

Adelina Dominguez died in San Diego. – She was 114

Last week, we looked at God's first purpose – which is to get to know Him and to love Him. The Bible calls this worship because you were planned for God's pleasure.

Today we're going to look at His second purpose for us, which is – we are formed for God's family.

Hebrews 2:10, *"God is the one who made all things, and all things are for His glory. He wanted to have many children to share His glory"*

God wanted a family – That's why we're here. And the Bible says He planned everything in the entire universe so we could be born, so we could share in His glory, so we could be part of His family.

The Bible say's

"His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ."

The entire Bible is the story of God building a family. – That's what it is all about. God is building a family for Himself that is going to last – not just here on earth, but forever into eternity. It is an eternal family. We're made to last forever.

So our first purpose is to know and love God – which is **worship**.

Our second purpose is to love our spiritual family – that's us, we have to learn to love each other – we are members of his everlasting family.

1 Peter 2:17. *"Love your spiritual family."* – This is called **fellowship**

So how do we fellowship?

Tea and coffee after church...

"Fellowship, is **loving God's family**."

1 John 4:21. *"The person who loves God must also love other believers."*

So how do we do that?

Well, Paul wrote this to help us,

"I'm writing so that you'll know how to live in the family of God. That family is the church."

It's not a building, institution, organisation, club – it's a family.

Now fellowship is very important – why? Because without fellowship we can't fulfil the other purposes God has for our lives. We weren't meant to go through life on our own, we need each other.

There are four levels of Fellowship, the first level is Membership.

That is "**Choosing to belong**," that means you find a church family and you choose to get connected to it.

Ephesians 2:19. *"You are members of God's very own family and you belong in God's household with every other Christian."*

When we were born we automatically became a member of our family. We don't automatically become a member of God's family – we have to choose to be a member.

Footballer, Soldier – Platoon...

You can't be a Christian without being part of the church family

A Christian without a church family is an orphan. God meant us to be a part of a family.

This week coming in the Purpose Driven Life book, we're going to be reading together six reasons why we need to be a part of a church family, why it meets our needs and why we meet other people's needs.

Romans 12, verse 5, *"In Christ we who are many form one Body, and each member belongs to all the others."*

Some people never make the decision to belong – they go from one church to another, one week they say I'm part of this church – then the following week they change their minds and they join another church.

Can you imagine planting a flower in the ground – then the following week you dig it up again and plant somewhere else – then a week later you dig it up again and plant it some where else – pretty soon that plant will shrivel and die.

If you want to grow – if you want to see God at work in your life, you've got to join a body and stay rooted.

The Second level of Fellowship goes a little bit deeper, and this is called **Learning to share.**

We were created in God's image. So we were made for relationships. The Bible says, "*It is not good for man to be alone.*" In other words, we were made for each other.

Acts 2:44. "*All the believers met together constantly and shared everything with each other.*" Notice two things: one – you can't develop friendships without meeting together; and two – you can't develop friendships without sharing, and the more frequently we meet together, the closer we're going to get.

Do you know why most people are lonely? They don't make time for friendships. You have to put time in! You have to meet together – You have to get together. And until you start saying this is going to be a priority in my life, you're not going to develop any deep meaningful friends – and deep meaning full friendships are one of life's greatest joys.

They don't just happen – you have to chose to make them happen – by making time and learning to share with each other – you can't develop friendships without sharing. The Bible says, "*they shared everything.*"

Now, those of you who are parents know one of the fundamental lessons children have to learn is learning to share. And in the same way God wants us to learn to share.

So what do we share? – Well!

Experiences. The Bible says people learn from one other "*just as iron sharpens iron.*" The Bible teaches us to learn from one another's experiences because we don't have time to make all the mistakes ourselves – so we have to share our experiences.

Think of the wealth of experience in this room right now which potentially we can all tap into.

Second, the Bible says we're to share our **homes**.

1 Peter 4:9 "*open up your homes to each other.*"

It doesn't say open up your homes if they are really nice – it just says open up your home.

Why does God say we are to share our homes? Well we can only fellowship in a small group – or one to one.

We can't fellowship in large crowds it doesn't work we need more intimate surroundings – One of the reasons we keep saying, join a small group is because that's a Biblical principle – that's where we fellowship best.

Which brings us to the third area of sharing - our **problems**.

We're not meant to face our problems alone. **The Bible says**, "*Share each other's troubles and problems.*"

You know when you share a joy it is doubled – but when you share a problem it's halved.

The Bible says, "*Weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice.*" Sometimes in a small group we die with laughter and sometimes we're sharing each others pain.

You don't have to fix everybody's problems God hasn't asked you to do that. In fact you don't even have to offer advice – God has just asked us to share our problems – this means just listening.

