

# MISSIONAL --- COMMUNITY

grace



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By Michael Albano  
FIRST EDITION



GRACE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP  
Fergus, Ontario

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This material is produced by Grace Christian Fellowship  
35 Farley Rd., Fergus, ON Canada N1M 2W3  
519.787.1978 | [info@igrace.ca](mailto:info@igrace.ca)

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# INTRODUCTION

Thanks for taking the time to have a deeper look at what we believe at Grace. What follows is a break down of how we are living out the gospel together as a “Family on a Mission”. The reason we called this book Missional Communities is because of the central role, we believe, these groups have to our calling as the family of God. Our hope is that as you read through, this you will discover what drives us as a church community. So that this booklet is more helpful to you, you first need to know what we mean when we talk about “Family on a Mission”. The phrase itself, comes from our *Vision & Values* document, which outlines what we believe and why. *Vision & Values* are the first two of our three V’s, which help define a target for us, as we move forward as a church. We have:

1. **OUR VISION:** The Kingdom: Big Picture or “*Why*” We Believe
2. **OUR VALUES:** The Kingdom: Defined or “*What*” We Believe
3. **OUR VEHICLES:** The Kingdom: Applied or “*How*” We Believe

This booklet sets out to define the *Vehicles* or the practical ways that we are applying what we believe to the world we live in. To explain, you may find this helpful:

Our **Vision** is what we believe the big picture should look like for every Christian. This is meant to be the place where most of us regardless of our minor differences in theology or application can agree that the main things, are the main things.

Our **Values** are a more clearly defined idea of the twelve things that we believe are necessary to living lives centred around the *Vision*. For instance, we believe that because Jesus is Lord & Saviour (a *Vision* or big picture thought), a central focus of our's is to lead lives of authentic and extravagant worship. That's why Worship & Prayer is one of our twelve *Values*.

Our **Vehicles** then become even clearer and more practical as they express how we are going to live out our *Vision & Values* in the culture we are apart of. This means things like worship *style* can change. *Vision* and *Values* are the “why and what we believe”, but *Vehicles* are the “how” that is best suited to reaching the culture we live in. Worship is a *Value* thing, but worship *style* is a *Vehicle*. For example, if a church exists in a persecuted area of the world where the public and lively expressions of worship that we are used to are actually dangerous, it is not wrong for them to develop a worship *style* that is more appropriate. It is simply a matter of assessing the proper *Vehicle* for their context by applying their values.

Often, we get bent out of shape because our favourite kind of *Vehicle* is changing. At Grace, our goal is to be people who think clearly and live passionately for our *Vision & Values* and at the same time hold very loosely to our *Vehicles* because they are bound to change. It is our hope that by the end of this booklet you will clearly understand how we are striving to live out our *Vision & Values* at Grace together.

Sincerely,

The Grace Eldership Team

# FINALLY ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

I had a defining moment in the early summer of 2014. It was July and I was outside enjoying a coffee on a shaded patio overlooking the Grand River. Every year, in those first quiet weeks of summer break, I usually take a week or two to process the year that was and think strategically about the year ahead. It was a great time to be asking big questions and I had been wrestling with one in particular. You see, *I didn't know what evangelism was really supposed to look like or have a compelling strategy to really disciple people*. I knew I wanted Jesus' call to go into all the world with this great news and "make disciples" to define my life, and yet it didn't seem like most Christians (myself included) or churches were particularly well positioned to respond to that call. It seemed to me that we'd become great at services, preaching, bible studies, and running all sorts of programs (which are all good in and of themselves), but we were not particularly good at the kind of life-on-life discipleship Jesus modeled with his disciples. There is no benefit to even the greatest treasure, if it's locked up inside of people who don't know how to give it away. I had grown up in church, had led worship, volunteered, gone on missions trips, gone to Bible School, and now was a pastor, and yet, of all of the people I had met I didn't know very many who actually successfully practiced a lifestyle of committed evangelism and effective discipleship with people who didn't know Jesus. More than that, I knew that my life, my priorities, and my family weren't aligned to fulfill that call. Looking back on that moment, I think I struck gold.

