

Connect Groups at Fruit Cove Baptist Church exist to connect people to God's Word, His People and His Mission. Our Connect Groups will carry that out by reaching, teaching and ministering.

Of the 3,776 verses we find in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John 2,014 of them refer in some way to reaching, teaching, and/or ministering. These three activities were obviously important to Jesus. If they were important to Jesus, they need to be important to us!

What you will find in the following pages is information that will help us continue to build a solid foundation of what we do, how we do, and why we do Connect Groups. Let's work together to make sure we zone in on what's important and focus on that, nothing else.

I've adapted some of the teachings by Allan Taylor and Ryland Whitehorn of FBC Dallas for this handbook. I'm confident that if we seek God's guidance, prepare ourselves to do Connect Groups on purpose with purpose and organize to maximize, we will see some great days ahead in the life of Fruit Cove Baptist Church!

Press on!

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FRUIT COVE Connect Groups Leader Expectations

Fruit Cove Baptist Church's Connect Groups will Reach People for Christ and church membership, Teach People God's word, and Minister to People in and through Connect Groups.

Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Matthew 9:35

Connect Groups Leader Expectations

1. I have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and have followed through on that commitment in baptism by immersion.
2. I feel that God has called me to serve Him in the area of Sunday School leadership.
3. My desire is to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit.
4. I will actively participate in the training and equipping opportunities here at FRUIT COVE.
5. I will actively participate in and encourage my Connect Groups Class to reach lost and unchurched people.
6. I will do all I can to make Sunday mornings a positive, uplifting experience.
7. I will attend Sunday morning worship services and be supportive of and promote Wednesday evening activities.
8. I will be supportive of the Pastor and staff.
9. I have read and am in agreement with the vision of FRUIT COVE and will lead my Connect Groups in a way that moves our church to fulfilling that vision.

I commit myself to serve my Lord Jesus Christ and His church by faithfully ministering through the Connect Groups ministry of Fruit Cove Baptist Church.

sign _____

date _____

Personal testimony statement

Name _____

Date _____

Date of Salvation _____ Date of Baptism _____

Please use the following points as a guide in writing out your personal testimony.

- What my life was like before I received Christ
- How I knew that I needed Christ in my life
- What took place when I received Christ
- How my life has been different since Jesus saved me
- How I would encourage someone to consider accepting Christ as their Savior

Annual Connect Groups Leadership Evaluation

(to be completed each Spring...online survey will be sent to you)

Please answer the following questions honestly. The purpose of this evaluation process is to draw us closer together as co-laborers in purpose and in heart.

Name _____

Leadership Position within Connect Groups _____

Name of Connect Group _____

Date _____

1. What is the purpose of your Connect Group?
2. What are some things you would like to see take place in your Sunday School class?
3. What would you say is your greatest passion for ministry?
4. If you could do anything with your Connect Group this year, what would it be?
5. How is your Connect Group and personnel structured around our three tasks?
 - a. Reaching People
 - b. Teaching People
 - c. Ministering to People
6. How can we help you become a better teacher/director/coordinator/care group leader?
7. How can we help you become a better discipler?
8. How can we help you in the area of leading people to Christ?
9. How can we help your Connect Group reproduce itself and start new groups?
10. How can we make the ongoing Connect Group Leadership Training Meetings more effective in helping/equipping you?
11. What topics would you like to see addressed at future Connect Group Leadership Meetings?
12. What other thoughts would you like to share with me that may not have been addressed on this evaluation?

13. How would you rate yourself in the following areas: (1 is low, 5 is high)
- a. Reaching People
 - a. Actively participating in evangelistic efforts
 - b. Actively participating in Leadership Meetings
 - c. Making Sunday morning a positive, uplifting experience
 - d. Actively participating in training and growth opportunities
 - e. Developing new leaders from your group
 - f. Organizing your group for effective ministry
 - g. Providing excellence in the learning/teaching process of the Bible
 - h. Giving of the tithe
14. What are some things you can do personally to improve in any of the areas above that you rated yourself a "3" or less in?

rightnow MEDIA

www.rightnow.org

Printed Resources (located in Leadership Resource Library, Church Office)

