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A Letter from Pastor Chris

Dear Friend,

Thank you for expressing interest in the small group ministry of Grace Point Church! Small groups are the best way we know how to encourage true discipleship, accountability, and spiritual growth. Small groups accomplish this through the teaching of God's Word, fellowship with other believers, and reaching out to the community around us.

We are constantly encouraging attendees to take the next step in their spiritual growth and our small groups play a huge part in making sure that our congregation's spiritual maturity will flourish.

Small groups exist to create a place for attendees to connect with other believers and to help them grow in their faith.

We must work diligently to grow larger and smaller at the same time. We want to be larger in the number of souls that are being saved. We want to be smaller by creating more small groups to maintain personal relationships. We hope you will soon discover that a small group is a place where you are known, cared for, and encouraged to grow in your faith.

It is our prayer that you will help others develop deep relationships that foster spiritual growth and move beyond superficial relationships.

I'll be praying for you as you live out the Great Commission!

1 Thessalonians 2:8

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris", with a stylized, sweeping underline.

Pastor Chris

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Section One: General Information

The Theme Verse

"We care so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us."

1 Thessalonians 2:8 CSB

1. **We care so much for you...**

Ministry without a pure heart is empty; ministry must be an expression of the love in our hearts for one another.

2. **... that we were pleased ...**

There is nothing wrong with feeling good because we are ministering to one another. In fact, we should train ourselves to take joy in serving others.

3. **... to share with you ...**

Sharing is exactly what we are doing. We can't force others to take what we have to offer.

4. **... not only the gospel of God, ...**

Our shared gift to others is nothing less than the very gospel of God. We have the truth, and we offer the truth to others.

5. **... but also our own lives, ...**

We are much more than college professors; we offer more than information. We must make large investments in relationships without worrying about the interest and return.

6. **... because you had become dear...**

One of the goals of small groups is for those in your group to become "dear" to you; know also that "becoming" is a long road paved with time.

7. **... to us.**

There are no lone rangers in a healthy small group or church. Remember that you are a part of a team; rely on them and be reliable.

What Is A Small Group?

1. **Small Group Definition.**

A small group is an intentional gathering of believers who covenant together to fulfill the Great Commission by living out the gospel in their community.

2. **Why a network of small groups?**

We operate as a network of small groups because we believe they are a great environment for fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and missions. Functioning as a network allows for large opportunities like major mission projects, large teaching forums, men's ministry, or women's ministry. The small groups that make up the network allow for the intimate interaction of accountability and exercising spiritual gifts. We see the "big" and the "small" environments as complimentary.

3. **Who are the small groups for?**

Everyone! Small groups are intentionally organized by geography. That means that small groups are a family with a diversity of ages and life stages. Small groups are a place where we learn from one another and share life together. This doesn't mean that we don't have ministries to specific life stages. It means that those ministries flow from the network of small groups.

4. **What makes Grace Point small groups different?**

Some churches offer small groups as one of the many ministries of the church's programs. We might say they are a church *with* small groups. In contrast, Grace Point small groups are not just what we do, they are who we are. We might say we are a church *of* small groups. We desire for the ministry of our church to flow through and from our small groups.

5. **What is a "Small Group Leader"?**

A Small Group Leader is what we call the person who facilitates and shepherds the small group.

6. **What is a "Small Group Coach"?**

A Small Group Coach is what we call the overseer of a network of small groups.

7. What is the typical format of a small group?

Every small group is different. The most common structure is sharing a meal, Bible study, and doing mission together.

8. Why should I join a small group?

Small groups are where we share life together on mission. The Bible doesn't say the church is like a family, it says the church IS a family. In our world, clubs and crowds are everywhere you look. Superficial friendships, casual interactions, and godless values make up the dominant colors of the tapestry of our culture. The Church is called to be different and marked by powerful, authentic, and Christ-centered community. We seek to create "pockets of community" through small groups. Here are some of the benefits of being involved in a small group:

- You will be known and accepted.
- You can be verbal and discuss important life issues.
- You can be accountable to a spiritual mentor and challenged to grow spiritually.
- You can get personalized applications of biblical truths and find real help for the real problems you face.

