



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 Christians in your church family? There are few better places than a church small group for studying the Bible, praying together and practising love for each other.

In our mid-twenties, Kathryn and I 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 they 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 being with them. 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.

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.

There is a couple of highlights I want to share from my RPC growth group experience in 2024. I was constantly encouraged by people honestly sharing how they were living out the gospel. In workplaces. Families. Relationships. Devotional life. Struggles with sin. We prayed for each other to live for Jesus in specific ways.

I was also inspired by newer Christians in the group to be more courageous to speak about Jesus with unbelieving family members and friends. Their eagerness to tell others about Jesus was contagious!

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 2025!

God Bless,
Mark Adams