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A Place to Belong

You are members of God's very own family, citizens of God's country, and you belong in God's household with every other Christian.

Ephesians 2:19b (LB)

God's family is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

1 Timothy 3:15b (GWT)

You are called to belong, not just believe.

Even in the perfect, sinless environment of Eden, God said, *“It is not good for man to be alone.”*¹ We are created for community, fashioned for fellowship, and formed for a family, and none of us can fulfill God's purposes by ourselves.

The Bible knows nothing of solitary saints or spiritual hermits isolated from other believers and deprived of fellowship. The Bible says we are *put together, joined together, built together, members together, heirs together, fitted together, and held together* and *will be caught up together.*² You're not on your own anymore.

While your relationship to Christ is personal, God never intends it to be private. In God's family you are connected to every other believer, and we will belong to each other *for eternity.*


The Bible says, *“In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”*³

Following Christ includes *belonging*, not just believing. We are *members* of his Body—the church. C. S. Lewis noted that the word *membership* is of Christian origin, but the world has emptied it of its original meaning. Stores offer discounts to “members,” and advertisers use member names to create mailing lists. In churches, membership is often reduced to simply adding your name to a roll, with no requirements or expectations.


To Paul, being a “member” of the church meant being a vital organ of a living body, an indispensable, interconnected part of the Body of Christ.⁴ We need to recover and practice the biblical meaning of membership. The church is a body, not a building; an organism, not an organization.

For the organs of your body to fulfill their purpose, they must be connected to your body. The same is true for you as a part of Christ’s Body. You were created for a specific role, but you will miss this second purpose of your life if you’re not attached to a living, local church. You discover your role in life through your relationships with others. The Bible tells us, *“Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we’re talking about is Christ’s body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body. But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn’t amount to much, would we?”*⁵

If an organ is somehow severed from its body, it will shrivel and die. It cannot exist on its own, and neither can you. Disconnected and cut off from the lifeblood of a local body, your spiritual life will wither and eventually cease to exist.⁶ This is why the first symptom of spiritual decline is usually inconsistent attendance at worship services and other gatherings




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of believers. Whenever we become careless about fellowship, everything else begins to slide, too.

Membership in the family of God is neither inconsequential nor something to be casually ignored. The church is God's agenda for the world. Jesus said, *"I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it."*⁷ The church is indestructible and will exist for eternity. It will outlive this universe, and so will your role in it. The person who says, "I don't need the church," is either arrogant or ignorant. The church is so significant that Jesus died

on the cross for it. *"Christ loved the church and gave his life for it."*⁸



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The Bible calls the church *"the bride of Christ"* and *"the body of Christ."*⁹ I can't imagine saying to Jesus, "I love you, but I dislike your wife." Or "I accept you, but I reject your body." But we do this

whenever we dismiss or demean or complain about the church. Instead, God commands us to love the church as much as Jesus does. The Bible says, *"Love your spiritual family."*¹⁰ Sadly, many Christians *use* the church but don't love it.

Your Local Fellowship

Except for a few important instances referring to all believers throughout history, almost every time the word *church* is used in the Bible it refers to a local, visible congregation. The New Testament assumes membership in a local congregation. The only Christians not members of a local fellowship were those under church discipline who had been removed from the fellowship because of gross public sin.¹¹

The Bible says a Christian without a church home is like an organ without a body, a sheep without a flock, or a child without a family. It is an unnatural state. The Bible says, *"You belong in God's household with every other Christian."*¹²

Today’s culture of independent individualism has created many spiritual orphans—“bunny believers” who hop around from one church to another without any identity, accountability, or commitment. Many believe one can be a “good Christian” without joining (or even attending) a local church, but God would strongly disagree. The Bible offers many compelling reasons for being committed and active in a local fellowship.

Why You Need a Church Family

A church family identifies you 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, *“Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”*¹³

When we come together in love as a church family from different backgrounds, race, and social status, it is a powerful witness to the world.¹⁴ You are not the Body of Christ on your own. You need others to express that. *Together*, not separated, we are his Body.¹⁵

A church family moves you out of self-centered isolation. The local church is the classroom for learning how to get along in God’s family. It is a lab for practicing unselfish, sympathetic love. As a participating member you learn to care about others and share the experiences of others: *“If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it. Or if one part of our body is honored, all the other parts share its honor.”*¹⁶

Only in regular contact with ordinary, imperfect believers can we learn real fellowship and experience the New Testament truth of being connected and dependent on each other.¹⁷

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Biblical fellowship is being as committed to each other as we are to Jesus Christ. God expects us to give our lives for each other. Many Christians who know John 3:16 are unaware of 1 John 3:16: *“Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.”*¹⁸ This is the kind of sacrificial

love God expects you to show other believers—a willingness to love them in the same way Jesus loves you.