Everything that follows in this booklet is a response to the questions that emerged that summer. It is our first attempt at making a framework that challenges us to change the way we live our lives, so we can more faithfully follow Jesus.

# WHY MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES?

Our vision at Grace is rooted in a three-fold conviction about the centrality of God's Kingdom, God's Family and God's Mission in our lives (see *Vision & Values* booklet). We believe that our maturity comes about as a result of people pursuing these things together in tension. What that means is that we believe that seeking God's Kingdom is not a singularly UPwards pursuit, but one grounded and expressed by living IN a family that is OUT on mission. In fact, we realize that having one (like the UP) or even two aspects of our faith (like the UP & IN) without the balance-tension of the other(s) is not enough (see fig. 1). Our goal is to have a community engaged and growing in all three realities. We believe Missional Community is the best way for Grace to experience and grow into a Kingdom Family on a Mission.

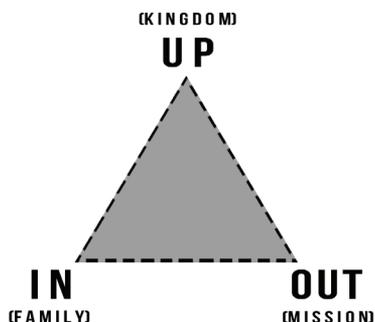


Figure 1

Following are a few examples to help you think about what dimension of IN, UP or OUT may be lacking or out of focus in your own spiritual life. The reality is that everyone is out of balance to some extent in their spiritual lives. We may not be avoiding any one area purposely, but we also haven't been as successful or intentional in our pursuit of them as we could be. Life seems to get in the way, frustration can hinder us, and selfishness can isolate us. The question is how can we find the balance-in-tension between all three realities for ourselves?

### **UP & OUT (LACKING IN)**

Imagine with me someone with a real tangible love for God, who had a solid devotional life and from that place of devotion, tried to tangibly love the world and people around them, and especially the less fortunate. However in the midst of this faithful life, that person did not have the deep meaningful relationships with other Christians at their church that they wished for. In fact, they couldn't point to someone who was actively discipling them and after having been disappointed after so many attempts at friendship, felt frustrated by the status quo, slow movement and comfort of the organized church (see fig. 2).

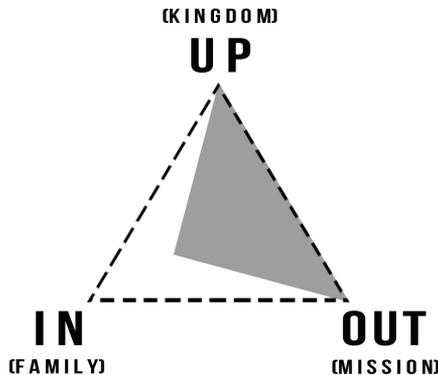


Figure 2

### **UP & IN (LACKING OUT)**

What of the busy couple with a few children who really enjoy their weekly "connect group"? They love to pray or worship when it's time and they know that they love God, but they reminisce about the past when they were less burdened down with responsibility and finding time to enjoy God was easier. They feel the tension of their busy life now and beyond

getting out to their weekly group, managing their family and trying to keep up with work, feel like they just don't have more to give (see fig. 3).