Various Bible Study leader books

Holman Commentary Set

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance

What The Bible is All About

NIV Application Commentary Set

The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible

Websites

www.BibleGateway.com

www.WordSearchBible.com

www.LifeWay.com

www.QuickVerse.com

REACHING

Why Reaching People Should Be Done through Connect Groups

“For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

Luke 19:10 (KJV)

1. FRUIT COVEs Connect Group ministry is an organization mandated to win people to Christ.
2. It is the largest ministry in the church.
3. Our Connect Groups meet during “prime time.”
4. It is the assimilation strategy for the church.
5. A church’s evangelism strategy and its assimilation strategy should never be separated.
6. Connect Groups place people in homogeneous groups. (groups of people sharing similar age/stage of life)
7. Our Bible studies should give us a heart like God’s heart.
8. Our Bible studies will help unsaved people come to faith in Christ.

“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.” Romans 10:17 (NIV)

How can my Connect Group reach people? _____

TEACHING

Why Teaching People Should Be Done Through Connect Groups

“But He answered, “It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Matthew 4:4 (HCSB)

1. The church is biblically mandated to disciple people. Discipleship best occurs in a small group setting.
2. Jesus did His most intense discipleship with the Twelve.
And he ordained the twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sickness, and to cast out devils. Mark 3:15 (KJV)
3. Jesus did His most intimate discipleship with the Twelve.
4. Connect Groups offer the two things every person needs in order to be disciplined: Instruction – The Word of God, and Individuals – The People of God.
5. Connect Groups afford every age group the opportunity to be taught in a small group setting at the same time.
6. Connect Groups provide age-appropriate and stage-appropriate teaching.
7. *Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life* (John 14:6). Therefore, to disciple people we must teach... The whole counsel of God (the Way), Doctrine and apologetics (the Truth), and Life application (the Life).
8. Discipleship is not just teaching *“all things whatsoever I commanded you,”* but *“teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”*

How can my Connect Group best teach people?

MINISTERING

Why Ministering to People Should Be Done In and Through Connect Groups

Know your sheep by name; carefully attend to your flocks. Proverbs 27:23
(The Message)

- 1. Ministry best takes place within the context of relationships.
- 2. Relationships best take root within the context of small groups.
- 3. Our Connect Groups are small groups.
- 4. Therefore, ministry best takes place within the context of our Connect Groups.
- 5. If God sends His children to FRUIT COVE, His expectation is that we take good care of them. That is ministry.

Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.' Matthew 25:37-40 (NAS)

How can my Connect Group effectively minister to people?

Suggested Sunday Morning Schedule for Connect Groups

FRUIT COVE Connect Groups start at 9:30AM and 11AM

We must be intentional in planning our structured time, starting on time, and ending on time!

:10 Fellowship (9:30, 11AM)

:5 Welcome/Announcements (9:40, 11:10)

:10 Outreach Emphasis (9:45, 11:15)

:30 Bible Study (9:55, 11:25)

:20 Care Group Time (10:25, 11:55)

This suggested schedule has 1st hour Connect Groups starting at 9:30AM and finishing by 10:45AM. The 2nd hour of groups starts at 11AM and finish by 12:15PM.

Connect Group Leadership Team Structure

Director/Membership Specialist

Teacher(s)

Care Group Leader(s)

Outreach Leader

Events Coordinator

Other roles will vary by class

Director/Membership Specialist

Ministry Description

FRUIT COVE Baptist Church

Responsibilities

1. Be responsible to lead the Connect Group to effectively reach, teach, and minister to people.
2. Actively participate in the church's outreach program.
3. Coordinate the teaching rotation of weekly Bible studies.
4. Make sure accurate attendance records are submitted to church office weekly.
5. Ensure proper follow-up of guests by making sure they complete a Guest Information Card and assigning them to a Care Group Leader.
6. Enlist Care Group Leaders, Outreach Leader, and Fellowship/Events Coordinator.
7. Conduct Class Planning meetings with the Connect Group Leadership Team.
8. Coordinate the Sunday morning class time so that the three purposes of FRUIT COVE Connect Groups are promoted by having a platform and proper emphasis.

Class Time Structure

<u>Sequence</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Time Allotted</u>
1st	Fellowship	10 minutes
2nd	Announcements	5
3rd	Outreach Emphasis	10
4th	Bible Study	30
5th	Care Group Time	20

9. Attend scheduled Connect Group Leadership Team Meetings.
10. Lead the Connect Group class to birth a new class every two years.

