



Effective Connect **Groups**

AN NCCB RESOURCE

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Contents

1	Introduction.....	03
2	Make Christ Central	04
3	Build Community	06
4	Care For People.....	08
5	Facilitate Contributions	10
6	Raise Leaders.....	12

Section 01 Introduction

Every profession requires a season of training and equipping. An aircraft pilot sits in the cockpit with confidence because he or she has completed the needed training.

2 Timothy 3:17 explains that we should be equipped for the good works that God has in store for our lives.

There is always a need for further equipping, to prepare and ready us for what God has lined up for us to do. We cannot have effective Connect Groups without making sure that the scriptures remain the central theme.

Every single Connect Group is a vehicle that glorifies the name of Jesus in our city through the transformed lives of those whom God has placed in our lives to lead. Connect Group Leading is the enormous privilege of being present as God does the calling, transforming, and commissioning of his people into the purposes that he has for them to fulfil.

The heart of the gospel is Jesus the servant, this drives our desire to lead people by pointing them to Christ. We trust that as you embrace the call to lead that this training will not just be another exercise that adds to your skill set or knowledge, but rather a moment where we can better partner with the King of Heaven to accomplish all he has planned in our city and in our generation.

THIS RESOURCE WILL TAKE YOU ON A JOURNEY THROUGH THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF BEING AN EFFECTIVE CONNECT GROUP LEADER.

We are so grateful that you are embarking on this exciting journey towards having a profound impact on our city!

Section 02 Make Christ Central

THE WHY BEHIND CONNECT GROUPS

Col 1:28-29 *“Christ is our message! We preach to awaken hearts and bring every person into the full understanding of truth. It has become my inspiration and passion in ministry to labour with a tireless intensity, with his power flowing through me, to present to every believer the revelation of being his perfect one in Jesus Christ.”*

I've heard it said that we should keep the main thing the main thing. If it's not already clear, it's all about Jesus, and will always be about Jesus.

CONNECT GROUPS ARE SO MUCH MORE THAN A GOOD CHURCH STRATEGY OR A NICE IDEA TO BUILD COMMUNITY. SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE EARLY CHURCH IN ACTS PEOPLE HAVE MET TOGETHER IN EACH OTHER'S HOMES, AND WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE TO DO SO UNTIL JESUS RETURNS.

But what is the goal of these authentic communities? Paul gives us a clue in this scripture - to present believers mature in Christ.

JESUS AT THE CENTRE

I find it fascinating that often we feel we are at the centre of the universe, that everything revolves around us. The earth is not at the centre of the galaxy but rather the sun allowing all physical life to exist. In the same way the Son of God is at the centre of everything that is spiritual and everything that will grow with eternal substance.

BEING PART OF A CONNECT GROUP IS BEING PART OF AN ENVIRONMENT TO BELONG, TO BUILD FRIENDSHIPS, TO LEARN MORE AND TO LAUGH TOGETHER, WHICH ARE ALL VERY IMPORTANT. BUT IF YOU TRULY HAD TO ASK WHY A CONNECT GROUP EXISTS, IT WOULD BE TO FACILITATE A GLORIOUS AND ETERNAL ROLE IN HISTORY, TO FACILITATE CHRIST FOLLOWERS GROWING INTO MATURE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS WHO EXPRESS AN AUTHENTIC FAITH IN HIM, LOVE FOR HIM, AND LOVE FOR OTHERS!

An effective Connect Group:

1 Moves people to a place that is closer to Jesus.

When reading John 15 we cannot escape the importance of being grafted into the vine. The vine represents Jesus, and we are grafted in through intimate relationship with Him. It's only when we are connected to the life giver that we bear much fruit and our lives will find our created purpose and meaning.

Hebrews 10:24 reminds us that part of being involved in a community like a Connect Group means that we need to do whatever we can to spur one another on towards love and good works. Every single believer has been given a mandate to consider how to deepen each others love and intimacy with God.

2 Moulds and shapes people to become more like Jesus.

Right at the end of Jesus' life on earth in Matthew 28, He reminds His disciples that He has been given all authority in heaven and earth, and because of their faith in Him, this authority has been given to them and now to us. This new authority was to be used to teach everyone to obey all that He had commanded so that every believer will become mature, reflecting the ways and works of Jesus. It starts with a heart change as we respond to Christ's grace, and then it is outworked in action as we respond to what he has taught through scripture.

3 Establishes a strength of personal identity in Jesus.

When we become followers of Christ Jesus there is a new identity that we receive. No longer are we alienated from God, but we are now reconciled. The change is significant; from lost to found; unsaved to saved; far from God to children of God; enemies of God to friends of God. As we mature as believers, we start to reflect more and more of this new identity in our lives. As people navigate the ups and downs of life, our Connect Groups are there to affirm, refresh and clarify the truth of who and whose we are in Christ.

