

CLOSER COMMUNITIES

BRING CHRIST-CENTERED COMMUNITIES AND BIBLE LITERACY TO YOUR CHURCH



HOW TO GUIDE





WELCOME

You are about to start something powerful.

Let us ask you this- do you feel like you don't know anyone in your church? When you go to church, do you just see a crowd of faces? Do you long to have closer relationships at church?

If you answered yes, let us encourage you. You may think you are the only one in your church who feels this way, but you are not! We know from experience that everyone is craving community. We also know that building it isn't that difficult to do. You can be the one to start it!

Or maybe you *do* know everyone...but maybe you don't feel connected to many of them. What if you could see people in a different way? What if you if you knew everyone by their walk of faith and could be encouraged by *them*?

We want that for you and for the people at your church.

Welcome to CLOSER Communities, where we are building closer relationships to God and each other through Bible literacy and Christ-centered discipleship inside the local church.

Our hope is that you will be able to bring the power of the CLOSER method and discipleship to your community so that you will feel more connected and others will, too.

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SUBSCRIPTIONS

RESOURCES

*www.gracetoday.org/
closerresources*

YOUTUBE

CLOSER Discipleship

- HOW IT WORKS -

Are you ready to get into the nuts and bolts of this thing? That's what this guide is here for. Let's start with an overview. If you have not been part of a CLOSER Community, we want to walk you through a typical week. We believe in a three-fold approach: complete the lesson on your own, share what you learned in a small group, and engage in a teaching.

PART 1: STUDY ON YOUR OWN

Letting the Lord speak to you through your own personal story is essential to growth. We see in the Bible that this only happens when we get alone with the Lord. For that reason, we ask group members to prepare for their group by completing questions for the week ahead of time. This is an essential part to the effectiveness of this study, so make it a priority for yourself and those in your community.

PART 2: SHARE IN A GROUP

Hearing how the Lord has spoken to someone else is encouraging and connective. Did we draw the same conclusions as others? Hearing others' answers can confirm the Lord's direction in our own lives. Did we get something different because we are looking from different perspectives? Group sharing is also a great way to get to know each other on a deeper level.



STUDY. SHARE. LEARN.

PART 3: LEARN FROM A TEACHER

A time of teaching after group time can clear up misconceptions and give an opportunity for testimony. Sometimes we get it wrong or sometimes we are just confused. A gifted teacher can help to correct that through a verse-by-verse teaching of the passage. A teacher can also expound on a key verse and bring it to life to inspire, encourage, or equip a group. We encourage teachers to use their own testimonies of God's redemptive power. The teaching portion will not only tie up loose ends; it will also rally your community around truth.

WHAT MAKES CLOSER UNIQUE

It is important that when you build your community, you include these three parts. Taking out a part or two will weaken the effectiveness of the community that you are trying to build. Think of it this way: We may have all done a great Bible study. We may have all had a group of people to do life with somewhere. We may have all had a sense of purpose in life. What we may *not* have had is all three of those in one place: Bible study, connection, and purpose—all in our own church. That's the power of CLOSER. If you want to build Bible literacy and Christ-centered discipleship, you will need all three parts.

STEP BY STEP

Starting a CLOSER Community doesn't have to be difficult. Follow these 10 easy steps to your first successful study. This is a general plan and requires that you step through it with prayer and flexibility. This is our plan, but it is your community, and more importantly, God's people.

STEP #1::Gather the Team

To begin a community, you don't need a big team. Find 2-3 ladies to lead alongside of you. See page 3 for the type of team members you will need.

STEP #2::Choose a Study

Already? Yes, choosing a study is the fun part and will energize your team towards the goal of getting started. Talk with your team and pick one that fires you up!

STEP #3::Pick a Venue

Where will you meet? At the church, in homes, or virtually? Knowing this part is important because it will dictate group size and start date. See page 4 for help.

STEP #4::Choose Group Size

How will you set up your groups within the space? How many people are your leaders comfortable discipling? We recommend 5-6, but up to 12 can work too.

STEP #5::Choose a Start Date

It is important to consult your church so that you don't conflict with any other church events. Also count ahead weeks adding two weeks to the study length. Skip over holidays or breaks. Do you need to adjust your start date accordingly? We provided our yearly calendar on page 6 as a sample.

STEP #6::Let Us Know

We want to celebrate your community and be praying for your success! Please reach out to Julie at jkeeler423@yahoo.com or Brenda at brenda@gccfred.org.

