



## We Really Do Need Each Other

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I came forward to kneel at an altar on the last verse of the last song on the last night of revival week. When I walked the aisle on that Sunday night in April 1963, I didn't know what I was getting into. I thought I was simply giving my heart to Jesus by confessing my sins and accepting Him as my "personal" Savior.

But a "personal relationship" with Christ is not really *personal*; it rarely begins or thrives in isolation. My decision that night was (in part) the product of the influence and prayers of a church family who loved me, believed in me and wanted me to be a fully devoted follower of Christ.

I suspect the beginning of your spiritual journey was most likely the culmination of similar influences. The "*not knowing what I was getting into*" comment describes (in part) how much the people of God would play an integral role in my life. Due to shared values and priorities, I cannot be a solo Christian, nor participate in any superficial membership. The attachment is far stronger than that. I am vitally connected to Christ followers who have my permission (no! the right) to speak into my life. I belong to others; we are family.

This concept is foreign to those who may seek eternal fire insurance without any intention of making a spiritual family connection. Eddie Gibbs addresses such concerns when he writes: "*Most Western Christians have either a casual or contractual relationship with the church, which falls short of the New Testament norm of a covenantal relationship. **Casual** relationships are both peripheral and shallow. **Contractual** relationships can be broken when the offended party decides to break it off. **Covenantal** relationships, however, are binding and survive the severe stresses of community life. As the surrounding culture becomes less tolerant toward the church and the teaching of Scripture, loosely connected church members become increasingly vulnerable. Ties to the faith community have to be exceptionally strong to survive in a hostile environment. They are also needed in order to keep on intimate terms with the Lord*" (p. 148, The Rebirth of the Church: Applying Paul's Vision for Ministry in Our Post-Christian World, 2013).

Like-minded observers of the North American church describe our present faith challenges as a purifying time for God's people. Cultural Christianity is a diminishing influence. If that is true and only the deeply committed survive, we will not survive alone. But that should never be our goal! We have a destiny to fulfill in God's mission, and that will never be accomplished all by ourselves.

Consider the following:

- How is your commitment to a local body of believers expressed?
- Do you sense that others in the body are supportive of your spiritual journey?
- Is there mutual accountability with someone?
- What's missing in your relationship with the church?
- How are you engaged with Christ and His people "on mission?"

In every way, we really do need each other.

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