4 Keeps people on mission with Jesus.

To be a mature believer of Jesus is to be on mission with him. This mission is about seeking and saving the lost through the vehicle of making disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey all that Jesus commanded us to do. If Connect Groups are there to make Christ central in everyone's life, then our love and compassion for those who don't yet follow Christ must be evident in all we do.

AS CONNECT GROUP LEADERS WE HAVE THE PRIVILEGE OF BEING FIRST HAND WITNESSES OF THIS PROCESS; PARTICIPATING IN AND WATCHING PEOPLE GROW INTO MATURITY IN CHRIST AS WE OURSELVES CONTINUE TO DRAW NEAR TO JESUS.

Section 03 Build Community

THE WHAT OF CONNECT GROUPS

Ephesians 2:14-15 'Our reconciling "Peace" is Jesus! He has made Jew and non-Jew one in Christ. By dying as our sacrifice, he has broken down every wall of prejudice that separated us and has now made us equal through our union with Christ. Ethnic hatred has been dissolved by the crucifixion of his precious body on the cross. The legal code that stood condemning every one of us has now been repealed by his command. His triune essence has made peace between us by starting over - forming one new race of humanity, Jews and non-Jews fused together!'

The cross is God's means of reconciling man to Himself - the Godhead - by substituting hostility with reconciliation and enmity with peace. God dealt with our rebellion on the cross and brought about the possibility of peace with him. The cross is the eternal invitation into fellowship with God. This encourages us to have fellowship with each other, so that we are not just surviving, but thriving in community.

BELONG, SERVE, GROW, AND THRIVE.

Everyone needs a place to belong relationally, everyone needs a way to serve functionally, everyone needs relationships that press them towards spiritual growth, and everyone need to be on mission to thrive.

When looking at the four areas on the next page we need to realize that Connect Groups are a great place for people who are in a large community to find a place where a community functions effectively. This is what defines a biblical Connect Group!



An effective Connect Group:

1 Creates a place where people belong relationally.

A Connect Group is not defined by a once a week meeting, but rather a network of relationships that happen to connect over weekly meetings. The relationships of the people within the group are far more important than the simple attendance within the group. The aim of Connect Groups are to be a place of increasing sincerity and authenticity where people feel free to be themselves, yet are inspired by the centrality of Jesus and his word. The deepening of friendship takes time, so be patient on this journey connecting over great hospitality, conversation, laughter, interests and good listening where celebration and gratitude is the overarching culture.

2 Creates a place where people serve functionally.

It was written about Jesus in Matthew 20:28 that ‘the Son of Man came to serve not to be served.’ If Jesus saw importance in serving, how much more should we approach our Connect Groups with the same posture. Every time we gather there should be multiple opportunities for people to serve in different roles and responsibilities. Every moment someone in our group serves another, it is a moment where the Kingdom of God is being established, and our love for one another is deepened.

3 Creates a place where people grow accountably.

Let us remember that Connect Groups don't exist to create best friends, but growing friends. Accountability should never be a functional formula, or a to do list, but rather a desire that sparks growth and maturity. If our Connect Groups are made up of friends who trust each other and want to learn from each other, then as Proverbs 27:17 says, we will be like iron that sharpens itself against another piece of iron to become more effective as a Christ follower.

4 Creates a place where people thrive mission-ally.

It is so important to be on mission together. If there was one thing that will unite a community of people, it would be that they have been on mission together. Loving people who don't know Christ, getting involved in social projects and simply praying together are always going to deepen community. A Connect Group on mission is a reflection of a people who don't just know the truth, but live out the life giving truth in every environment they find themselves.

AS CONNECT GROUP LEADERS LET US KEEP BUILDING A UNIFIED COMMUNITY THAT REFLECTS NOT JUST IN WORD BUT IN DEED, THE PRECIOUS WORK OF THE CROSS.

Section 04

Care For People

THE WHO OF CONNECT GROUPS

Matthew 18:12 "If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others on the hill and go out to search for the one that is lost?"

Romans 12:15 "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn."

James 1:19-20 "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires."

**IT WAS ONCE SAID THAT
PEOPLE MATTER TO GOD SO
THEY SHOULD MATTER TO US.
AS CONNECT GROUP LEADERS
WE SHOULD NEVER LOSE SIGHT
OF THE INCREDIBLE PEOPLE
GOD HAS PLACED IN OUR CARE,
PEOPLE CHOSEN BY GOD TO
LIVE EXTRAORDINARY LIVES
HERE ON PLANET EARTH.**

SHEPERDS

Connect Groups are so much more than a weekly meeting, but a group of individuals who have found community. One of the most descriptive pictures of spiritual leadership in the Bible is that of the shepherd, and Jesus refers to his people as sheep. As we read in Romans 12:15, we are reminded that our Connect Groups are communities where people are taken care of, and kept from danger. Jesus invites us as Connect Group Leaders into a partnership with him in taking care of his sheep.

