

## Here I Am To Worship?

By Elizabeth Creamer

Kelsey, Du, Sam, and I stood on the front step waiting for Lucy to open the door of her house on Manet Road. Kelsey, Du, and Sam were obviously excited to get to Christian faith group, but I was still unsure of my decision to accompany my best friends on their Tuesday night ritual. I had absolutely no idea what to expect from this experience, but my friends respected me enough to invite me to share in their faith with them,, so I knew I had a duty to participate courteously.

Lucy welcomed me into her home and introduced me to the group seated comfortably around the room with bibles in hand. Joe, one of the group leaders, began strumming an unfamiliar song on his guitar, and when my friends all lunged for copies of the songbook, I followed suit. I fumbled with the packet, located the song, and began following along. I refrained from singing as I was unfamiliar with the song and still unsure of how I felt about proclaiming beliefs that were not my own. I glanced quickly around the circle, and it was astonishing to see my best friends expressing their faith so openly and with such intensity and meaning. Why hadn't I ever experienced such a strong connection with my religion? Perplexed, I took a literal leap of faith and dove into the song's refrain. There I was, a baptized and confirmed Roman Catholic, expressing my love for God in a room full of strangers and in a completely unusual way.

Joe transitioned between songs without breaking to announce the title. I checked to see if this startled any other group members, but they were all so deeply immersed that it barely fazed them. We repeated a few songs numerous times, which baffled me as I thought it was a mistake.

Songs such as “Revelation Song,” “Forever Reign,” and “This Is How We Know” conveyed the faith Christians have in God and His goodness and their belief that He is forever present in their lives. “Forever Reign” by Hillsong relayed this message most clearly with the striking refrain, “Oh, I’m running to Your arms/ I’m running to Your arms/ The riches of Your love/ Will always be enough/ Nothing compares to Your embrace/ Light of the world forever reign.”<sup>1</sup> After a run of around ten equally moving songs, Joe concluded the session and everyone opened their eyes. As I was about to turn to Kelsey and inquire as to whether or not the order of the songs we sang was pre-established, it hit me. It was not about the order of the songs and not even really about the songs themselves-- the importance of the singing session was to express yourself, the titles would only have interrupted the thought process and disengaged the members from their connection with God.

At church at home, parishioners are informed when to stand, sit, and kneel. In my parish, the order of songs we sing at mass is pre-determined every week. Our songs mainly praise the glory of God and His love for us, and are not about our love for Him. At faith group, when a song strongly corresponded with the feelings of a group member, he or she would stand up and truly bask in God’s glory and love. It was surprising to see people extend their arms toward the sky to Him, exclaiming “Amen” and “Hallelujah” when a lyric struck them profoundly. The mere action of standing up and singing with their eyes closed so they could imagine themselves closer to the Lord seemed extremely out of the ordinary. Since I am accustomed to the strict routine of Roman Catholic mass where barely any genuine emotion is expressed, it took me some time to understand this phenomenon, but it also worried me that I had never experienced this connection.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.newreleasetuesday.com/lyricsdetail.php?lyrics\\_id=63208](http://www.newreleasetuesday.com/lyricsdetail.php?lyrics_id=63208)

Until this point, I had always considered myself a devout Roman Catholic. I went to church every Sunday, I volunteered, and I occasionally prayed before I went to sleep at night. I knew I was doing more than most other Catholics my age, and I believed that was “enough.” I was *required* to go to religious education every week, but we worked through each chapter as quickly as possible and focused mainly on the pretzels or chips provided for us that particular class. I was *required* to do community service hours in order to make my Confirmation, but I felt there was something missing as I knew little detail about the Scriptures and Gospels of the Lord. I was *required* to go to church every Sunday with my parents, but there is a difference between “going” to church and actually “being present” at church.

Next on the agenda at faith group was bible study. I received my first bible in my religious education class, but we rarely used it more than a few times. I was handed a bible from a bookshelf stocked with bibles and religious titles I’d never heard of. It shocked me to see so many bibles belonging to just one person. Every other member of the group casually pulled their own bibles out of their backpacks. Kelsey, Du, and Sam had made room in the jam-packed backpacks they had carried all day for their sacred books. If that isn’t devotion, I don’t know what is. Joe announced which verse we’d be studying, and everyone immediately turned right to that page. I was dumbfounded at their familiarity with the Bible. Kelsey caught my expression, grabbed my bible, and promptly found the page for me. They read the verse aloud and discussed its significance. I had always been taught that each verse had a specific meaning, but this group believed that the message is up for personal analysis. In their discussion, any member was free to share his or her opinions about the passage and how they related the sacred words to their own lives, situations, or thoughts. Each differing perspective was further discussed and welcomed by the group, and there seemed to be no right or wrong interpretation of the verses. This freedom

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was completely new to me, but my friends seemed so comfortable with it. I listened closely to their thoughts about the next few verses, which mainly revolved around the presence of God in the members' own lives.

For the students in the faith group, religious practice is entirely self-driven. Kelsey, Du, and Sam whole-heartedly participate in every Christian-based activity they can find on campus. Du gives thanks before each and every meal he eats no matter who is in his company. Seeing this, I realized that the only times I give thanks before a meal are on Thanksgiving and Christmas. Though I am eternally thankful, I never thought to pray about it. Why? Unlike at church, in every day life, no one is instructing me to pause and give thanks. I immediately felt guilty because I have always claimed the importance of religion in my life without actually practicing it.

My experience at faith group truly opened my eyes. Even though I am not a Christian, my own faith has blossomed as a result of one evening spent learning about another religion. The devotion of my best friends has sparked a change within me and made me realize that faith is something you must take into your own hands and develop in your own mind. Though I have believed in God my entire life, I have never felt truly connected to the faith I submissively profess. I am slightly envious of my friends' deep relationship with God and the experiences they have had, but I have realized that I need to be attentive at mass, spend some free time familiarizing myself with the Bible, and evaluate the role Jesus plays in my life. In my religious revelation I have learned that, *“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work; If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)*