle of right now. This ministry year we wanted to try a few new things:

- 11 weekly sessions
 - Easier to commit to
- We all start and stop at the same time
 - Create a rhythm of work and rest
- Using the same study this fall
- We are intentionally pulling back on Oasis night seminar classes and lecture style classes so that people are encouraged to move toward small group opportunities.

Your feedback is key during this time. The small group team/coaches feel this will help more people find community at our church and grow in their faith. Not all groups are following this model right now and that is okay, but if this is successful, we are really going to encourage more and more of you to give it a try.

As we move into 2011 three things:

- There will be Spring Huddles when your coach will want to try to gather your huddle of small group leaders together for prayer, sharing and encouragement.
- Next summer we will have a Sunday morning training again to prepare us for the next season of ministry.
- Next fall, Sept. 2011, we will be asking groups to serve together at least once during the eleven week session. We'll keep giving you ideas and help you get connected to these opportunities.
 - several groups this fall helped out at the Community Fall Festival
 - another group is cutting firewood for those who heat their homes that way