Now, you're never going to go to this second level of fellowship until you get into a small group.

And if you try one group and don't feel comfortable – then try another one – and another until you find one that's right for you.

The third level is Partnership.

Partnership is **doing my part**. Partnership is realizing that I've got a contribution to make; that the family of God needs you.

God did not bring you to CJ's to sit and soak in some spiritual spa. – That's not why you're here. – He brought you here to serve.

God wants to make a difference through your life. – In every family there are family responsibilities. You divide up the things that need to be done – being part of a Christian family is the same – every one of us has a part to play. The Bible says 58 times in the New Testament we are to work with one another in getting this job done.

1 Corinthians 3:9. *"We are partners working together for God."*

Paul once wrote *"we're partners spreading the good news of Christ everywhere."*

In Greek, the language the New Testament was originally written in, the word "fellowship" is often translated "partnership." That's how close these two words are.

We're a team! – have any of you guys ever wondered what it would be like to play for Brazil in the world cup finals? – To be part of a world beating team – well Brazil are pretty good but they do get beaten. – The thing is you are part of a world beating team – a true world beating team, - you're part of the greatest team that ever was - the church. – What we do is going to last forever. We get to be part of God's plan for the universe. That's what it is all about, we're off the sub's bench and onto the field of play when we cooperate and participate together in the family of God.

But in order to be a part of this team – you've got to find where you fit in – find your niche.

The Bible tells us we all have a niche.

Ephesians 4:16 says. *"The whole body is fitted together perfectly."*

This is God's job.

"...As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole Body is healthy and growing and full of love."

We are a part of God's body – and it is working together that we get things done.

Mother Teresa spent her life working with the poorest of the poor in Calcutta. And she was once asked, "How do you handle all the death and disease on a daily basis? How do you do the tough things when it comes to serving?" And

her answer was this – “Every person I bathe, every person I bandage, I imagine seeing the face of Jesus and I do it for Him.” – That’s the attitude that’s behind this. It’s the attitude of **Matthew 25:40**

"Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are the members of my family, you did it to Me."

Now, the deepest level of fellowship in the family of God is what Rick Warren call’s **"Kinship."** – Now kinship is an old term. We don't use it much anymore.

Kinship means your closest family. When somebody has an accident, they say, “Notify the next-of-kin”.

Kinship is treating, and **loving believers like family.**

Acts 2:42. *"They were like family to each other."*

God says *"we're not just like a family; we are a family."*

Romans 12:10 *"Be devoted to each other like a loving family."*

Now, the word for fellowship in the Bible is the Greek word “koinonia.” And this means being as committed to each other as we are to Jesus Christ; that is the deepest level of fellowship.

1 John 3:16. *"We know what real love is because Christ gave up His life for us. And we ought to give up our lives for our Christian brothers and sisters."*

This is the deepest level of fellowship; sacrificing for each other. It’s the kind of love Jesus Christ had for us.

Now, the Bible talks about the fellowship of suffering. But to be honest in Britain we know nothing about this level of fellowship. Christians in Muslim and communist countries experience this level of fellowship all too often – millions of Christians every year lose their lives in these countries just for being believers.

Now, we’re not persecuted like that so it is hard for us to experience this deepest level of fellowship – where we’re actually giving our lives for a brother or sister in the family of God.

But we can do what we’re called to do whenever we’re called to do it – we can stand by our brothers and sisters when they are going through a crisis – to help each other through tough times. To always be there for one another.

This is what life is all about, loving God and learning to love each other. If you miss this, you have missed the purpose of your life.

Life isn't about accomplishments – It is about relationships.

You were put on this earth to know God and love Him, and to know His family and love them, because that's whom we're spending eternity with.

When people are dying they don't ask for their accomplishments to be brought to their bedside – they want what's most important to them – they want their family – we will all discover what life is all about – sadly some people only discover it on their death bed.

And if there is anybody here that has still to discover it – but wants to discover it – then we'll say a prayer for you now - and again if you want more prayer at the end of the service.

Loving God, that's called "Worship," and loving each other, that's called "Fellowship."

Let us pray.

Father, next to salvation, the greatest gift you've given us is the opportunity to be a part of your family. Thank you that we don't have to go through life disconnected or isolated. Thank you for creating CJ's family for us all.

Now if anybody wants to, you can say this after me "Dear God, I want to be a part of your family and I want to learn to love my spiritual family just like you do. Forgive me for not taking this seriously in the past. I want to grow in the levels of fellowship, so today I'm choosing to belong. I'm not going to float around anymore. I want to learn to share and make time to develop real friendships. I want to do my part in the family of God. I want to learn to love other believers like brothers and sisters. Teach me the meaning of real love. In your name I pray, Amen."