



**GROUP LIFE MINISTRY
TRAINING MANUAL**

GROUP LIFE AT ANTHEM CHURCH

WE WERE CREATED FOR COMMUNITY

You don't have to look any further than creation itself to see the importance of relationships. The Bible says that after God created Adam he declared "It is not good for the man to be alone." This is the first time in scripture where the creation is declared "not good" (Gen 2:18). God remedied the problem by creating the first woman as a wife for Adam. While a relationship with God was critical for Adam, a relationship with another human being was equally important.

In a practical sense, **we have learned that disconnected people rarely become all that God has for them.** People need both a personal relationship with Jesus and a personal relationship with His Body, The Church, if they are to grow and become the people God has in mind. Our entire ministry, as a church, is centered around the belief that we know and love God best when we are part of a local church.

FROM TEMPLE COURTS TO HOUSE TO HOUSE

There is a powerful section of scripture in Acts 2:42-47 that casts vision for group life:

*⁴²They devoted themselves to the **apostles' teaching** and to **the fellowship**, to the **breaking of bread and to prayer.**⁴³Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common.⁴⁵Selling their possessions and goods, **they gave to anyone as he had need.** ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in **the temple courts.** They broke bread **in their homes** and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. **And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.***

You will notice that there were two types of meetings happening in the early church – the people continually met together in the temple courts and from house to house. Each environment had a profound impact on the growth and development of the people's walk with Christ.

Temple Courts: The temple courts were the place where all the believers would come together in unity for public worship and teaching from the scriptures. The early word used to describe the church (greek "ekklesia) referred to a large "assembly" or "gathering" – much like the early meetings that would happen at the temple courts.

House to House: The believers also met more informally in their own homes. This is where the close knit community life of the church was built and where people were cared for, life was discussed, and new believers were integrated into the church family. It was within these informal meetings that the full beauty of the gospel and Christian community was realized.

TWO KEY ENVIRONMENTS AT ANTHEM CHURCH

Everything we do as a church revolves around these two, equally important environments:

Sunday Worship Gatherings (temple courts) and **Group Life** (house to house). We believe that each environment has a critical and equally important (though different) part to play in the ministry of our church:

Sundays are a time for...

- Celebrating Jesus in worship,
- Hearing the preaching of the Word,
- Being united as a church family, and
- Welcoming new people into our church family.

Small Groups are a time for...

- Building close relationships (having fun and sharing life),
- Discussing and applying God's Word to our lives,
- Fostering authentic, biblical community like Acts 2, and
- Caring for the needs of one another through prayer and sharing.

Those who find a group are blessed by the impact that these two different environments can have on their ongoing relationship with Christ!

THE IMPORTANCE OF GREAT LEADERS

As you can see, the group life ministry of Anthem Church is critically important! We have come to realize over time that life changing groups are led by leaders who invest the best of their time, talents, and passion into the lives of their group members. ***There is simply no replacement for highly invested and gifted group leaders.***

My primary responsibility as a group leader at Anthem Church:

My primary responsibility is to help everyone in my small group to Follow Jesus + Share His Story. I do this through ongoing leadership, care, and discipleship.

The qualities of a successful group leader at Anthem Church are as follows:

1. **A deep love and devotion to Jesus Christ** and a desire to pursue continued growth in your relationship with Him. This includes an ability to model your faith for other people and live “above reproach” (1 Peter 2:11-12, 1 Timothy 4:12).
2. **A personal commitment to Anthem Church** and its ministry in this city – including church membership and an ongoing commitment toward living out our anthems.
3. **A passion for group life ministry** and a desire to see the members of their group grow toward full devotion to Jesus Christ. They love to gather a group of people together for the purposes of building relationships, spiritual growth and serving one another.
4. **An ability to attract people to themselves and to the vision of their particular group.** They are good at helping individuals feel a sense of ownership and contribute to the group.
5. **A love for the scriptures.** An ongoing love for and time in the scriptures equips leaders to effectively disciple others and pass on their faith. Group Life leaders don’t need to know everything, but they must believe that the Bible is our ultimate answer for life in Christ.

GROUP LIFE STUDY OPTIONS

One of the most important roles of a group leader is picking a good direction for each group meeting. ***After years of experience, we have come to value the importance of integrating what we are talking about on Sundays into the weekly group experience.*** We believe this helps build unity within our church body and creates a culture of personal application as each group wrestles with how the message can best be lived out in their individual lives.

Many group leaders achieve this by asking their group members to take notes on Sunday and come ready to share a thought or fresh insight that applies to the message.

