

8<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pentecost



14<sup>th</sup> July 2024



## What does it mean to be a member of God's family?

Many of you heard that a few days ago on that dark rainy night, when the roads were slippery, my son Branson came off his bike when turning a corner.

When he called and told me what had happened, you can imagine the pictures that flashed through my mind. He told me he had tried to make it through an orange light, but immediately regretted that decision.

While my mind was still processing all that must have occurred just moments earlier, my first response was to ask, "How are you? Are you hurt?"

As any caring parent, my first concern was to ensure he was OK.

Now was not the time to give him a lecture on the folly of attempting to go through an orange light on a rainy night. Nor was it the time to launch into a debate on the risks of riding a motorcycle.

As he sat in a carpark with his bike beside him, in who-knows-what condition, there were more important things to deal with.

The thing that I found really reassuring, was not only that he was alive and uninjured, but that I was the first one he called.

And I was also the *only* one to whom he confessed his hasty decision to try to beat the red light.

Why did he call me when he felt stranded and alone?

Why did he confess to me his foolish attempt of speeding up instead of slowing down?

... Because we're family. He's my son and I'm his mother. He knows that no matter what he does, or how drastic the ramifications are of his poor decisions, I will never reject him.

... Because we're family, I will also always be there to support him.

We respond this way to our family – whether it be caring for an elderly parent, opening our home to a stranded son or daughter, or sitting beside a dying aunt or uncle – we support each other, ... because we're family.

And it is this same loving and supportive relationship that God describes we are as His family here at Southlakes.

God calls us a spiritual family, to whom we belong and are members – so that no matter what troubles we face, or disastrous decisions we make, we can have confidence knowing that we will not be rejected, nor will we be 'kicked out',

... because we're family.

Today I'd like us to focus on what it means to be a member of God's family.

**Point 1 | As members of God's family, how we relate with each other will differ significantly from those who are spasmodic 'attendees' or 'visitors' to our gatherings.**

Think about the bunch of us here this morning.

There could be any number of reasons why people may have decided to come.

One may be visiting, or just passing through, others may have been invited.

Another may be looking for a church community and are gauging whether we are a good fit.

Or it's possible that someone may have simply walked in, because God's Spirit unexpectedly prompted them to come to church.

It's impossible to list every reason why each person may find themselves here.

However, if I was to ask, 'are you a *member* of this church?' I would expect to hear one of two answers.

You see, when someone considers themselves to be a 'member' of a church family it means something very specific.

Of course, we are all very familiar with the concept of membership.

It's likely every one of us is a member of some kind of club or sports centres.

But membership is actually a biblical concept.

The Apostle Paul wrote,

*"Now you are no longer strangers to God and foreigners to heaven, but you are members of God's very own family ... and you belong in God's household with every other Christian."* (Ephesians 2:19 *The Living Bible*)

If you are a 'member' of a local church family, you are no longer stranded on the side of the road, on a rainy night with no one to call.

If you are a 'member' of a local church family, you are no longer a stranger sitting in a hospital bed without anyone coming to visit you.

If you are a 'member' of a local church family, you'll not be regarded as a foreigner, for you now 'belong' and are 'one-of-us'. Why? Because we are family.

Now, just like with membership to a club or sports centre to become a member we had to pay a membership fee and sign a contract of commitment.

In the same way, membership of Christ's body, has costs and responsibilities. There is even a rite of passage, so to speak.

Thankfully, the membership fee into God's family was so high, only His Son could pay it – and He did with His own life.

Then Jesus calls all members to mark their membership through the symbolic act of baptism.

Paul writes, *"For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—"* (1 Corinthians 12:13)

**Point 2 | Members of God's family make a commitment to each other to support each other through good times and the bad.**

And baptism is not a passive act. The person being baptised needs to make a public confession of faith, before the local congregation of the family of God. [When a child is baptised, it is the parents who make this faith declaration on behalf of their child].

Once you've made this declaration, although you're welcomed into the worldwide family of God, your membership is expressed by committing to a local Christian body.

And because we're family, and call each other brothers and sisters of Christ, we care for each other no matter what. We don't turn around and say to our brother or sister, "I don't need you." Or "you're not wanted here". This was such a big issue, the Apostle Paul had to devote an entire chapter reminding the early Christians on this truth (see 1 Corinthians 12:12-31).

There's an old story that comes to mind,

As you all know, before everyone jumped on a plane, cruise ships were the way people travelled overseas. Well, the story goes that a man won a ticket on a ship travelling to the United States from Europe. It was such a rare and expensive privilege and would take about two to three weeks to complete.

