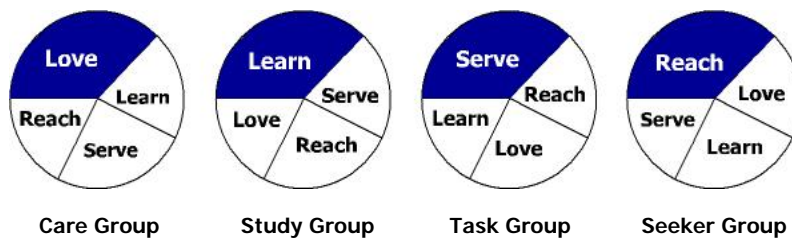


## Small Group Values

While each small group at St. Mark's takes on its own identity, we've discovered that it's important for all groups to share a few common values. These values help groups stay connected to the vision, mission and life of the church and keep us unified and committed to one common goal – biblical community. They also help move us toward being the type of church described in Acts 2:42-47.

While we encourage all groups to embrace and incorporate into the life of their group the values of Love, Learn, Serve and Reach, it's natural and okay for a group to have one of the four values as its primary focus. See the diagram below.



We describe the values of Love, Learn, Serve and Reach the following way:

### Love – Our Concern and Care for One Another

Love is expressed in a variety of ways in group life. Through prayer and worship we express love to God. We express love to members in our group as we fellowship together, serve each other, care for one another, and pray for the needs represented in our group. John 13:34-35 tells us, “A *new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*” It is Christian love that makes our groups distinctive and provides that sense of belonging that comes with community.

**Ideas:** Here are a few ideas on how some groups have chosen to express the value of love in their group: discovering ways to pray for one another, caring for each other in time of crisis – death, illness, etc., celebrating life's milestones – birthdays, anniversaries, births, new jobs or homes, etc., surprising group members with unexpected acts of kindness – cards, babysitting, work on their home, etc.

### Learn – Our Discovery of God and One Another

Why is it important to have the “learning element”? Learning about God and our relationship with him is a key component of group life and helps us to grow individually as fully developing followers of Jesus Christ. All groups learn in one way or another — they learn about the Scripture, Christ, one another, and themselves as they read and discuss chosen study materials and experience life together.

Choosing a study is usually one of the more challenging responsibilities of group life. The Loft Resource Center at St. Mark's has a large variety of study resources in stock for you to review and choose from. The Loft carries topical studies, verse-by-verse Bible studies and video/DVD-driven curriculum. 2 Peter 3:18 says, “*Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*” It is through the study, discussion and learning of God's word that our group members grow spiritually.

**Ideas:** Here are a few ideas on how some groups have chosen to express the value of learn in their group: select a popular Christian book to review, take notes from the weekend message and discuss them, choose a topical study – parenting, marriage, relationships, etc., pick a resource on a certain book in the Bible and do a verse-by-verse study, etc.

## **Serve – It's Not About Me, but One Another**

Service is part of any vibrant, healthy small group. Challenge your group to think of ways to serve one another, the community or the church. Serving can take many forms so don't limit the possibilities. For example, it can begin by serving one another within your group when there is a need such as a surgery, a new baby, a death or even a home project. It can include serving together at St. Mark's as an usher team, in the Atrium, or on a grounds maintenance day. It can also include serving at the Homeless Shelter, or participating in the Samaritan's Purse Shoebox Christmas outreach. Groups find that when they serve together, they get to know one another better and the group is energized by its outward focus. James says, "*Faith by itself, if not accompanied by actions, is dead*" (James 2:17). It is in serving that we become the hands and feet of Jesus in the world and learn to turn our focus beyond ourselves. Groups are encouraged to plan a serving project at least twice a year.

**Ideas:** Here are a few ideas on how some groups have chosen to express the value of serve in their group: Serving members of your group during a specific time of need, participating as a group in serving opportunities around the church and community – Operation Christmas Child Ministry, adopt a Christmas Cheer family, Good Shepherd's Kitchen, Loaves and Fishes, serve at the church on designated project days, etc.

## **Reach – Helping Others Discover What I Have**

Opening your group to new people at different times throughout the year ensures that your group doesn't become inward focused and stagnant. Let's face it, without new people, it's easy to get in a rut and possibly bored with each other. New people force us out of our routine, causing us to take a fresh look at our group and ourselves and also allowing us to partner with the church in fulfilling its mission - "Connecting People to Christ and One Another." It is in committing to reach spiritually lost people and others needing to be connected in community that we ultimately fulfill Christ's commission in Matthew 28:19-20, "*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*" To express the value of reach, your group can open its doors to others in the church looking to connect in community or choose to encourage unchurched friends to join you for group gatherings and studies.

**Ideas:** Here are a few ideas on how some groups have chosen to express the value of reach in their group: have the group create a prayer list of people needing to be connected, do a study on God's heart for disconnected people, have a social gathering where group members invite friends/neighbors or others interested in getting connected in a small group, partner with and coach a newly forming group, bless and send a few members of the current group out to begin a new group, etc.