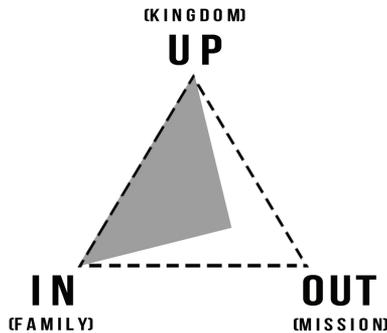


Figure 3

### IN & OUT (LACKING UP)

Lastly, what about the young couple that is newly married or a young single professional in their first job? They are used to the familiar pattern of Sunday mornings, may have grown up in the church and have many friends there. They consider themselves to be Christians and try to lead moral lives, but don't have a consistent or meaningful devotional life. They are at a time of massive transition in their lives and so, while they do care about others (especially social issues), it is easy for them to become absorbed in their next career step, their new house or their hobbies. While they are socially connected when they want to be, there is a sense of something deeper that is missing. They can connect that "something missing" to their spiritual lives and the growing distance they feel from God. In the end, they aren't sure how things have changed, but they have. They don't know if it's them, their church or simply life, and they don't know how to get back (see fig. 4).

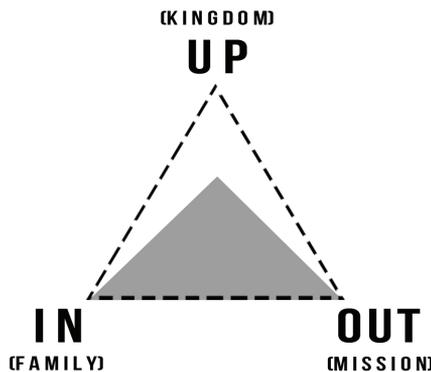


Figure 4

You can see, that while the specific answer is different for each person, the solution for each is the same: Missional Community. Addressing this reality is the purpose of this booklet. We want to tie together the threads of each of these essential pursuits (UP, OUT & IN) and then outline how we will be attempting to practically live these out together through Missional Communities.

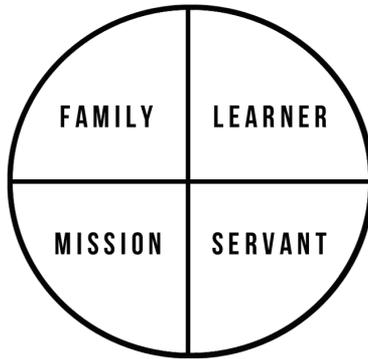
# MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES VS. SMALL GROUPS

Missional Communities are groups of 10-25 people who have committed themselves to pursuing the *Kingdom of God* by living as a *Family on a Mission Together*. This is different than a typical small group principally, because the *goals are much broader* and the *process is more practical*.

Regular small groups usually work to accomplish set goals like learning more about the bible, building relationships, and consuming a ton of cake and coffee. From the comfortable couch in a living room we learn, discuss, and dream about the practical steps we should take, yet we often do not. The difference is that while small groups can increase our knowledge about following Jesus, they aren't the best model for real practical discipleship and growth or where we learn how to live like Jesus.

Missional Communities on the other hand, have a much broader goal: to conform a community around a lifestyle of mission and discipleship that enables us to effectively express and exemplify Jesus to the community we live in. To do that, we combine four basic and essential elements of the Christian life in a weekly rhythm that aims to encourage, activate and mature each person in their life with Jesus (A NEW CIRCLE OF LIFE). Once we are saved, we believe there are four essential identities of life in Christ that we are called to live. The four identities are: LEARNER, FAMILY, MISSIONARY & SERVANT. We'll discuss what we mean by each term and after, explain how it all works together practically for our church community.

# MISSIONAL IDENTITIES



Being a **LEARNER**, is another way of saying disciple. In fact that's what the word disciple really means. Just like the first disciples who followed Jesus, learned from him and allowed him to teach and challenge them, we are people who are committed to learning what it means to know and love Jesus in this life. Being a learner, means leaving behind your previous knowledge of your own life, your own dreams and your culture, in favour of the identity, dream and culture of the Kingdom of God. It requires being teachable and staying humbled in grace. It means choosing to follow Jesus wherever he leads you, in order to learn an obedience that comes from faith. **You were created in Jesus to live a life of complete submission to the Father.**

