



FORMING MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES

While we put this resource together creatively, much of what is said is either taken from or heavily influenced by others who have gone ahead of us. We've been so influenced by others that it's impossible to know exactly who to give credit for what, but we do want to specifically mention the following:

Stonegate Church | Midlothian, TX | stonegate.church
The Covenant Church | Shreveport, LA | thecovenantchurch.com
Austin Stone Community Church | Austin, TX | austinstone.org
Redeemer Round Rock | Round Rock, TX | redeemerrr.org
Soma | wearesoma.com
3DM | 3dmovements.com
Total Church, Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, 2008
Saturate, Jeff Vanderstelt, 2015
Leading Missional Communities, Mike Breen, 2013

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Describing Missional Community

A Missional Community is ***a gospel-centered family who lives on mission together.***

Gospel-Centered - Missional Communities gather and operate around the gospel. They are not formed around common interests or hobbies, people who enjoy each other's company, or people in similar life stages. While a Missional Community may share some of these things, it is centered around Jesus and the gospel message.

The gospel is the good news that God, in Jesus, has reconciled us to himself (2 Cor. 5.18), and in doing so has reconciled us to each other (Eph. 2.16). So we are community only because Jesus has made us that way, and our primary orientation in the community is around him (Eph. 2.20).

Family - A Missional Community that is functioning well is more than a loosely connected group of people. Our connection in the gospel and our orientation around Jesus makes us sons and daughters of God (Rom. 8.16) and brothers and sisters to each other. Since this is true, Missional Communities should function less like classes or programs and more like families (1 Tim. 3.15), both in relationships and rhythms.

On Mission - A Missional Community is the spiritual family of God, and our God has a mission (Mt. 28.18-20). He is a sending God. He sent Jesus, and Jesus sent us (Jn. 20.21). So we are not simply a gathered people who enjoy the benefits of being together or being in the family of God. In reconciling us to himself, God has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation for others (2 Cor. 5.19), and Missional Communities live on mission as a fundamental part of who they are.

Together - The family nature of a Missional Community implies a togetherness in the way we live, but it is worth saying plainly: a Missional Community is not a bunch of people talking about community, life, discipleship, or mission and then going our separate ways to live that out. We live out these things together (Acts 2.42-27). We are regularly involved in each other's lives, and we consistently live out Jesus' mission as a function of that life together, rather than alone.

So a Missional Community is ***a gospel-centered family who lives on mission together.***

How <i>Not</i> to Think About Missional Community	How to Think About Missional Community
Program	People
Event	Family
Weekly meeting	Rhythms of life
Bible study or social group	In life & on mission together

Basic Elements of a Missional Community

To most effectively live as a gospel-centered family on mission, we have identified six basic elements of a Missional Community:

1) **Pray & listen to God together**

As a gospel-centered family we should certainly be communicating with God, we should be doing it together, and a big part of that is listening. In addition to asking God for things in prayer, we should be asking God where he is at work around us, what he wants to teach us, and what he is doing among us, as well as listening for his voice. There should be both an individual and a corporate nature to this.

2) **Pursue Bible-saturated spiritual growth**

A part of following Jesus is growing in discipleship. We want to be taking spiritual steps forward both as individuals and as a Missional Community. We never want to stall, having good conversations about God, but not putting things into action and growing in maturity. As we make spiritual growth a goal, spending time reading the Bible and discussing what God is saying through it should be a regular part of our rhythms.

3) **Eat together**

Making community a goal does not usually end well. A group with that kind of goal usually winds up inward-focused and eventually implodes. But there is one thing that naturally builds community that we can intentionally do, and that is eat together regularly. Everyone eats, and life is shared around the table, so eating becomes an easy invitation into the community and a natural place to develop both community and disciple-making relationships.

4) **Bear each other's burdens**

Part of being family is caring for each other, and one tangible way we do that is bearing each other's burdens. Some of our burdens are the trials of life, like a death, losing a job, or problems in our marriage. Some of our burdens are just the ordinary pressures of life like stress at work or home, work around the house, or moving. In all of these things, we care for each other enough to know what is going on, offer counsel or prayer, and offer to help when there is a need we can meet.