9. Do all small groups study the same thing?

Nope. It is up to each small group to decide what to study. We have a catalog of recommended and approved studies. There are times we want the entire church to be on the same page and all small groups will be using the same material. Small Group Leaders can request specific studies from the SG Coach for approval. The approval process is primarily for theological alignment.

10. Can I just show up?

Most people are not typically comfortable attending a small group "cold," so we do our best to put you in touch with someone in the small group (typically the SG Leader) before you go. That way you can get more details about what to expect and "know" at least one person.

12. Where do small groups meet?

Small groups can meet anywhere! They may meet in someone's home, coffee shops, or the YMCA. Since we (the people) are the church, the building does not really matter.

13. Is childcare provided?

Grace Point as the “mothership” does not provide childcare. It is up to each small group to decide. Some small groups may choose to have a lesson for the children in a separate room and some may choose to include the children in the content time with the adults. Since children are part of the family, we encourage their inclusion at some level.

14. Can I switch small groups?

Yes, but don't give up too quickly. Our recommendation is to attend at least three weeks before moving to a different small group. Keep in mind there is no perfect small group! Talk with one of the leaders at the Connection Point to switch small groups.

15. Can I join a small group in a different area than where I live?

The goal is for everyone to attend the small group closest to their home. We understand this is not always realistic. For example, there may not be one in your neighborhood or the small group closest to you may meet on Wednesdays and you are only available on Thursday. The most important thing is that you get plugged in to one! Being in a small group close to your home allows you to be “on mission” for Christ in your community with others from your community.

16. How do I get into a small group?

If you have a friend or family member who is in a small group, attending theirs is always a great start! On the home page of our Web App, click the “Sign Up” icon. Or just visit one of the leaders at the Connection Point on Sunday.

17. How can I volunteer to serve in leadership of a small group?

The leadership ranges from coaches, leaders, hosts, apprentices, and so forth. From the Small Groups page of our Web App, select “Small Group Resources” and “Leadership Information.” Or just visit one of the leaders at the Connection Point on Sunday.

19. What else do you have other than small groups?

Small groups are really who we are. We do have program-based ministries for children and students through high school, but that is the majority of our programs. We do not have typical age-graded Sunday school classes. At the end of the day, ministry at Grace Point just looks different. We seek to give as much ministry as possible to the non-paid, everyday Christ-follower because we know that we are all ministers of the Gospel under the true head of the church, Jesus.

20. Still have questions?

If you still have questions about small groups, you can contact us through the Web App. You can also talk with one of our leaders at the Connection Point on Sunday.

The Purpose of Small Groups

1. **Small Group Purpose.**

Small groups are a place for authentic fellowship. Our greatest desire for small groups is that it is a place where believers can connect with one another and form meaningful relationships with other believers.

Small groups are a place for discipleship. Every week we will study and discuss biblical passages. A portion of the small group time will be devoted to the application of biblical truths to our lives.

Small groups are a launching pad for ministry and missions in the church. We desire to see every small group actively involved in ministry and missions.

2. **Small Group Vision.**

We desire to see 80-90% of our Weekend Worship Service attendees connected to the church family through a small group.

We desire to see small groups and networks of small groups in every community around the larger Lake Norman community.

We desire to see every small group committed to launching new small groups for the purpose of remaining mission-focused and kingdom-minded.

3. **Small Group Values.**

Grace Point Values are the same for all ministries of the church. These core values are summarized in the themes of the Gospel: creation, the fall, redemption, and restoration.

- We value PEOPLE because they are created in the image of God
- We value GRACE because we know that people are flawed.
- We value REDEMPTION because we ourselves have been redeemed.
- We value TRANSFORMATION because it brings glory to Jesus.

