

take root



hpumc small group
curriculum guide

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HIGHLAND PARK
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Over the last year, my husband and I have had the opportunity to take our family on a few road trips exploring places we had never seen before. We put over 7,000 cumulative miles on the car as we explored some of our nation's treasured National Parks.

Most recently, we were at Sequoia National Park in California where we were dwarfed by the largest tree on earth, General Sherman. It stands at around 275 ft tall and is estimated to be around 2,300-2,700 years old! Navigating this grove of truly magnificent trees was a humbling and inspiring experience.

How could these trees withstand the weather, fire, and other seasons of their long lives to sustain continued growth?

The sequoia tree cannot point to a deep root system (which is only about four feet deep) as the reason it has stood tall through the seasons of life, but rather its interdependence on the surrounding trees. They are only naturally found in groves surrounded by other sequoia trees. They don't grow alone, and neither do we.

**“YOU ARE YOURSELF A SEQUOIA.
STOP AND GET ACQUAINTED WITH YOUR BIG BRETHREN.”**


JOHN MUIR

As you embark on this journey toward an authentic community for which we have been designed by our Creator, I pray that you may grow in wisdom and stature as a disciple of Jesus. Whether you are planting tiny seeds of faith or you are continuing to mature a strong faith, in the name of Christ, you are welcome here.

Blessings on your journey, friends,

ANDI FANCHER

DIRECTOR OF DISCIPLESHIP



group meeting structure for take root (1 hour):

- ◆ **fellowship & connection** (15 min)
- ◆ **discussion** (40 min)
- ◆ **prayer** (5 min)

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notes:

week 1:

GOD'S DESIGN FOR CONNECTION

**We fully depend on others
and community to be human.
We are because we belong."**

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

scripture.

"For where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them."

MATTHEW 18:20

"So God created them in His own image. In the image of God, He created them."

GENESIS 1:27



you belong here.

You were made in the image of God. And one of the most significant ways God has wired you is for community. We are designed to be in fellowship with one another for our transformation and to reflect His character in the world.

Being connected in community with one another is risky business. It can be awkward. It can be messy. But it's worth it. Each of us comes to this group with various desires, expectations, and past experiences. The one thing we all have in common is that we all fall short. We are all human.

But God shows up in these spaces to refine us and shape us as we seek to grow closer to Him and to others. Our work is merely to be present, be a participant, and be yourself.



notes:

ice breaker.

- ◆ Have you ever been on a team?
- ◆ What kind of team was it and how was that experience for you?

discussion questions.

INTRODUCTIONS: In three minutes or less, what would you like the group to know about you? Have you ever been in a Small Group before?

EXPECTATIONS: What would you like to get out of being in this group?

COMMITMENTS: What are we committed to do in order to make that happen?

prayer.

As you conclude your meeting time, pray together as a group.

on your own.

PERMISSION SLIPS: What do I need to allow myself to do/be/feel in order to be fully engaged in this group?



notes:

week 2:

GROWING IN COMMUNITY

Spiritual growth is not only about coming back into a relationship with God and each other, and about pursuing a pure life, but it is also about coming back to life—the life that God created for people to live.”

Dr. Henry Cloud

scripture.

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good, acceptable, and perfect.”

ROMANS 12:2

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

2 CORINTHIANS 3:17-18





notes:

rows and circles.

Each week we participate in weekly worship together—in rows. We greet one another, worship, and pray during the service, and oftentimes, we are quickly out the door and on with the rest of our Sunday.

But the transforming work that God wants to do in our lives falls short if we just stay in our rows. We've got to gather in circles. Throughout Scripture, God is constantly gathering His people in groups. This is where the magic happens!

The word community literally means "**common unity.**" The strength of this group depends on that which unifies you. We surely are part of all sorts of groups: friend groups, athletic groups, work groups, parenting groups, etc. We call those affinity groups where the thing that unites them is a common interest. But the kind of community that Jesus envisioned flows from unity with him.

notes:

It is no surprise that when the early Christians first started practicing their new faith, they did so in groups. As they learned to live this new Christian life, their teachers wrote letters to them instructing them on how they could best follow Jesus together.

The letters (i.e., most of the New Testament) mention the phrase **“one another”** over 50 times. It is clear that being together, being with **“one another,”** was an important theme in early Christian life.

Today, we are no different than the first Christians, a group of people trying to figure out how to follow this man (and God) called Jesus.

As we think about what it means to **“one another”** each other, consider the verses below.

“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”

EPHESIANS 4:2

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

EPHESIANS 4:32



notes:

“Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”

EPHESIANS 5:19

“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone.”

COLOSSIANS 3:13

“Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves...Love one another with brotherly affection.”

ROMANS 12:10

“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

THESSALONIANS 5:11

“Serve one another humbly in love.”

GALATIANS 5:13

“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

GALATIANS 6:2

notes:

ice breaker.

- ◆ Who has had the most profound impact on your faith?
- ◆ What did this person do that pointed you to God?

discussion questions.

- ◆ What are some “one another moments” you have experienced in your life, either that you have witnessed or you have participated in?
- ◆ Each of you has different life experiences; the perspectives of group members may cover a broad spectrum. How might your differences enrich your growth process?
- ◆ What would it look like for you to “one another” each other toward continued growth?

prayer.