Being a **FAMILY**, begins with properly understanding your relationship to God through grace. If we know that he is the Father over all creation, then Jesus is your adopted brother. So in the exact same way that the Father has loved Jesus, he now also loves and cares for you. It means that everything God has given to Jesus he now also gives to you. It requires that you have left behind your natural family, in favour of your new spiritual family. Our goal is that Missional Community is the place of deep covenant friendship and ongoing partnership in the work of sharing the gospel. **You were created in Jesus, to live life as a growing and vital member of God's family and a beloved child of your Father.**

Being a **MISSIONARY** is to understand that mission can no longer be something we have to leave on a plane to do. It is not just for the extrovert, the spiritually-gifted, or the over-zealous, but a burden for the gospel that is shared by every believer in every place. Mission is not a function of the church (something we do), rather the church is a function of the great mission of God that began at creation. Before anything else we are partners with Jesus in his goal that every person hear and respond to the gospel's good news that Jesus has overcome death and sin. Being a missionary means daily praying for the Kingdom of God to come on earth as it is in heaven through your life. It means submitting in faith to the leading of the Holy Spirit to work through you in your family, at your work and through your community. **You were created in Jesus to live a life of gospel adventure and power by the Holy Spirit.**

Being a **SERVANT** is to recognize that just as you have received grace that saves, you were saved by grace in order to do good works. These good works are the acts of selfless service that are the aroma of Jesus to the world around us. Because your life now is not your own, and was paid for with a price, the servant's life, aims to prioritize "others" above ourselves. Being a servant is to live out Jesus' call to serve and give his life in totality to those in need. Being a servant is responding to God's high call to go to the low place. **You were created in Jesus to be a light and sign of his divine love through selfless service to the neighbour and needy around you.**

# APPLYING THE CIRCLE

We stated earlier that Missional Community is different than a small group or Bible study because the goals are broader (becoming a Family/Missionary/Servant/Learner) and the process is more practical. More so than a Bible study or Small Group, a Missional Community moves us deeper into a holistic gospel life. Missional Community takes the “family” of “learners” who meet once a week to study and moves them into the place of “mission” by uniting them as a team of “servants” together with a call to serve their community. With this in mind, each Missional Community works practically in four new ways to live out their new identities together. This is the basis of the second ring of the missional circle (see figure 5).



Figure 5

# WHAT DO WE DO?

If you look below at the wider lens of the Missional Circle, you will find how each identity intersects with the one on either side of it. At the intersection of each identity, the missional circle shows us the practical action that emerges as a result of the two coming together and gives us four main responsibilities as Missional People:

Learner + Family = Sunday Sabbath  
Family + Mission = Missional Community  
Mission + Servant = Social Action  
Servant + Learner = Open Friendship.

## **SUNDAY SABBATH:**

Where our identity as a Learner + Family intersect at the top of the circle, you find the practical purpose for Sunday Sabbath gatherings emerge. Sunday's are the time where we rest from our work to gather together as a united family, for worship, teaching and encouragement in our lives as disciples of Jesus: *Family learning to follow Jesus together.*

## **MISSIONAL COMMUNITY:**

Where our identity as Family + Missionary intersect at the left side of the circle, you find the practical purpose for our smaller Missional Communities to gather. Our weekly Missional Community night is the time set aside to be a family that grows together as a smaller missional team to love, support and work together for the gospel: *Family on a Mission Together.*

**SOCIAL ACTION:**

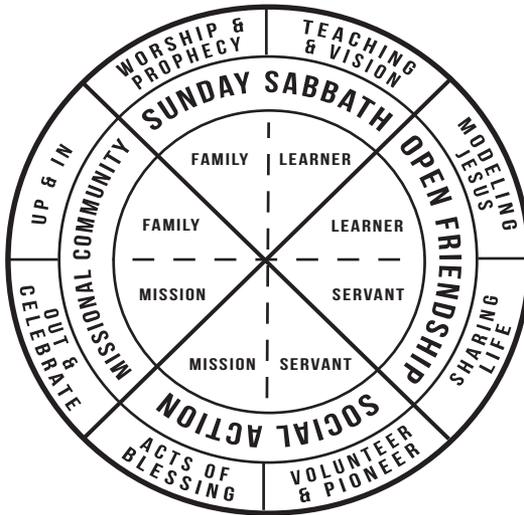
Where our identity as Missionary + Servant intersect at the bottom of the circle, you find the practical purpose for our ongoing commitment to good works in the community. Social Action is our commitment to not just serve those in our spiritual family, but especially serve our neighbours and all in need in faithful and creative ways: *Missionaries who selflessly serve the world together.*