5) **Pray for the lost**

One of the first and most effective ways to live out God's mission to the lost is to pray for them. We recommend every person have a "Top 5" of unbelievers in their lives they are praying for consistently. As an MC we should pray for these people together, asking the Lord to draw them to himself and to use those in your MC as part of that process.

6) **Invite others in**

Many people will not be open to the gospel story or to faith in Jesus at first hearing. Their unfamiliarity with it, or their past experience, make them unready to believe. For many of these people, seeing what life among the people of Jesus is like will be a major part of their journey. As we invite them into life in our MC's, they will have an opportunity to see and hear what it means to follow Jesus and may start picturing themselves that way.

The Role of a Missional Community Leader

A Missional Community leader is a spiritual guide who consistently reminds their people of the gospel, prays and cares for them, encourages them to hear and respond to God, and leads them toward an outward focus as part of the life of Remedy Church.

- Being a **spiritual guide** starts with maintaining a consistent and healthy walk with Jesus. One of your primary responsibilities is to **spend personal time with Jesus in his word, prayer, and worship on a regular basis** and to cultivate loving and humble devotion to him in your own life. Without this, you can't lead others.
- Being a spiritual guide also means taking responsibility for a group of people spiritually. It doesn't mean you do everything for them—in fact, you can't—but it does mean that you **invest yourself in their lives and their spiritual health**.
- The first job of an MC leader is to **remind their people of the gospel** regularly. We do this by keeping Jesus central and the message of grace clear in our teaching, correcting, training, and conversation. Our goal is to shape people's hearts by a deepening understanding of the gospel that leads to obedience.
- It's not your job to do all the **caring** and **discipling**, but it is your job to see that everyone in your MC is being cared for and has the opportunity to be disciplined and grow spiritually.
- Having an **outward focus** does not happen by accident. It is the result of intentionally modeling living on mission and consistently keeping disciple-making in front of your people.
- You and your Missional Community are **part of Remedy Church**. You are not on an island as a leader, and your MC is not on an island as a community. We are here for each other, and we are moving toward a common mission together.
- Know when to **ask for help**. You are not alone. Your Missional Community Shepherd is there to help you navigate hard conversations or situations and even to get involved when needed. When you come up against something you aren't sure how to handle, or that just doesn't feel right, reach out for help.

You are the pacesetter...

- You are modeling the life of a disciple.
- You are modeling the life of a missionary.
- You are caring for your people, leading them toward spiritual maturity and mission.
- You are not expected to be perfect or have all the answers, but your MC will not outpace you. Lead the way, admit your mistakes and struggles, and invite them into your life.

Big Picture: Your job is to lead your MC to be a gospel-centered family on mission together.

Practically Speaking: Leading your MC toward gospel-centered family on mission means leading them to live out the six elements of a Missional Community.

Forming a Missional Community

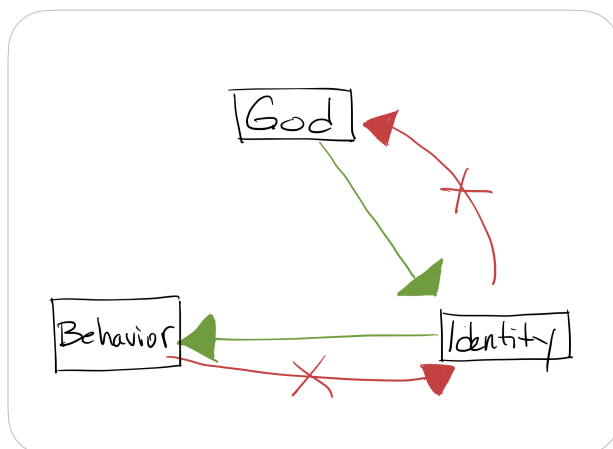
1) Start with a gospel foundation

The gospel is the centerpiece of missional community. This is the good news that God has, in his grace, rescued us through faith in Jesus and repentance from sin—setting us free from sin and shame, giving us a new identity, and freeing us to obey out of love and devotion. Everything he is presently doing is to redeem and sanctify, and one day he will restore all things in Jesus. He has given us a new identity in Jesus, he is currently working that identity out in us as we more deeply understand the gospel, and one day he will perfect us.

