

CHAPTER 7

FELLOWSHIP - ENJOYING GOD'S FAMILY

ASSIGNMENTS:

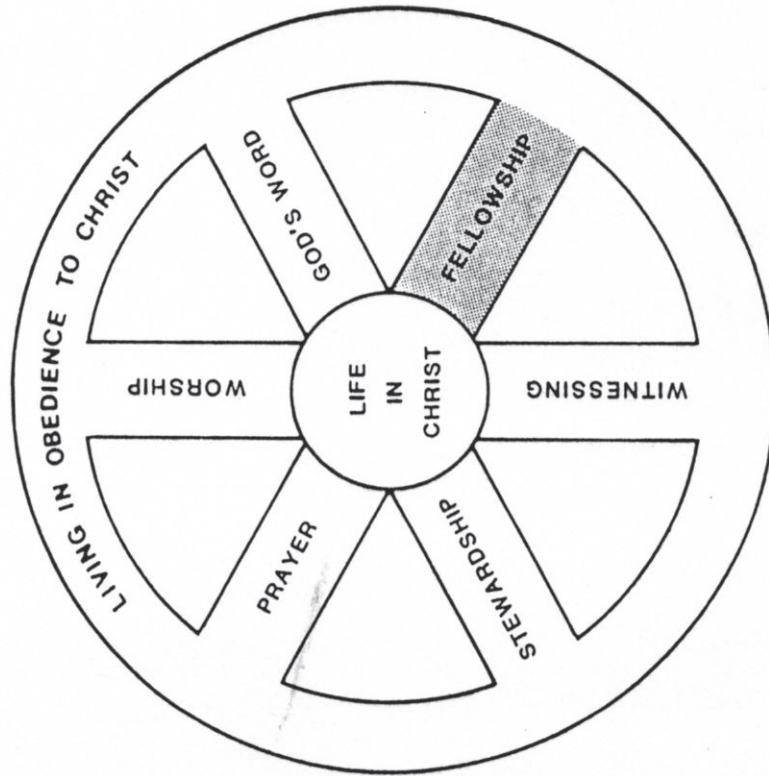
1. Scripture Reading - Philippians 1-4; Colossians 1-3  
Read one chapter each day.
2. Prayer - Use the prayer list page to record your requests and answers.
3. Memorize - Hebrews 10:24,25  
Additional verse - Ephesians 4:16
4. Study and complete the material in the chapter.
5. Outline the pastor's Sunday sermon.

Outline your daily progress below:

| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wcd | Thu | Fri | Sat |
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CHAPTER 7

FELLOWSHIP - ENJOYING GOD'S FAMILY



As children of God we have the privilege of being a part of God's family. This family includes all the people throughout the world who have Christ as their Savior. This family is also called the Body of Christ, or the Church. Christ Himself is the Head, and we are the members of the body. As we grow and mature we will understand how we are to function as a member, and how fellowship relates to that function.

The word "fellowship" in the New Testament is translated from the Greek word koinonia, which means "sharing in common." It is used to describe attitudes and actions that Christians have toward their fellow believer. Through fellowship we can have the intimacy of personal involvement and heart-to-heart contact with one another. We can experience the joys of being a part of God's plan for us in the Body of Christ.

*Under His direction the whole body is fitted together perfectly, and each part in its own special way helps the other parts, so the whole body is healthy and growing and full of life (Ephesians 4:16).*

There are many different facets of fellowship. Let's look at several verses that define fellowship and show our relationship to one another.

MEMBERS OF ONE ANOTHER

*So we who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another (Romans 12:5).*

The New Testament states that Christians are "members of one another." Paul used an illustration to get this point across - the human body. He clearly spelled out the similarity between the "human body" and "Christ's body - the Church." Read 1 Corinthians 12:14-26. The point is that Christians are "members of one another." At the conclusion of these illustrations in 1 Corinthians is this concise statement: "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is part of it" (1 Corinthians 12:27).

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Paul also describes the functioning body of Christ in Romans 12 and Ephesians 4. The emphasis of these passages is:

1. No individual Christian can function effectively by himself. If a speck of dust blows into your eye, you instinctively rub it with your finger: Debate is not necessary to get your finger to help your eye.

