



Formed for God's Family

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Chapters 17 & 18

Notes: This Bible Study is intended to be a companion to "The Purpose Driven Life" by Rick Warren. The Scripture references in this Bible study are taken from the New King James Version.

Chapter 17: A Place to Belong

How do we know that God does not intend for any of us to be loners?

Even in the very beginning, in the perfect sinless environment of Eden, God said:

Genesis 2:18 - "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

We are created for community, fashioned for fellowship, and formed for a family...none of us can fulfill God's purposes by ourselves.

As members of the church, how are each of us associated with each other?

As fellow children of God, we are family members to each other...

Romans 12:5 - so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

What does Ephesians 2:19 have to say about what characterizes children of God?

Ephesians 2:19 - Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

We are no longer independent entities but fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household. Following Christ involves belonging in addition to believing.

How is it part of our purpose to be an active part of the church?

Each of us was created for a specific role and we will miss that part of our purpose if we are not connected to a living local church. Just as our body's organs have to be connected to our bodies to fulfill their purpose, we too need to be attached to Christ's body...

Romans 12:4-5 - For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

What does it say about a person who becomes inconsistent at worship services and other gatherings of believers?

This is a symptom of spiritual decline. When a person becomes careless about fellowship, everything else begins to slide as well. There is also the possibility that such people were only pretending to be Christians in the first place...

I John 2:19 - They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

What is the problem with being irregular about participating in church activities?

Not being active in church means we are not fulfilling our purpose in being part of the body. An organ can't live outside the body, it will wither up and die, and of course the body suffers as well...

Ephesians 4:16 - the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

So what should our attitude be about the church?

We should love the church and demonstrate that love by being a part of it... as 1 Peter 2:17 says, "*Love the brotherhood.*" If you truly love someone, you will seek to be with them.

How has the spirit of independent individualism that is so pervasive in our culture affected the church?

It has resulted in a whole generation of spiritual orphans, baby believers who go from one church to another without any identity, accountability or commitment.

- You can spend a lifetime searching for the perfect church but you will never find it because the church is made up of imperfect sinners. As God loved us in our flawed condition, we are called to love the church in its flawed condition.

Why do you need a church family?

A church family identifies you as a genuine believer...

John 13:35 - "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

A church family moves you out of self-centered isolation, it is a lab for practicing unselfish, sympathetic love.

What does 1 Corinthians 12:26 have to say about why all Christians need to be part of a church family?

1 Corinthians 12:26 - And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

Suffering is easier when you have others to suffer with you. We should suffer with each other to the point of dying for them if necessary. As Christ gave His life for us, so we should give our lives for each other...

1 John 3:16 - By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

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A church family helps you to develop spiritual muscle... Isolation breeds deceitfulness, it is easy to fool yourself into thinking we are mature if there is no one around to challenge us. We grow faster and stronger when we learn from each other. When I learn from others, I get to benefit from what God is teaching them.

Proverbs 27:17 - As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.

What does 1 Corinthians 12:7 have to say about why all Christians need to be part of a church family?

1 Corinthians 12:7 - But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all

You need a church family because the Body of Christ needs you. Spiritual gifts are given to us to benefit the church.

What does Ephesians 2:10 have to say about why all Christians need to be part of a church family?

Ephesians 2:10 - For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

You need a church family so that you may share in Christ's mission in the world. This is part of our purpose, to do His work.

What does Hebrews 3:13 have to say about why all Christians need to be part of a church family?

Hebrews 3:13 - exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

A church family will keep you from backsliding.

How do we keep each other from backsliding?

As Hebrews 3:13 says, encourage them in the faith, get involved in their lives and help them see that being connected to the Body of Christ works in their lives as well.

What is the difference between a church "attender" and a church member?

"Attenders" are spectator from the side-lines who come to church to be entertained or ministered to without taking any responsibility. Members are those who make a commitment and contribute to the work of the church.

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

1. My main contribution is teaching which I believe God has gifted me with the opportunity to do this. I enjoy studying His Word in preparation for teaching and I get a thrill through leading people in self-discovery of the wonderful truths of God's Word.
2. I also feel that I need to be an encourager of others who are ministering in the church, especially those involved in children's programs which are so vital in bringing people to Christ.
3. Creating an awareness in the community about our church is another important program where I contribute by publishing fliers several times during the year.

Chapter 18: Experiencing Life Together

What is the word that the Bible uses for the church experiencing life together?

