



Why Hangout with Your Family?

"I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it."
(Matthew 18:16b, NLT)

Have you noticed how everyone likes to hang out with friends? That's because God made us that way. When you became a believer, the Holy Spirit immediately placed you into God's family (the church) made up of believers from all nations, tribes and languages, including those who have already died. In addition, God has provided local churches for believers. Today, God's children have divided into groups or denominations, but God looks at the heart. As his child, God expects you to connect with a local church family. The Bible warns, *"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 again is drawing near."* (Hebrews 25:25, NLT) God never created you to live on an island.

The birth of the church

In the Greek language, the word "church" means "called out ones." God formed the church, not man. When Peter expressed his faith in Jesus Christ, Jesus said that he would build his church and that no powers of hell would conquer it! As the founder, Jesus is the head of the church and the members are the body. (Ephesians 5:23) The Bible also calls the body of believers, "The Bride of Christ." (Revelation 21:9)

How did Jesus build his church? It is an exciting story! In one of Jesus' last meetings with his disciples, he told them, *"Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you what he promised ...in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."* (Acts 1:4-5, NLT) Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would give them the power to tell people everywhere about him. Shortly after saying this, Jesus ascended into heaven.

The disciples obediently returned to Jerusalem and met with other believers to pray. Can you remember a time when you were excited about a promised gift? Now imagine how excited the disciples were as they waited for the promised Holy Spirit! Jesus had told them, *"The Holy Spirit lives **with** you now and later will be **in** you."* (Acts 14:17b) For nine days, they prayed and waited. On the tenth day (the Pentecost feast day celebrating the summer harvest), one hundred twenty people met to pray. Thousands of people from many nations were in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost.

Suddenly, without warning, the Holy Spirit came. A sound from heaven like a mighty, roaring windstorm filled the air and their room. Flames or tongues of fire appeared and

settled on each one. As the Holy Spirit filled them, these mostly uneducated fishermen, tradesman and humble women began speaking in the native languages of the lands where the people were born, telling about the mighty miracles of God! To the bewilderment of the Jews present from many nations, they understood what they were saying. Some people thought they were drunk!

Peter, the fearful disciple who earlier had denied he knew Jesus, stood up and calmed the crowd. Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, he explained what was happening. He reviewed the life and death of Jesus, explained how Jesus fulfilled prophecy, and how his resurrection proved he was their Messiah. Three thousand people believed! After the disciples baptized them, they became part of the new church. Imagine training three thousand people!

The training of the church

Just as newborn babies need food and special care, so do newly born spiritual babies. The church is a place to train believers in Christian living. Remember, they only had the Old Testament written on scrolls kept in the Temple or synagogues. The Holy Spirit led the disciples and others to write the New Testament later. How did they train these new “babies”? Read Acts 2:41-47. The training involved –

- Instruction by the apostles (teaching them how to obey God’s commands)
- Sharing regularly in the Lord’s Supper
- Learning to pray
- Listening to preaching
- Witnessing answered prayer by miracles
- Worshiping in the Temple and in homes
- Learning to share generously, meeting needs of those in need
- Participating in fellowship – sharing meals with great joy, praising God and enjoying the goodwill of the people
- Witnessing God’s power as he added to their group those being saved

As these new Christians received training and learned to use their spiritual gifts, they shared the Good News with others. Soon churches in other cities formed – Corinth, Ephesus, Colosse, etc. Amazingly, in a single generation, the Gospel penetrated almost all of the Roman Empire! Persecution never stopped them! They were fulfilling Jesus’ Great Commission to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching the new disciples to obey all the commands Jesus gave them. (Matthew 28:19, 20)

Your new family

Now that you are a believer, God wants you to be part of a local church family. You may have attended church all your life or you may never have been to a church. God wants you to be in a group where you not only learn about him and grow to love him more deeply, but he wants you in a group where you learn to love and care for others. Because of our selfish nature, this is not easy to do! Jesus said, *“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 13:34a, 35, NLT) Imagine a church known by the way the people love each other! However, remember that a church family consists of imperfect people learning to become like Jesus. Therefore, you won’t find a perfect church!

A youth group should be a place where you make friends, worship, study the word, participate in mission opportunities and grow in knowing Jesus and living more like him. If your church does not have a youth group, ask a mature adult Christian to teach you and to help you grow in your Christian life.

Why hang out with your family? You will develop friendships with other believers who will walk with you as you learn and grow. They will be there when you are in need. Is someone you love ill? Your family will pray for them. Do you need a job? Your family will pray for one. Do you have an addiction? Your family will stand by you as you overcome. Did you win a scholarship? Your family will rejoice with you. If you move to another city, there will be a family ready to welcome you. Wow! How wonderful the family of God is! Join one and receive God’s blessings. God wants you in relationships! He wants you to know that you belong. He wants you to be part of reaching others with the Good News.

Attitude Check:

- How eager are you to be part of a church? Is this because you want to worship your Lord and learn more about him?

Explore:

- Read, “What to Look for in a Church?” (Acts 2:42, 44-47), “You Have a Place in the Church” (1 Corinthians 12:12-27) and “Look for and Attend the Right Church” (in front of the *Student New Testament* .). Write in your journal why God wants you to commit to membership in a church.

Talk with God:

- Father, may my love grow stronger and stronger toward my church family.