A church family helps you develop spiritual muscle. You will never grow to maturity just by attending worship services and being a passive spectator. Only participation in the full life of a local church builds spiritual muscle. The Bible says, “*As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.*”¹⁹

Over fifty times in the New Testament the phrase “one another” or “each other” is used. We are commanded to *love* each other, *pray* for each other, *encourage* each other, *admonish* each other, *greet* 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, be *devoted* to each other, and many other mutual tasks. This is biblical membership! These are your “family responsibilities” that God expects you to fulfill through a local fellowship. *Who* are you doing these with?

It may seem easier to be holy when no one else is around to frustrate your preferences, but that is a false, untested holiness. Isolation breeds deceitfulness; it is easy to fool ourselves into thinking we are mature if there is no one to challenge us. Real maturity shows up in relationships.

We need more than the Bible in order to grow; we need other believers. We grow faster and stronger by learning from each other and being accountable to each other. When others share what God is teaching them, I learn and grow, too.

The Body of Christ needs you. 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: “*A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church.*”²⁰

Your local fellowship is the place God designed for you to discover, develop, and use your gifts. You may also have a wider ministry, but that is *in addition* to your service in a local body.

Jesus has not promised to build your ministry; he has promised to build *his* church.

You will share in Christ’s mission in the world. When Jesus walked the earth, God worked through the physical body of Christ; today he uses his spiritual body. The church is God’s instrument on earth. We are not just to model God’s love by loving each other; we are to carry it together to the rest of the world. This is an incredible privilege we have been given together. As members of Christ’s body, *we* are his hands, his feet, his eyes, and his heart. He works through us in the world. We each have a contribution to make. Paul tells us, *“He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.”*²¹

A church family will help keep you from backsliding. None of us are immune to temptation. Given the right situation, you and I are capable of any sin.²² God knows this, so he has assigned us as individuals the responsibility of keeping each other on track. The Bible says, *“Encourage one another daily . . . so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.”*²³ “Mind your own business” is not a Christian phrase.

We are called and commanded to be involved in each other’s lives. If you know someone who is wavering spiritually right now, it is your responsibility to go after them and bring them back into the fellowship. James tells us, *“If you know people who have wandered off from God’s truth, don’t write them off. Go after them. Get them back.”*²⁴

A related benefit of a local church is that it also provides the spiritual protection of godly leaders. God gives shepherd leaders the responsibility to guard, protect, defend, and care for the spiritual welfare of his flock.²⁵ We are told, *“Their work is to watch over your souls, and they know they are accountable to God.”*²⁶



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Satan loves detached believers, unplugged from the life of the Body, isolated from God's family, and unaccountable to spiritual leaders, because he knows they are defenseless and powerless against his tactics.

It's All in the Church

In my book *The Purpose-Driven Church*, I explain how being part of a healthy church is essential to living a healthy life. I hope you will read that book, too, because it will help you understand how God designed his church specifically to help you fulfill the five purposes he has for your life. He created the church to meet your five deepest needs: a purpose to live for, people to live with, principles to live by, a profession to live out, and power to live on. There is no other place on earth where you can find all five of these benefits in one place.



God's purposes for his church are identical to his five purposes for you. Worship helps you *focus on God*; fellowship helps you *face life's problems*; discipleship helps *fortify your faith*; ministry helps *find your talents*; evangelism helps *fulfill your mission*. There is nothing else on earth like the church!

Your Choice

Whenever a child is born, he or she automatically becomes a part of the universal family of human beings. But that child also needs to become a member of a specific family to receive nurture and care and grow up healthy and strong. The same is true spiritually. When you were born again, you automatically became a part of God's universal family, but you also need to become a member of a local expression of God's family.

The difference between being a church *attender* and a church *member* is commitment. Attenders are spectators from the sidelines; members get involved in the ministry. Attenders are consumers; members are contributors. Attenders want the benefits of a church

without sharing the responsibility. They are like couples who want to live together without committing to a marriage.

Why is it important to join a local church family? Because it proves you are committed to your spiritual brothers and sisters in reality, not just in theory. God wants you to love *real* people, not *ideal* people. You can spend a lifetime searching for the perfect church, but you will never find it. You are called to love imperfect sinners, just as God does.

In Acts, the Christians in Jerusalem were very specific in their commitment to each other. They were devoted to fellowship. The Bible says, *“They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers.”*²⁷ God expects you to commit to the same things today.

The Christian life is more than just commitment to Christ; it includes a commitment to other Christians. The Christians in Macedonia understood this. Paul said, *“First they gave themselves to the Lord; and then, by God’s will, they gave themselves to us as well.”*²⁸ Joining the membership of a local church is the natural next step once you’ve become a child of God. You become a Christian by committing yourself to Christ, but you become a *church member* by committing yourself to a specific group of believers. The first decision brings salvation; the second brings fellowship.

Day Seventeen

Thinking about My Purpose

Point to Ponder: I am called to belong, not just believe.

Verse to Remember: *“In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”*

Romans 12:5 (NIV)

Question to Consider: Does my level of involvement in my local church demonstrate that I love and am committed to God’s family?