STEP #7::Publicize It is time to get the word out! Check out page 5...

STEP #8::Opening Night

Hosting an Opening Night is a great way to start your community. Come together to meet one another, explain how the community and study will work, and to pick up workbooks.

STEP #9::Keep Momentum Going

Once your groups are meeting weekly, it is important to keep the momentum going through regular communication with your leaders and group members. Use weekly emails or social media posts to share teachings, prayer requests, or just to check in.

STEP #10::Celebrate!

After everyone has completed the study, have all of the groups together for a final celebration. A great way to celebrate is to have ladies share how the Lord has used the study to grow them closer to Him. Stories and testimonies are powerful!



- BUILDING A TEAM -

The local church is meant to equip and grow the leaders. Our guess is you have some pretty gifted people in your church! How did we know? Because God promises it. It is part of his design for the church, and He says we are to use our gifts mightily. (2 Timothy 1:6, 1 Peter 4:10) Therefore, do your fellow church members a favor and invite them in to be part of the team!

COORDINATOR

The first thing you will need is a coordinator- someone who is willing to take the helm, plan the initial logistics, and make sure things happen! If you are reading this manual, our guess is that is you. You are a go-getter and you see a need. Now you just need a few more people....

SMALL GROUP LEADERS

The small group leaders are the facilitators. You want to pick people who are serious about Jesus, reliable, friendly, and know their Bible. They don't need to be Bible scholars, they just have to be students of the Bible.

OTHER POSITIONS

You want to engage as many people as you can. The more invested people are, the greater sense of community you will have. These next positions may not happen right away, but are worth keeping in mind as you get going:

- Social Media Coordinator: Posts upcoming studies and information.
- Hospitality Coordinator: Sets up tables and makes the space look inviting.
- Table Hostess: Decorates the group's table and brings a snack to share.
- Welcomer: Stands at the door to welcomes people in at the start.
- Worship Leader: Leads the large group in a song before large group time begins.
- Administrator: Prints and distributes workbooks and takes attendance.

TEACHERS

If you have some gifted teachers in your congregation, ask them to join your team. They will be responsible for delivering the weekly teaching after the small group time. You can have just one teacher or split up the weeks among a few. If you have some who are willing but would like more training, we provide that at gracetoday.org/closerresources.

DON'T GO IT ALONE.

GETTING THE TEAM TOGETHER

Once you have your team together, make sure you communicate with them regularly. We recommend setting up a regular meeting. How often? That's up to you and the availability of your team. Use virtual meetings if necessary. These frequent communications are opportunities to keep momentum going, trouble shoot, and communicate opportunities for training.



DON'T FORGET

Good leaders make better groups, so take time to equip your leaders. We have all the resources you'll need on our [Training and Resources Page](http://www.gracetoday.org/closerresources).

**Visit our Training and Resources Page at
www.gracetoday.org/closerresources**

- PICKING A MODEL -

Whether you have two groups or 10, you can build a CLOSER Community...and you can build it to suit your church's needs. Every community will need time for fellowship, small group time, and a time to come together for the teaching (large group time). When picking a model, keep those in consideration.

ALL TOGETHER

If you have a large room at church that you can use weekly, you can have all three components together. Here's one way to do it:

- **Set Up:** You will need one table for each group and a podium. Set up tables in the large room with the podium up front.
- **Fellowship:** Welcome everyone in with refreshments and have some large group social time.
- **Small Group Time:** At a set time, invite everyone to take a seat and have small group leaders begin small group time at their tables.
- **Large Group Teaching:** After small group time, take a break and then return to tables for the large group teaching up front.
- **Total Time:** Plan for an hour and a half, especially if meeting at night.

AT HOME GROUPS

If you do not have a large space or want to have various meeting times, you can have at home groups and still have a large group component.

- **Set Up:** A meeting space for opening and closing night, a podium, and sound equipment.
- **Fellowship:** Host an Opening Night on the first week to hand out materials, give logistics, and get to know the whole group. On the last night, host a Closing Celebration to share testimonies, food, and fun.
- **Small Group Time:** Each group will set up their own day and time during the week and meet at the leader's home.
- **Large Group Teaching:** Video record the weekly teaching and send out to your groups each week or use our videos from our YouTube channel.