The gospel informs all of our living, teaching, correcting, training, and conversation, and as we more profoundly understand and apply the gospel to our lives we gladly bring our lives more into obedience to Jesus.

Our goal is to shape people who are “gospel fluent.” This means that we are growing in our understanding of the vast implications of the gospel, that we can apply it to our own hearts, and that we can articulate and apply it in conversations with non-believers and believers.

THE GOSPEL		
...saved us from the penalty of sin.	...is saving us from the power of sin.	...will save us from the presence of sin.
Colossians 1.21-22 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless before him...	Titus 2.11-12 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age...	Titus 2.13 ...waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.
Justification	Sanctification	Glorification

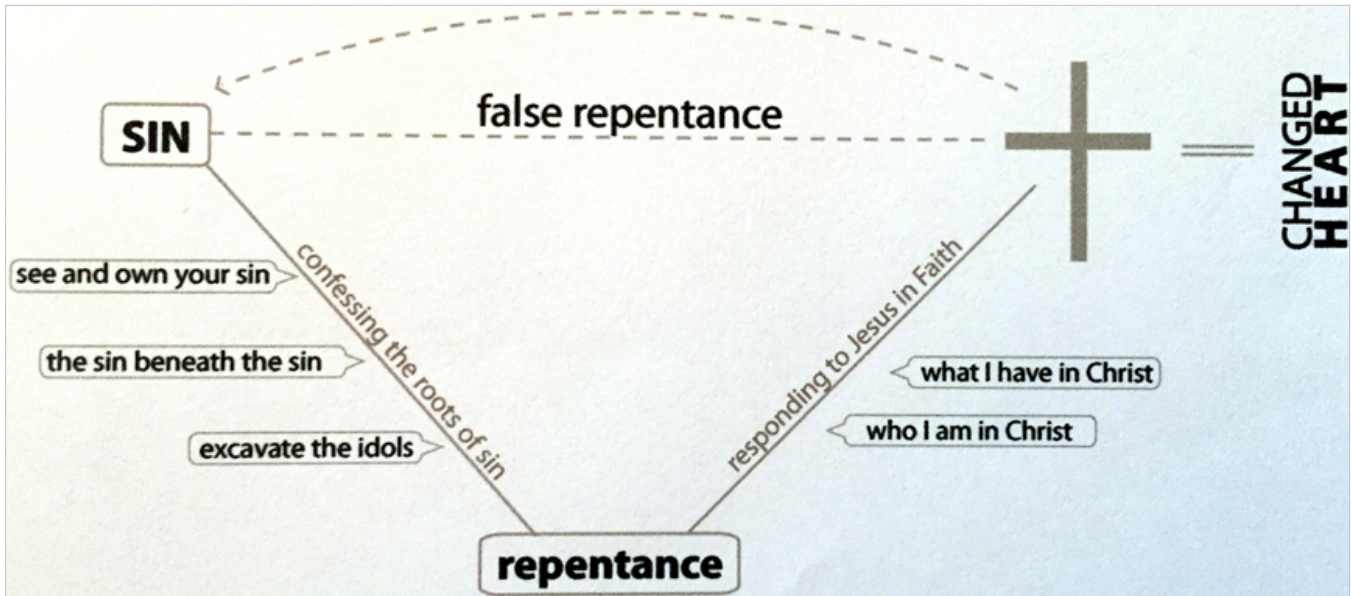


Most people focus on behavior, believing that if they can live a certain way it will earn them an identity that will please God and get them to him. But none are good enough (Rom. 3.10-11).

The gospel says that God makes us who we are through faith in Jesus (2 Cor. 5.21), and our behavior is a response to what we have already freely received.

So sinful behavior is not a matter of effort, it is a question of unbelief: what are we not fully believing about God or who he says we are?

One major hindrance to gospel belief and obedience is idolatry in our hearts. Most idols show up as something else (anger, sarcasm, insecurity, etc.), but underneath, something else has replaced Jesus as the love and master of our lives. Growing in the gospel means identifying and addressing the idols in our hearts. To tear down idols, we must actively identify them and apply the truth of the gospel (as seen in Scripture) to them.