**OPEN FRIENDSHIP:**

Where our identity as Servant + Learner intersect at the right side of the circle, you find the practical purpose for an open servant-friendship to be the primary vehicle of discipleship. Open Friendship is our commitment to love and lead all those who the Holy Spirit draws us into relationship with: *Servant-led friendships that love the lost together.*

# DEFINING OUR CULTURE

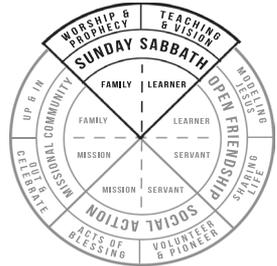
To further explain what we mean by each of the four components of our weekly missional rhythm, we have expanded our circle with one more layer. In the outer layer now we have broken down each of the four actions into two more specific actions that will help to define exactly what we mean when we talk about each part.



## SUNDAY SABBATH

### *Worship & Prophecy:*

The Bible instructs us about the importance and power of maintaining a consistent gathering for the people of God to declare, sing and agree together in the Spirit about who God is and celebrate their life in Him together. Like 1 Corinthians 11:14 spells out, when we gather, we are not just to express praise to God but to encourage one another through shared prayer, and the exercising of all the spiritual gifts in order. We believe experiencing God happens when the people of God speak God's word to one another in love through faith.



### *Teaching & Vision:*

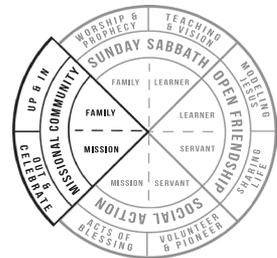
Each Sunday Sabbath is an important place for the Word of God to be taught. Just as Timothy and Titus are encouraged by Paul to uphold and guard the teachings of the gospel by faithfully and unapologetically teaching, we believe in the importance of regular preaching and instruction in both expository and topical methods. Sunday Sabbath is also an important place to inspire and express the Vision of the church as we follow God's leading and express what the eldership believes God is speaking to the church as a whole.

## MISSIONAL COMMUNITY

Each Missional Community at Grace follows a four-week pattern based upon the UP, OUT, & IN of our triangle.

**Week 1** is devoted to encouraging our UP relationship to God, where we will spend our evening working through the current series that is being taught on the Sunday Sabbath. We will discuss the text, apply the gospel to our hearts and pray with one another.

**Week 2** is devoted to exploring our OUT relationships with our neighbours and friends by hosting them for dinner. The groups do not meet on this week, but are committed to investing in new relationships.



**Week 3** is devoted to reengaging our IN relationships with one another, where we will spend our evening asking how we can support and pray for one another in the relationships we spent building the week before. We also take time to discuss our lives and talk about the struggles or victories we are experiencing.

**Week 4** is devoted to celebrating and enjoying what God is doing amongst us, by hosting a party. Hopefully some of us can also invite our neighbours and other friends to join us for the meal or event.

**SOCIAL ACTION**

Every Missional Community also is commissioned to serve. Our hope is that while each group practices the simple acts of blessing to their neighbours and community that we look for ways to invest ourselves in longer term strategies to serve the needs of the people around us. Each group then when it begins is asked to experiment together through a practical process of trial and error and prayer to find out where God is calling them to serve together. The goal is for all of our groups to be in serving situations where they are highly committed and highly passionate. However, we realize that that kind of service doesn't just happen right away. More likely, we will have to begin by serving the community in small and simple ways that are low risk, low impact and low commitment before we can find something that works for us to commit to for a longer term as a group, that sparks our collective passion. In the end, we believe that all serving is to God first, so the practice is more important than the target. We believe God has specifically gifted our church to serve and creatively care for our community in ways that will impact and help people understand the free love of Jesus. We believe God has gifted us many skilled people who are called to serve extravagantly, who will volunteer and pioneer great social benefits for our community.