The Bible calls our shared experiences "fellowship."

How has the meaning of the word fellowship been distorted in our day?

Fellowship has come to mean casual conversation, socializing, food, and fun.

How does the Bible describe the shared experiences of the church?

The Bible describes fellowship as unselfish loving, honest sharing, practical serving, sacrificial giving, sympathetic comforting, and all the other "one another" commands in the Bible.

Does the size of your group have an impact on fellowship?

Size does matter: smaller is better. Jesus demonstrated this principle when He chose only 12 disciples. He could have chosen more but 12 people is about the maximum if everyone is going to participate.

If you have a small group, does that mean you are guaranteed to have true fellowship?

No, regardless the size of the group, you can be stuck in artificiality.

What is the difference between real and fake fellowship?

Authentic fellowship is not superficial chit-chat. It is genuine, heart-to-heart sharing. It requires participants to be honest about what is going on in their lives: sharing their hurts, revealing their feelings, confessing their failures, disclosing their doubts, admitting their fears, acknowledging their weaknesses, and asking for help and prayer.

Why is honesty such an important ingredient for fellowship?

Honesty is necessary for intimacy. The world thinks that intimacy occurs in the dark, but God says it happens in the light...

1 John 1:7-8 - But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another... If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

Being authentic requires both courage and humility, it means facing our fear of exposure, rejection, and being hurt again... Why would anyone take such a risk?

Because honest sharing with your family is the only way to grow spiritually and to be emotionally healthy...

James 5:16 - Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

What principle of fellowship is given in 1 Corinthians 12:25?

1 Corinthians 12:25 - there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.

In real fellowship, people experience "mutuality," the art of giving and receiving. Every part of the body of Christ should be dependant on every other part.

How did Paul indicate that he needed the fellowship of other believers in Romans 1:12?

Romans 1:12 - that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

Paul not only wanted to encourage other believers but looked forward to the encouragement that he would receive from the fellowship with them. Encouraging one another is the heart of fellowship...

Romans 14:19 - Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

What role should sympathy have in fellowship?

True sympathy should be present in fellowship...

What is sympathy?

Sympathy is not giving advice or offering quick cosmetic help; sympathy is sharing in the pain of others.

How does sympathy help others?

Misery truly does love company. Sympathy, a.k.a. empathy seeks to understand what others are going through and affirm them that what they feel is normal.

How do you offer sympathy to others?

You listen to them and try to put yourself in their place and practice Colossians 3:12...

Colossians 3:12 - Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;

Rick Warren in his book proposes four levels of fellowship: sharing, studying, serving, and suffering, what examples can you think of for each of these levels?

Sharing: spending time together and telling each other about your experiences.

Studying: studying God's word together such as we are doing right now.

Serving: ministering together such as mission trips or mercy projects.

Suffering: when we enter into each other's pain and carry one another's burdens. Those who understand this level best are those who are being persecuted and even martyred for their faith. This is what Paul expressed in Philippians 3:10...

Philippians 3:10 - that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

What role should mercy have in fellowship?

As Rick Warren says, "*Fellowship is a place of grace, where mistakes aren't rubbed in but rubbed out.*"

For fellowship to happen, mercy must win out over justice.

Why should we offer mercy to others?

We need mercy ourselves. Without mercy, we might as well give up because there is no hope...

2 Corinthians 2:7 - you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow.

Another reason is that bitterness and resentment always destroys fellowship. God offered mercy to us, we should likewise extend it to others...

Colossians 3:12-13 - Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

Should you extend mercy when someone else hurts you?

For mercy to be mercy, you have to have been hurt. When you are hurt, that is when you need to decide whether you are going to channel your energy and emotions into retaliation or resolution.

Why are people reluctant to show mercy?

Often people don't understand the difference between trust and forgiveness... forgiveness is letting go of the past, trust has to do with anticipating future behavior.

When should you forgive others?

Forgiveness should happen immediately, whether or not a person asks for it...

Matthew 18:21-22 - Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

How is trust developed?

Trust requires time, a person must establish a track record to earn the trust of others.

So how should you respond to someone who hurts you repeatedly?

You should forgive them each time they hurt you but you are not expected them to trust them until they prove that they have changed by their behavior. You are not obligated to allow them to continue hurting you.

What one step can I take today to connect with another believer at a more genuine, heart-to-heart level?

I need to be quicker to share my weaknesses with other believers.