The Components of a Small Group

- 1. Pre-Meeting Preparations.** (Host)
Small Group Host: Make sure the temperature is set around 70 degrees, pets are put away, and refreshments are ready.
- 2. Refreshments.** (Refreshments Coordinator & Others)
Find some time during your gathering for refreshments. This could be before, during, or after.
- 3. Leadership Arrives.** (SG Leader, Apprentice, & Host)
The SG Leader and Apprentice(s) should arrive no later than 15 minutes before the scheduled time for their small group. Use this time to greet others as they arrive.
- 4. Welcome & Prayer.** (SG Leader & Apprentice)
The Apprentice introduces guests to the group and someone opens the group in prayer.
- 5. Spiritual HABITS.** (SG Leader, Apprentice, or HABITS Champion)
Devote intentional time for encouraging others. This is a great opportunity to ask how others is doing in developing Spiritual HABITS. What challenges are they facing? How can you pray for them?
- 6. Topic-Teaser.** (SG Leader, Apprentice, or Other)
The Apprentice leads some type of ice-breaker/topic teaser for the group. The topic teaser should encourage discussion and introduce the topic to be discussed during Bible study.
- 7. Bible Study.** (SG Leader – primary, Apprentice - monthly)
This is where you actually get to the curriculum aspects of your small group. Don't rush through the study and don't be afraid of silence. If you ask a question, allow enough time for others to think and consider their answers before moving too quickly. Men and women may choose to form separate breakout groups for accountability and deeper relationship building.
- 8. Missions Project Update.** (Missions Coordinator or Other)
Take some time to discuss your current mission project.
- 9. Prayer Requests and Dismiss.** (SG Leader or Prayer Warrior)
Near the end of your meeting take time to hear prayer requests from your small group. Close in prayer and dismiss. Once you dismiss, make sure that you stick around for a moment in case someone wants to speak with you.

Section Two: Leadership Information

The Leaders of Small Groups

We desire for every member of every small group to have some ministry responsibility within the group. However, we have identified four leadership positions that ensure a successful small group structure.

1. Small Group Coach.

The Small Group Coach oversees a regional network of SG Leaders (those who lead the small group). There are three primary roles of the Coach.

- **Huddle:** Meet monthly with all SG Leaders in their network to pray, train, and equip.
- **Visit the Group:** Visit each small group at least twice each year to affirm the leader and the group.
- **One-on-One:** Make one on one contact with each SG Leader on a regular basis (e.g. phone calls, lunch meetings, etc.). This is an opportunity to “shepherd your shepherds.”

2. Small Group Leader.

The Small Group Leader provides personal leadership to their group. There are four primary roles of the SG Leader.

- **Study:** Prepare for the lesson and facilitate the discussion.
- **Recruit & Launch:** Select at least one apprentice and possibly two apprentices to train and give opportunities to lead. Guide the group toward reproduction of another small group.
- **Disciple Others:** Shepherd your small group by helping them develop Spiritual HABITS, care for them in times of need, and help them with movement in spiritual growth.
- **Be Discipled:** Meet with your Coach on a regular basis and attend Huddle meetings for prayer, training, and equipping.

3. Small Group Apprentice.

The Small Group Apprentice is being prepared for the role of SG Leader. It is the understanding and goal that they will launch their own small group and develop their own apprentice(s). There are six primary roles of the Apprentice.

- **Guests:** Identifies, welcomes, and introduces guests.
- **Attendance:** Takes attendance and reports to the Coach.

- **Ice-Breaker:** Opens the group with an ice-breaker or topic-teaser.
- **Refreshments:** Ensures a refreshment schedule is developed.
- **Study:** Leads the discussion/teaching time once a month.
- **Missions:** Leads the group in developing a group mission project.

