

APPENDIX ONE: The Circle of Grace Process

Once upon a time a group of Christian people formed a circle in order to intentionally include others in their faith. They called their ever widening circle a Circle of Grace.

1. A *conversation of grace* is defined by Jesus in Mat 18:20 as “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” *Lost people* are defined by Jesus in Luke 15 as simply *those who are not with the others*. There are lots of people who are not with the others in the religious sheepfold of the traditional church. Lost people encounter Jesus in conversations of grace.

2. A *circle of grace* is an ongoing *conversation of grace* that occurs on a regular basis, usually weekly. People can look forward to the next circle meeting, and if they miss one, know where and when to expect the next one.

3. There are two kinds of circles. *Nurturing circles of grace* meet the needs of people in the earliest stages of grace. They are relaxing, affirming, supportive and fun as people get to know each other and build positive friendships. Sometimes we call these people *spiritual newborns* because they are just beginning.¹

4. *Learning circles of grace* meet the needs of curious people who have questions about Jesus, faith and the Bible.² Sometimes we call these people *spiritual children* because they have the joyful, eager curiosity of children (Matthew 18:1-4, 19:13-15).

5. **How, where, when:** Conversations of grace just happen; a *conversation of grace* becomes a *circle of grace* when people can reasonably look forward to another conversation in the future at a particular time or place. *Circles of grace* are planned and scheduled; people get together on a routine basis for *conversations of grace*. Both can take place anywhere people can visit: a restaurant, a public park, the beach, before or after another event or even when friends go walking for exercise. Each *circle of grace* develops their own customs of conversation.

6. As they are inclusive and deliberately include people, *conversations of grace* naturally grow into *circles of grace*. Within circles, new conversations begin which lead to new circles forming. Most frequently this happens when a circle grows beyond twelve regular participants.

7. When people desire or need *more* from God, they can join a *JUMP group*. JUMP stands for “Jesus Understands My Problems.” The purpose of a JUMP group is to help people who desire it

¹Author Ralph Neighbour calls these “share groups.” Other people just call them fellowship or hanging out with friends. They usually involve some kind of activity that everyone in the group enjoys.

²Some authors call these groups cells, Bible studies, classes, seminars or workshops. John Wesley called them class meetings.

to work on their faith. Like an exercise class, it's meant to be challenging. The difference between a *circle of grace* and a *JUMP group* is the difference between walking and running for exercise. JUMP groups are an option; they are not for everybody.

8. JUMP groups use a standardized format of *spiritual exercises* which provide a good spiritual workout on a weekly basis. You can add more exercises to the weekly workout, but JUMP groups must provide the eight minimum *spiritual disciplines*: the Centering prayer, reading the Bible, prayer for yourself and others, goals for your life, becoming more like Jesus, having good spiritual conversations with lost people (Prayer Tool), and evaluating yourself with questions with the help of a partner. Because of these spiritual disciplines and because their goal is to follow Jesus, those who participate in JUMP groups are called *disciples*.

9. JUMP groups usually involve 2-4 spiritual partners who meet weekly to answer spiritual questions and support each other. Often, one of the partners acts as a “trainer” or “coach” to help the group achieve more; exercise classes that have leaders work harder. This person is called a *spiritual parent* because they help raise *spiritual children* to a maturity where they also become *spiritual parents*.

10. A JUMP group intentionally works toward some sort of transformation or change desired in the life of the person participating. People often decide to participate in a JUMP group because they want God's help with a problem, want to grow faster, to find themselves, understand their purpose in life or invest time and energy in serving God.³ Because they are a *rite of passage* we often call people in JUMP groups *spiritual teenagers*. Spiritual adolescence can be very exciting and very painful, something like a spiritual roller coaster; growing up can be hard. JUMP groups are intended to help ease that transformation from one stage of spiritual growth into another.

11. JUMP groups look for people who desire help in growing spiritually through *conversations of grace* and in *circles of grace*. JUMP groups naturally form and reform as people begin as *disciples*, grow up and become *spiritual parents* of others. When *spiritual children* become *spiritual parents*, their *spiritual parent* becomes a *spiritual grandparent* (2 Timothy 2:2). The role of *spiritual grandparents* is to help *spiritual parents* raise *spiritual children* in a *spiritual family*. This is much more than a small group; families naturally raise up children to start their own families.