They might start the group meeting by asking simple questions like: *“So what were everyone’s thoughts from the message on Sunday? What stood out to you? What was encouraging or especially challenging about the message? What do you sense the Lord wants you to do about what you heard?”* etc. This opening discussion might take 15-20 minutes or the entire group time (depending on the topic, how much people are sharing, and the specific vision of each group meeting).

In addition to a brief discussion of the sermon at every group meeting, the group leader might want to consider one of the following three ideas for the remainder of the study time:

1. TAKE THE SUNDAY MESSAGE DEEPER

Taking the Sunday message deeper is an easy way to build upon what is already fresh in people’s minds. The group leader will want to bring fresh scripture and/or insights to the group meeting in order to help the group take the Sunday message deeper and not simply repeat the message verbatim. This approach helps people deeply apply one subject to their life each week. Sundays + Group Life = Powerful Combination. We write sermon-based group life questions every single week and send them out to all group leaders in order to help equip them to have a great group discussion. If you are not already on this list, please let us know.

2. STUDY THROUGH A BOOK OF THE BIBLE

Studying through an entire book of the Bible (over a number of weeks or months) is a great way to help people get used to Bible study in their own personal lives. We would highly recommend that the group leader have a good Study Bible (Life Application or NIV Study Bible are examples) or Bible commentary (the two volume The Expositor's Bible Commentary Abridged is a good choice) so that they can study in advance of each group time. Furthermore, it might be helpful for the group leader to let their group know which chapter or verses they will be studying together so that participants can read ahead of time. For help in choosing a good book of the Bible to begin your next study with, we recommend one of the Gospels, the book of Acts, Ephesians, or Philippians as a first book to study. For further ideas, please contact our office or someone on our pastoral team.

3. STUDY THROUGH A SPECIFIC RESOURCE OR BOOK TOGETHER

There are many great studies and books available for groups to study through together. While we would not encourage this to be the ongoing practice of each group (where they simply go from book to book and never spend time in a book of the Bible or in deeper discussion about the message), short seasons (4-12 weeks) set aside for a specific study on marriage, finances, parenting, or any biblical topic can be highly beneficial for any group. If you need assistance, please reach out to a coach or pastor.

FIND YOUR “WHATEVER IT TAKES” AS A GROUP

When your group finds a sense of purpose and mission together, community will flourish like never before. Unity forms, bonds are created, and genuine community is developed between people when we do things together. We see this in the life of Jesus and his disciples. Much of the way Jesus disciplined his followers was done in the midst of doing.

We encourage every group at Anthem to find their own “Whatever It Takes” - meaning each group would find one project or ministry to participate in together for the sake of reaching our city and world with the message of Christ. Ideally, this will be something that the entire group rallies around and feels a sense of calling toward. This is important because each small group should do its best to function like a small church and live out all of our church Anthems.

On a Practical Level: We encourage every group to pick several times a year or a monthly project to complete together. Some groups do something regularly (monthly, every other month, etc) while other groups do at least one thing every semester together. The frequency of projects will depend on the unique dna of every group but we encourage them to happen at least once each fall, spring, and summer.

Two approaches to consider:

1. **Group Leaders are encouraged to create or identify an ongoing “whatever it takes” to participate in as a group.** This may involve joining with a local non-profit or creating something of their own. This often arises from an area of passion in the group leaders own hearts in conjunction with brainstorming alongside their small group. On a practical level, we encourage group leaders to brainstorm ideas with their group and then the group leaders should pray and decide on their own. It is important that the group leader is passionate about the project/ministry.
2. **If you aren’t sure what to do, or are just getting started as a group, consider joining with any number of outreaches we do through Anthem Church over the course of a year.** These include Feed My Starving Children every spring, Thanksgiving Outreach every fall, and numerous apartment outreaches, mission trips to Mexico and beyond, and community events. Joining in with existing outreaches is more simple to organize and is a great way to participate with the larger church family.

Specific Ideas to Pray About:

- Car Care Clinic: Volunteers help mostly single moms with basic car care in the parking lot of Anthem Church. Mark Hanne for more info at 918 809-8128 or mmhanne621@gmail.com

- The Little Lighthouse: The Little Lighthouse serves families and children with disabilities. Learn more at www.littlelighthouse.org or call their office for more information.
- John 3:16 Mission: Go as a group to feed the homeless. Or volunteer at their monthly outreach to students and children. Contact their volunteer coordinator for more information.
- Clean out a neighbor's flower bed, rake leaves, etc. around their house.
- Throw a "block party" by inviting neighbors to come to a cook out that your group throws.
- Adopt a widow or single mom to take dinner to and do work around their house.
- Go to a local city meeting and hand out bottles of water to people.
- Host a \$1 Car Wash where you wash people's cars and give them a \$1 Bill. (The Church has all the necessities for this.)
- Be a blessing to the teachers at the Union 9th grade center by writing cards and giving school supplies. You can contact vice principal Beau Brannon at 479 739-6757 to learn of any specific opportunities or teachers.
- Contact Josh's Sno Cones to come in their van to your neighborhood to bless your street.
- Find a local business who might need a fresh coat of paint on the outside of their building.
- Go to dinner together as a small group and leave an ENORMOUS tip for the waiter/waitress with an Anthem card.
- Care Portal: Care Portal helps those in need, specially foster parents, with practical needs like food, furniture, clothing, etc. For more information, contact Andrew Hahn at andrew@weareanthem.church.

APPRENTICESHIP, CO-LEADERS, & KINGDOM MULTIPLICATION

Your leadership has the potential to deeply impact the lives of people for generations to come. One of the ways we do that around Anthem is by developing leaders and giving our best to the next generation.

What is apprenticeship?

Apprenticeship is our primary leadership development strategy at Anthem. An apprentice is someone who is learning from someone else of more experience. For the sake of the future and for the sake of the gospel, we ask every group leader to have an apprentice they are encouraging and coaching at all times. You can use the term apprentice or co-leader for this purpose.

How do I recruit an apprentice?

The best way to recruit an apprentice is to see someone with potential, pray for God's leading, and then tell that person about the potential you see in them. Then ask them to pray about walking with you through a season of learning and leading for the sake of leading on their own one day.

How do I coach and develop an apprentice?

This doesn't have to be complicated. The best type of leadership development is coaching while doing. Jesus modeled this with his disciples. Here are five practical steps to help you coach an apprentice toward full leadership:

1. I do. You watch. We talk. *Think at your small group
2. I do. You help. We talk.
3. You do. I help. We talk.
4. You do. I watch. We talk.
5. You do. Your new apprentice watches. Your two talk.

When you talk after doing and watching, consider asking "What went well?", "What could have gone better?", and "What did you learn?" types of questions.

What does a practical long-term coaching and developing relationship look like?

We would encourage you to meet monthly in person or by phone/video to talk through "victories" (what is going well), "challenges" (what has been difficult) and "hot topics" (one topic each that you want to talk through together).

What is the purpose?

The Kingdom is in need of multiplication and reproduction. This includes a multiplication of disciples, leaders, small groups, and churches. Your life can become a multiplier and live beyond your own leadership! As you raise up other kingdom leaders, the kingdom advances!

ADDITIONAL COACHING IDEAS FOR GROUP LEADERS

Everyone needs a coach. The scriptures are full of examples of people being taught by the wisdom and experience of those before them and then passing that wisdom down to the next generation of leaders. One of the best scriptural examples is of Paul the Apostle who had both a mentor (Ananias), a peer (Barnabas), and a disciple (Timothy). The healthy believer will have each of these three involved in each of their seasons of life and ministry.

If you would like to be coached as a group leader please share your desire with a staff member and we'll do all that we can to help you grow as a leader.

EXAMPLE COACHING QUESTIONS:

- Tell me about your groups recent victories and challenges.
- What specific hot topic (most important) would you like to discuss today?
- How are you doing – with life, relationships, time management, Christ?
- What is going well? What you are struggling with?
- What's happening with the people in your group? Stories of Life Change?
- Who are you investing in as an apprentice leader?
- What's next for your group?
- Do you have any questions for me?

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURES TO TALK ABOUT DURING COACHING

- Acts 2:42-47 Developing a vision for your group
- 1 Peter 5:1-4 What it means to be a shepherd
- Matthew 13:1-23 The Parable of the Sower (different types of soil; the same seed)
- 1 Timothy 3:1-13 The qualifications for elders & deacons (leaders in the church)
- Ephesians 4:1-16 Called to equip God's people for life and ministry

TIPS FOR LEADING A GREAT GROUP DISCUSSION

TIP 1: INVITE PEOPLE TO COME

New people breathe life into the group and it is the leader's responsibility to model inviting for the rest of the group. A healthy group size is between 8-15 people (a little larger or smaller can work as well).

TIP 2: PREPARE IN ADVANCE

Take some time before each weekly meeting to prepare for the series/lesson using resources such as the notes from the Sunday message, commentaries, and additional books / study guides. And don't forget to pray!! Pray about the lesson you are discussing and for the hearts of group members to be open.

TIP 3: OPENING QUESTIONS/INTRODUCTIONS

If you have any new(er) guests, allow everyone an opportunity to introduce themselves. It may be helpful to have everyone answer an opening question that allows people to share, relax, or have fun.

TIP 4: GET YOUR GROUP MEMBERS INVOLVED

The goal is to do whatever you can to get everyone talking during every group meeting.

