



BUSINESS OWNERS BAND TOGETHER IN NEW SMALL GROUP

“For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

- Jeremiah 29:11

Teresa owns a dance studio. Heidi owns a college test prep business. Michael owns a Bojangles franchise. These Carmel members are among the 30 million small business owners in the US working to maneuver through the impacts of COVID-19. They are also part of the Small Business Owners Small Group that gathers via Zoom every Thursday morning.

This small group was formed in April to encourage and connect those in the Carmel family strongly impacted by our changing world amidst the coronavirus - struggling to keep their small businesses alive. The group is co-led by Michael Vines and Larry Reed.

Michael felt called to start this Small Business Owners group. *“This is my sweet spot. I love encouraging and connecting people. But I stepped into starting this group with no expectations. I just prayed that God would show up and let it be His. This has become a safe place for people to share their needs, ask questions, and share resources and information. We also pray together and share celebrations in every call.”*

“I don’t know what you’re doing but I want to be a part of it. I need help!” was Teresa Sandman’s response when she first learned of the newly formed Small Business Owners Small Group at Carmel.

When her bank of 20+ years would not return her calls, group members connected Teresa with a banker who, within a few days, provided her with the small business loan needed to sustain her dance studio.

Teresa is so grateful for this group, *“This is an amazing group of people and a safe place to talk through things, get referrals, glean wisdom and a place to support one another and raise each other up. This is a shared space for good, hard, and encouraging conversation.”*

The group began meeting via Zoom in early April and averages 15 members a week with a range of businesses represented - from a dentist to a gym owner. Their discussions run the gamut - from celebrating ways God has provided, to reviewing the technicalities of the Payroll Protection Program, to how to have grace with and support employees struggling in this season.

When asked to reflect on the impact this group has had in this season, Teresa says “[This season] has been hard and I have been so blessed with all these people who have such great wisdom and outlook.”

Heidi Wright’s mom inspired her small business. “[My mom] was ahead of her time as an entrepreneur who did well by doing good. The impact she had on her clients spoke powerfully to me. She taught me that one way to love others is by using my expertise to help them.” Heidi’s business guides families through the information-heavy world of SAT and ACT test prep - which has become even more complicated amid COVID-19. She learned of the group through her Discipleship Community and desired support in this season.

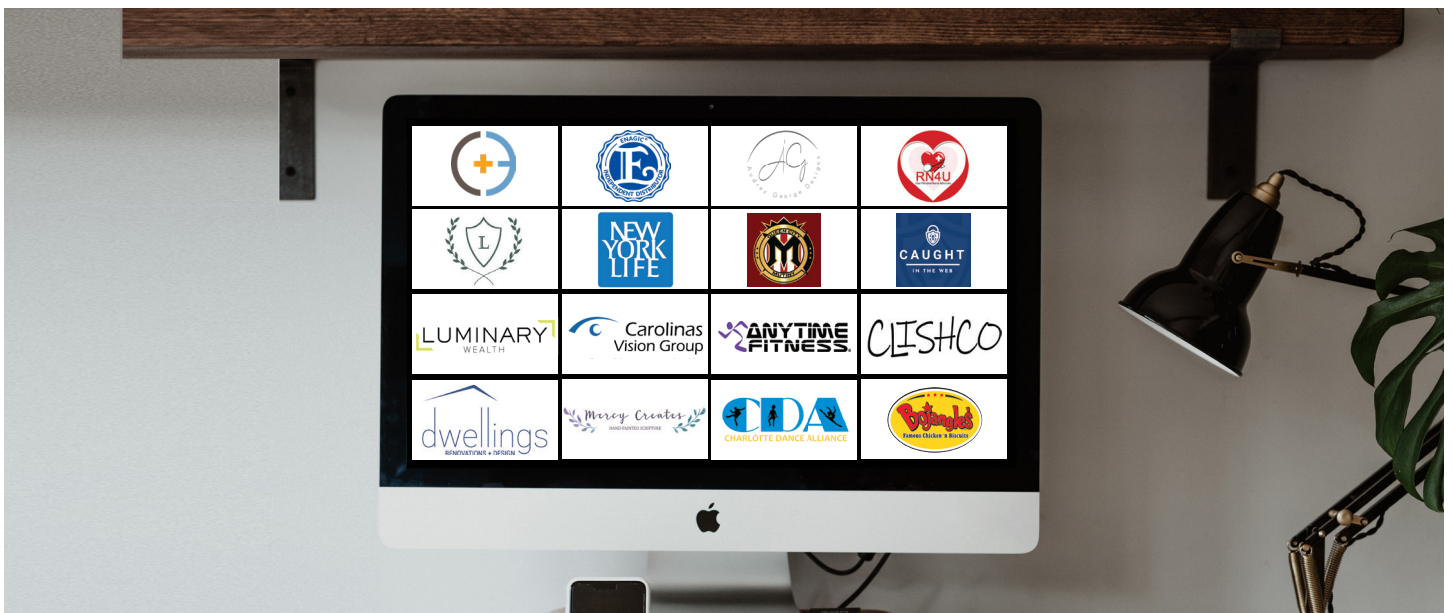
“Sometimes you can feel isolated and lonely as a sole proprietor. In times like this, you don’t even always know what you need. I feel safe in this group about being transparent and I’m getting SO much out of it! One group member affirmed my need to file for unemployment because of lost business, and even walked me through the application. Though things certainly had slowed down a lot when SAT and ACT tests got cancelled, I had been telling myself that others had it so much worse, so I didn’t file. The group helped me see that it wasn’t greedy or wrong. I was just accessing the help available.”

Heidi has found value in the exposure to business people who are believers and has been blessed by the godliness and focus of this group. “Our work can feel so big and important, but, really, this is such a small part of eternity. God has tasked us for such a time as this to walk out our faith and be Jesus with skin on!”

Each week’s gathering begins with Michael inviting the group members to share a celebration from the past week. Heidi reflects on this weekly ritual and says, “My celebrations are simple. One week I thanked God that my son was working so he could pay for our wifi.”

Michael shares that this Small Business Owners Small Group has challenged him in his walk with Christ. He states, “As Christ-followers and small business owners we get to ask ‘how do we bring Jesus into our business so that the things we do and say glorify and show Him?’ This group has been a catalyst for these conversations about how we can bring Jesus into our businesses and ensure our actions are consistent with who we are called to be.”

To learn more about this small group and others, email connections@carmelbaptist.org.



Carmel is committed to making disciples of those Nearest, our Neighbors and the Nations.

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