My life only has value if/I am only happy when/what I want most is...	Potential idol
People like me.	Approval
Gospel response: God loves me. He proved it when he sent Jesus to die for me. I am his.	
People do what I want them to.	Control
Gospel response: God has given me everything I need in Jesus. I am free to empty myself & serve others.	
I have a certain kind of pleasure.	Pleasure
Gospel response: Earthly pleasure is fleeting, but God promises joy & satisfaction in his presence, through Jesus.	
I have a certain quality of life.	Comfort
Gospel response: God will supply all my needs in Christ Jesus. Suffering for his sake is more than worth it.	
I have influence or power over others.	Power
Gospel response: God has given me everything I need in Jesus. I am free to empty myself & serve others.	
Someone is there to protect me.	Dependence
Gospel response: God will never leave me. He promised it, and he showed it when he sent Jesus to die for me.	
My parents/siblings/kids are happy with me.	Family
Gospel response: God loves me. He proved it when he sent Jesus to die for me. I am his.	

2) Shared leadership

Varied gifting - Your MC is made up of people with varied gifts, strengths, and weaknesses. Some are great teachers while some are evangelists. Some are great at hosting while others are the life of the party. Utilize all of their various giftings, and do it from the start.

Shared responsibility - There are a number of jobs to be done in your MC. Even if you could do them all, it would not be good for the community. Everyone needs to contribute and share the load. That's what families do. Enlist others to lead out in things like mission, care, meals, hosting, leading discussions, prayer, and kids. *Pay special attention to leadership in caring for people and keeping an outward focus.*

3) Clarify vision for your Missional Community

Don't just start a "new group." Call people to a vision of life together. We will all live out the six basic elements of Missional Community, but how will that look unique in your particular group of people, the places you live and work, or the passions God has put in your hearts? Are there particular things you want to focus on like kids, a certain neighborhood or school, Bible study, or prayer. How will you care for each other well and keep an outward focus? These kinds of questions will help you clarify a unique vision for MC that fits within the overall picture of what a Missional Community is.

4) Establish healthy Missional Community rhythms

Think intentionally about the six elements of a Missional Community. When will you do them and how often? You shouldn't attempt all six every time you gather, but there are times when they will overlap. Think about the natural rhythms of your lives and how families function.

A possible rhythm for your MC might look something like this:

S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
Family Dinner (together)			Guys Discussion			Special Event (monthly)
			Ladies Discussion		Play Date	Invite Friends Over

These rhythms may (and probably should) change over time through various seasons of your MC. Remember the point is not to schedule a regular weekly meeting and stick to it. The goal is to live out the six elements on the way to becoming a gospel-centered family on mission.

