



FIRST EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH
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Why I Need a Small Group BY JOEL SUTTON

Frome in Somerset, England has seen a dramatic fall in emergency hospital admissions. The source for this medical breakthrough was surprising. It's called community.

After a trial study, the data showed that when isolated people who have health problems are supported by community groups and volunteers, the number of emergency admissions to hospital falls spectacularly. One doctor remarked, "No other interventions on record have reduced emergency admissions across a population." Source: George Monbiot, "The town that's found a potent cure for illness—community," The Guardian (2-21-18)

Evidently, being part of a community is good for physical health. It is also good for spiritual health. Let me give you five reasons why small groups are essential to your spiritual growth.

1) It's the classroom for learning how to get along in God's family.

It's a lab for practicing unselfish, sympathetic love. You learn to care about others and share the experiences of others: "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Cor. 12:26, ESV).

Only in regular contact with ordinary, imperfect believers can we learn real fellowship and experience the connection God intends for us to have (Eph. 4:16, Rom. 12:4-5, Col. 2:19, 1 Cor. 12:25).

2) A small group helps me develop spiritual muscle.

You'll never grow to maturity just by attending worship services and being a passive spectator. One of the main tools of spiritual growth is participation in a small group, where your spiritual muscles get a regular workout.

Over fifty times in the New Testament the phrase "one another" or "each other" is used. We're commanded to love each other, pray for each other, encourage each other, serve each other, teach each other, accept each other, honor each other, bear each other's burdens, forgive each other, submit to each other, and many other mutual tasks! These are your "family responsibilities" if you claim to be a part of God's family. Real maturity shows up in relationships. We need more than the Bible in order to grow; we need other believers.

3) A small group confirms my identity as a genuine believer.

I can't claim to be following Christ if I'm not committed to any specific group of disciples. Jesus said, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35 ESV). When we come together in love as a small group from different backgrounds, ethnicities, and social status, it's a witness to the world (Galatians 3:28, John 17:21).

4) A small group will help keep me from spiritually backsliding.

None of us are immune to temptation.

Given the right situation, you and I are capable of any sin. God knows this, so he has assigned us as individuals the responsibility of keeping each other on track. The Bible says, "Exhort one another every day . . . that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb 3:13, ESV).

"Mind your own business" is NOT a Christian idea when it comes to helping each other! We're commanded to be involved in each other's lives. If you are unplugged from the life of the Body and isolated from the fellowship of God's family, Satan knows you'll be defenseless and powerless against his tactics.

5) The Body of Christ needs me!

You have a background and experiences that other people can learn from and draw strength from! God has a unique role for you to play in his family. This is called your "ministry," and God has gifted you for this assignment. "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1 Cor. 12:7). Your small group is the place God designed for you to discover, develop, and use your spiritual gifts and talents.

Our goal this Fall is that everyone who calls First Free their church home, will get involved and connected to a small group. Community is essential for your spiritual health. I pray that as you get connected, that Christ might be formed in you.

You can learn more and/or sign up for small groups by going to firstfreechurch.org/community.

CREEKSIDE FAMILY HIKE

Guided by Ross Olson

- A parent is asked to attend and be responsible for your child/children.
- Bring your own snacks and water bottles.
- Gather at Crosby Farm Regional Park.
- Kids of all ages are invited!

1:00 p.m.
October 9th



Register at: firstfreechurch.org/children

Questions: carrie.boyum@firstfreechurch.org

**OUR MISSION:
TO HELP
INDIVIDUALS
BECOME
CHRIST-CENTERED
& CHRIST-SENT
TOGETHER**

WANT MORE INFO?

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SEE MORE INFO AT:
www.firstfreechurch.org

MEET OUR MISSIONARIES: Phil and Cindy Read

Phil and Cindy Read lived almost 30 years in East Asia. They returned to the US in 2019 as their oldest daughter, Megan, started college in Ohio. Their younger daughter, Sarah, began college in Nashville in August. They now work with Chinese students at the University of Minnesota as part of The Navigators International Student Ministries.

Favorite Food:

Phil: Yellow Curry

Cindy: Pork and Cabbage Dumplings

Megan: Rice

Sarah: Noodles



What's your favorite game to play with your family?

3 of our favorites are: Rummikub, Banagrams and Quidler

How have you seen God use you in the last year?

We have seen God work in amazing ways, in enabling us to continue to help Chinese back in East Asia grow in their faith by meeting regularly for Bible studies via Zoom. Then, despite Covid, last year we were able to meet and develop some friendships with Chinese undergrads and grads, and had zoom seminars and studies, and also hosted outdoor activities at our home. Students are very interested in knowing more about God.

Now this fall we are excited for the work, since many Chinese obtained visas and arrived in Minneapolis. There were over 200 airport pickups. Forty students attended our welcome picnic in early September and now there are weekly discussions on thriving, English corners, and even a Fall Retreat (Sept. 24/25).

Phil and Cindy Read will be here for our Outreach Weekend on November 6th and 7th.

CHILD DEDICATIONS

Child dedications are a special time for parents and close family and/or friends to dedicate themselves to raising their children in a way that is pleasing and honoring to God. It is also a time for the Church body to encourage, support, and commit to helping raise and teach the children to live a life for God.

Are you interested in having a child or children dedicated? We'll be doing Child Dedications in both services on Sunday, October 10.

If you are interested in participating in child dedications or learning more about dedications, contact Carrie Boyum at carrie.boyum@firstfreechurch.org.

TAKE THE NEXT STEP

Join a Small Group, Community Group, or Affinity Group

Take the Next Step! We are so glad that you have chosen to make First Free your home church. This Fall, we want to encourage you to take the next step. We believe that growth and mission happen best in community. Life is complicated, and sooner or later we will all need help, encouragement, prayer and support; we need community. Here at First Free we have several ways that you can get connected: Small Groups, Affinity Groups and Community Groups.

Small Groups typically have 6-12 people, and meet at a time and place chosen by the group. Small Groups are places where people "do life" together: supporting and encouraging each other, praying for each other, serving and seeking biblical wisdom together. If you would like more information about joining a Small Group, contact Jay Pound at jay.pound@firstfreechurch.org. Or, visit <https://www.firstfreechurch.org/smallgroups> to find our online sign-up.

Affinity Groups (like MOPS or Men United) usually focus on a specific need or objective. They typically meet at church, and are open to any who want to drop in and join. You can find the full list of groups and more information on each at: <https://www.firstfreechurch.org/affinity-groups>

Community Groups are medium sized groups of 15-40 people that meet on Sunday mornings during one of our Worship Gatherings (@ 9 and 10:30). They are organized around life stages to provide a natural setting for studying and applying God's word to real-life issues together. Community Groups focus on providing relevant teaching and equipping for everyday ministry. All Community Groups are open to everyone, so feel free to check one out anytime! <https://www.firstfreechurch.org/community-groups>



"Being part of a small group has been a great way to connect on a personal level with others within our church. It can be hard to connect just by attending a church service, but we have made life-long friends through the small group we have been a part of. The group has helped support us through sickness and the blessing of welcoming a baby girl into our family. With the onset of Covid we have been unable to attend worship in person but our small group has kept us connected to the church. It is a safe place to study God's Word, ask questions and find support in our faith journey."

- Brian and Laura Johnson
(and Ariella, 19 months)



CHURCH FAMILY NEWS

- Congratulations to Ron & Mae Olson on their 68th wedding anniversary!
- Congratulations to Maria & Allan Peters on the birth of their son Archer Jonathan Peters!