

GOD'S AWESOME FAMILY... AND YOU!

The next “piece” of the “puzzle” for your growth in Christ, is Christian Fellowship... getting rightly connected to others in God’s awesome family.

Do you want great relationships? Awesome relationships? Extreme relationships? God wants that for you too. And, His Holy Spirit makes such relationships possible.

Extreme relationships with others will occur as you abide in Christ...and join other believers who are training together to be winners in God’s great “race”.

Christian fellowship is a vital “piece” of the “puzzle” you will want to make a continual priority.



GET CONNECTED!

EXTREME RELATIONSHIPS

CITIZENS OF HEAVEN

The Apostle Peter told the early believers to think of themselves as part of a building...with Jesus being the “chief cornerstone”.

“And now God is building you, as living stones into His spiritual temple....You are a chosen people. You are a kingdom of priests, God’s holy nation, His very own possession.”

1 Peter 2:5&9

God is saying awesome things about you as one of His children. He is saying that you and all other believers are:

- Living Stones in His Spiritual Temple
- A Chosen People
- A Kingdom of Priests
- His Very Own Possession
- A Citizen of God’s Holy Nation

It doesn’t matter what color your skin is, how smart you are, how pretty you are, what gender you are, or how wealthy or important you are...you are part of Christ’s body with believers from all time. You are a full citizen in God’s Country...heaven! (Ephesians 2:19)

Q Your thoughts: _____

CHRIST'S LOCAL BODY

You, along with all other Christians of all time make up the body of Christ, the Church.

The Bible also calls a local gathering of believers a “church.”

Jesus made an awesome promise to you and me. When we come together, with Him as our focus...He is there:

“For where two or three gather together because they are mine, I am there among them.”

Matt.18:20

THE EARLY CHURCH

The book of Acts relates the establishing of the early churches, which met primarily in homes. The Letters of the New Testament are the instructions written to them by the Apostles. Everything the Holy Spirit commanded and instructed the early believers applies to the church today.

The commitment of the early church was so strong, and their love for one another so great, that within three hundred years, Christianity had spread throughout the entire Roman Empire. They truly changed their world for Christ!

EXAMPLE OF THE EARLY CHURCH

To get an understanding of how committed the early Christians were to one another, read the Book of Acts in the New Testament.

Q What stands out the most to you in your reading of the book of Acts?

Q How important were the other believers to Paul, Peter, and the other Apostles?

Q How important are other believers to you?

Q What are you doing to develop extreme relationships with other believers?

GETTING “CONNECTED”

One of the main reasons so many Christians live defeated lives, is that they have isolated themselves from other believers.

Paul told the early Christians that they were each vital “parts” of the “body of Christ”.

Every part of your body is important. If your little toe hurts, it can make your day miserable. The invisible parts, such as the heart, liver, and kidneys are vital for the life of the entire body. It is similar in the body of Christ.

Read 1 Cor. 12:14-27, and write what Paul said about each part of the “body”:

Q Who is the “HEAD”?

Q Who are the “MEMBERS”?

Q Are any “MEMBERS” insignificant?

Q What are some of the most important “PARTS”? (v.22)

When you are joined together with other believers who are growing in Christ, you each encourage one another, and keep each other “fired up” in your mutual faith. You enjoy each others company and build meaningful relationships together.

Coming together with other believers in Christ’s name is similar to hot coals which keep each other hot when lumped together. However, a coal that is separated from the others will soon grow cold.

AWESOME GIFTS

You are a unique creation of God. He has given you unique gifts that are needed in the body of Christ. In 1 Cor. 12:4-11, Paul tells you some vital things about your gifts:

Q Who gave you your gifts?(v.11) _____

Q Which gift is most important?(v.21-23) _____

Q What are you warned against?(v.25) _____

Q What are you to do for others?(v.26) _____

Satan is very clever in convincing many Christians that they are not important to Christ's work on earth. Many leave the job of doing God's work to those with gifts that are more obvious... such as the speaking gifts. God's Word is clear that each gift is vital to His Kingdom!

The entire body of Christ is commissioned and gifted to accomplish Jesus' Great Commission...to "go into all the world and tell the Good News to everyone". With God, there is no distinction between clergy and laity.