TIP 5: HAVE FUN TOGETHER

People's hearts open when they have fun together. We encourage groups to find ways to have fun together on a regular basis – whether through each weekly meeting or through fun times together outside of group. If you have fun together – you'll stay together.

TIP 6: USE THE BIBLE

Every group meeting should have as its foundation the study of God's word. Depending on the week, it may be more helpful to pick one main passage rather than several verses or smaller passages so that the group can easily follow along. The Spirit of God anoints the reading and preaching of God's word – so the more you include it in your plans the more your plans will succeed.

TIP 7: BE CREATIVE

Make the Bible come alive in a fresh way for your group and watch their learning grow!

TIP 8: LEAD PEOPLE TOWARD PERSONAL APPLICATION

You don't just want to have a good discussion. You want people to wrestle with the topic and then apply it to their lives. You might ask group members to share their "take away" at the conclusion of each group experience to help them move beyond information and listening.

TIP 9: PRAY TOGETHER

Give your group members an opportunity to voice prayer requests for the group to lift up in prayer. Sometimes it's effective to open up the prayer time for multiple people to voice prayers. Other times you may want to select one person to lead the prayer.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

HOW DO I START A NEW GROUP?

We are excited that you are interested in leading a group at Anthem Church. The three qualifications for new leaders include: (1) You have partnered with Anthem Church through church membership; (2) You embrace Anthem Church's group's strategy and values; (3) You are recommended for this role by your current group leader. If all of these are true of you, then please set up a meeting with a pastor or groups ministry leader to begin discussing the idea of starting a new group.

WHY DO WE START NEW GROUPS?

New groups are started in order to reach out to new people. Usually 1-2 people will agree to lead this new group and then invite new people (those not already connected with a group) to join this new group. We like to start "new groups for new people" because new people are looking for new relationships and when they all begin a group together at the same time relationships flourish.

HOW LONG ARE GROUP LEADERS EXPECTED TO SERVE?

The initial commitment of a new group leader is for the upcoming semester (fall, spring, or summer, etc) but normally lasts for 9-10 months. Beyond that, this is to be decided by the group leader in conjunction with his/her leader.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT GROUPS ARE THE "CENTER OF CARE" IN OUR CHURCH?

In many ways, group leaders serve as shepherds/pastors to the members of their group. When someone is in need (sickness, financial, spiritual, etc) or has a concern, we ask our group leaders to be on the front-lines in terms of meeting with and providing care to their group members. That's one reason our groups are so important. If someone's not in a group, it's much easier for them to fall between the cracks in terms of care.

SHOULD OUR GROUP BE FOR A CERTAIN TYPE OF PEOPLE OR REMAIN "OPEN"?

That depends entirely on the vision of the individual group leader and the needs of the church. Some groups choose to organize around a certain type of people (i.e. age, male/female, marital status, children present, etc.), a certain location (i.e. for people who live in Broken Arrow or Midtown), or a theme (sermon based, reading through the Bible together, etc.) All of these are good options and carry various pros and cons.

WHAT IS THE MOST HELPFUL WAY TO ORGANIZE A GROUP?

We highly suggest that every group have the following: (1) Group Leader(s), (2) Apprentice Leader, (3) and Host Home Leader (often different than the group leader's home).

IF I NEED SOMEONE'S CONTACT INFORMATION, CAN THE CHURCH HELP?

Absolutely. Simply contact a staff person and we can get you the information you need, or help you get set up with our Online Community with extended permissions.

HOW SHOULD WE PREPARE FOR CHILDREN IN OUR GROUP?

While many adults have a genuine desire to get connected in a group where they can build relationships and grow spiritually; it is very common for there to be childcare challenges. Though there are challenges, rest assured that there are many good solutions that have allowed groups with kids to meet on a regular basis. Here are a collection of the best options to consider:

1. Have your group meeting during a day and time that the church already provides kids programming options at the building. Currently, this includes Sunday mornings and Sunday evenings.
2. Each family makes arrangements for their own childcare needs.
3. The group may decide to come up with its own solution for childcare, including involving the children in the group time, sharing the cost of a babysitter at the host home, or rotating responsibilities among group members.

WHAT DO I DO IF SOMEONE IN MY GROUP IS GOING THROUGH A CRISIS?

Please reach out to a pastor or member of our pastoral care team and we will help.

WHAT COUNSELLING RECOMMENDATIONS SHOULD I OFFER SOMEONE GOING THROUGH A CRISIS?

While there are many good counseling groups available, we strongly recommend people find a licensed, Christian counselor who is counseling with a Christian worldview. Locally, we have frequently recommended Cornerstone Christian Counselling and Christian Family Institute. For more information, please reach out to our Pastoral Team led by Pastor Rob McNamara. Pastor Rob can be reached at rob@weareanthechurch.com.