



ALL HANDS IN

FELLOWSHIP [DO WE REALLY NEED EACH OTHER?]

THE HURDLE

After trusting Christ, Mo felt the peace he hoped he'd feel. That's why he was confused when his teammate immediately suggested he get involved in a small group fellowship or start going to church. I'm not sure about that, Mo thought to himself. I might like to go, but I don't have time with everything going on, and it doesn't seem all that relevant. Honestly, I've always thought church a bit boring. Besides, I can grow just as well and probably better by reading my Bible and doing what God wants me to do. All the church people I know have just as many problems as me—some have more! And I'm not sure I'd fit in very well with the people who do small groups. I'll think about it...

What was your experience with the local church while growing up?

A well-known comedian once joked that “every day people are straying away from the church and going back to God.” What do you think he’s trying to suggest?

What value might there be in spending time with other Christians?

The mindset of our time: Attending church is irrelevant and unnecessary at best, harmful and stifling to spiritual growth at worst. But the idea of “church” isn't a human invention; rather, God Himself ties our personal growth and our purpose on earth to a regular, committed fellowship with other believers.

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The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies—probably because they are generally the same people.

G.K. Chesterton
Journalist/Author

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I HEAR YA

The Bible endorses characters that “lock arms” in the journey of life ...

Writer of Ecclesiastes: “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. If they fall, the one will lift up his friend. But woe to him that is alone when he falls, for he doesn't have anyone to pick him up.” (Ecclesiastes 4:9,10)

New Testament Christians: And all those who had believed (in Jesus) were together, and had all things in common ... and day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart. (Acts 2:44,46)

Jesus' First Followers: Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them two by two ahead of Him to every city and place where He himself was going to come. (Luke 10:1)

James: “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” (James 5:16)

Solomon: “Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” (Proverbs 27:17)

LISTEN UP

Our new allegiance to Christ and His purposes also introduces new challenges to our faith. How do you continue believing when others are faithless? How do you persevere in the midst of trials with little or no encouragement? How do you love and serve when it is not reciprocated? We need each other to keep going!

Read Hebrews 10:23-25.

1. In each verse, identify the positive actions believers are to do.

v23

v24

v25

2. Christian hope believes that God is faithful and will provide what He promises. How might hope encourage perseverance in your present circumstances?

3. Verse 24 says that we live out our confession by “spurring one another on to love others and do good works.” Who has “spurred” you on in your faith and how did they do it?

4. While the text doesn’t give us specifics, what consequences might first century believers experience for not staying in regular fellowship (v25)? In what ways might these be the same for you?

5. In Philippians 2:2-3, the apostle Paul says to be “united in spirit, intent on one purpose ... regarding one another as more important than yourself”. Why is it easier to pursue a great cause locking arms with others rather than going it alone? How have you experienced this?

FOR THE RECORD

God values relationships! We share this likeness with God, and our relationship with Him can only truly be developed in relationship with others—that’s the way He’s wired the human experience! Even though relationships are challenging and messy, we need each other to become what we otherwise would not. People provide opportunities to practice giving and receiving forgiveness; they

supply encouragement and accountability to “do the right thing”; they help us see our areas for growth; they refresh us through genuine fellowship; they add depth to our vision of this life and the after-life. We don’t grow in isolation—we grow while connecting in community, in the crucible of authentic fellowship, the sharpening of one life against another.



YOUR MOVE

1. What prevents you from being in close relationship with other Christians?
 - My schedule is too demanding to make time for others.
 - We have games and travel on the weekend.
 - I can't even keep up with good friends let alone the Christian community.
 - After practicing all week, I need a break on Sunday.
 - I don't know anyone at church and frankly don't want to meet anyone.
 - I feel uncomfortable letting others know the "real" me.
 - I'm not good at initiating with other people.

2. New Testament Christians were described as "devoting themselves to fellowship." (Acts 2:42) What adjustments would you need to make in your attitude or actions to be described as devoted to fellowship (authentic, sincere, vulnerable, accountable Christian connections)?

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You can impress people at a distance, but you can only impact them up close.

_____ **”**

*Dr. Howard Hendricks
Seminary Professor/Author*

3. Based on the ways people have encouraged you, what could you do for others to encourage them in their faith? Write down their names and what you could do to strengthen their faith.

People Who Need Encouragement	What Can I Do for Them?

4. What practical ways could you get involved with Christian community now instead of waiting for an off-season that never comes? A Bible study? Prayer group? Church?

The solo mountain climber who reaches the summit has but himself to pat on the back. The fighter pilot who engages the enemy without his wingman is asking for trouble. A soprano can carefully hit every note of her song, but the richness and beauty of harmony is unsurpassed. Progress in any field is most often the result of incremental contributions from numerous individuals. (George McGovern, New York NFL/MLB chaplain)

For additional work on your own, visit **The Training Room** on the next page for more ideas on pursuing authentic Christian community!

AS YOU ENTER

“DO NOT MERELY LOOK OUT FOR YOUR OWN INTERESTS BUT ALSO FOR THE INTERESTS OF OTHERS.” (PHILIPPIANS 2:4)

Finding a Christian Community: Your Local Church

While no official Biblical “list” exists to determine a good church, there are several categories to consider:

- Belief in Jesus’ divinity and His exclusivity for salvation
- Preach the Bible and take authority of the Bible seriously
- Leadership accountable to board or someone else
- Active prayer ministry
- Expectation that you’ll use your spiritual gifts to serve others
- Character of people loving and forgiving
- Outreach oriented and committed to discipleship
- Pursue praise and worship of God
- Accept sinners/pursue spiritual growth
- Ideally multi-racial, multi-generational, multi-socioeconomic

Beware of the following characteristics of unhealthy churches:

- Salvation requires baptism or membership in the church/particular denomination
- Salvation is an effect of “Jesus plus” something else
- Legalistic restrictions: what food you can eat, music you can listen to, how you dress, etc.
- Bible isn’t taken seriously; messages filled with interesting topics but no Bible explanation
- Worship or “excessive” praise of historical figures or current church leaders
- Congregation unconcerned about unity with other local churches or reaching out to serve local community

Living in Christian Community: The “One Another” Passages

Read these passages and consider what God may be saying to you.

Galatians 6:2 _____

I Peter 4:8 _____

I Peter 4:9 _____

I Peter 4:10 _____

John 13:14 _____

John 13:34 _____

Romans 12:16 _____

I Corinthians 1:10 _____

Ephesians 4:32 _____

Serving in Christian Community: Discovering Your SHAPE

While no official Biblical “list” exists to determine a good church, there are several categories to consider:

Read I Corinthians 12:12-27. Paul uses the metaphor of a “body” to describe the interdependence of each individual Christian with all other Christians. Part of growing is learning to function well with all parts of the body. Considering your SHAPE will help you understand how you can best serve the Christian community. After each category, write a few words to describe how God wired you for service. Remember: Others need your gifts as much as you need theirs!

Spiritual gifts - Gifting God gives you for specific acts of service

Heart - Your particular passions and burdens for people and causes

Abilities - Your natural born strengths

Personality - Your temperament and demeanor, how you interact with the world

Experiences - All the events of your life, both positive and negative

For more help thinking about your SHAPE, go to

<http://www.saddlebackresources.com/en-S/Pastors/Focus/FOCUSSHAPE/FOCUSSHAPE.HTM>

AS YOU LEAVE

» REMEMBER: INTERDEPENDENCE IS A MUST FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO GROW SPIRITUALLY AND KNOW THEIR GOD-GIVEN PURPOSE IN THIS LIFE!