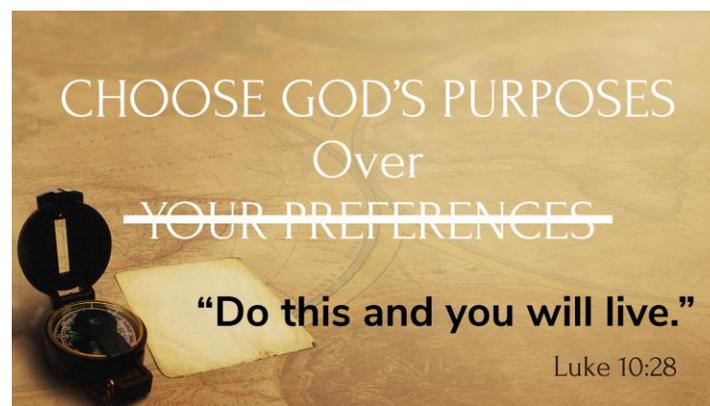


From front to back, beginning to end, the Bible is a story about **FAMILY!** God forming a family for Himself called the **BODY OF CHRIST**. One of the best experiences we can have in this life is to feel a true sense of **BELONGING**. This is why **MEMBERSHIP** matters, and why church membership is about life-giving relationships, not institutional affiliations. When I find my way into a group of people who love God humbly, and cherish my life sincerely, then I have found the holy grail of fulfillment. Understanding that I matter, I count, I am a part of others, and my story is significant when I attach my life to a group of selfless others bent on loving and serving – I have made life's most significant choice:



Today, we are exploring the second great purpose that God has for our lives, and that is, you and I were **"formed for God's family!"** We were made to belong! We were crafted for community. The very moment we give our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ in surrender and love, is the moment we cross the threshold from death to life (John 5:24) and move into a new neighborhood. This KOG (most importantly) is a well-integrated neighborhood where racial strife, divisions, hatred, animosity, and estrangement have been abolished and a new family set up in its place.

## Read Ephesians 2:14-22 The Message

14-15 The Messiah has made things up between us so that we're now together on this, both non-Jewish outsiders and Jewish insiders. ***He tore down the wall we used to keep each other at a distance.*** He repealed the law code that had become so clogged with fine print and footnotes that it hindered more than it helped. Then he started over. Instead of continuing with two groups of people separated by centuries of animosity and suspicion, ***he created a new kind of human being, a fresh start for everybody.***

16-18 Christ brought us together through his death on the cross. ***The Cross got us to embrace, and that was the end of the hostility.*** Christ came and preached peace to you outsiders and peace to us insiders. ***He treated us as equals, and so made us equals.*** Through him we both share the same Spirit and have equal access to the Father.

19-22 That's plain enough, isn't it? You're no longer wandering exiles. This kingdom of faith is now your home country. ***You're no longer strangers or outsiders. You belong here, with as much right to the name Christian as anyone.*** God is building a home. He's using us all—irrespective of how we got here—in what he is building. He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he's using you, ***fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone,*** with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together. We see it taking shape day after

**day—a holy temple built by God, all of us built into it, a temple in which God is quite at home.**

Separated by degrees of human divisions, disagreement, and disdain – the **CROSS** is the only thing that bridges and brings us **TOGETHER IN LOVE!** In order for that kind of new community to take place, there needs to be a special kind of coming together, and it needs to be just like the process of **GRAFTING**, which allows for new life and growth to occur. How many of you know it's easy to be a **STRANGER IN A CROWD**. Just because you hang out near a tree does not mean that you have been **GRAFTED IN** with the **OTHER BRANCHES**.

In order for us to become a true BIBLICAL FAMILY with one another, there are **three things that need to happen** according to the grafting process. You and I are what orchardists call "**SCIONS**" and this is how God intends for us to experience **NEW LIFE** (through the **metaphor of GRAFTING**). For the next two minutes, let me take you to AJ's mango orchard for a quick lesson on grafting.

**VIDEO:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3usjQ7FTE4> (00:05 – 01:46)



**CUT & JOINED**

**ALIGNED ON THE EDGE**

**WRAPPED & SEALED**

<https://purity.designuspro.com/en/rastenyami/vyrastit-limon-iz-kostochki.html>

The scriptures tell the story of the creation, fall, and restoration of humanity. **God's desire was that we become grafted back into the tree of life, the household of faith, and the family of God.** You and I have been called to a life of "**JOINED SHARING!**" And here is what must take place in our lives for God's vision to be achieved.

**(1) We must be CUT & JOINED:** Part of my life must be cut and exposed and part of your life must be cut and exposed if we are to be permanently joined in a fruitful relationship (membership – “each member belongs to all the others” Romans 12:5). My hurt and vulnerability joined to your hurt and vulnerability. Sounds like a recovery support group, doesn’t it?

**(2) Our “Cambium” layers must be ALIGNED ON THE EDGE:** Nourishment, life and growth all flow through the cambium layers, *the thin green layer between the bark and the wood*. There needs to be an exchange and flow of life in the form of **encouragement, empowerment, engagement and accountability**. This is why **ALIGNMENT** is so important. Middle center leads to death. **Bringing OUR REATIONSHIP to the edge** is where growth and action happens. **Grafting happens on the edge of discipleship**. Don’t have to be same size – *just aligned on the edge*.

