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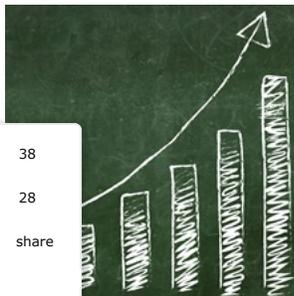
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Intentional Spiritual Growth in Small Groups

Understanding how we grow and change

Amy Jackson

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This article is excerpted from our Training Tool *Theological Discussions for*

As small-group leaders, we want to help the people in our groups grow and mature in their faith. We want them to experience life change and walk away from our groups different from when they came in. And so we discuss the Bible or the sermon from Sunday or some theology we want our group members to understand.

Although we have good intentions, we may not see the change we're hoping for, and that's because so few of us have considered what it takes to really grow. James C. Wilhoit writes in *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, "Christian spiritual formation: (1) is intentional; (2) is communal; (3) requires our engagement; (4) is accomplished by the Holy Spirit; (5) is for the glory of God and the service of others; and (6) has as its means and end the imitation of Christ." A lot goes into spiritual formation—the process of becoming more like Christ—and yet we often enter into it with little to no thought. And then we wonder why we're not seeing results.

To get the results we desire, we must take a step back and ask, How do we grow? If we're to be intentional in our formation, we must understand the process. Essentially, all growth begins with a desire, a yearning for a change. We must decide that we want to grow. This desire may come as we read about the way things should be or we see a godly attribute in another. It may come when we've been humbled and shown a side of our self that we tend to ignore.

But the desire is simply not enough. If it were, we wouldn't struggle to keep our New Year's resolutions each year. Instead, we must allow our desire to propel us to gain knowledge that will help us see things differently. This knowledge will turn into changed behavior and a new way of life. As we experience this new way of life, we develop new desires for change and growth, and the cycle starts over again.

To flesh out this cycle, imagine that Sara has the desire to make a difference in the world, to have a life of meaning. It's a good desire, but without adding knowledge, Sara has no idea how to make a difference. Then, Sara's small group works through a Bible

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