



Introduction to Circles

FACE TO FACE

- 1 John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was **with** God, and the Word was God.”
- 2 This verse teaches us that the God of the Bible, though fully **ONE**, is also **plural**—the members of the Trinity are **with** one another. “With,” in the Greek, literally means **face to face**. The Godhead is **turned in on themselves** in face-to-face communion, and relationship. To *image* God in the best fashion—as his children and image bearers on earth—is to posture ourselves toward him and others in a way that portrays God’s personhood and kingdom closeness. Our **invisible** God is made **visible** to the world when **we**, as the Body of Christ, worship and serve our Triune God face-to-face in a **circle-like-closeness**, and **we** turn **toward** one another in devoted affection and truth.
- 3 This is why we call what we do **circles**. Now, how is a “circle structured?” Let’s give a bit of background.

OUR BIG IDEA: Garden City wants to facilitate people gathering together, eating meals together, creating together, learning about God together, and meeting the felt needs of those in their context; particularly the fatherless, the widow and the orphan together. Here’s how we want to do it.

A SUPPER AND SYMPOSIUM

- 1 Jesus’ last visible display of the kingdom on earth was at the Lord’s Supper—an actual full meal held in a circle, where he **turned toward his people** around a table. In this supper, both Jew and Gentile were represented, and Jesus not only linked his discourse with the Jewish Passover heritage in the 1st Cup raised, but in Luke’s gospel, Luke is intentional to show Jesus also raising the 2nd Cup. In this 2nd cup, Jesus linked the supper to the Greco-Roman clubs and political structures of the Roman culture of that day. In raising the 1st cup, he proclaimed himself the awaited Messiah (as the Jew would have understood it), and in the 2nd cup, he proclaimed himself as the King of everything (as the Gentile would have understood it). This is why we want our **circles** to always include a **full meal**.

This model follows in the way of Jesus. A meal holds an err of invitation to all those that would come. A meal's atmosphere best represents what the coming kingdom will be like, and it poses a friendly way to reveal the kingdom "**now**" to those that haven't yet experienced Jesus.

- 2 A symposium (discussion) normally followed a meal of this nature. Greco-Romans would invite their elite guests to discuss topics related to their kingdom.

Paul's discourse on the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 10 demonstrates Paul's understanding of this, in that his teaching on the Lord's Supper, is followed by a discussion concerning "symposium-like" behavior. He instructs the Early Church believers, who had clearly gathered to share gifts, teachings, prayers, and leadership related to Christ's new kingdom through his church (1 Cor. 12-14), to share and produce together in an orderly manner. Clearly the Early Church had an understanding of how the meal and the Lord's kingdom are linked; not only in **sharing together**, but in **creating and producing together**.

During these symposiums, Christ's way appears to be intentionally subversive, in that he doesn't mesh with the cultural norms in just surrounding himself with, nor inviting people like him—or people that made him look good. He invited all men and women, in whatever lost state, to discuss and produce together on equal footing under the gospel banner of grace. He did this so that beautiful things in work and deed, proclamation and teaching, innovation and invention, and creativity and art could pour forth.

- 3 These meals were truly the front door of the early churches, and were highly multiplicational. People of all race and creed came to these banquets, where even the earliest Christian documents (e.g. like the *Didache*) clearly show believers and non-believers supping together (which also happened in the Passover feast—Num. 9:14).

Clearly, however, a distinction was also made at some point in the meal between the **common meal** (the **Agape** meal, or love feast—offered to feed the body, but also the poor) and the **Eucharistic meal** (where the bread and wine represent Christ's body and blood). Christ was to be remembered in the meal by both believer and non-believer.

His **common** grace is remembered as HE shares all things—even with those that don't believe. His **saving** grace is offered in the sanctified (set apart) elements, and affirms those who do believe, while also inviting and beckoning all to trust in his blood and body for salvation.

- 4 This **Agape** style meal was very normative until around the time of Constantine. He politicalized Christianity in 313A.D. with the Edict of Milan, and made it the state religion, which resulted in the sacraments of **Baptism** and **Eucharist** (the wafer and cup) being observed by the church in the morning (more as a way to document regional citizenship as well as true believers). The **Agape**, or ministry to the poor, moved to the evening time.

What tragically happened, and has been happening ever since, is that ministry forever became divided and top-down. No longer were people sitting around and across from each other—reminded of their equal footing as sinners before a Holy God—but now

those who were **in** came to serve those on the **outside** in a **separate** venue and service.

This **link between supper and symposium** has implications to restoring our models for ministry back to the place where believer/non-believer, affluent/poor, uneducated/educated, different races and creeds, and those of any differing position can be invited to come together to **share** in the life of Christ.

TYPES OF CIRCLES

- 1 **SongCity Circles:** Our simplest type of circle is yes, based on affinity. We want songwriters to come together, eat, and remember the Lord, and break into a symposium-time of discussion, singing, sharing, and creating through the art of song. Songs are among the most formational tools that we have in instructing the Body in how to mature and grow into Christ's likeness (Col. 3:16). Garden City wants to further encourage songwriters to grow in lyrical depth, musical beauty, and Christian character in order to stir up in local contexts singing that is congregational, rich, thoughtful and formational.

Garden City wants to help spear head these circles, catalogue where they are going on, and develop the resources to promote, publish, or produce what grows out of the local success. We work hard to develop the network so, that if innovative promise and gospel transformation is shown in a local context, we can equip and help other churches produce in like manner.