Teacher

Ministry Description
FRUIT COVE Baptist Church

Responsibilities

1. Be responsible to lead the Connect Group to effectively reach, teach, and minister to people.
2. Actively participate in the church's outreach program.
3. Prepare and present the weekly Bible study lesson.
4. Assist Director/Membership Specialist in enlistment of other Sunday School leadership.
5. Identify and enlist an Associate Teacher and allow him/her to teach frequently for the purpose of developing a new teacher.
6. Participate in Class Planning meetings with Connect Group Leadership Team.
7. Help ensure the Sunday morning class time is focused on The Big 3.

Class Time Structure

<u>Sequence</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Time Allotted</u>
1st	Fellowship	10 minutes
2nd	Announcements	5
3rd	Outreach Emphasis	10
4th	Bible Study	30
5th	Care Group Time	20

8. Attend Connect Group Leadership Team Meetings.
9. Lead the Connect Group to birth a new class every two years.

Care Group Leader

Ministry Description

FRUIT COVE Baptist Church

Responsibilities

1. Be responsible to help lead the class to effectively minister to people.
2. Actively participate in the church's outreach program.
3. Follow up with guests assigned to you by Director/Membership Specialist.
4. Aggressively pursue delinquent members of your Care Group to restore them to fellowship.
5. Lead members of your Care Group to contact absentees on a weekly basis.
6. Attend Connect Group Leadership Team Meetings.
7. Participate in Class Planning Meeting with the Connect Groups Leadership Team..
8. Lead the "Care Group Time" on Sunday morning by discovering ministry needs, involving others in meeting those needs, assigning contacts, sharing prayer requests and praying for each other.

Class Time Structure

<u>Sequence</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Time Allotted</u>
1st	Fellowship	10 minutes
2nd	Announcements	5
3rd	Outreach Emphasis	10
4th	Bible Study	30
5th	Care Group Time	20

9. Work with Director/Membership Specialist in reporting attendance and ensuring proper guest follow-up.

Outreach Leader

Ministry Description

FRUIT COVE Baptist Church

Responsibilities

1. Be responsible to lead the class to effectively reach people.
2. Participate in the church's outreach program.
3. Be trained in the church's evangelism strategy.
4. Train Connect Group members in sharing their faith by encouraging them to attend the church's evangelism strategy classes and by mentoring them.
5. Keep the Connect Group Prospect Book updated and current.
6. Attend Connect Group Leadership Team meetings.
7. Attend Class Planning meetings with the Connect Groups Leadership Team.
8. Lead the Sunday morning "Outreach Emphasis"

Class Time Structure

<u>Sequence</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Time Allotted</u>
1st	Fellowship	10 minutes
2nd	Announcements	5
3rd	Outreach Emphasis	10
4th	Bible Study	30
5th	Care Group Time	20

9. Serve as the class Greeter on Sunday mornings. Help people with their nametags as they arrive.
10. Lead the class's missions endeavors and partnerships.

FRUIT COVE CARE GROUP LEADERS MINISTRY

SCRIPTURAL BASIS

Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and perform good deeds. Hebrews 10:24

1. Carefully Consider How – Put your mind to finding ways.
2. Ardently Incite – Provoke positively.
3. One Another – I am responsible for those in my group.
4. To Love – This is much more than verbal expression. Someone who comes alongside and expresses concern for us motivates us.
5. To Do Good Deeds – Ministry begets ministry. Action prompts action. Concern prompts concern.

WHAT IS MY JOB DESCRIPTION?

SIMPLY PUT!

- Keep regular contact – use a variety of personal contacts, letters, phone calls, emails, texts, etc.
- Meet needs – physical, spiritual, emotional.
- Establish relationships with group members.
- Fellowship outside the class setting.

IMPORTANT REMINDERS FOR CARE GROUP LEADERS

- Contact absentees regularly – have a plan.
- Give immediate attention to guests and new members.
- Remember special days with a card, call, email, letter, or visit.
- Discover pertinent information using questions.
- Involve Care Group Members in fellowships.
- Pray for each member by name.

WHAT THINGS SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT MY CARE GROUP MEMBERS?

