

# ONLINE 7

## FOLLOWING JESUS

### TOGETHER: GOD'S FAMILY

God does not want us to live our Christian lives in isolation. As CS Lewis put it, “*Several coals blaze brightly together, but put one on its own on the hearth and its fire soon goes out.*” When we invited Christ into our lives, we were born into God’s family (JOHN 1v12). He’s our Father and other believers are our brothers and sisters. His purpose is to build a people who share their lives and his love in such way that his glory is displayed to the world. This community is at the heart of God’s eternal plan. We belong to one another and need each other to grow as disciples of Jesus.

What’s been your experience of church?

What comes to mind when you think of church?

Jesus spells out the heart of the Christian faith in Matthew 22:

MATTHEW 22 v 36-40 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” 37 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Our relationships with others are to be increasingly shaped by our relationship with God. (1 JOHN 4v7- 12) He longs to use us to help others grow in their faith and to use others to help us. God longs for his family to be close and to care for each other. Paul talks about our interdependence in 1 CORINTHIANS 12 v 12-27:

12 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free, and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 14 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.

v 12-14

Collectively we are the “body of Christ” because his Spirit lives in us and expresses his life through us.

Do you think the metaphor of a body in describing the Church is a good one? Why?

What do we learn about the make up of the body?

How does this passage answer the idea that “my faith is a personal thing and I can just worship God on my own”?

15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honour to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

v 15-17

What do we learn about our relationship to the rest of God's people?

What specific gifts and abilities can you bring to God's family?

What, in general terms, can all believers bring to God's family?

What are the consequences for the body if we fail to play our part?

v 18-20

How does the picture of the body help us understand our diversity and our unity?

What encouragements are there in these verses for us?

v 21-27

What do we learn about the attitude we need to have towards other believers?

How does going to church help us?

Where do you specifically need help from others?

How easy do you find respecting and honouring those who are different from you?

Who is concerned for and committed to your spiritual life? Who are you committed to?

Acts gives us some wonderful pictures of what church life can be like

ACTS 2 v 42-46 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.



What excites you about this picture?

Historical details of the church have changed, but what principles behind the specifics challenge you?

“Fellowship” refers to a “deep sharing in common” - In what practical ways can you “devote yourself” to the fellowship?

If you're not already in a church, ask God for wisdom and discernment, and ask other believers you trust to point you in the right direction. Remember, no church is perfect; even the churches described in the Bible had big problems. The New Testament gives us some things to look out for:

- The Bible, not just the opinion of the preacher, is the authority for what's taught.
- The leaders affirm that Jesus is God in human form (JOHN 1:1-3, 14) and members are devoted to him rather than to church programmes.
- People have real, honest friendships and look out for one another.
- People are serious about praying, seeking and enjoying God.
- There is a concern to make Christ's Gospel known to others.
- The overall environment is one where you can be challenged in your spiritual growth and be given opportunities to serve others.

God has designed us to share our journey of faith with other believers. If we try to go it on our own, we miss out on a big part of what God has planned for us. We are part of God's family.