Just as "there are many parts of one body" in the physical makeup of human beings, so the body of Christ is made up of many members. Each member is important. No member of Christ's body can say to another member, "I don't need you."

2. No member of Christ's body should feel that he is more important than another member of Christ's body. No Christian has exclusive rights to God's grace. "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you" (Romans 12:3). "Be completely humble and gentle; bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2). Though one person may have a more responsible position, in God's sight even the person who may go unnoticed is just as important and necessary in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:22-23).

3. Christians should work hard at creating unity in the body of Christ. "The body is a unit, Though it is made up of many parts" (1 Corinthians 12:12). Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Corinthians 1:10). All of us as members of Christ's body are to strive for unity and peace.

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What does the comparison between the "human body" and "Christ's body - the Church" mean to you?

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## DEVOTED TO ONE ANOTHER

*Be devoted to one another in brotherly love*  
(Romans 12:10).

This exhortation introduces another analogy to illustrate the functioning church. It is a family unit. The concept of the family adds a dimension of warmth, concern, and loyalty. The term "brotherly love" refers to the love Christians should have for each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. We are the family of God? The word "brothers" is distinctly a "family term." When it refers to Christians, it means "fellow believers." It means we have all been "born again" into God's forever family.

To "be devoted" refers to the mutual love of parents and children and husbands and wives. Christians are to be just as devoted to each other as are the individual members of a close-knit family unit. We are indeed "blood brothers," for in Christ "we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Ephesians 1:7). Christians begin as infants in Christ. We go through stages of development. In our immaturity we can fall into patterns of self-centered behavior. But as we mature, our lives should reflect more and more the nature of Christ. That is why we are exhorted to "do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others"

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(Philippians 2:3-4).

We must take seriously what the Bible says about brotherly love. Evaluate your attitudes and actions toward other members of your "Christian family".

a. Do I spend most of my time thinking about myself rather than others?  
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b. Do I spend time praying more for myself or for others?  
\_\_\_\_\_

c. Am I forgiving toward others?  
\_\_\_\_\_

d. Am I basically angry and resentful?  
\_\_\_\_\_

e. When I am hurt, do I withdraw or do I continue to be involved with other people?  
\_\_\_\_\_

f. Do I fear rejection or do I reach out to others?  
\_\_\_\_\_

g. Do I humbly consider others as more important than myself?  
\_\_\_\_\_

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h. Do I seek to get involved with the interests of others?  
\_\_\_\_\_

After considering these questions, list some practical things you can do to show brotherly love toward you family, roommate, friend, and other Christians.  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

HONOR ONE ANOTHER

*Honor one another above yourselves*  
(Romans 12:10).

The example is given of an excellent musician - a pianist extraordinary, who desires to help other people "look and sound good" - especially when he accompanies them. He is admired not so much for his musicianship but for his honoring others above himself. He always makes sure his volume does not compete with the vocalist. His music enhances the other's presentation rather than detracts from it. He assists the singer in hitting difficult notes and even covers up a person's mistakes. He is always excited and satisfied when a vocalist he has accompanied is honored by others for a job well done. He is an example to us. Every Christian should strive to make other believers "look and sound good." Every Christian should rejoice when others are honored, when others are successful. When this happens, the body of Christ will function beautifully and mature and grow in Christ.

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Christ set the example in honoring others above Himself. A short time before His death, He taught the disciples a powerful truth. At an evening meal, Jesus filled a basin with water and stooped to wash His disciples' feet. Then He exhorted them to do the same - to "honor on another above ourselves."

How many situations can you recall where you attempted to honor someone above yourself? In what ways did you reflect sincere appreciation for the other person? How can you do this in the future?

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## BE OF THE SAME MIND WITH ONE ANOTHER

*Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus* (Romans 15:5).

Satan's strategy involves destroying unity among Christians. He is the author of confusion, insensitivity and false doctrine. In the Bible we discover the power whereby Satan's strategy can be defeated. It's the power of "onemindedness" in the body of Christ. In Christ's prayer to the Father in John 17, He made a request - that His disciples might experience unity and oneness. "Holy Father," prayed Jesus, "protect them by the power of Your name - the name You gave Me - so that they may be one as We are One" (John 17:11). It is a visible unity - a oneness - that reveals the essence of the Gospel. And that essence comprises the fact "that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Christ

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was indeed God in the flesh. He was (and is) one with the Father.