12. While anyone in our fellowship can form a small group, *circles of grace* in our fellowship are led by leaders participating in a JUMP group. This provides for stability and accountability. With the *disciples* acting like older brothers or sisters and *spiritual parents* providing loving oversight, the *circle of grace* will hopefully develop the feeling of a healthy, *functional family of God where Jesus is Lord and people grow*. For some this may be the first healthy experience of family that

³JUMP groups are descended from Neil Cole's *Life Transformation Groups*, which were inspired by small groups John Wesley called “bands.”

they have known.

13. In order to help *disciples* learn more about spiritual parenting, they are called upon to do most of the leadership tasks and teaching in a *circle of grace*. The *spiritual parents* watch over them and help primarily in the area of relationships; in the Bible this task is called *equipping* (Ephesians 4:11-16). When members of a spiritual family are ready, they become *disciples* in a new JUMP group; the former *disciple* becomes the *spiritual parent* of the new JUMP group. In this way one JUMP group becomes two, three or four new groups; one remains as the leadership team of the original *circle of grace* while the others branch out to form new *circles of grace*, thereby creating an *extended spiritual family*. Some *circles of grace* continue producing JUMP groups for years. Others cycle; they open for a short time, produce their JUMP groups, and then close.

14. **Quest:** In order to structure their journey toward spiritual maturity, a JUMP group can choose to go through a Quest process.⁴ The Quest program helps new *disciples* discover their gifts and ministry calling and then form a new *circle of grace* to fulfill that calling. If the new *circle of grace* is designed to minister to a need in the community, it is sometimes called a JOLT group (Jesus Overcomes Life's Troubles).

15. **Gospels 4x12:** as a basic exercise of learning the teachings of Jesus, we encourage *disciples* to read the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) through twelve times in order to familiarize themselves with the teachings of Jesus. At one chapter per day, each round takes three months. We celebrate the completion of the 4th, 8th and 12th round as milestones in spiritual growth within our fellowship. Followers of Jesus need to become very familiar with the teachings of Jesus. As they read, *disciples* record the commands of Jesus that they believe to be related to their ministry calling in order to fulfill Matthew 28:20.

16. **LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE:** *Spiritual parents* in JUMP groups that lead a *circle of grace* participate in a core group of leaders. At the center of the core group of leaders is a group called the Hub. The Hub consists of the senior pastor, sometimes an administrator, and the twelve senior group leaders who are actively involved in leading a JUMP group.

17. **GATHERING:** The Hub will organize a monthly Gathering which functions as a prayer meeting where there will be worship and preaching that will inspire members of *circles of grace*. Gatherings are more intended to meet the needs of insiders than for newcomers.

18. **RETREATS:** The Hub may sponsor retreats, like a *Walk to Emmaus*, for concentrated learning and building up the body of Christ.

⁴For the details of the JUMP group and Quest process, see pp. 12-20, *Seminar Three: Decision*, on the Resources page at www.disciplewalk.com.

19. SOLOMON'S PORCH: The Hub may sponsor meetings for JUMP group participants to equip them for leadership. These would be for prayer, inspiration and/or to receive education (knowledge), training (skills), supervision and planning. These meetings are called Solomon's Porch similar to the gathering of leaders with the Apostles in Acts 5:12.

20. REQUIREMENTS FOR LEADERSHIP are basic. Leaders are normally *spiritual parents* within our fellowship. They are leaders in a JUMP group and a *circle of grace*.

We expect leaders to have control over their behavior as evidenced by faithful participation in the group process. We expect leaders to have control over their finances as evidenced by tithing their income to God's work (2 Cor 9:6-8, Matthew 6:19-21).⁵ We expect leaders to evidence maturity by building up rather than dividing the fellowship (1 Cor 1:10-12, 3:1-9). We expect leaders recovering from addictions to work a program of sobriety. We expect leaders to refrain from cruel, criminal or abusive behavior. The Hub may add to these basic requirements when necessary, but our principle is to be less restrictive and more open to the guidance of the Lord.

⁵Tithing can be to any charity, not necessarily to the Circle of Grace Fellowship; it's not about the money, it's about obeying Jesus. Church World Service, UMCOR and other opportunities for giving to missions abound where no portion of the gift goes to fund raising costs or administration. Leaders have a plan to increase in percentage giving annually until they become tithers. The Circle of Grace Fellowship will have a ministry that helps people get control of their finances as this is a major cause of human anxiety and pain inside and outside the faith.