When I earnestly gave my life to Christ 25 years ago this coming Saturday, I had no idea how important a role the local church, and becoming a church member, would play in the Holy Spirit transforming my life.

The local church is one of the few places that we;

* Stand under Christ to worship together.
* Listen to Christ & learn together.
* Grow in Christ & serve Him together.

All with people who are all different from one other.

* People who have more & those who have less.
* Young people & vintage people (historic).
* Black, white, Chinese, Hispanic people.
* People with piercings and tattoos and people don’t.
* Educated people, less educated people.
* Men & woman
* Veterans & civilians.
* People who are slaves to themselves and the desires of the flesh & people who have been set free and are living a saved, sanctified, Spirit filled, Spirit led life in Christ.
* Some who are adopted into the family of God and some who may still need to be. ALL TOGETHER IN ONE PLACE!!

And the unifying factor in it all is the sin removing grace of our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ. Who sacrificed His life and shed His precious blood so that we all could be called the sons & daughters of the living God.

So, Church is not a club, filled with people who are just like us (people who have the same likes and dislikes as we do).

People that we would NOT be naturally drawn to, or hang with, or go on vacation with.

Instead, it is a SUPERNATURAL COMMUNITY of people very UNLIKE ourselves to whom we are bound together in Christ Himself. It’s a SUPERNATURAL miracle every time we gather!

It’s a miracle because most of the body of Christ, just a short time ago, was scattered all over the Verde Vally, in our nice warm beds, under our nice warm covers or sitting in our bathrobes drinking coffee.

The Greek word for “church (ekklesia)” means “called out ones”. And I for one am glad the Lord called you out of your bathrobes and hair curlers!

But all joking asisde… much more important than that, He has “called us out” of a heart that desires to sin against God… Into a pure, Sanctified heart holiness lifestyle - that strives to live a holy life before God and man… One that makes our calling and election sure.

Called out of a lifestyle that focuses on elevating ourselves above others, and into a lifestyle that prays and seeks God for opportunities to meet the Spiritual and physical needs of not just those we like, but those who claim to be our enemy. (making hay while the sunshines).

In Romans 12:1-11

V1-2 In view of the mercy that God has shown each of us (meaning because God offers to withhold giving us what we deserve – hell/eternal separation & punishment)

1. Members of the Body of Christ Conform & Transform.

In worship, we come together to lay our “old lives” (that we made for ourselves”) on the altar of sacrifice before the Lord, not picking them up again.

In dying out to self, the Holy Spirit makes us living, holy sacrifices, that are pleasing to God.

And He gives us an AMAZING new life! Far greater than anything you could produce on our own.

It is our “true & proper worship”.

Therefore, Members of the body worship no matter what style of music is being played! Nothing can stop us! We find a way.

No matter who is bringing the Word! It’s the WORD that matters to the believer, not the messenger.

For Members of the Body - Church isn’t some “emotional gathering” where we come just because “everybody knows our name and they’re always glad we came.” Or to get free food or coffee.

No… God gathers the body of Christ into this community called “New Beginnings Church of the Nazarene” because a NEW WEEK HAS BEGUN. Every Sunday is a “New Beginning”.

And He knows we need to start our week in the church of His Son, Jesus the Nazarene. Because a clock is ticking, and Jesus is coming back!

2. Members of the Body are - Humble People. V3

In talking about church and church membership in the past, some people have said “church membership isn’t “Biblical”, I guess because they couldn’t find it in the Bible.

To which I respond… What were you hoping to find? A chapter that outlines church membership?

It’s not in there… However the entire New Testament is about being in Christ and Christ being in His church.

So it’s impossible to be in Christ without being in His church, and if someone says they are in Christ and not in His church, either they are not in Christ or they don’t understand what it means to be in Christ.

Christ Himself set the example for us! Luke 4:16

When people lack humility they tend not only to be “debaters”, but can also be “drifters”.

They drift in and out of local congregations all the time.

They pop in, check out what’s on the Sunday menu to see what’s being offered, then when they’re bored or displeased by something they experience, they move on…

Which ironically is very characteristic of relationships these days.

Hook up, try what’s on the menu and then move on to the next. That’s why the spread of AIDS & STD’s is so great.

Folks who lack humility in the area of Membership can also be deniers.

I’ve heard people say thinks like “all I need is my PJ’s, a computer and a cup of coffee and I’ve got church!” No you don’t!

Watching us on Facebook/internet may supplement church but it cannot replace church.

How can you obey Hebrews 10:24-25 with a computer/TV screen?

And members of the body love to obey God’s Word! Because they have experienced God’s blessings…

They don’t look for faults and contradictions…

That’s usually when the excuses begin to fly… “I don’t want to go to church and sit with people that I don’t really know or I don’t really like or people that are vintage or not in my age group…”

The debaters, drifters & deniers all serve as proof of not having paid attention to the clear instruction of the Bible. Romans 12:4 tells us that all the members of the body are different. We come expecting different!

The phrase “in Christ” in Romans 12:5 is crucial, Paul uses it all the time, to talk about being members of the body.

It’s Paul’s testimony! When he was Saul he hated Jesus and all who followed Him. He committed himself to their destruction. Definitely not a Member of the Body.