The ingredient in the church today that convinces non-Christians that Jesus is God is unity - being of "the same mind with one another." This represents a miracle because men everywhere tend toward disunity. When non-Christians see true unity and true oneness, their heart cry out to be part of that kind of love.

Read Romans 15:5,6 and 1 Corinthians 1:10. What are some things that can be seen in a body of believers that is unified?

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## ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER

*Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God* (Romans 15:7).

In at least three areas Christians have historically violated the injunction "accept one another" by judging one another (legalism), in showing partiality (prejudice), and by not being reconciled to one another (bitterness).

### 1. Judging one another.

"Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgement on disputable matters" (Romans 14:1). To pass judgement on other Christians on such issues is in violation of the exhortation to accept one another.

"The man who eats everything must not look down upon him who does not, and the man who does not

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eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him" (Romans 14:3). In other words, we are not to judge each other in areas that are not specified as sin.

To the strong in faith Paul wrote, "All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything else that will cause your brother to fall ... We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves" (Romans 14:20-21; 15:1).

If we are mature Christians, we will be sensitive toward our brothers and sisters in Christ who are not as strong as we are. We will be careful to do nothing that would cause them to stumble and fall into sin. If these two attitudes are working concurrently in a local body of believers, unity will emerge.

## 2. Showing Partiality

"Live in harmony with one another. Don't be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Don't be conceited" (Romans 12:16). James 2:9 states, "If you show favoritism, you sin."

Prejudice, favoritism, and discrimination in the body of Christ violate the law of God. Furthermore, they violate the nature of the functioning body of Christ. (Ephesians 2:11-12). We are all one. Every member is important - rich or poor, young or old, black or white, weak or strong! If we show favoritism, we also destroy the unity, harmony, and oneness in the body of Christ which Christ and Paul both prayed for and commanded. Ephesians 2:11-22: Cultural, racial, national, and religious barriers are broken down when people are brought near to God by the blood of Christ. There is peace between peoples that formerly were enemies when they are both members of the

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body of Christ. All believers have the same access to God the Father because the same Spirit dwells in them. Together we are being constructed into a spiritual temple of God.

## 3. Having bitterness.

Bitterness toward another believer may be one of the most common causes of division in the body. Hebrews 12:15 says that we should not let any "root of bitterness" spring up in us. When we become bitter, it destroys our love and care for that person. Follow this three-point plan for overcoming any problem in your life that reflects legalism and prejudice:

- a. Acknowledge it as sin (1John 1:9).
- b. Pinpoint the areas of your life where you need to change. Ask God to help you overcome your sins. Pray specifically about specific problems.
- c. Take an action step. For example, select another member of Christ's body you have had difficulty accepting. Do something for that person that reflects true Christian love. (Don't wait until you "feel" like changing or doing something about your sin. If you do, the feelings may never come. Christian love acts on what is the right thing to do.)

ADMONISH ONE ANOTHER

*And concerning you, my brethren, I myself am also convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all the knowledge, and able also to admonish one another*  
(Romans 15:14).

To confront a Christian about their sin is difficult. However, it is a great sign of love to be willing to risk rejection. And if admonishment is done in the right spirit, with the right motive, using an appropriate method, the person who is not living a life worthy of the Gospel of Christ usually senses the risk you are taking. Though that person may have difficulty acknowledging it at that moment, down deep one really knows. Romans 15:14 identifies the basis for being competent to instruct (or admonish) one another.

1. We must be "full of goodness" (i.e., living a holy, Christ like life). Christians who are sensitive about their walk with God are capable - and responsible - to admonish other Christians. This is not "judging others." We must make sure we "clean up our own act" before we try to help someone else "clean up" theirs.
2. We must be "complete in knowledge." In order to admonish another, we must have an adequate knowledge of God's Word. Admonishment must be based upon God's specific will - not on what we think other Christians should or should not be doing.
3. There are helpful guidelines in scripture treating the concept of admonishment.
  - a. Admonishment must be done with concern and love (Acts 20:31).