4. Small Group Host.

The Small Group Host is primarily concerned with creating a welcoming environment. There are five primary roles of the Host.

- **Location:** Provides location for the small group to meet.
- **Greeting:** Arrives early and greets everyone as they arrive.
- **Refreshments:** Sets up refreshments before the meeting time.
- **Seating:** Arranges the chairs for best group interaction.
- **Comfort:** Sets the temperature around 70 degrees and makes sure pets are put away.

5. HABITS Champion.*

The HABITS Champion is primarily concerned with helping people in their small group have the resources necessary for personal spiritual growth.

- **Hang Time:** Devotional and prayer resources.
- **Accountability:** Prayer partners and accountability groups.
- **Bible Memorization:** Scripture Memory & Study Resources.
- **Involvement in Ministry & Mission:** Serving.
- **Tithing Commitment:** Stewardship Challenge & Resources.
- **Sermon Application:** Personal application of messages.

6. Missions Coordinator.*

Each small group should identify a Missions Coordinator. They will coordinate projects for the small group and will also network with the other Missions Coordinators to facilitate regional and church-wide missional emphases.

- **Missional Focus:** Each small group should have a missional focus. We believe that each small group should be empowered with the freedom to plan and implement a missional effort about which they can be excited and passionate.
- **Missional Accountability:** The small group environment provides accountability to accomplish missional goals. The group provides support and accountability for individuals

as they identify specific individuals with whom they are witnessing. The group also provides support and accountability as together they live out the mission of God to the people they have been called.

- **Missions Ideas:** When praying about specific missions projects, each small group should consider ways they can build relationships and develop an on-going missional effort. Here are just a few ideas...
 - Adopt a nursing home.
 - Adopt a local school and coordinate an appreciation dinner.
 - Take baby baskets for new mothers to a local hospital with invitation to our church.
 - Offer free oil change and basic car maintenance for people in the community once a month.
 - Welcome baskets for new residents.
 - Take appreciation baskets to local police, fire fighters, emergency personnel, etc.
 - Host a block party for your neighborhood. See your Small Group Coach about planning a block party.

7. Men's & Women's Ministry Coordinators.*

Each small group should identify a Men's Ministry Coordinator and a Women's Ministry Coordinator. They will network with other Men's & Women's Ministry Coordinators to facilitate regional and church-wide forums.

8. Fellowship Coordinator.*

Each small group should identify a Fellowship Coordinator. They will coordinate fellowships for the small group and will also network with the other Fellowship Coordinators to facilitate regional and church-wide fellowship opportunities.

9. Additional Small Group Leadership Opportunities.

The small group environment is the launching pad for ministry and missions. It ensures that our church does not operate with 20% of the people doing 80% of the work. Here are some additional ideas for members of your small group.

- Prayer Warrior
- Refreshments Coordinator
- Childcare Coordinator
- Card Coordinator (we miss you, get well, etc.)
- Worship Leader
- Social Media Coordinator

* Those marked with an asterisk will work with others who hold the same position in other small groups. They will network together to coordinate regional and church-wide emphases.

Leadership Training

1. Huddle.

Your Network Small Group Coach will schedule monthly training huddles.

2. Follow-Up Questions.

Twice each year, your coach will ask you the following questions so they can better care for you.

1. I've been praying for you; is there something specific I can be praying about?
2. How is your spiritual life right now? Prayer time? Time alone with God? Are you on an upswing or downswing?
3. How do you feel about your ministry right now?
 - a. Are you enjoying your ministry?
 - b. What do you like most? What do you like least?
 - c. What's the hardest aspect for you about being an SG Leader?
4. What's God doing in your life right now?
5. Tell me about your small group.
 - a. Are you having any difficulties?
 - b. How are they responding to the lessons?
 - c. What are some of their struggles?
 - d. Do you feel like you're connecting with others in your small group?
 - e. Have you seen anyone in your group outside of your small group setting? (e.g. Did you visit them in the hospital? Take them out to lunch?)
 - f. Are you comfortable leading your group?
6. Tell me about your apprentice(s).
 - a. Have you spent time training him/her?
 - b. Do you feel they are ready to lead a small group?
 - c. How soon do you anticipate launching?
7. How can I help you? Is there an area where you are struggling?
8. Tell me about the people in your small group; how are they doing?