**(3) In order for grafts to take and become successful, they need to be WRAPPED & SEALED with wax.** Vulnerable and open relationships need to be protected and strengthened. They need to be held together and supported by common dignity, respect and deep valuation for each life story. Only a sustained relationship has the hope of actually grafting into one. Wrapped tightly with the Holy Spirit’s grip, and sealed with the promises of scripture, is how we become a sustainable and fruitful family for God.



<https://hillsidefellowship.org/2018/03/27/59-one-another-statements-in-the-new-testament/>

In the Bible, there are actually 59 “One Anothering” commands given to us in the **Mutual Voice** or in the **GRAFTING VOICE** of (love, pray, encourage, admonish, accept, honor, forgive, devote, pray for, etc.). God has already scripted how He wants us to live together. Rick Warren has distilled these commands into nine essential biblical qualities or characteristics of true Christian community (chps. 18 & 19 in your books); a type of guide to **“Living as Spiritual Siblings”** in God’s family. Taken together, they must

be grafted, grown and guided by love, which the Bible says is ***the most excellent way*** (1 Cor. 12:31).

Family relationship *are* how God shapes and changes us, heals and restores us, corrects us and fulfills us, guides us and protects us. If the “hoped-for” budding stick of my life is lying on the orchard floor (even if it’s leaning up against the tree), I won’t have any of those benefits of the tree. That’s why we have to be ***grafted - present and participating***. Those who are becoming credible believers and followers of Jesus Christ are called to be advocates and conduits of these nine relationship qualities the Bible speaks of.

## ***Guide to “Living as Spiritual Siblings”***

- **Authenticity**      **Share our true feelings**
- **Mutuality**        **Encourage each other**
- **Sympathy**        **Support each other**
- **Mercy**             **Forgive each other**
- **Honesty**          **Speak the truth in love**
- **Humility**         **Admit our weakness**
- **Courtesy**         **Respect our differences**
- **Confidentiality** **Refuse to gossip or defame**
- **Frequency**       **Make church a priority**

The truth is, you and I cannot discover or experience the fullness of who we are, and the depth of our life’s meaning or purpose, until we are grafted to other Christians in a church family. Paul reminds us,

***“Each part gets it’s meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we’re talking about is Christ’s body of chosen people”***

**Romans 12:4 The Message**

Too many people live as SPIRITUAL ORPHANS, doing faith-life apart and away from fellow family members. This is not a part of God's heart or vision. And it's not a way we like to think about our earthly families either. That's why the Bible says; **"You belong in God's household with every other Christian" (Eph. 2:19 LB)**. And not just **"on the roles"** but **"in relationship!"** Present, practicing, participating, partnering!

DON'T MISS THE BIG IDEA THAT PAUL IS SHARING IN EPHESIANS 2!

- **Humanity is racially and relationally estranged**
- **The Cross unites the divide & ends hostility**
- **Jesus moves us from strangers to insiders (family)**
- **God is fitting (grafting) us together to be the new home for His Spirit**

To restore love to the human story is heaven great quest and our great calling. No wonder the scripture speaks so loudly and forcefully on this issue:

**"Your *strong love for each other* will prove to the world that you are my disciples"**  
**John 13:35 LB**

**"Let *love be your greatest aim*"**  
**1 Corinthians 14:1 LB**

**"The *only thing that counts* is faith expressing itself *through love*"**  
**Galatians 5:6 NIV**

Believing in God and belonging to Jesus means demonstrating love in the specific context of our "Church Family Responsibilities." Love cannot be lived or learned in isolation of people, and God's purpose of FELLOWSHIP cannot be expressed or experienced outside of the church body. That's why fellowship and church life is so important. It is precisely our mutual,

interdependent relationships that help us experience and grow through God's transforming love. The Bible teaches us to...

**"Show *special love* for God's people"**

**1 Pet. 2:17 CEV**

**"When we have the opportunity to help anyone, we should do it. But we should give *special attention* to those who are in the family of believers"**

**Galatians 6:16 NCV**

Lest we "romanticize" or "idealize" life in the church too much, we need to frankly say that ***the church, your personal family and planet earth are not easy places to live***. Are we all in agreement on that? Nobody is saying that the church is a "strife-free" zone, or that God's family is somehow "insulated" and "exempt" from the relational challenges and trials of life. What we are saying is that ***The church is intended to be God's GRAFTING GREENHOUSE for growth, love, learning, and life transformation...and we are all responsible*** for how our church family works, worships and lives inside and outside of these walls.

That's why the scriptures command us to ***"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace"*** (Ephesians 4:3 NIV). It's easy to use the church, remain on the fringe, avoid it, criticize it, or try to control it. It is an entirely different matter to humbly Love the church (the family - bruised, bungled, botched, and beleaguered as we are) and serve her faithfully.



<https://www.dreamstime.com/royalty-free-stock-photography-concept-harmony-unity-image12062837>

It is everybody's responsibility to in **INITIATE HARMONY & FOSTER UNITY** in this family. Grafting and joining our lives together is not quick or easy work. Rick Warren rightly observes, "When we focus on personalities, preferences, interpretations, styles, opinions or methods, then divisions always happen. But if we **concentrate on loving each other** and fulfilling God's purposes, harmony results." Paul says, "**Let there be real harmony so there won't be divisions in the church. I plead with you to be of one mind, united in thought and purpose**" (1 Corinthians 1:10 NLT).

Who in this family do you need to be **MORE JOINED TO?** Why not call them and get together this week! The future is ours. Let's go to work!