- b. Admonishment must be personal. When a particular Christian has a particular problem, it is better to make exhortation a private matter (Matthew 18:15). However, that does not mean that there is never general admonishment (like Paul admonished the church at Galatia in the epistle to the Galatians).
- c. Admonishment must be done with pure motives. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn (admonish) you, as my dear children" (1 Corinthians 4:14).
- d. Admonishment is a natural outgrowth of proper body function. There are two types of admonishment - preventive and corrective. We are to warn each other to stay away from sin (preventive admonishment). Preventive admonishment should be consistent in the church as the body of Christ functions as a group (Col 3:16). We are also to directly confront someone about sin in their life (corrective admonishment) (Matthew 18:15-17).

How should we handle correction or admonishment? What does Proverbs 9:8,9 and 12:1 say about our attitude toward this?

Where should our primary source of information come from when admonishing someone (2 Timothy 3:16, Colossians 3:16)?

SUBMIT TO ONE ANOTHER

*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ* (Ephesians 5:21).

The word "submit" is used in the relationships of one Christian with another. The concept of "submission" is used by biblical writers to describe a variety of Christian relationships. Young men are to submit to older men. All members of Christ's body are to submit to the authority of their leaders. Servants should submit to masters. Children should submit to parents. Christians should submit to leaders in government. Wives should submit to husbands.

Christians who are in positions of authority must also function with a submissive attitude. Husbands are directed to love their wives as Christ loved the church. Fathers are to deal sensitively with their children. Elders are commissioned to be "servants." Masters are to treat their servants fairly. (See Ephesians 5:22-6:9 on this concept.)

Mutual submission even by those who are in authority, is a distinctive concept made possible by Christ. Christ brought a whole new approach to functional relationships between people. In the world there is no "mutual submission." People basically operate out of selfish motives. He has little or no interest in helping others reach their goals - except when it might be beneficial to themselves.

In Christ, believers have the potential to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Even those who have positions of authority - elders, husbands, masters (in our day - employers) - are to relate to others with an attitude of submission.

All members of Christ's body are to submit to the authority of their leaders (Hebrews 13:17). Leaders enjoy giving a good report of those who are learning submission to others. These are then qualified for leadership (1 Timothy 3:10).

What does the concept "mutual submission" mean? Give examples.

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SERVE ONE ANOTHER

*You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge your sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love* (Galatians 5:13).

As unbelievers we are "prisoners of sin" (Galatians 3:22). But in Christ we are set free (Galatians 5:1).

"Freedom in Christ" does not mean:

1. Freedom to sin.  
To have this attitude is to misuse, abuse, and misunderstand the grace of God (Romans 6:14, 15).
2. Freedom from the reality of the old nature.  
Our old sinful nature is not eliminated. Therefore we are warned not to indulge our sinful nature (Romans 7:14-25).
3. Freedom from servanthood.  
Rather than using others to indulge our sinful nature, we are to "serve one another in love." The Christian who wants to experience true freedom in Christ must live in total commitment to Christ. Being a "servant to Christ" also involves serving other members of the body. Turning our lives over to Christ also means turning our lives over to each other. Our responsibility to one another is greater because we are



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members of the family of God (2 Corinthians 4:5).

In "serving one another in love" we find true freedom in Christ. Our deepest needs are met in legitimate ways. We are not used by one another. We are not put on a performance standard. Our relationship with others can be truly satisfying. This is true freedom!

Being a servant implies practical involvement in doing good to all men, especially to fellow believers (Galatians 6:9,10). God is glorified as non-believers see our servanthood demonstrated in good works (Matthew 5:16) which help to meet people's spiritual, physical, mental, and social needs.

How do you "serve one another in love?" This can be evaluated by how you are reflecting "the fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22,23) in your relationships:

- a. Do you express Christian love to others? \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Is there evidence of joy in your life? \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Is there peace and unity with others? \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Are you showing patience with others? \_\_\_\_\_
- e. Are you kind in your actions and attitudes? \_\_\_\_\_
- f. By your acts are you demonstrating goodness? \_\_\_\_\_
- g. Are you faithful to others? \_\_\_\_\_
- h. Do you demonstrate gentleness with others? \_\_\_\_\_
- i. Do you control yourself in conversation and general life style? \_\_\_\_\_

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j. Can you think of someone you can serve? How?