Immediately, he went out and bought a suitcase and filled it full of cheese and crackers. After all he would need to eat, and that's all he could afford.

Once on board, he watched all the other passengers go to the large, ornate dining room to eat their gourmet meals.

However, the poor man sat outside on one of the deck chairs and ate his cheese and crackers alone. This went on day after day. He could smell the delicious food, and he heard the other passengers speak of it in glowing terms as they rubbed their bellies.

He wanted to join, but he had no extra money.

Toward the end of the trip, another man came up to him and said, "Sir, I can't help but notice that you never join us in at mealtimes. Why don't you come and eat with us?"

Flushed with embarrassment, the poor man answered, "Well, to tell you the truth, I received the ticket for this cruise as a gift. I don't have any extra money to purchase fancy meals."

The other passenger gasped in surprise, and said, "Sir, don't you realize the meals are included in the ticket? Your meals have already been paid for!"

As we consider what membership means in Christ's body, I couldn't help but think how many Christians are like this uninformed traveller.

They may have accepted Jesus, and therefore have free access to become a member of His body, but they miss out on the richness of God's blessings, because they fail to commit to a local church family.

If we stretch the illustration a little, the dining room with its many tables is like the many different churches people can choose to join.

Some Christians, like the poor traveller, stay on the outside looking through the glass at the fellowship enjoyed by others. They fail to realise the importance of entering in and dining as a family.

Some even complain that there's no point joining the diners inside, because you never know who you'll have to sit next to at the dinner table! So, they choose to eat their cheese and crackers alone!

Others do go inside the dining hall, but constantly move from one table to the next, or one local church to another, never making a commitment to one specific community of God's people.

But that is not how God designed members of His family to live.

Membership will always require a commitment. Why? Well, if we continue to run with the cruise ship analogy, every table is made up of imperfect people, who have struggles, hurts and wants and dislikes.

### **Point 3 | There are five benefits that come from being a member of a local church.**

And, as we mentioned last week, because every person needs to be loved and accepted, God designed His people to find this love and acceptance in a local community of Christ's body.

So, what are some of the benefits or privileges of being a committed member of a local church?

If we refer to the five purposes of God's church, we'll easily identify the five benefits of being part of Christ's body:

Firstly, it helps us focus on God. When we WORSHIP together, it is easier to resist distractions and focus on what matters most.

Secondly, it helps us face life's problems. The FELLOWSHIP we share means that we don't face life's difficulties alone. We gather to help each other, support each other through seasons of grief and rejoice with each other in times of celebration.

Also, being a member of Christ's local body, will help strengthen and grow our faith. You've heard it said, "it takes a community to grow a child". In the same way, it takes a faith community to grow to maturity in Christ. The journey of DISCIPLESHIP is never designed to be taken alone.

Next, membership of God's local family, will help us to find our place of MINISTRY. We'll more easily recognise the contribution we make, and how we are making a difference in people's lives.

Finally, being a member of a local church body, helps the entire body to fulfil God's MISSION.

May the Southlakes community know we are God's people, not only by our love for God, but through our love for one another and in doing so we will fulfill God's two greatest commandments.

## *Learning about God's purposes for His Church*

<b>During July</b>	<b>Title of message</b>	<b>Theme</b>
Sunday, 14 <sup>th</sup> July	Why it's essential to be a member of God's church family.	MEMBERSHIP
Sunday, 21 <sup>st</sup> July	Why is membership of God's church more than just attending Sunday worship? <b>*hosts meet after church</b>	DISCIPLESHIP
Sunday, 28 <sup>th</sup> July	Why are we called to grow to maturity and how does growth happen? <b>*hosts meet after church</b>	DISCIPLESHIP
<b>During August</b>		
Sunday, 4 <sup>th</sup> August	Why has God called every member to serve His church and the world?	MINISTRY
Sunday, 11 <sup>th</sup> August	How can we start sharing the good news of Jesus with our community?	MISSION
Sunday, 18 <sup>th</sup> August	How can we B.L.E.S.S. our community?	MISSION
Sunday, 25 <sup>th</sup> August	How can we serve our community by making a monthly Sunday worship service more welcoming?	MISSION

## *Can you H.O.S.T. a small group in your home?*

Commencing September, we are hoping to start a whole host of small groups in people's homes. There will be no 'leaders' as such, just group hosts. What do you need to be able to do to be a host?

**Have a heart for people    Open your home**

**Serve tea/coffee    Turn on your T.V.**

If you're interested in being a small group host and want to learn how, there'll be a meeting after church on Sunday, 21<sup>st</sup> July and 28<sup>th</sup> July from 10.45 to 11.15 am.