Then one day in Acts 9 he met Jesus through a blinding light and he became a man “in Christ”.

* He repented of his sin
* He was baptized
* He was filled with the Holy Spirit
* And he joined himself (with the help of Barnabas) to the disciples of Jesus, and the rest of the family of God for worship, prayer, giving, fellowship, discipleship, & evangelism.

Paul was adopted into the family of God and became a member of the local Church in Jerusalem!

Which is exactly what Peter preached on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2

V38 and following. *“You crucified the Son of God, but God is waiting to forgive you.”* Did they respond, “no thanks, we’ll do church on the couch?

NO! They were:

* Converted
* Added
* Baptized
* Involved

The New Testament does NOT teach that anyone can or should be an unattached (rogue) member.

If I cut my hand off and put it in my office, it would still be a hand, but it would no longer be a part of my body.

So saying one can be “in Christ” without being an attached, productive part of the body of Christ, is foolish/prideful, and there is no Scriptural basis for it.

3. Members of the Body are – Committed People.

The purpose of church membership is to voluntarily commit, connect and consciously grow “in Christ” to become a loving/giving/positive example of Christ that others will be drawn to.

Both inside and outside the church (Timothy/Paul relationships).

To put ourselves in a place with other people who we can hold us accountable to a straight & narrow walk with Christ that produces a lifestyle of Holy & Godly decision making.

You see the metaphors given to us in the New Testament for the church only make sense, and only become real, when we meet on Sundays & Wednesdays as a church community.

His flock, His body, His family, His building…

* One sheep by itself doesn’t make a flock.
* One brick doesn’t make a building.
* One limb doesn’t make a body.
* One individual doesn’t make a family.

All of those pictures of a church presuppose an organic unity (throughout the entire body), that is grounded in and founded in God’s work in our lives.

How/what you think about the church and church membership, touches the lives of others in in positively or negatively.

So be careful, because Jesus said we will be held accountable for every idle/useless toward the building of God’s Kingdom that we speak. Matthew 12:35-36

The reason why the writer of Hebrews had to write 10:25 is because the tendency (still today) is towards isolation rather than commitment & involvement as Members of the Body.

4. Members of the Body – Expect order & Structure

To say no…, You’ll go against the church leadership and do things “your way”… or in “your own time”… Well… it sounds like rebellion… and rebelling against Christ and the order and the structure that God Himself has established…

well… honestly, that doesn’t sound like something a Member of the Body of Christ would even consider.

To be “in Christ”, is to put ourselves under that order and structure.

Without order and structure there is…?

Paul wrote to Titus in 1:5; *“The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.”* Order & Structure in the body of Christ.

* So that the church might know who is in leadership.
* So that the servants might know who & how to serve.
* So that the relationships with one another are clearly be delineated by the Truth of God’s Word. Otherwise sin & chaos reign.

Ephesians 4:11-13 – Pastor’s and teachers have been given as a gift to the church in order that the saints might be edified and do the works of the ministry. See org chart

God has not ordained the church to be some unstructured, loosely knit club that jumps into action only when a need has been revealed.

Call me if you need something people…Members are ALWAYS needed!

You might be thinking well, amen to all of that, but all of that can be accomplished without a formal membership process of taking a membership class (that is intended to help you grow in Christ and become all that Christ has saved you to be to the benefit of His Kingdom and grow His local church.

Why not…? Would a Member of the Body of Christ think that way?

There is a trend, that I think is slowly coming to an end, that says *“a piece of paper and a ceremonial exchange of vows stating our love and commitment to each other isn’t necessary…”*

That’s part of our old “structured” society…,

I praise God that more and more ladies are beginning to put their foots down and saying; “You’ll never buy the cow, if you give you the milk for free!”

Living together isn’t marriage… just like attending a church isn’t membership.

Membership at New Beginnings Church means;

* You are 15 years of age or older.
* It means standing before God’s church to express, in a real and tangible way, that you can be counted to be personally committed to the fellowship here.
* That you have found confidence here in the way the Word of God is taught.
* That you have confidence in the fellowship and leadership of God’s people here.
* That you want to participate in the annual election of said leadership and be able to vote on important matters concerning the church.

You are saying; “Shepherd me” or “Guide me”, “employ me in Kingdom service”, “encourage me”, “discipline me”, perhaps one day “bury me”.

You have no idea what it means to have someone come to you and say, Please don’t leave before I die, please officiate my funeral/memorial…

What are they saying? This matters… this is my family… this is my place… I belong here…

Some have said; but “I’ve never found the perfect church to become a member.”

To which I reply; “If you do, don’t join because you’ll mess it up!”

The local church is a Motley Crew with all of it’s imperfections, weaknesses, oddities, and problems.

But within this community exists God’s blueprint (DNA) for a broken world, made new.

My goal in this message was not to increase our membership numbers.

It was t help you understand part of the responsibility of being a Member of the Body of Christ and thereby the important responsibility of becoming a Church member in this faith community called New Beginnings .

There is at least one couple praying about membership and two other couples that are currently taking the membership class that meets here on Sunday.

If you are interested, please see me.

Or if you have any further questions about membership, please see me as well.