## OPEN FRIENDSHIP

### *Sharing Life:*

Jesus had twelve learners (disciples) who followed him and he was faithful to teach, lead and love them into a new relationship with God. However, he says in John 15 that he didn't just consider them servants, but friends, and that real friendship is marked by the whole-hearted giving of our lives in love to one another, even to death. Jesus' disciples didn't start as Christians, they were as lost as every other person apart from God. Yet as they shared Jesus' life, as he loved them, and considered them as friends, they were transformed. We believe that that is key for any discipleship relationship, it must be rooted in the deep love of covenant friendship. We are called to share our lives in love with one another. A love that serves and gives to the other, without pause, because they are our friends.

### *Modeling Jesus:*

This then radically changes our perception of evangelism. We are simply not allowed to just spray some truth and pray that God does the rest. We are called into a life, where as we learn to follow Jesus, we live to model him to our friends, who don't know him. Our goal is to draw many into friendship with Jesus as we love and serve them, as Jesus commands us. Also, because our friendship is open, we are not solely drawn to those like us, but likely to those who are different culturally, ethnically and economically. Nothing makes it clearer to the world who Jesus is, than a people filled with the love of God, reaching out in divine friendship to serve and value them as God does.



# CONCLUSION

Thanks so much for taking the time to read through this booklet. It is our hope that this has given you a clearer picture of the vision we at Grace are pursuing together as a church. While the purpose of this booklet has been mainly about answering the question, “Why Missional Communities?”, You’ll have noticed it goes far beyond that to define a holistic weekly rhythm of life for us as followers of Jesus. The reason is that with Missional Communities, we are not just introducing “another program” or initiative, but “the program” for us as we purposefully pursue our vision of being a “Family on a Mission”. Missional Communities is certainly the hub of that lifestyle. We are very excited to see *what could actually happen* if we simplified our lives to the point where the three realities of Kingdom, Family & Mission became central. In fact, because the enemy of “the great” is often “the good”, we are very aware that there are some “good” things may not be as central in this new form as they were in the past. We fully expect this to challenge the priorities and patterns of our life. Absolutely no one has ever achieved a new goal by doing the same thing they were doing before. Missional Communities, therefore, offers us a very exciting challenge to truly align ourselves with God’s purposes for our lives.

With all of that in mind, Missional Communities will never be a “must” or “have to” for you to belong at Grace. We welcome everyone, in any state and any stage of faith to come and join us as we love Jesus together. Whether that’s simply coming Sundays, being a part of a service project,

or meeting people through a Missional Community, we want to encourage and challenge you to love and follow Jesus.

Also, we recognize, that not everyone's life fits well with a Missional Community group as we have laid them out. Whether it be a stage of life that is exceedingly busy, a work related schedule or ongoing health issues, there are a lot of reasons you may not be able to participate in the way you want to. In that situation however, we believe the values of Missional Community are still available as goals for you, but they must simply take a different form. For instance, the applications of Missional Community through work or sports is vast. Missional Communities as we've defined them, are meant not to be a one size fits all approach revolving around Grace the church, but a conviction about what a mature life in Christ looks like. Our system for meeting, which you've read about above is simply the easiest and clearest way we know to achieve our purpose together. In fact, we believe that the applications of Missional Community are vast and wide for you and your situation. Moreover, one of the biggest goals we have is a commitment to equip and raise up new missional leaders in new contexts. We are excited to see the various forms that "Family on a Mission" takes in the future. To conclude the purpose of this booklet is to instruct you about "why" we at Grace are going where we are going and to invite you to come with us as we discover the fullness of a life lived for Jesus.