As you conclude your meeting time, pray together as a group.



notes:

on your own.

Over the next two weeks, you will be asked to share your story with the group. This is an opportunity to reflect on the events, people, and places in your life that have shaped you into the person you are today. Whatever form the story takes (and you can tell it any way you want to tell it!), this is a chance for you to connect to the rest of the group through vulnerability in a safe environment.

ideas for sharing your story:

TIMELINE: Create a timeline of your life, noting important events and major lessons you learned along the way. As you create your timeline, think about why you chose certain events. What impact did they have on you? How did God show up in those circumstances for you?

THREE, THREE, THREE: Name three people, three places, and three events that altered your life or were very significant to you. What was it about those people or places that mattered so much to you? Why do you still remember it today?

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW: What are the things about you that you would like the group to know about you to better understand how you operate, engage, and build relationships? What are the things in your life that shaped that thinking?



notes:

a few things to consider:

SHARE: Tell the group as much as you feel is appropriate, but we encourage you to stretch yourself regarding what is **“comfortable.”**

USE DISCERNMENT: You may find that you have a lot to share and some of it may be best left for later discussions or one-on-one interactions. Personal emotional safety is paramount here, so use your best judgement.

TIMING: You will have about eight minutes to share. Please be respectful of the time so that each member of the group has an opportunity to tell their story over the course of two weeks.

NOTES: Feel free to bring notes if that helps you collect your thoughts and communicate your story. You can also speak from your heart—whatever you feel led to do.



notes:

week 3:

AUTHENTICITY IN COMMUNITY

“Courage starts by showing up
and letting ourselves be seen.”

Brenne Brown

scripture.

“I came to you in weakness and fear and with much trembling and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”

1 CORINTHIANS 2:3-4

your story. god’s story.

The next two weeks can serve as a powerful reminder that we are all connected in some way, that we are all part of a larger story. That being said, sharing your story, for many people, can be a very vulnerable thing. As you listen, practice active listening—remaining attentive through non-verbal and verbal cues.



notes:

as you are listening, think about:

- ◆ **WHERE** do you see God active in the speaker's life?
- ◆ **WHAT** themes or values do you see present throughout the story?
- ◆ If the speaker would like a response or feedback after she or he shares, feel free to share your observations with the group.

discussion.

Sharing of Stories (eight minutes each).

prayer.

As you conclude your meeting time, pray together as a group.

on your own.

- ◆ What did it feel like to share your story? What parts did you leave out?
- ◆ What parts did you choose to share? Why?
- ◆ What themes did you notice in your own story?
- ◆ Where did you see yourself in others' stories?
- ◆ How do you connect differently with your group members now? What can you learn from them?

notes:

week 4:

ROOTED IN COMMUNITY

“Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much.”

Helen Keller

scripture.

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

HEBREWS 10:24-25

“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

EPHESIANS 3:16-19



notes:

finish sharing stories.

Today, you will finish sharing your stories. After that, take some time to consider the structure your group will build so it can thrive and grow. The following thoughts and recommendations will assist your group in doing this after all stories have been shared.

preparing the root system.

While the shallow root system of the sequoia tree may not be central to its massive growth, it is a critical element to the foundation. The seed needs to be planted in good soil, watered, and nurtured in order to grow. In a similar fashion, there are some things that your group can set up now in order to provide a structure from which you can all grow together.

We have found that there are a few key conversations to have as you are in the early stages of your group experience. Begin these conversations now as you continue to study together. You will have a chance to revisit and recommit at the end of the eight-week session.

notes:

breaking bread together.

Begin thinking about a gathering for fellowship to share a meal and get to know each other better.

shared ownership.

This isn't your Small Group leader's group; this is your group. Each individual plays a vital role. Consider various roles that you and others can play in supporting the group.

discussion.

Same as week 3, share remaining stories.

prayer.

As you conclude your meeting time, pray together as a group.

on your own.

Prepare for next week's study.

group commitments & values

creating your group covenant

A covenant is simply another word for promise or pact. A Small Group Covenant is a key element to being in authentic, intentional community. It will help your group live out its commitments and values.

God made covenants with Abraham and Noah. They were His way of saying what He expected of people and to let people know what they could expect of Him. Having clear boundaries and expectations and having well defined, easy to understand goals will help your Small Group flourish and thrive.

This covenant should consist of 5-12 core ideas from your group. It serves the purpose of helping the members of your Small Group move closer to God, grow together in a respectful environment, and create a safe space for each person to share.

After your Small Group Covenant is written, please have each member sign it and receive a copy of it. At the beginning of each meeting, the covenant should be read as a reminder of who we are and why we meet together and should be displayed throughout the meeting.





small group covenant example

- ◆ We will seek God in all we do.
- ◆ We will pray for one another, our church, and our community.
- ◆ We will serve others who are in need, both in our church and in our community.
- ◆ We will encourage one another.
- ◆ We will make attending this group a priority, and we will try our best to be on time.
- ◆ We will share ownership of this Small Group.
- ◆ Everyone is free to share without interruption.
- ◆ We are not here to “fix” one another. We are here to listen and share.
- ◆ We will have differences in how we view God; let’s be respectful of all views.
- ◆ What’s said in this group stays in this group.

notes:



notes:



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