VIRTUAL GROUPS

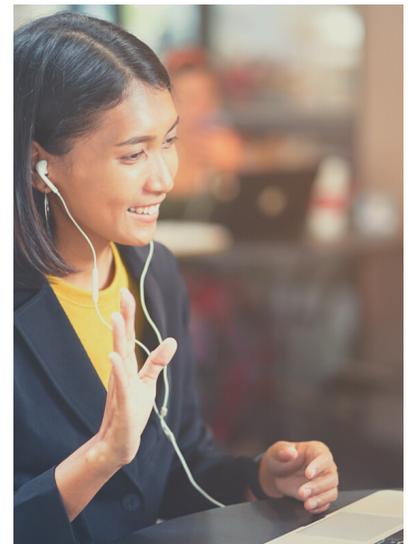
If you need distance learning for health or convenience, you can still build community:

- **Set Up:** Zoom or another type of virtual meeting space for each group. Leaders can set up their own.
- **Fellowship:** Host and Opening and Closing Night as a large group through one big virtual conference call. There are great ideas on line of how to make this interactive and fun.
- **Small Group Time:** Each group will set up their own day and time during the week and meet using a separate meeting link.
- **Large Group Teaching:** Video record the weekly teaching and send out to your groups each week or use our videos.
- **Total Time:** Plan 45 minutes for small group time and 20 minutes for teaching.

TEACHERS

You have three options for the large group teaching time:

1. Find a group of small group leaders who can also teach and have each of them teach one week.
2. Find one great teacher who is willing to teach every week. Have a separate group of small group leaders to lead groups.
3. Use our videos from our CLOSER Teaching Team, which you can find on our Resources Page or YouTube channel. You will still need small group leaders



DON'T LEAVE THIS OUT

We have learned that no matter what option you choose, **or if you make your own combination**, you should make room for Opening and Closing Night. This is the time for the group to feel the power of community.

THERE IS POWER IN COMMUNITY

- GETTING THE WORD OUT -

People want to know that you are out there- you just need to let them know! Doing a few simple things get help you to get the word out to your church and surrounding community. Once you have set your dates for your first CLOSER Communities study, follow these simple steps.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Use your pre-existing church announcements to help you. Reach out to your church's administrator and ask to have your study announced. Feel free to use some of the language in this manual to help you, like a few lines from the Welcome section on page 1. If your church uses digital slides, contact us and we'll share our graphics for CLOSER and for each study.

EMAIL

If you have an established mailing list, use that, too. You don't want to leave anyone out!

In our CLOSER Community, we use email within our groups during the duration of the study. Group leaders will send weekly emails to their group members with reminder, prayer requests, and the link to the teaching if they are virtual. Regular communication with your group members is so important!

**GRACETODAY.ORG/
CLOSERRESOURCES**

SOCIAL MEDIA

Nowadays, social media is where it is at! When we first started CLOSER, we were not fully comfortable with social media. But once we started it, we realized just how easy it was. Think of yourself as a digital hostess. Write with the familiarity that you would talk, attach a graphic to make it appealing, and voila! you have a post.

Post to your account or your church's account, and then ask your team members to share on their timelines. The more shares you have out there, the better.

Facebook or Instagram? This depends on your audience. If you have mostly a 35+ age group, use Facebook. If you have a group that's mostly under 35, use Instagram. If you have both, then use both. Ask people to help you. Find someone who is active on those platforms to post for you if you aren't comfortable.

PERSONAL INVITATION

Never underestimate the power of a personal invitation. We all want to feel chosen. Encourage your women to reach out and invite their family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers.



- PLANNING A YEAR -

Sometimes it's just easier to plan the whole year out ahead of time. Here's a sample Year-At-A-Glance similar to what we use in our community. We provide training for our leaders in between studies, but that is not necessary to begin. Leaders can self-train through our Podcast: A CLOSER Look at Discipleship. You can choose to take the weeks in between studies off and let everyone rest and recuperate for the next one.

Training for Winter/Spring Study

- 4 weeks
- Runs weeks of January 3-24
- Week of January 31 OFF for everyone

Winter/Spring Study

- 10 weeks
- Runs weeks of February 7- April 11
- Week of April 18 Off for everyone

Training for Summer Study

- 4 weeks
- Runs weeks of April 25-May 16
- Weeks of May 23- June 13 everyone off due to end of school year

Summer Study

- 10 weeks
- Runs weeks of June 20-August 1
- Week of August 8 everyone off

Training for Fall Study

- 4 weeks
- Runs weeks of August 15-Sept 5
- Week of September 12 everyone off

Fall Study

- 10 weeks
- Runs weeks of September 19- Nov 21
- Nov 25-December 26 Everyone Off

