

The Community of Believers

Church

Now that you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you are probably aware that there are a bunch of other people who also follow Jesus. You are probably aware that there is something called church, and you may have already been there before. This segment of instruction we are going to talk about Church and its place in your life and God's plan for our world.

In our current society there is a bit of a misconception about the word church. In the original text of the New Testament of the Bible the word for Church is "Ecclesia" which means "assembly." You see the church is the assembly of God's people. The church is not a cathedral, basilica, or building. Although there are some incredible buildings built by God's people over the years, the real church is in the heart of the believer of Jesus.

The church is you and I together. The key word here is assembly. The church is the community of the faithful and is sometimes referred to as the family of faith or family of God. But it is even more than this, it is the physical representation of Jesus upon the earth when empowered by the Holy Spirit. The church is the hands and feet of Jesus. **Matthew 18:20, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them."**

Unity

An unfortunate trend in these times is a lack of unity, and at times it is lacking in the church as well. It was a problem even in the early church. Unity in the faith and among the believers of Jesus is an important thing. Jesus even prayed for us to be unified during His earthly ministry. We are called to be together. **Ephesians 4:1-6, "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."**

Hebrews 10:23-25, "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some who are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

Some of you who are reading this have experienced trauma by people in the church. This is a terrible thing, but it is also something God can heal and help you with. You see God loves you along with all of your failures and offers forgiveness to you. He only asks us to forgive others in return for what He has done for you. It is not easy, and in no way am I saying what

may have happened to you is insignificant. The point is we have a choice to follow Christ, who even forgave those who crucified him, and receive freedom through forgiveness. Through forgiveness God offers deliverance and healing to you and have the streams of living water, that only Jesus can give, flow forth in your life.

Gathering

So, what happens when the people of God get together and what should it look like?

1 Corinthians 14:26, “What then, brothers and sisters? Whenever you come together, each one has a hymn, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Everything is to be done for building up.”

From this passage we see that when the church is together, we should be seeking to build each other up. We are to build each other up in our relationship and walk with Jesus. We do this by singing praise to God for what He has done for us. We take time to listen to teachings from God's word. We take time to listen to the Holy Spirit to teach us and encourage us in our relationship with God. All of this is to build each of us up in our faith and service to God and His people.

Acts 2:42-47, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers. Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with a joyful and humble attitude, praising God and having favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved.”

When we are assembled together as the church, we should be taking time to learn and study God's Word in the Bible. As it says in the above passage “they devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching.” We still do this today as we read God's Word and listen to sermons and participate in Bible studies. When we gather together, we give place for fellowship. Fellowship or connecting with other believers in Jesus is important. Fellowship is what helps us in understanding what we have studied and helps us put what we have learned into action. It is where we can grow in faith from hearing other believers' testimonies of God's faithfulness and how it can apply to our life. The early church family took time to eat together and prayed together. What is interesting in this passage is that when the early church did these things they were filled with awe and witnessed many wonders and signs through the apostles. Gathering together is really important and if done right will strengthen and establish you in your faith and further transform your life in Jesus.

Hebrews 10:24-25, “And let us be concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works, not staying away from our worship meetings, as some habitually do, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

When we are gathered together as the Body of Christ, we should consider others and encourage each other until Jesus returns. This passage and the previous passage in the book of Acts is reflective of what a family should look like.

Let me provide a personal experience from when I was a new believer in Jesus. On a particular Thanksgiving holiday, my family was out of town, and I found myself alone for the holiday. I didn't necessarily feel lonely, but didn't have anywhere to go, so I decided to go surfing as the surf was up and well it was fun. After coming out of the water I was changing out of my wetsuit and happened to be near the house of my pastor of our church at the time. To my surprise the pastor came out and asked me if I would join him and his family as well as a couple other people from the church for Thanksgiving dinner. I had no other options, so I accepted the invitation. I will never forget that Thanksgiving meal, for I was blessed, encouraged, and built up in faith. It modeled to me what it looks like for the Body of Christ to look like in action. It was a simple thing but left a lasting impression of what the Church can be as a family.

Ephesians 4:11-16, “And He personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness. Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head —Christ. From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.”

You have purpose! God is inviting you into His family which is the Body of Christ. God has given the church gifts through the power of His Holy Spirit. Those gifts are designed to help you live for Jesus and build you up in your faith so that you will fulfill what God has for your life. God has purpose and gifts for your life, and He wants you to be connected to His body so that those gifts benefit others in His church. In this way we are all built up and encouraged together so we do the works of Jesus until He returns for us.

I understand it can be daunting and uncomfortable going to a church for the first time or even going back after being away for a while. And I get it, some of you have not had the best of experiences in the past. Someone once told me church is somewhat like a hospital. There are a lot of people there with problems that need help. To be honest we all have problems and issues, but if you want to be delivered, healed and set free, the Church is that place where those who have been healed and delivered are at and can help you grow in your relationship with Jesus. Remember the church is the hands and feet of Jesus, and God has a place for you to serve as well. In a sense, the Church needs you too.