

Does God Expect Me to Go to Church?

radiate

Settling In: *About 10-20 minutes*

- 1) Make a note to yourself who, if anyone, is missing from your home group this week:
- 2) Spend some time finding out how everyone is doing: make a note for prayer requests.
- 3) Introduce a time of conversational prayer. Make it clear that group members are not required to participate if they are not comfortable.

Or

- a) Read and reflect on the hymn: "The Church's One Foundation".
- b) You can find the words and melody at <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/html/c/h/chofound.htm>

This is only for your information...don't make a big deal of who is missing to the members who are present.

Conversational prayer means each member taking turns praying for various concerns with reasonably short and to the point prayers.

Opener: *About 10 minutes*

- 1) What do you like best about going to church?
- 2) What do you like least about going to church?
 - a) *This is not to be focused on a particular church...neither as a gripe session nor an advert for one church over another.*
 - b) *The goal here is a brief, honest response. Be careful to keep the general tone positive, if it starts going negative move along to the next section.*

You may not have time to ask every question in the study. Also, some of the discussion questions may not be appropriate depending on who is at the home group on a particular night. That's okay! We've intentionally given you more material than you can usually use.

Mini-teach: *About 10 minutes*

The Community of God's People

- 1) From the beginning it has been God's design to have a people dedicated to himself.
 - a) "Then I will make you my people, and I will be your God. You will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the forced labour of the Egyptians." (Ex. 6:7, GWORD)
 - b) Throughout the Old Testament, even as God relates to individuals he does so in the context of their community of faith.
- 2) At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus immediately forms a community.
 - a) "As he was going along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew. They were throwing a net into the sea because they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, "Come, follow me! I will teach you how to catch people instead of fish." They immediately left their nets and followed him." (Mark 1:16-18, GWORD)
 - b) Throughout the Gospels, Jesus makes it clear that he expects his disciples to stick together and work together as a community.
- 3) Most of Paul's letters are addressed to groups of people rather than individuals.
 - a) "From Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and from Sosthenes, our brother in the Christian faith. To God's church that was made holy by Christ Jesus and called to be God's holy people in the city of Corinth and to people everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 1:1-2, GWORD)
 - b) Paul wrote these letters to be read to the gathered community of

Today's individualistic society would have been very alien to the people of biblical times.

You could introduce a discussion contrasting the difference between a *personal* faith and a *private* faith.

Christian faith should always be personal but it was never intended to be private.

Exceptions to this statement can be found only in Philemon, Titus, 1st and 2nd Timothy. But even here the focus of these letters are on how these individuals relate to the community of faith.

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believers rather than circulated to individuals.

Discussion 1: About 15 minutes

When it comes to church, what does God expect of me?

- 1) "We should not stop gathering together with other believers, as some of you are doing. Instead, we must continue to encourage each other even more as we see the day of the Lord coming." (Heb. 10:25, GWORD)
 - a) What problem is the writer speaking to? What do you think was going on?
 - b) What would we miss out on if we didn't consistently gather together as believers in Christ?
 - c) What is our responsibility to one another?
- 2) "We understand what love is when we realize that Christ gave his life for us. That means we must give our lives for other believers. Now, suppose a person has enough to live on and notices another believer in need. How can God's love be in that person if he doesn't bother to help the other believer? Dear children, we must show love through actions that are sincere, not through empty words." (1 John 3:16-18, GWORD)
 - a) According to this verse, what should our attitude be toward other believers?
 - b) What does that mean in practical terms? What are some ways we can demonstrate this love on a daily basis?
 - c) What might a non-Christian say if he or she saw this kind of love in action in the church?
 - d) If we understand our community to be an essential part of our witness to non-Christians, how does our absence affect the church's effectiveness in evangelism?

The writer expects that Christians will gather together consistently and that we should encourage one another to continue to do so. This is especially true as we are closer than ever to Christ's return.

Often when we read this verse we think of opportunities of heroic deeds of self-sacrifice that may or may not ever present themselves. Giving your life for another believer must have a practical application in day-to-day living.

This kind of loving implies that at very least we need to be present for one another, which is nearly impossible if we don't attend church.

Discussion 2: About 15 minutes

What if I don't feel like I'm getting anything out of church?

"For example, the body is one unit and yet has many parts. As all the parts form one body, so it is with Christ. By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. Whether we are Jewish or Greek, slave or free, God gave all of us one Spirit to drink.

As you know, the human body is not made up of only one part, but of many parts. Suppose a foot says, "I'm not a hand, so I'm not part of the body!" Would that mean it's no longer part of the body? Or suppose an ear says, "I'm not an eye, so I'm not a part of the body!" Would that mean it's no longer part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, how could it hear? If the whole body were an ear, how could it smell? So God put each and every part of the body together as he wanted it. How could it be a body if it only had one part? So there are many parts but one body.

An eye can't say to a hand, "I don't need you!" Or again, the head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you!" The opposite is true. The parts of the body that we think are weaker are the ones we really need. The parts of the body that we think are less honourable are the ones we give special honour. So our unrepresentable parts are made more presentable. However, our presentable parts don't need this kind of treatment. God has put the body together and given

This passage emphasizes the unity and diversity of the Body of Christ (The Church) and the varieties of gifts that are dispersed to its members.

The point is twofold: 1) No member of the Church should say "I'm non-essential or redundant personnel". Each person has and is a gift without which the Church cannot be complete. 2) No member of the Church can treat another member the Church as though they were inferior. All the parts are essential to make up a healthy and whole "Body".

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special honour to the part that doesn't have it. God's purpose was that the body should not be divided but rather that all of its parts should feel the same concern for each other. If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts share its suffering. If one part is praised, all the others share in its happiness.

You are Christ's body and each of you is an individual part of it. In the church God has appointed first apostles, next prophets, third teachers, then those who perform miracles, then those who have the gift of healing, then those who help others, those who are managers, and those who can speak in a number of languages. Not all believers are apostles, are they? Are all of them prophets? Do all of them teach? Do all of them perform miracles or have gifts of healing? Can all of them speak in other languages or interpret languages?

You <only> want the better gifts, but I will show you the best thing to do. (1 Cor. 12:12-31, GWORD)

- 1) What does the body represent? And the parts? What is the main message of this metaphor?
- 2) How do you think Paul would respond to the question: "What if I don't feel like I'm getting anything out of church?"
- 3) What does he mean by "The parts of the body that we think are less honourable are the ones we give special honour"?
- 4) What are some roles in today's churches that some may see as "less honourable" but are really essential to the church?
- 5) How can we deal with our own attitudes when we don't receive the gifts or opportunities in church that we would like to have? How could this be an opportunity for spiritual growth?
- 6) Paul says: "If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts share its suffering. If one part is praised, all the others share in its happiness." Is that really possible? How can we develop a generous spirit?

We need to be on-guard against a spirit of consumerism that has infected many Christians today. Many behave as consumers of church services rather than servants of those in the church who need their help.

Many people who feel "stale" in their church involvement find a renewed sense of passion as they take on an attitude of servanthood and begin to seek out ways to be a blessing to others in the church.

Even those who have the "more desirable" gifts must deal with jealousy, disappointment, and frustration.

Generosity means more than giving lots of money away. It can also mean giving away the attention, honour, or "glory" that we would like for ourselves to others.

Closer:

- Are there any wrong attitudes that you have about church that you need to work on?
- Are there any "less honoured" gifts that God has placed in you that you need to "honour" and use in service to the church?