- Basics - name, address, home and work telephone numbers, and email address
- Children's names and ages
- Birthday and Anniversary
- Hobbies
- Are they a member of FRUIT COVE Baptist Church?
- Who do they know in the church or class?

HOW DO I HANDLE OR CULTIVATE ABSENTEES?

- Follow up special prayer requests with a note.
- Build a bridge of friendship.
- Call and check on them periodically.

SUNDAY MORNING – THINGS TO DO

- Connect them to others in the class.
- Communicate information for upcoming events.
- Involve members by giving them responsibilities.
- Escort guests to the Worship Service and sit with them.
- Greet... Greet... Greet!

How to Assign and Cultivate Care Groups

One of the most important elements of our Care Group network is the system by which they are set up. In a class with 40 people on the roster, it is very hard for every single person to get to know every other person. So that is why we want to break the larger group into smaller groups, for more effective ministry to take place. How do we do this? We start by trying to identify the types of members in our class. For internal purposes (not to be shared with the rest of the Connect Group), we are going to use the terms Touch Group, Ministry Group, and Core Group.

Touch Group: The truth of the matter is these people aren't coming and will not be actively involved in your Connect Group. However, when (not "if") a tragedy takes place in their life (divorce, loss of a loved one, child on drugs, etc.) they will be more receptive to your message. We must continue to reach out to them so that we "earn the right to be heard" when the crisis comes, but do not consume a lot of time and energy here until that takes place. The best means of contacting people in the Touch Group are by email or phone. Frequency should be monthly or quarterly.

Ministry Group: If you want to see immediate results in your attendance, then this is the group to focus your time and efforts on. As you continually minister to them you see them go from attending 15 times a year to 20 times a year, and eventually they move into the Core Group.

Core Group: This is the group from which you will be developing leaders to minister to the other two groups. By the time people reach this group they are committed enough to the church to want to become involved in service. It is important to help them find meaningful ways to serve in and through the church.

Example of Proper Care Group Distribution

Touch Group (attends 0-6 times per year)	Ministry Group (attends 7-23 times per year)	Core Group (attends 24+ times per year)
Joe & Sue	Jim & Sally	Jeff & Sara
Bill & Mary	Bob & Marci	Bud & Lyn
Tim & Ann	Tom & Angi	Cal & Jan

Care Group #1	Care Group #2	Care Group #3
Joe & Sue	Bill & Mary	Tim & Ann
Jim & Sally	Bob & Marci	Tom & Angi
Jeff & Sara <i>(Care Group Leaders)</i>	Bud & Lyn <i>(Care Group Leaders)</i>	Cal & Jan <i>(Care Group Leaders)</i>

GUIDELINES FOR EMAILS, LETTERS & TELEPHONE CALLS

- Make sure you are “Personal.”
- Avoid “missed you Sunday” except for regulars.
- Share about upcoming special events.
- Mail handwritten notes rather than typed.
- Ask for prayer requests.
- Avoid any “guilt trip.”

PERSONAL TOUCHES

- Warm greeting, handshake, pat on back.
- Send personal notes.
- Mail a birthday card or call on their birthday.
- Share your personal prayer list.
- Listen to them.
- Help them during difficulties.
- Spend time getting to know their heart and concerns. Be genuine!

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I CONTACT MY CARE GROUP MEMBERS?

- If they are active attendees, call/email them once a week to say hello, ask for prayer requests, and remind them to be in Connect Groups .
- If they seldom attend, contact them every 5 weeks with a call, email or card.
- If they are prospects to our church, call every two weeks.

Ministry Phone Tips

Following are some excellent ideas for using the phone in outreach. Please do not let the number of ideas overwhelm you. Be willing to try a new idea... you may like it. Do not be frustrated if you find yourself making a mistake.

THE BASICS OF GOOD COMMUNICATION

- Keep your voice clear with a bright, cheerful tone.
- Smile as you are talking on the telephone. Believe it or not, your smile makes a difference over the phone!
- Do not rush, but pace yourself to the pace of the person called.
- Be attentive to the needs of the person called (ie: new baby, recently married, etc.).
- Be courteous!!!
- Get the facts straight (name, address).
- Don't rush over the points that may be familiar to you but are unfamiliar to the person called.
- Let your message develop out of questions you ask the person being called, so they will feel a part of the conversation. The things you want to say can be worked into your responses to their answer.