5) Stay connected to an Missional Community Shepherd

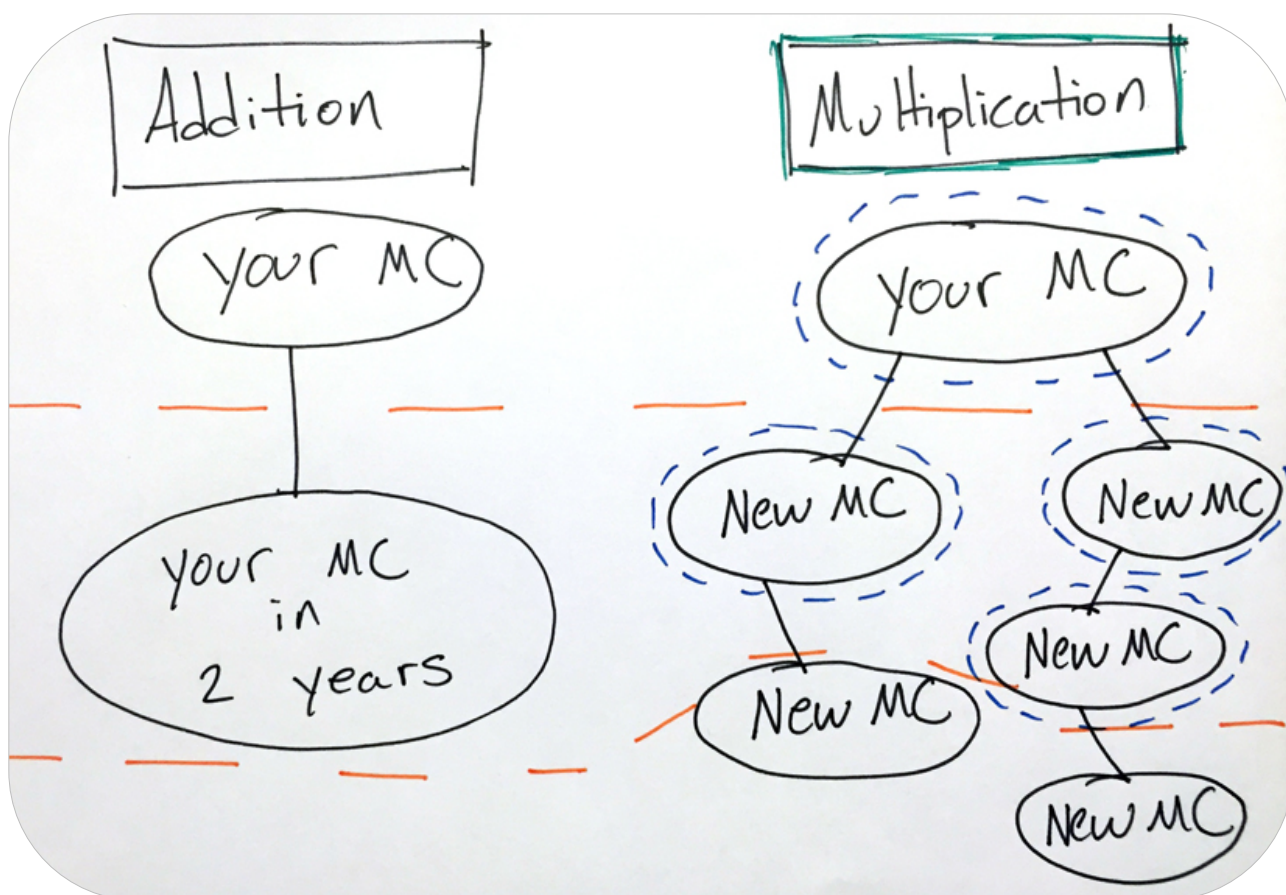
Talk to your MC Shepherd frequently for encouragement, coaching, updates, and ongoing development. This is not simply a monthly report. This is a two-way relationship to help you most effectively lead your MC while also staying healthy yourself.

6) Plan to multiply

We start new Missional Communities to make space for disciple-making. We do not start a new MC simply because an existing MC is too big. As an MC grows, we intentionally look for a new leader with a vision to multiply, leading his/her own gospel-centered family on mission.

This means...

