

Eight Reasons to Join a Small Group

by Pastor Rick Warren (Saddleback Valley Community Church)

1. You will understand the Bible better in a small group.

If you've ever listened to a Bible teacher or preacher and wanted to stop that person and say, "But what about...?" or "I don't understand," then a small group is for you! Preaching and teaching is one way communication. You listen while the speaker speaks. It's fine for imparting knowledge but not as effective for personal application as a small group. In a small group setting, you can ask questions, participate in a discussion of the text, and hear others share insights and illustrations of the truth you are trying to grasp. The Bible must be applied to your own personal situations and that happens best in small groups.

Sometimes I've had people tell me after a service, "Pastor Rick, it would be helpful if I could sit down with some others and discuss the implications of your message today. You said so much, I need to digest it!" Many of our groups are using the Sunday morning message outline as a Bible discussion guide.

2. You will begin to really feel like part of God's family.

Most people who have been a part of a group say the greatest benefit is the close relationships and friendships that develop. They will frequently telephone each other during the week to share an urgent prayer request or an exciting answer. You'll discover that your needs and problems are not unique ~ we're all in the same boat. It helps to know that others are facing the same difficulties, or have lived through them and learned spiritual principles in the process. Over fifty times in the New Testament the phrase "one another" is used to describe our relationship to other believers. We are instructed to love one another, encourage one another, pray for one another, accept one another, bear one another's burdens, and build up one another. The only way you can obey these commands is in a small group! We really do need each other. God never meant for you to go it alone in the Christian life. If you're lonely, the answer to your problem is to join a group.

3. Prayer will become more meaningful to you.

Many people are hesitant to pray in front of others, especially in a large church. In a small group of 6 to 12, you will learn to participate in prayer by having a conversation together with God. No one is pressured to pray, but as you become comfortable, you'll be able to pray sentence prayers and join in. There are many promises in the Bible related to group prayer. In praying together with a few others, we are drawn together and we find answers to the needs in our lives.

4. You will be able to handle stress and pressure better.

Small groups provide excellent support in times of crisis, change, and stress. You'll have a sense of stability and security knowing there are people who really care for you and are committed to standing with you.

When someone loses a job, or a family member has an extended illness, or a mother needs a babysitter - these are practical needs that will be naturally taken care of through your small group. Your group will coordinate the sharing of hot meals to be brought in when your family is in need. Many people in our church could testify that they would not have made it through a difficult time if it hadn't been for the support of their group. In addition, we have a number of special support groups that deal with problems like alcoholism, financial difficulty, abuse, and other needs.

5. You will have a natural way to share Christ with friends, relatives, and work associates.

It may be that some of your friends who don't know the Lord wouldn't be caught dead in a church. They have a preconceived idea and just the thought makes them defensive. But those same people may be open to an invitation to a casual Bible discussion in a home or office setting. In a small group, your unbelieving friend can ask questions and express honest doubts without feeling "put on the spot". When your friend sees the love and warmth and honesty of your group, it will make him more receptive to the Good News.

6. You will develop leadership skills you never knew you had!

The Bible teaches that every believer is given certain talents or "gifts" to benefit others in the family of God. Unfortunately most Christians remain as Sunday morning spectators all their lives because large group meetings are primarily "sit and listen" situations. As you share and participate in a relaxed small group setting, you'll discover your confidence and self-esteem rising. This will help you at work, at church, and in every other relationship.

7. You will deepen your understanding of worship.

Many believers mistakenly believe that worship can only happen on Sunday morning in a large group with a sermon, a choir, and an offering plate! Worship happens anytime we focus on God. Sometimes that happens best in a smaller group in praying or singing together.

8. You will be a New Testament Christian!

The book of Acts is very clear about how God intends for His people to grow and have their needs met in the church. We will never be able to hire enough professional pastors to meet all the individual needs in our family. God never intended for it to be that way!

Consider these verses:

"They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Every day they continued to meet together... they broke bread in their homes and ate together... and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." Acts 2:42, 44, 46-47

"Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the Good News that Jesus is the Christ." Acts 5:42

"Greet also the church that meets at their house." Rom. 16:5