QUESTIONS AND INFORMATION TO COMMUNICATE

Please remember that you do not want to ask all of these questions or share all this information the first time you call someone. Avoid making this an interview or a series of questions and answers.

1. Introduce and try to identify yourself. Introduce yourself a second time, just before you hang up. Some people will miss your name the first time you give it.
2. Did they come as guests of one of our members? If so, who?
3. How did they find out about Fruit Cove?
4. Ask about their children's experience at our church. (if applicable)
5. If we don't have children's names and ages, please ask.
6. Ask about their experience in Worship (music, sermon, any questions).
7. Help them network with other members. Ask if they work with or know other members of FRUIT COVE.
8. Discover where they work and see if other members work with them.
9. Find out if the wife is a stay-at-home mom. If so, tell her about Bible studies offered by FRUIT COVE's Women's Ministry.
10. If you feel comfortable, give them your telephone number to call if they have questions.
11. Encourage prayer requests.
12. If they express hesitation about FRUIT COVE and not feeling a connection...
 - Encourage them to go to Connect Group – they will feel different!
 - Mention the small group Bible Study in Connect Group – “the church within the church.”

13. Have they attended a Connect Group ?

If they say NO...

- Encourage them to park in guest parking. Then go to the Welcome Center where a First Impressions representative will escort them to a class and introduce them to someone, starting with their youngest child to the parent.
- Share with them that our Connect Groups are where they will make friends and begin to discover the heart of our church.

If they say YES, ask ...

- Who is the teacher?
- Do they feel comfortable?
- Do they know they are encouraged to visit several classes before they decide in what class they want to participate?

14. Offer to mail information about age group ministries such as Preschool, Elementary, Middle School/High School Students, College, Single Adults, Young Adults, Median Adults, and Senior Adults.

15. When leaving a voicemail...

- Introduce yourself once at the beginning and a second time after you have left a brief message.
- Thank them for coming to FRUIT COVE.
- If you are comfortable sharing your telephone number, leave your number and invite them to return your call if they have questions.

16. When talking about Connect Groups ...

- We are age-graded, need-graded, and life-stage graded.
- Teachers are trained to help guests feel comfortable.
- You will not be asked to pray or read the Bible out loud unless the teacher is sure you are comfortable in doing so.
- You will not be put on the spot by being asked questions.
- As a guest, you can be a spectator or get involved at the level you feel comfortable.

17. If they have a lot of questions about the church...

- Encourage them to attend an upcoming Connecting class.

18. When asked questions about different ministries, these are the people to whom you may need to refer their questions:

FRUIT COVE Church Office number is **904-287-0996**

Executive Pastor Neal Cordle

Pastor to Families and Missions Jonathan Wilson

Worship Pastor Brian Woofert

Adult Ministries Jonathan Wilson

High School/College Pastor Dan Elkins

Middle School Pastor Jason Stanland

Children's Director Melissa Goodman

Preschool Directors Meghan Roy and Ginna Ashby

SportsLife Recreation Ministry Neil Muniz

19. If you believe it will help us reach them if a specific staff member contacts them, please call or email Jonathan at jonathan@fruitcove.com.

YOUR ADULT CONNECT GROUP LEADERSHIP TEAM

Class Director/Membership Specialist

Phone Numbers:

H _____

W _____

C _____

Email Address _____

Associate Class Director/Membership Specialist

Phone Numbers:

H _____

W _____

C _____

Email Address _____

Teacher

Phone Numbers:

H _____

W _____

C _____

Email Address _____

Teacher

Phone Numbers:

H _____

W _____

C _____

Email Address _____

Teacher

Phone Numbers:

H _____

W _____

C _____

Email Address _____

Outreach Coordinator

Phone Numbers:

H _____

W _____

C _____

Email Address _____

Care Group #1 Leader

Phone Numbers:

H _____

W _____

C _____

Email Address _____

Care Group #2 Leader

Phone Numbers:

H _____

W _____

C _____

Email Address _____

Care Group #3 Leader

Phone Numbers:

H _____

W _____

C _____

Email Address _____

Care Group #4 Leader

Phone Numbers:

H _____

W _____

C _____

Email Address _____

Fellowship/Events Coordinator

Phone Numbers:

H _____

W _____

C _____

Email Address _____

Class Member Information Sheet

Name: _____

Address: _____

Apartment #: _____ City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____

Cell Phone: _____

Work Phone: _____

E-Mail Address: _____

Occupation: _____

Birth Date: _____

Anniversary Date: _____

Relationship with Christ: _____ Yes _____ No _____

Family Information: _____

Hobbies and Interests: _____

Date Called	Notes	Other Contacts	Comments

APPENDIX

The Element of Surprise

One of my favorite tv shows of all time is The Andy Griffith Show. There are so many great life lessons taught through that show, including many biblical principles. A favorite character of everyone, Gomer Pyle, had a popular phrase he'd say, "surprise, surprise, surprise!". I ran across the article below and wanted to pass it along. As you read it, think of how implementing some of these ideas may enhance what takes place in your Connect Group each week. –Jonathan

Surprise, Surprise! It's What Your Group Members Need

by [sundayschoolguy](#), Ken Braddy

If variety is truly the spice of life, too many small group Bible studies are pretty bland. Whether on a church campus or in a home, group leaders tend to revert back to easy (and predictable) teaching methods. It's time to spice things up a bit and become less predictable. Did you know that when God communicated with people, He often did so in surprising ways?

Hebrews 1:1 tells us that God communicated with man "in different times and in different ways" (HCSB). Some of those ways proved to be surprising to the person or audience. Think about Moses suddenly hearing God's voice through a burning bush, or the surprise when Balaam's donkey spoke! Shepherds were surprised to hear angels singing and proclaiming the birth of the Savior, and who could have predicted that a hand would appear and write on the wall during a banquet?

God has a way of communicating with man that is often very surprising.

As a group leader, you can copy this aspect of God's communication style. Your group Bible study members won't mind a bit if you change things up, do something delightfully different, and keep them wondering what you've got up your sleeve.

If you're in the mood to surprise your Bible study group this week, try one of these ideas to spice things up:

1. Surprise them by changing the order of things. Most groups have an identifiable pattern when they meet. Change the order in which you fellowship, pray, worship, and study. You can begin by jumping into the Bible study, and end with a time of fellowship. Save announcements until the end of the session, or don't make them at all...simply hand out a sheet of paper on which you've listed them. As someone once said, "If your group members know what's going to happen, it's time to throw out your playbook."

2. Surprise them by teaching in a different way. If you tend to be a discussion-oriented group, intentionally deliver a mini-lecture. If you tend to speak a lot as the group leader, introduce some visual aids or object lessons to help your visual learners connect with the lesson. Break the group into smaller groups, watch a video clip, or try using a musical element in the lesson (play a song from your phone, iPad, or other device and have group members read the lyrics while the song is being played). The goal is to get out of your rut and appeal to the different learning styles of your group members. When you hear a small, quiet voice that says, “Your group members won’t like it,” simply ignore that voice and do it anyway. You’ll be surprised how much people will appreciate a little variety in the way you lead them through a Bible study.

3. Surprise them by changing your group’s location. If you are an on-campus Connect Group, meet off-campus or in a different classroom, or just go outside if the weather is nice. A change of venue can excite your group members and build anticipation for your Bible study session.

Don’t be afraid of trying something new to surprise your group this week. A small surprise can help you capture your group members’ interest, redirect their focus, and help you teach God’s Word more effectively. Don’t be predictable...be surprising! God would. It’s time to spice things up!

The Role of Curriculum in Connect Groups

-Jonathan Wilson, Pastor of Equipping



One of the most frequent questions I get from Connect Group leaders is, “Do we have to use the curriculum?” It’s a great question, and I would like to provide some reasoning behind my answer, which is, “yes”. There are currently three lines of curriculum that are approved for our Adult Connect Groups . Each line is published by LifeWay Christian Resources, the Southern Baptist resource

entity based in Nashville TN. The three lines include Explore The Bible (a Bible book study), The Gospel Project, Bible Studies for Life (BSFL). Connect Groups currently have the option of choosing from any of these three lines.

Each one of these lines has its strengths. For example, a class that desires to get in and study God’s Word book by book would see Explore The Bible as a good option. A class that would like to balance Bible study with life application would see BSFL as a good fit. We offer all four as choices in an effort to get a good curriculum fit for each Connect Group.