Leadership Strategies and Reports

1. **Attendance Reports.**

Please have someone from your group (e.g. Apprentice) make sure that attendance is taken each week and reported to your coach.

2. **First-Time Guest Strategy.**

If you have a first-time guest, please make sure that you get their full contact information (e.g. mailing address, e-mail address, phone numbers). Share that contact information with your coach. It's important that we have adequate information for follow-up purposes. Don't assume we already have it.

Please make contact with them as soon as possible after your group has met. Let them know that we appreciate them attending and we hope to see them again. If they do not return after 3 weeks, contact them again and let them know you've been praying for them and they're always welcome to attend your small group.

3. **3-Week Strategy.**

Small groups are the #1 venue for developing community and making sure people feel connected. For this reason, it's extremely important that we have a strategy for making sure that no one "falls through the cracks."

It's understandable when someone misses a week or two of small groups due to busy schedules. However, if someone misses three consecutive weeks, we want to make sure the SG Leader contacts them. It's important to follow-up with them even if we already know why they have missed the three weeks. Three consecutive absences are usually an indication that something is going on in their life and we should be proactive in ministering to their needs.

For this reason, your Apprentice should watch closely for absentees. Because of the purpose and high value of small groups, this may be the most important thing you can do for a person who is struggling to connect. Please don't assume that an e-mail is sufficient. If anyone misses a 4th week, please make sure that a personal phone call is made.

Section Three: Shepherding a SG

Four Commitments of an SG Leader

1. **Connections.**

"We care so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us" 1 Thessalonians 2:8.

Superficial community exists at nearly every level of our lives, and we often settle for less and miss out on powerful relationships. Your small group should be a place where people feel the freedom to be real and take risks in sharing their struggles. The first step to creating this environment should be taken by the leaders. The following section will explain the six stages of building genuine community.

2. **Commitment.**

"Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" James 3:1.

Your task is not to be taken lightly. As a mature believer, you have within you the ability to communicate God's truth. Be committed with your diligence to prepare for your small group time. Follow up on important issues. Be the leader God created you to be.

3. **Authenticity.**

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" Colossians 3:14.

Don't seek to offer something to your small group that you don't have. Maintain a vibrant relationship with Christ. Make filling yourself up with God's Word your first priority, and then passing that along to others will require less effort as you'll be offering directly from your heart. Be regularly concerned about your spiritual health.

4. **Maturity.**

"But solid food is for the mature, who by contrast use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil" Hebrews 6:11.

The ultimate goal of your investment in the lives of your small group is to encourage them to grow closer to God. Help them mature in intimacy with God and the knowledge of the truth. Pray for your small group and other leaders.

Relational Ministry

As part of your training as a Small Group Leader, it is important to understand the six stages of building genuine community. In many cases we have overused and generalized the word “fellowship” to include just about everything we do in ministry. Typically, when we think of “fellowship,” we might think of a potluck meal with fried chicken served once a month in the church “fellowship hall.” Many times we hear people say, “Hope you can make it; it will be a great time of fellowship.”

In the early church, fellowship was more relational than recreational. Don’t get me wrong. I enjoy recreation and think it’s a vital part in building genuine fellowship in any group. However, the most effective way to produce biblical fellowship is through building a sense of community.

1. Stage One: Getting Acquainted.

The first step in building community is to break down the cliques and barriers that exist, and to establish a sense of trust. During small group, we dedicate intentional time for members of the group to get to know one another.

