

The Family of God – A Place Where I Belong

Tradition 7: We encourage further spiritual growth through participation in a church fellowship.

There are many ways for us to grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ. We are encouraged through Jesus' example to talk to other Christians – to have fellowship. Throughout the Bible and down through the centuries, Christians have found it essential to meet together regularly. We need teaching and direction from those who have experience and wisdom. We need prayer and sharing of our lives and God's plan is for us to be connected together in groups called "the church."

They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord's Supper and in prayer. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had. (Acts 2)

Too many people try to live their spiritual life on their own – "me and Jesus" – and this was never God's plan. Jesus gathered 12 disciples around him, instructing them, asking them to pray for him, and being with them in ways that met spiritual needs. Because they were together they were exposed to truth in ways that just wasn't possible on their own and their lives were dramatically changed for all time. When we come together in church we encourage each other. We share each others burdens and celebrate each others joys. We can pray for each other and invite God's goodness to touch and heal our lives.

Jesus said, "I also tell you this: If two of you agree down here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three gather together because they are mine, I am there among them. (Matthew 18)

As we meet together with other Christians we learn from their teaching and experience how God offers to support and guide us. We learn safe boundaries and guidelines for developing healthy morals and

values. The Bible is full of helpful teaching and God gifts us with pastors, Bible study group leaders, and other teachers, who help us get in touch with what God has taught us down through the ages. Our changing culture and world need the unchanging and timeless truths that God has given us for stability. We participate in a church fellowship to stay grounded in what has worked for healthy people for centuries.

We are citizens along with all of God's holy people. We are members of God's family. We are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. We who believe are carefully joined together, becoming a holy temple for the Lord, where God lives by his Spirit. (1 Peter 2)

Without wavering, let us hold tightly to the hope we say we have, for God can be trusted to keep His promise. Think of ways to encourage one another to outbursts of love and good deeds. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near. (Hebrews 10)

If a person places several logs together in a fire, they will burn brightly; but if one log is put aside on the cold hearth, the fire in it will quickly go out. We need the diversity of experience that people from many walks of life can share with us. We face many challenges as we live life on life's terms and God has provided brothers and sisters, pastors and teachers, from whose experience we can learn, not simply how to overcome a problem, but how to live well with God and with one another.

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. Why go to church? Why not just go to meetings? Why not just do my own personal prayer and meditation?
2. What gifts does God intend for us to receive when He asks us to join with other Christians in churches?
3. Why do we need teaching from Christian teachers and leaders? Why can't we just learn things on our own?
4. What do we have to offer to a church fellowship?