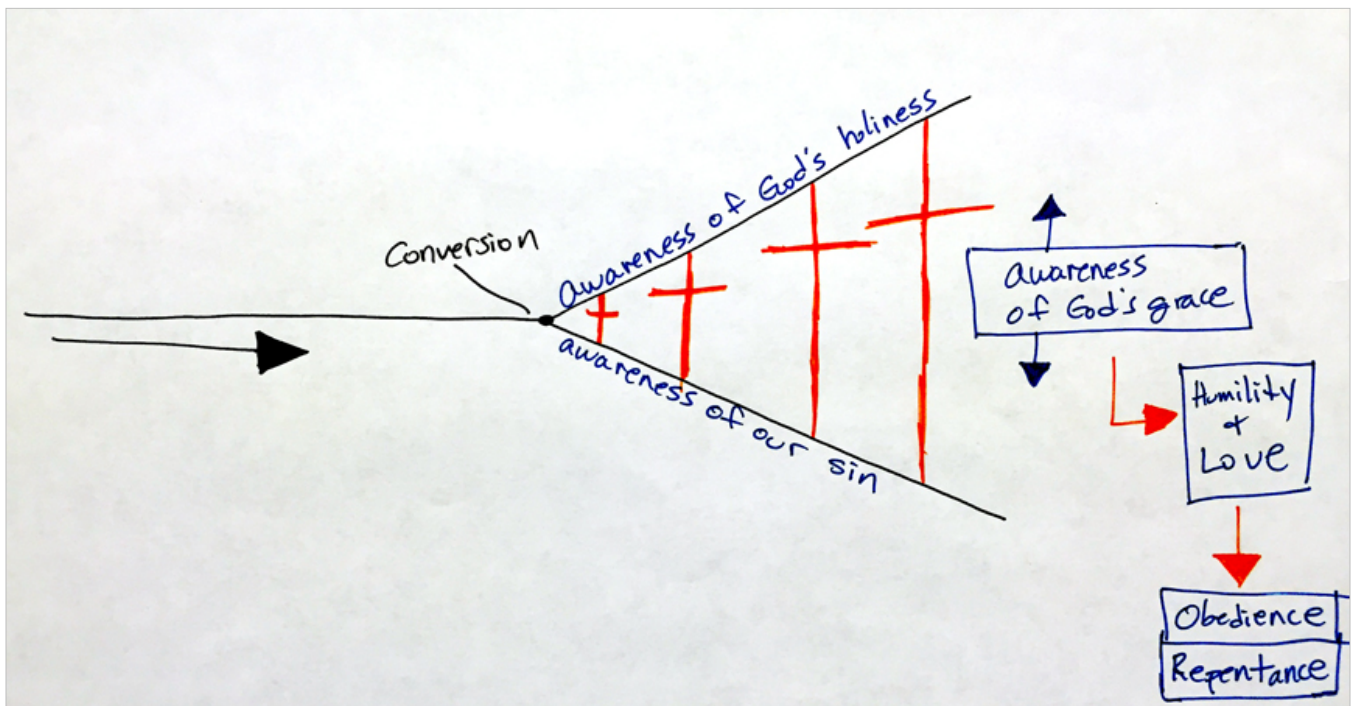
- a) Talk early, openly, and often about starting new MC's, and why.
- b) Give potential leaders experience from the start of the MC (shared leadership).
- c) Watch for idols that hinder multiplication (comfort, familiarity, control, etc.).
- d) In addition to celebrating, acknowledge and grieve what is lost when a new MC begins.
- e) Think multiplication rather than addition.



Leading a Missional Community

Pursue Spiritual Growth Through the Gospel

Spiritual growth and maturity come from an increasing understanding of the gospel and its implications for all of life, as observed through Scripture. We do not grow by knowledge, working harder, going to church, sharing our faith, or even being in a Missional Community. While all of those things have their place, they only lead to spiritual growth and maturity as they point us toward the kindness and grace of God in Jesus toward our sin. As that increases, so does our maturity and obedience. Growing awareness of the gospel in our lives causes us to love Jesus, and love gives birth to obedience. So we learn *why* and *how* to obey through the Bible.



As we pursue Bible-saturated spiritual growth, let us apply the Bible from a place of received grace rather than obligation, guilt, or behavior modification. Let's ask questions that reveal idols and unbelief in our hearts and constantly point each other back to Jesus through the gospel.

Kids in Missional Communities

Our kids are part of our family. It's that simple. As we form Missional Communities we should look for ways to meaningfully include them in the life and discipleship of the group. That doesn't mean that they have to participate in, or even be present for, every activity or gathering. Just like in a family, some activities and occasions are suited for kids and others are not.

Think through how best to pursue discipleship of the kids in your MC. You might set aside time at one of your regular gatherings or you might plan an event once in a while just for them. Either way, you should have an intentional plan and clear rules and expectations for both kids and parents every time the kids gather.

Leading Larger Missional Communities

As your MC grows, the way it functions and the way you lead it must grow. A smaller group of people naturally functions in a certain kind of rhythm. A larger group functions differently. Think about a family of four (2 parents and 2 kids) vs. a family of ten. A family of ten is not just a larger version of the same thing—it's a different kind of thing. The dynamics are naturally different. The same is true with a growing Missional Community.

Larger MC's have some great strengths. They can care for each, serve each other, and live out mission very well because there are more people and resources to mobilize. There are lots of personalities, gifts, and experiences to bring to the table. But because of the larger number of people and ideas, unless the MC is more structured and leadership shared, chaos can ensue.