An effective Connect Group:

- 1 Cares about peoples spiritual growth, health, and relational wellbeing.**

When leading people we realize that we start to carry every persons journey on our hearts. Our prayer life, our diaries, our phone accounts, even the way we speak reflects the care shown for the people God's given us to lead.
- 2 Practically cares for one another through acts of kindness.**

One of the greatest privileges of leading a Connect Group is being available to help people, or even better still, seeing others in the group caring for one another. This may be visiting individuals who are in hospital, making a meal plan when a baby is born or when someone is sick, by encouraging people to reach out to members who are distancing themselves from the group.
- 3 Are there to rejoice with those rejoicing, and weep with those who are weeping.**

One of the greatest privileges of leading people is being able to celebrate with those who are celebrating, or at times being available to those who are suffering. Our role as leaders is to try help people find God's goodness in whatever season they find themselves in. We need to remember that generally people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

- 4 Knows when to pick up the phone.**

As leaders we are faced with many light weight or heavy weight issues, and it is important to pray for wisdom around all issues before tackling them. There are some issues we can address, but there are others sometimes that will need to include the Elders or even professionals. It is so important as a Connect Group Leader not to work in isolation but to partner with other leaders to ensure that our people are taken care of, and kept out of danger.

AS CONNECT GROUP LEADERS, WE LEARN MANY OF THESE SKILLS ALONG THE WAY AS INDIVIDUALS AND TOGETHER IN TEAM, MEANING THAT WE DON'T EVER NEED TO FEEL OVERWHELMED OR UNDER-QUALIFIED. THIS IS WHY IT IS SO IMPORTANT TO LEAD YOUR GROUP INTO A SPACE OF BEING EFFECTIVE CARERS OF PEOPLE.

Section 05

Facilitate Contributions

THE HOW OF CONNECT GROUPS

Romans 12:4-8 'For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.'

THIS PASSAGE DESCRIBES THE CHURCH AS A BODY. WE KNOW THAT ANY HEALTHY BODY NEEDS TO BE ACTIVE IF IT'S GOING TO GROW. NOT ONLY THAT, BUT EVERY PART OF THE BODY NEEDS TO BE ACTIVE IF IT'S GOING TO STAY HEALTHY.

In Romans 12 we're called to bring our contribution. We all have something to offer, regardless of its perceived size or value.

FACILITATE

THE WORD FACILITATE IS USED DELIBERATELY. THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WHO THINK OF CONNECT GROUP LEADERSHIP AS HAVING TO MAKE EVERYTHING HAPPEN, TO BE THE PERSON WHO IS THE BEST THEOLOGIAN, LEADER, PREACHER, FRIEND, EVANGELIST AND MORE. THIS IS NOT THE CASE!

Whilst a good Connect Group Leader has Godly character and a level of wisdom and leadership, he or she is not asked to be the source of every excellent contribution within the group, but rather is required to facilitate the contributions of others who are in the group. As leaders we need to facilitate peoples contributions during the weekly meeting, or beyond the meeting.



An effective Connect Group:

1 Creates moments for everyone to connect as friends.

Relational connection is the glue that holds a group together, and as a leader we can help facilitate this by setting a tone of relational warmth, and creating environments conducive to friendship building like meals, games, fun activities or story sharing.

2 Plans message based conversations that everyone can engage with.

Crucial to growing as disciples is that we have the chance to speak about and deepen our convictions about Christ within the group. There are a few helpful keys to facilitate a life-changing conversation:

- Set the tone of openness and vulnerability. Create a warm and honest environment so people can be authentic and open to share.
- Keep the Bible as the central reference when bringing contributions or looking for answers. Encourage people to bring their Bibles, and get them to read from it.
- Identify someone else you feel is capable of facilitating the discussion to increase contributions. This is a great way to raise up leaders.
- It is important to listen in a way that has more power than speaking. Listening helps pose more questions that inspire life-changing conversations.
- Draw people out. Create space by deliberately inviting people tactfully to contribute so it's not always the loud and talkative ones.
- Make sure there is no one or two dominant voices. Connect Groups are not a preaching platform but a place that encourages shared contribution.
- Ask open-ended questions. This is part of helping people towards a dependence on Christ. We as leaders need to allow other people to answer which could spark further questions.

3 Is prepared in prayer, and has moments where people have the opportunity to pray.

The key to leadership is creating moments of prayer where it is not forced, but lead by the Holy Spirit. When encouraging the group to pray we need to give clarity on what we are praying into and why, which can be facilitated in groups where everyone is given a turn to pray.