I am a firm believer in the importance of churches using curriculum for their Sunday morning Bible studies. Here are some of the benefits I have seen:

- Curriculum provides rails for a class (and its teachers) to run on
- Participant study guides for each member (and guest!) provide an opportunity for people to study God’s Word individually during the week leading up to Sunday when the class gathers for discussion of the lesson
- Approved curriculum gives church leaders a better understanding of what each class is studying and allows opportunities for church-wide tie in to certain lessons
- A curriculum scope and sequence (what will be taught and when it will be taught) gives the teachers and the class a “big picture” idea of where the class will be going over the next few months in study
- In the long run a teacher will be much more effective in teaching from an organized plan as opposed to a week to week “choose your own adventure” method of Bible study

These are just several reasons that come to mind. But hear my heart. I know that God works in our lives and reveals certain topics and ideas we would like for our Connect Groups to study that may be outside the scope of the curriculum line. That is why we have the following policy:

“Connect Groups are expected to follow an approved curriculum line for at least 3 of the 4 quarters of the year. Connect Groups are allowed to veer off of their curriculum for up to 1 quarter each year upon approval from the Pastor to Families and Missions.”

So be thinking about some topics or studies that your Connect Group may want to dive into this year. Here are some studies you may want to consider:

- Marriage Check Up
- What It Means to Be a Baptist (Baptist Faith and Message)
- Guiding my children to develop a Biblical world view
- Heaven
- PLACE (your Connect Groups going through the PLACE assessment together)

By no means is this an exhaustive list. It is just meant to get you thinking. Feel free to shoot me your ideas at jonathan@fruitcove.com. One additional reason we need to stick to our curriculum is this...we pay for it! Let's be good stewards of what we purchase and make sure we use the resources. If you would like to discuss the best-fit curriculum line for your Connect Group please contact me. In the meantime, get as many of the participant guides into the hands of our people as you can. This is what happens:

**Bible study guides lead to >>> Bible study >>>
leads to >>> changed lives!**

5 Types of People FRUIT COVE Sunday School Classes Must Care For

(adapted from article by Ken Braddy of LifeWay)

If you lead a group Bible study, or if you are a member of a Bible study group, one of the things your group must do well is to care for 5 kinds of people. There are different kinds of adults who come through most groups, and you can't ignore any one of them if you want to be effective in ministering to people.

1. Absentees - every group has a certain percentage of people who are absent whenever the group gathers for Bible study. It is not uncommon for up to 50% of group members to be absent each time the group gets together for Bible study. An effective leader will not only rejoice over those who are in attendance, but he or she will feel compelled to reach out to absentees. A quick phone call, an e-mail, or a visit in the person's home can help reconnect an absentee to the group.

2. Prospects - unless the Bible study group is closed to new members, every group should have a prospect file. It is recommended that a group have one prospect for each member of the group. Prospects should always be invited to the social activities of the group, and they should be cared for just as if they were full-fledged members.

3. People in crisis - It's a given that if you have a group of people coming together to study the Bible, things are going to get messy at some point. People will experience the ups and downs of life, and you may find yourself in the role of a "first responder." A lost job, the sudden death of a loved one, or a wayward child may bring a group member to a moment of crisis, and you will be on the front line of ministry to that person and perhaps even his or her family. To ignore a person in crisis is to invite disaster...this is the time to reach out and make a difference, not sit idly by and hope things will get better on their own.

4. Associate group members - These heroes deserve your group's appreciation and remembrance when it's time to get together and socialize. Associate group members may have left your group to serve other people in the church's kids or student ministries, and they often miss adult fellowship. Keep these folks on your ministry role and invite them to every fellowship your group has. Associate members need to know they haven't been forgotten, and they need to be affirmed for using their spiritual gifts elsewhere in the church and community.

5. The regular attender - It's easy to forget about these people, but don't! Although the guest, the person in crisis, the associate member, and the

absentee all need your time and attention, so do the loyal, always-there group members. It's easy to let these "good" group members go unthanked and unnoticed, but these are the kinds of people who need an encouraging word. Thank them for their regular attendance. Thank them for being a stabilizing factor in your group.

There you have it... 5 kinds of people that groups must care for. Overlook any one of them and your attendance will feel it. Your group dynamic will suffer as well. Make it a point to take care of all 5 types of people and you'll help your group succeed and be effective for Christ.