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BEARING WITH ONE ANOTHER

*Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love (Ephesians 4:2).*

The word "bear" in Ephesians means to be tolerant toward Christians: to bear with them; to patiently endure their idiosyncrasies and weaknesses; to have a forgiving spirit toward others who may sin against us.

Colossians 3:12-13 puts it this way: "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

When we are tempted to be impatient with one another, we need to think about Christ and His attitude towards us. This was Paul's secret. The Lord's long-suffering and patience toward him marked his life (1 Timothy 1:15-17) and gave him unusual tolerance towards others. Seeing himself as the worst of sinners and experiencing God's love and patience in saving him caused Paul to respond to others with the love and patience of Christ.

Bearing with one another and having a forgiving spirit are synonymous concepts. Some Christians carry grudges for years. This is out of character for a follower of Jesus

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Christ. How ungrateful for a Christian to hold a grudge against a fellow believer when Christ has canceled our own debt of sin. Patience, forbearance, and forgiveness are not automatic actions that follow conversion to Christ. These involve deliberate acts of the will. Every person who has an unforgiving spirit chooses to do so.

Christians who really care about each other, who really are concerned about doing the will of God at all times, will "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the body of peace" (Ephesians 4:2-3).

Practical steps for bearing with one another in love:

- a. Make a private list of all Christians you have difficulty relating to - especially those you hold a grudge against. Now ask God why you can't relate to these Christians; or why you are angry with them.
- b. Consciously and deliberately forgive every person who has ever done anything to have hurt you or someone you care deeply about. Then, one by one, talk to these Christians. If they hurt you, tell them why you feel as you do. Ask them to forgive you for your attitudes - even though they may be primarily at fault. (Don't base your "forgiveness" on the condition that they offer an apology. Take care of your own attitudes and God will take care of theirs.)

## ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

*Therefore encourage one another and build each other up*  
(1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Christians are to build up and edify one another. No one Christian can build up all other believers in a local church. God's design is that every Christian be a functioning part of the body of Christ; that every Christian contribute to the process.

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Paul commended the Thessalonian Christians for their concern and love for one another. They had learned the importance of mutual encouragement, exhortation, and comfort. He knew the primary means for mutual encouragement - the Bible. "We also thank God continually because, when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the Word of God, which is at work in you who believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

God's Word is powerful, significant, and reassuring. We are not sharing human philosophy or ideas limited to space and time. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away" (Matthew 24:35). This is why God's Word is the primary means that Christians should use to "encourage one another" and to "build one another up."

As Christians we must realize how important the Word is in building up others in the body of Christ. Christians need to be challenged to learn what God's Word says. We should be ready to share the Word with others who are in special need of encouragement. Christians cannot encourage one another with Scripture if they are not familiar with the Scriptures. Therefore, every believer should study the Word of God - not only for personal growth, but also to assist others in their growth.

Read Hebrews 10:24,25. What should we encourage others to do?

SUMMARY

In the "Body of Christ," the Church, every member contributes to its success. The church should be a group of people who believe the Bible, who believe in the God of the Bible, who love and care for "one another," and who want all men to be saved and to experience fellowship with God and with other believers. This is what Jesus prayed for when He was yet on earth: "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as We are one: I in them and You in Me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent Me and have loved them as You have love Me" (John 17:20-23).



THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. How would you define fellowship?

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2. Why is fellowship important to you?

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3. What do you think is the difference between a social time, one that entertains such topics as the latest fashions, sports highlights or current events, and true Biblical fellowship?

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4. Why should God's Word be the primary source of "encouraging on another" and "building up one another?"

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5. How can you improve your fellowship times based on the topics that have been mentioned in this chapter? Be specific.

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6. Describe how the "body of Christ" works, as compared to the human body. What is its goal?

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7. Most Biblical references to the functioning body of Christ focuses on the local churches. Why do you think it is important to be a functioning member of a local church? Read, "Why should I be a member of a local church," in the Addendum.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made, D. Yancy and P. Brandt

Life Together, Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Measure of a Church, Gene Getz