

Small Groups & Spiritual Growth

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My experiences with small groups have been important in the formation of my faith and how I share it with others. For a few months now I have been involved in a small group that meets on Wednesday nights. When I initially joined my small group I was nervous to start interacting with a group of people I didn't know. On top of that, it was my first experience being involved with a group alongside people my age. Like others, I grew up in the church from an early age and progressed my way through the nursery and into my church's youth group. For many years I had the opportunity to grow close with the other kids and begin to form the early foundations of my faith. My particular youth group was heavily involved with worship on Sunday mornings. We met on Wednesday nights and did Bible studies, and every year we did several mission trips around our state. That level of interaction and intentionality led me to grow in my faith and encouraged me to continue in my faith journey long after I graduated from the group.

When I started college I had the expectation I would find a group on campus that would encourage me to progress forward in my faith journey. I searched through the various groups on campus and eventually found campus ministry. This group of around 20 people met on Wednesday nights for campus worship and spend time afterward in fellowship. At first I really enjoyed being a part of another group who came together for worship and connection, but over time I began to realize those were the only activities we did. Every week looked like a carbon copy of an old routine. I thought to myself, "Is this really it? Is this what it's like after youth group?" This stagnant feeling remained with me the next four years as I continued my undergraduate studies.

Because of my experiences in college with campus ministry I didn't think this new small group I was joining would be any different. I thought we would hear a message, spend time talking about some superficial topic, and then go home and come back the next week. But my first experience with this small group completely dismantled my expectations.

Right away I was welcomed by a group of people who were enjoying fellowship time before we started. I was introduced to several small group leaders and a wide variety of young adults. One thing that stuck out to me was just how excited everyone was just to be present in that space. I could feel the energy in the room as everyone talked about what was going on in their lives. When I talked with small group leaders I heard a passion for ministry in their voices, eager to help lead and support the young adults of our church. That same level of excitement followed us through our time of devotion and into our small group discussions. During that time, I got to meet the people in my small group and learn more about them and why they choose to attend the meeting. Some attend because they find a sense of belonging in the community. Others are unable to attend church on Sundays because of their work schedules or family commitments.

But as for me? I attend my small group because this is the only area of my life that I have the opportunity to have conversations about the church with others around my age. This community gives me the chance to have theological discussions and see new perspectives from other young adults. Personally, this group does not eliminate my spiritual need for worship on Sunday morning, rather it supplements and encourages my spiritual formation and personal growth as I discern where, and how, I am being led by God.