



## Dear Friends,

Wherever Kathryn and I have been at church for the past thirty years, we have joined a small group. We see belonging to a small group as integral to church life. How else can you form close relationships with fellow Christians in your church family? In my view, there are few better places than a church small group for studying the Bible, praying together and then putting into practice loving each other.

In our mid-twenties, we belonged to a small group made up of couples with young children. We met on Sundays in someone's home after morning church. We ate together, and then the kids played while the adults did Bible study. There were lots of interruptions.

That group was hugely influential on our lives. The other couples were all about ten years older than us. These were mature Christian men and women, following Jesus in the hurly-burly of work and mortgage stress, raising kids and doing marriage. We loved the Bible study and prayer times. But what made the greatest impression on us was the way these couples did life.

We saw up close how these men and women related to each other as husband and wife. We observed the ways they raised and related to their kids. They didn't sit us down and say, "Now, here is a life lesson about marriage or parenting." We absorbed it by osmosis. Just by hanging around them. Being in their homes. Watching and learning.

It's not that they were perfect. It's that they shared themselves with us. They loved us enough to invite us into their homes, families and lives.

I can say God used this small group to shape me into the man, husband, father, pastor, and friend I am today. I dare say, Kathryn might say the same thing.

We have been in many small groups ever since. None quite like this one. But then, no group is ever the same.

But each group in its own way has been formative in our Christian journey and maturity. Whenever I first join a small group (including the one I just spoke about), I'm always amazed when I look at the people God has gathered to be part of THIS group. I think to myself, "These are not people I would have chosen." It's then that God begins his beautiful work. By his Spirit, God teaches us to love each other. Not just talk about love. We practice love.

In a small group, I learnt to respectfully disagree with fellow Christians. I have had to repent of impatience and insensitivity to others. I have been inspired to be more intentional in speaking of Jesus to unbelieving friends by another's example. I was encouraged to love others different to me by a Christian brother and sister in a small group who became close friends, despite them being on opposite ends of the political spectrum!

God places you and me in a church because that is where we learn to live the Christian life. It's where we practice love. Note all the responsibilities we have to fellow believers from Colossians 3:12-15:

*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

So, if you want to connect with fellow believers and grow as a Christian, join a growth group in 2024!

God Bless,  
Mark Adams