- 2 **Liturgy and Arts Circles:** We hope that these circles grow a little more robust than just a common shared practice like song writing. Many today are realizing that Christ is the only one worthy to possess titles like Worship Leader and Senior Pastor. His role over his flock is far above what we can attain. He leads and pastors the cosmos, the church, and culture. A change in structure within churches has been reforming itself for awhile in our current trends due to this fact, and many are realizing that the **gifted Body** of Christ as a **team**, is better at shaping and forming under Christ's leadership than one or two individuals relegated to a piano or a guitar. Worship is much more than one person or just song. Worship is a Liturgy.

Liturgy is the work of Christ pressed in, through and out of his people into all the rhythms and habits of life (through grace gifts or the **charismata**). Every practice or routine we engage in—from church service to civil service is profoundly **forming**. What we need, more than just singing (even though this is profoundly important) is a team of innovators and artists to consider the people and gifts of those in the church, and to stir up the artistry, innovation, and creative work. This will shape God's people in Christlikeness both in **creativity and character**.

We want circles of invention at all levels to come together, eat, and remember the Lord, and break into a symposium-like time of discussion, singing, sharing, mission, and creating through the art of innovation and invention. Garden City wants to help spear head these circles, catalogue where they are going on, and develop the resources to promote, publish, or produce what grows out of the local success. We work hard to develop the network so, that if innovative promise and gospel transformation is shown in a local context, we can equip and help other churches

produce in like manner.

Watch the video to hear how this model will help you learn about a **person**, about the truth of **our God**, and about the **beauty of someone's trade** in a manner unparalleled.

- 3 Churches & Circles:** In the Early Church, a little less than 2% of the population could read. Much of what we now READ as Scripture, was most likely performed, dramatized, sung, or artistically remembered by those in the ORAL culture of Jesus' day.

Roughly 80% of the world cultures today still operate as ORAL cultures, and we in the West have largely kept on using our ineffective, literate, and corporate church models, to try and meet the needs of those in these cultures. This model of **circles is explosive** in other parts of the world because it can survive **in any time, in any place and under any circumstance**. This model in particular can survive in the midst of tremendous persecution and suffering (e.g. in the wake of financial crisis, poverty, transience, and drastic life change of any kind).

Garden City believes this circle model to be relatively close to the way the Early Church multiplied and remained **safe, discreet**, and yet **effective** amidst trial and hostility, and we hope that these circles will become a way to see expansive church growth around the world. We want to see churches affirming leaders (See our PPK assessment), and seeing **homes, meals, discussion, sharing, and producing creatively together** as the primary mode through which to transmit the gospel and grow kingdom community.

WHY THE C.R.O.S.S. ACRONYM AND STRUCTURE?

- 1** The Godhead is clearly three-in-one. In plural unity they are united in *how they relate* (Community), *how they do things* (Reasoning), *how they organize* (Organization), *how they think, learn and believe* (Scripture), and *in how they lead* (their Signature mission). Though there is NO WAY to limit God or the Trinity to an acronym nor a structure because His nature is beyond our comprehension, C.R.O.S.S. gives us a comprehensible tool to evaluate His image, as well as ourselves.

By making our circles centered on becoming like Christ, we keep **character, creativity, and craft**; as well as **time, talent, and treasure** framed in the proper perspective. Our **ultimate goal** is to be shaped as a "people" and a "community" into the image of Christ. Christ has the Father and the Holy Spirit, and to become like him we also need the "**other**."

2 Every church has their model for “Small Groups” as shown in this diagram below:

-  Open Small Community
-  Closed Small Community
-  Cell Community
-  Free Market Community
-  Neighborhood Community
-  Purpose Driven Community
-  Sermon Based Community
-  Organic Community
-  House Community
-  Host Community

We feel that to unite around anything other than the CROSS and goal of becoming like Christ (e.g. hobbies, affinity, neighborhoods—though these have their place) is to risk falling into **uniformity** not **unity**.

We naturally tend to gather around those just like us, and this *can be* a positive thing, but around the CROSS, is where **we all CROSS, and where both those of low and high esteem are made equal in Christ**. Unity can ONLY be found in making the work of Christ central because it makes room for every nation and creed to join in **together**. Out of this central focus, of *becoming like Christ* in his death and resurrection, will all our similarities and differences truly flourish.

PLANNING THREE-FOLD | Idea Generator, Plan & More

Biblical, Historical & Theological: As you plan your circles, use our **Circle Idea Generator** or **C.R.O.S.S. Plans** as you see fit, in order to organize ideas for your meetings. In our tools you'll find places Scripture and sound teaching, as well as space for supplemental helps like videos, links, reading etc. that can help your circle mature in Biblical truth.

You'll find places to list creative ideas, creative different structures for your time together in order to facilitate balance and a greater focus on truth, fellowship, or mission. You can also check out our Prophet, Priest and King materials to enable those in your group with differing **tendencies** in their giftings and ministries. These resources will empower them to serve and to make the circle well rounded and creative in different ways.

We would invite you, as you continue in the process of being creative, to look at the biblical, historic and theological ways our Savior, and our Church Fathers enhanced the **meal** (prayers, hallel psalms, table songs, ritual and symbol). Consider also ways to enrich your **symposium** discussions and creative offering time in order to make sure they are **guarded** by sound leadership, **enriched** by the giftings and offerings of

others, **led** by the truths of Scripture, **deepened** by the wisdom of history, and **transforming** in how they cause participants to see and serve Christ rightly.