Some ideas for leading a larger Missional Community:

- **Shared leadership** - We talked about this in the "Forming a Missional Community" section. It is essential from the beginning, and even more so as the MC gets bigger.
- **Multiple gatherings** - Since an MC is not a weekly gathering, you don't have to do everything in one night. Start multiple ongoing gatherings over the span of a couple of weeks designed to accomplish different purposes, and every person does not have to be at every gathering. It's more about regular rhythms and life together than weekly attendance.
- **Discussion in smaller groups** - Look for ways to have deeper discussion in smaller groups rather than always with the big group. This fosters participation, vulnerability, and accountability. Not everyone in the MC has to be involved in every discussion. Starting separate guys and ladies discussion groups (or even more than one of each) will help facilitate this.

The pushback to this will be that we don't know what is going on with everyone anymore, but that is not necessarily a bad thing. The goal is not to be caught up on each other's lives. The goal is discipleship. Plus, you'll probably stay more connected than you think if you are doing life together.

- **You don't have to be best friends with everyone** - In a smaller group, we feel a connection to everyone in the group, sometimes deeply. As an MC grows, that no longer becomes possible or necessary. It is still important to connect to a few people more deeply, but in a larger MC that is no longer everyone in the community—and that's ok.
- **Be creative with the kids** - As an MC grows, the number of kids usually grows, too. This can present noise or space issues, so look for ways to be creative in how you involve and care for the kids. You might need a more organized, planned evening than when you had 6 kids in the MC or you may design a separate night just for them. Having a point person for this (shared leadership) will be a big help.
- **Circle the wagons** - If you are gathering all of the adults for discussion less often, build in regular times to circle the wagons and recast vision. Use these times to remind the MC why you are together, tell stories, and talk about where you are headed. Schedule this time in, and do it regularly. This is also a good chance to pray together, have fun, and ask for input.

Leading a Discussion

"How to lead a discussion in a Missional Community" is sort of a misnomer because it assumes every discussion time looks the same. If MC's are functioning in a healthy way, there will be a variety of occasions to gather, facilitating various kinds of discussion. Some will be very light-hearted and casual while other discussions will be intentionally deep, transparent, and challenging. Some will be more geared for maturing believers while others will be geared toward including lost people. All of these are valid and necessary.

Refer back to #2 of the 6 elements of MC's: Pursuing Bible-saturated spiritual growth. Engage people in discussion about real-life, practical issues using what the Bible, and specifically the gospel, says as a guide. Avoid the temptation to think that every discussion like this needs to be a Bible study. Definitely study the Bible together, and at other times allow the Bible (and the implications of the gospel) to saturate and drive a conversation.

Some good questions to ask to facilitate Bible-saturated, gospel conversation:

- Where have you blown it this week? What was the root of that, and how will you address it?
- What is God saying to you through his Word (sermon, personal or MC Bible study, etc.)?
- You mentioned (fill in the blank) last time—how is that going?
- What things have most preoccupied your thoughts and time this week?
- What is your level of joy and hope in Jesus?
- Where are you seeing God at work in your life?
- Where are you seeing God at work around you?
- Who are you investing yourself in? Who are you praying for? Who are you sharing with?
- Where do you need to repent of something?
- What steps do you need to take to respond to God in faith?

Rhythms of Rest

There are seasons and life cycles for every MC. Some will be seasons of push, when you need all hands on deck. Others should be seasons of rest. That may mean taking a week off or changing the rhythm once in a while. There may also be times when various responsibilities need to be rotated to give someone a season of rest.

We have built in the Summer Sabbath to be part of this rhythm of rest for the entire church. Look for other ways to flow with the rhythms of life and the city. Don't fight against the current. Work hard when it's time to work, and rest when it's time to rest.

Stay connected to your Missional Community Shepherd

You will work together with your MC Shepherd to establish vision and strategy for your MC. Stay close to him/her and talk often about what's going on with your people, challenges you're facing, questions you have, or wins you're celebrating.

When you come up against a care or discipleship issue you aren't sure how to handle (or even sure what's going on), reach out to your shepherd early to fill him/her in and to get their counsel on how best to move forward.