4 Have shared responsibilities so everyone feels that they have a part to play.

Leading a Connect Group is not a 'one man band', but is a community where everyone should take ownership. Delegation is key to any successful Connect Group from emails or WhatsApp communication, cooking/eats roster, hosting rosters and more. As you consider all the different people in your group, be intentional to give people responsibilities that you know they will do well in like someone who can arrange social activities which goes beyond the weekly meeting.

As Connect Group Leaders let us be intentional in facilitating contributions from every person in our groups.

**A THRIVING COMMUNITY
FUNCTIONS AS A HEALTHY
BODY BEYOND THE WEEKLY
MEETING. ENCOURAGE ONE
ANOTHER INTO MISSIONAL
LIVING, SERVING AT
CHURCH ON SUNDAYS,
AND GETTING INVOLVED
IN OUTREACH OR SOCIAL
JUSTICE INITIATIVES.**

Section 06

Raise Leaders

THE IMPACT OF CONNECT GROUPS

Matthew 4:9 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."

2 Timothy 2:2 'And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.'

When Jesus started his ministry - the very first thing he did was to prayerfully recruit 12 disciples.

He promised to equip them for the mission they were being called to. Jesus called them to train and equip others just like He was training and equipping them.

JESUS WAS VERY INTENTIONAL, AS WE SHOULD BE, TO RAISE LEADERS FOR THE EVER GROWING IMPACT THAT THE LOCAL CHURCH WILL HAVE THROUGH CONNECT GROUPS.

THE HEART OF A CONNECT GROUP LEADER

When looking out for new leaders for a Connect Group, it's crucial that their hearts are in the right place, even more importantly than their skills or gifts. One of the most important identifications when looking for a potential leader is that they know God and are open to the leading of the Spirit. Other helpful things to look out for in a potential leader are:

- Do they love people and love watching others flourish?
- Are they actively involved in the church community, submitted to leadership?
- Do they lead themselves well, is their faith and trust in Christ worth imitating?
- As Connect Group Leaders it is our responsibility to facilitate the growth of people into these types of leaders.



An effective Connect Group:

1 Provides opportunities for potential leaders to up-skill themselves.

There are three different areas which will prepare them to excel as Connect Group Leaders. The three areas are:

- **Hospitality** - A person who makes others feel at home and comfortable to be themselves is a community creator.
- **Facilitation** - A person who is good at getting others involved, participating and contributing is a great facilitator.
- **Leadership** - a person who simply makes things happen, and others follow.

2 Provides moments for potential leaders to take full responsibility.

It always starts with assignments before appointments. Start asking potential leaders to lead a part of an evening or to host the evening at their house. Give them greater responsibility where they can come alongside you as a second in charge. Remember to not say people's no's for them; skilfully, confidently and prayerfully ask them to step into a greater role in the group.

3 Provides a launchpad for new groups to start.

Our favourite way of starting a new group is by planting out a leader from an existing group. Once a potential leader has been raised up the key question to ask is; 'should this new leader take over the existing group and the leader plant something new, or should the new leader step out with the support of the group to start something new?'

When planting a new group there will always be those who go with the planting leader those whom the leader has relationship with from other groups and those who are not yet in a group who will support. The heart behind planting more groups is to get those disconnected from community connected. There is no 'one size fits all' strategy, so it is good to discuss this with leadership when a potential plant is on the horizon.

As Connect Group Leaders we need to adopt the perspective given by Bruno Bettelheim when he said;


**'I AM CONVINCED
COMMUNITY CAN FLOURISH
ONLY IF IT EXISTS FOR
AN AIM OUTSIDE ITSELF.
COMMUNITY IS VIABLE IF
IT IS THE OUTGROWTH OF
A DEEP INVOLVEMENT IN A
PURPOSE WHICH IS OTHER
THAN, OR ABOVE, THAT OF
BEING A COMMUNITY.'**


Remember - God equips the called; he doesn't call the equipped.

AT NEW COVENANT CHURCH BRYANSTON WE BELIEVE THAT EVERY LEADER HAS BEEN GIVEN A UNIQUE GODLY GIFT, WHICH WHEN EXPRESSED IN COMMUNITY WILL ALWAYS PRODUCE FRUIT. IT IS OUR DESIRE TO SEE MANY GROUPS AROUND THE CITY EXPRESSING COMMUNITY IN DIFFERENT WAYS TO REACH MANY MORE PEOPLE FOR CHRIST.

WE ARE CONVINCED THAT THROUGH CONNECT GROUPS, WE WILL SEE THE CHURCH MATURE AND GROW, REACHING THOSE DISCONNECTED FROM COMMUNITY AND HELPING THEM FIND DEEP LASTING FRIENDSHIPS. WE HOPE TO SEE THOSE WHO ARE FAR FROM GOD IN OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD AND CITY COME TO A KNOWLEDGE OF HIS SAVING GRACE.



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