

CORE GROUP VISION

My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ...

COLOSSIANS 2:2

TIME + TRUST = TRANSFORMATION

We are only as deep with God as we are with other people. The goal of the spiritual life is a transformed heart, rooted in Christ, and changed to show kindness, patience, joy, peace, compassion, and love. This doesn't happen alone. We were made to reach our full potential in community. When we struggle, we need a brother or sister to offer us the strength of Christ. When we sin, we need a brother or sister to offer us the forgiveness of Christ. When we are weak, Christ in our brother or sister is strong. This is how we know God's presence and promises. That is why we created Core Groups. ***What is a Core Group?***

A core group is a group of three to five people, of the same gender, who read together, pray together, and meet weekly to become the love of God for one another and the world.

No homework. No chapter to read. No qualifications or prerequisites necessary. Just try to walk with God through the week and then come share your heart in a safe, affirming context. Even the leaders are just participants. Core groups help us pay more attention to ***the inner state of our souls, what is really going on with others, and our attention to what the Spirit of God is speaking to us.***

If you are interested in joining or starting a Core Group, please reach out to Chad Myers at ***chad.myers@mthorebumc.com***.

WHY CORE GROUPS?

Two are better than one,... If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up... Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12

We are only as deep with God as we are with other people. Do you believe that? When it comes to relationships, we often only rely on others in moments of stress, crisis, illness or when we need God to come through for us. We nod our heads in agreement when it comes to the importance of community, the significance of honest and vulnerable relationships, but what steps have we taken toward cultivating this? Statistics show that adults have few close friends. God's design for our spiritual formation was always meant to be in relationship with one another. We will only reach spiritual and emotional maturity in the context of close community.

A core group is like a garden. We are creating the context and giving the opportunity for others to shine the sunlight of truth and pour out the water of fellowship in prayer. A core group is like a team. We encourage each other toward God's best, hold each other accountable and cheer each other on toward overcoming our battles. A core group is like a fireplace. The fireplace doesn't make the fire, but it is a safe place to start one.

Who knows us well? Who can support us in our struggles and offer compassion for our sins? God wants us to be surrounded so that we can be a strong chord, encouraged and encouraging, experiencing God's presence and promises through one another.

WHAT IS A CORE GROUP?

And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

HEBREWS 10:25

Apparently, the writer of Hebrews understands that it is common for a group to get together, start out strong, and then slowly fall away from regular meetings. The writer wants us to make a habit to meet together and not neglect the practice.

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READ TOGETHER:

When it comes to discipleship, we do not have a content problem; we have a connection problem. Rather than just another avenue for learning, we need the kind of relationships that can harness spiritual growth. So why read together? Support. In busy times, the reading of Scripture and daily time with God is often the first to go. Consistency can be hard, but Core Groups are about supporting each other toward establishing spiritual rhythms. Similar to our physical body, some muscle groups are more important than others. When we strengthen our core, we are free to grow stronger in other parts of our body. That's why we focus on just a few things in Core Groups, the essentials.

The goal of a Core Group is to read short passages of Scripture or devotional content daily. The content of daily reading was not meant to be center of the group interaction but a springboard for conversation on what God is doing in our lives.

PRAY TOGETHER:

Praying as a group is agreeing with God as he matures us and invites us into deeper surrender. God hears and responds to our prayers and praying for each other is a powerful gift (James 5:16). When someone confesses sin, we pray God's forgiveness. When someone shares a hurt, we pray God's compassion. When someone is in a struggle, we pray God's strength. We listen and we pray. No fancy words needed. No professional prayers required.

MEET TOGETHER:

Meeting together is the core practice of a group. Without the regular weekly practice, there is no real hope of developing the kind of consistency and relationships that are needed to truly encourage one another toward spiritual maturity. The best approach is to find a standing time each week. If the group cannot meet that week, there's no need to reschedule; just skip until next week. On the week the group can't meet, send a text update for prayer and care.

Reading, prayer, and meeting is the simple structure of what a Core Group does. These are foundational and essential practices that guard our hearts and minds in Christ and move us to embody God to each other and the world.

HOW DO WE DO IT?

"Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

EPHESIANS 5:14

THE OPENING:

Start with a little conversation as people are arriving. Small talk can be the grounds for deep talk. We want to respect the clock (core commitment) so after 5-10 minutes, the leader should begin with prayer and the reading of a scripture verse. Ephesians 5:14 can be a great start.

THE QUESTIONS:

After the opening, the group will move into part two of the gathering. Each group member will spend 15-20 minutes answering the five questions with as much or little detail as he or she feels comfortable. The questions are meant to correspond and raise awareness for the most important elements in our life: ***the inner state of our souls, what is really going on with others, and our attention to what the Spirit of God is speaking to us.***

In the early weeks, the first three questions are often enough. As the group grows more comfortable with each other, members will feel free to answer all five questions.

1. How is it with your **soul**?
2. What are your **struggles** and **successes**?
3. How might the **Scriptures** and **Spirit** be speaking in your life?
4. Do you have any **sin** that you want to confess?
5. Are there any **secrets** or hidden things that you would like to share?

After a person in the group has shared, someone in the group should pray for that person for a few minutes. Keep the prayer simple and invite the Spirit to lead. Sometimes more than one person will feel lead to pray. Then it's the next person's turn to share. Share, pray, and the pattern continues.

THE CLOSING:

At the end, close your meeting with somebody praying the closing prayer:
Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)

After this you might do a quick check in to confirm that everyone is able to meet the following week. It is a very simple and repetitive structure by design, and the simplicity is what makes it easy to get started and sustain.

THE CORE SEVEN

Time+Trust=Transformation. The Core Seven are the foundational rules of engagement for how members should respect and honor each other. Many support communities and groups that have as their purpose transformation begin their meetings with some simple guidelines. These create a safe culture from which to share. In highly relational environments, honesty is key, and the culture must be safe and affirming. We suggest reading the Core Seven at the start of each meeting for the first four weeks, and then revisiting them at least monthly from then on.

1. RESPECT THE CLOCK

You have 15–20 minutes to share. Do your best to stick to that time frame.

2. FREEDOM TO SHARE

You have permission to skip a question at any time. For example, you can say, “I don’t have anything on question 4 this week.”

3. NO CROSS-TALK

When someone is sharing, don’t interrupt.

4. ONE COUNSELOR (COME, HOLY SPIRIT)

When someone is sharing, listen deeply and pay attention to how the Holy Spirit might prompt you to pray. After the person has shared you are free to ask clarifying questions, share encouragement or a Scripture passage, but please DO NOT SHARE ADVICE.

5. COMFORT WITH EMPATHY

Hold space for others with open hearts, show up and tune in—bless, encourage, and build up.

6. COMMUNITY OF GRACE

When someone confesses sin, pardon by saying, “In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.” If someone shares a secret, thank them for their courage and never condemn. Offer them hope by stating, “God loves you unconditionally in Christ.”

7. STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

Never share another person’s story, struggles, successes, sins, or secrets outside the group.

CORE GROUP LEADER

Each group will have a leader either by designation or group vote. The leader is an equal participant in each group and is not required to prepare for anything or to try and be on another spiritual plane. It is more for practical purposes so that the church can have information and accountability from each group, through the leader.