2. Stage Two: Group Bonding.

We all want to be accepted. However, in our attempt to be accepted we can fail to become a church and instead become a collection of self-serving individuals. When people are welcomed and accepted by others, they begin to identify themselves as being part of the group.

3. Stage Three: Opening Up.

People like to talk about themselves. When an individual can share non-threatening areas of his or her life, they have made a huge step in growing toward genuine fellowship.

4. Stage Four: Affirmation.

This step is absolutely crucial to growing a healthy church. When people are encouraging each other we are experiencing a glimpse of what genuine fellowship was intended to be in the New Testament Church. When a man is encouraged by his peers, he will enjoy participating in the group much more. When a woman is told by her friends that they appreciate her, her feelings of self-worth dramatically increase.

5. Stage Five: Stretching.

The Bible says we are to “consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds,” because difficult situations can bring about growth (cf. James 1:2-3). We all go through trials, but when these tough times are experienced as a group, opportunities arise for people to truly “bear one another’s burdens.”

6. Stage Six: Deeper Sharing & Goal Setting.

The stage has now been set for the final and most important step: Individuals share deeply with other members of the group and set goals. At this stage, group members are not “gossiped about” nor “condemned” for sharing they have a drinking problem. When group members share a problem, the rest of the group is empathetic and gives support and encouragement.

As a Small Group Leader, it would be wise to assess the progress of your small group through these six stages of building genuine community. It is our hopes and prayers that this tool enables you to lead a group toward genuine fellowship, one that will penetrate through every aspect of our church and we will be a healthy, comforting, close-knit, caring, sharing, and loving community. That’s genuine fellowship!

Spiritual HABITS

We want every member of a small group to be developing Spiritual HABITS that will help them grow on their own. Learning some classical spiritual disciplines won't just enhance your maturity; your growth will not be dependent on a program. To help develop these disciplines we have created some resources.

Each small group should identify a HABITS Champion who will help others in their small group develop these disciplines. This person will also be part of the Resource Team for the entire church. The Resource Team operates the church's bookstore and helps people find the resources they need to help them grow in their faith.

- H. Hang Time with God.** Daily Bible reading and prayer.
- A. Accountability in a Small Group.**
- B. Bible.** Bible Study & Bible Memorization.
- I. Involvement in Ministry & Missions.** Where do you serve?
- T. Tithing Commitment.** Giving 10% of your income to God.
- S. Sermon Application.** Personal application of messages.

Movement Toward Spiritual Growth

As a Small Group Leader, you are taking on the responsibility of helping others mature in their faith. There are two things that you can look for in helping others mature: fruitfulness and movement.

Spiritual growth is a process that requires movement. Within the context of your small group, we want to be continually challenging attendees to take the next step in their faith. The following can help you assess movement.

Step 1: Worship (Weekend Worship Services)

Our worship services are often the first point of contact for first time guests.

Step 2: Fellowship (Small Group)

Our small groups are where people begin to feel connected to the church family, develop relationships, and commit to growing in their faith. As a Small Group Leader, you should be able to explain the gospel, know if your small group attendees have been baptized, be able to explain baptism, and answer their questions.

Step 3: Discipleship (Personal Spiritual Growth)

Spiritual HABITS are disciplines that you develop at your own pace. As a Small Group Leader, you should be able to explain the Spiritual HABITS, help small group attendees develop these disciplines, and answer their questions about spiritual growth.

Step 4: Ministry (A Ministry in the Church)

One of the greatest roles of a Small Group Leader is to challenge others to get involved in ministry. Every person should have a ministry in the church. As a Small Group Leader, you should know who is serving, where they are serving, and help them find a place to serve.

Step 5: Missions (A Mission in the World)

We want to encourage each small group to give leadership to missions. Through small groups, we can mobilize 100% of our church congregation in missions. Every person should have a mission in the world. As a Small Group Leader, you should know what missions opportunities are available and know how to help get people engaged in missional living.