In one way, your role in the church is similar to a player on a basketball, football, or soccer team. Unless each player uses his skill and talent to play, the game could be lost. To win, each player must do his job well.

As an important part of God's winning team, you need to play the position He has gifted you to play!

THE KEY TO EXTREME RELATIONSHIPS

Jesus knows your heart. He knows the difficulty we all have at times with one another. As humans, we all are tempted to gossip, judge, get angry, and accuse one another.

And yet, Jesus truly desires for us to love one another...and model His love to the world. Listen to what He told His disciples in some of His last comments to them:

"So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

John 13:34-35

How many times have we failed Jesus by disobeying this command?
Unfortunately, far too often.

Love is the key to extreme relationships...but how do we get it? God gives us the answer in Paul's letter to Timothy:

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self discipline.”

2 Tim. 1:7

Q Look closely at this verse. Where does love come from?

As you learned in Chapter 3, love is a “Fruit of the Spirit”, and is a gift the Holy Spirit gives to all who abide in Christ.

Since “love” is the key to extreme relationships, it is vital to know what love really means, and how it “plays out” in your daily interaction with others. (Read Gal. 5:22)

The Corinthian Church was full of “baby” Christians whom Paul called “carnal”, or “fleshly”. They had accepted Christ’s love for them, but treated each other largely from a selfish point of view. They were jealous, and continually griping and arguing. (1 Cor. 3:1-4)

Q What do you think is the solution to that kind of behavior?

Paul told the Corinthians what Christ’s love would look like if they were controlled by the Holy Spirit:

“Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.” 1 Cor. 13:4-7

Read the entire 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians, and put down your thoughts:

If you recall from Chapter Three of this study, the Holy Spirit gives you His extreme power to love with Christ's love by faith. You can't generate it on your own. Love is the result of abiding in Christ.

LOVING BY FAITH

Corrie ten Boom was one of the few women who survived the torture and humiliation of Ravensbruck...a Nazi prison camp during World War II.

Corrie's faith in Christ had remained strong, even during times of degradation when she and all the other women were paraded naked in front of heckling male prison guards.

The war was now over, and Corrie had devoted herself to speaking in churches of Christ's love and forgiveness.

One day, at a church service in Munich, Corrie was startled to see the SS man who was her former prison guard when she and the other women were herded into the showers like cattle.

Corrie recalls the incident in her book, *The Hiding Place*:

“He came up to me.. ‘How grateful I am for your message...to think that, as you say, He has washed all my sins away!’

His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often... the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side. Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more?

‘Lord Jesus’, I prayed, ‘forgive me and help me to forgive him.’

I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so, I breathed a silent prayer.

‘Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me your forgiveness.’

As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.

And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than our goodness that the world’s healing hinges, but on His.”

“When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself”

(The Hiding Place, Fleming H. Revell Co.)

No matter how hard Corrie tried...she didn't have the power in herself to love this former enemy who had humiliated her.

Yet she knew that Christ had commanded her to love everyone...even her enemies.

By faith...Corrie confessed her sin, and turned the matter over to God. Her faith resulted in the power to obey. And, her obedience resulted in the great joy and peace that only comes when we abide in Christ.

Q Are there people in your life you can't forgive?

Q What does God tell you to do? (Eph. 4:32)

Take some time alone with God to confess your un-forgiveness, and ask the Holy Spirit to forgive them through you. As you abide in Him, He will give you the power!

And...then join other believers in running the race.

Q Jesus was our greatest example of forgiving others. Who did He forgive in Luke 23:34?



SO...ARE YOU READY TO GET CONNECTED WITH OTHER BELIEVERS?

It is truly awesome to “fellowship” with others who love Christ...and are living for Him! When each believer is using his gifts, it truly creates the “oneness” Jesus prayed for us. (John 17:21)

Remember though...abiding in Christ is the key to love. And love is the key to every relationship!

HOW TO GET STARTED:

- Ask God to direct you to other believers.
- Attend a Bible teaching and outreaching church.
- Join a small Bible study and prayer group.
- Use your gifts to reach others for Christ.
- Find a mature believer who will “disciple” you.
- Ask God for someone you can disciple.

“...If we are living in the light of God’s presence, just as Christ is, then we have fellowship with each other...”

1 John 1:7a



Read Hebrews 10:24&25.

How do you plan to live according to those verses:
