



THE FAMILY OF GOD

Becoming a part of a
Community of Faith

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Welcome!

I want to congratulate you on becoming a member of Foothills Christian Church! Our goal as a church is coach you in your faith, connect you to God's family and help you to discover your ministry in the world.

I believe that when you become a member of a local community of faith you are pledging yourself to Jesus Christ and what he wants to do through you in this world. It is one of the most significant decisions of your life.

Every great decision we make can either be strengthened or weakened over time. I am writing this book as a letter to you so that you can strengthen the decision you have made. If you lay the proper foundation and follow the principles in this book, then you will experience Jesus in ways you never imagined. Here are just a few things you will see happening in your life:

- Your faith will grow.
- Your sense of purpose and direction in life will become clear.
- Your knowledge of what God is doing in the world and why He is doing it will expand tremendously.
- You will experience a deeper, fuller life.

If you have been a follower of Jesus for any length of time, then I am writing this book to you so you can know how to keep your faith strong and vibrant.

Laying a Foundation

Do you know that the day you became a Christian, you became a part of a family? The Bible tells us that when a person begins a relationship with Jesus Christ, he gives them the gift of family- his family. The Bible calls the family of Jesus Christ "The Church". What is this family like?

If you drive down the street of any town in America, you will see church buildings. There are classic designs, traditional, contemporary and each one has a different name. All of these buildings may give a person the idea that there are many churches. However, Jesus tells us in the Bible that there is only one church. He tells us his church is a spiritual community based on faith in him. Every person who is connected to Jesus Christ through the redemption of His blood is connected to this community of faith. So there are people all across the globe whom you are connected to through a common faith in Jesus Christ.

The community of people Jesus calls the church saw themselves as His body, or presence- in the world. The authors of the letters in the Bible make this clear. For instance, in Romans 12:5 it says, *"so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others"*. The sense you get from these authors of the Bible is that we are not just a social community- but a powerful community of people highly committed to one another in the name of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, as a follower of Jesus Christ, you are connected to every other follower of Christ. There are people in Chili and South America who are connected to you in Jesus Christ. There are people living in the interior of Africa who are directly connected to you through a common faith in Jesus Christ. They may all speak different languages, eat different food, and sing very different songs - but you are connected to them. This is the global church and it can be found in Thailand, South Africa, underground in China - even in Iraq or Afghanistan. Once you understand how you connected to the Body of Christ- the church, then being a part of a local church makes sense. The local church is how you are connected to the global Body of Christ.

One of the differences you will discover at Foothills is that we continually call the church a “community of faith”. The reason for this is simple: our culture has changed the meaning of the word “church”. It has come to be defined as a building, or a place of worship. Almost by accident, the culture has redefined the meaning of the word church to mean exactly the opposite of what Jesus intended. In the original language, the word church comes from “ekklesia”. It means: “one’s called out”. As you can see, Jesus intended, by the very word itself, that the church is meant to be a community of people called to a specific purpose.

When people accept the society’s redefinition of church, it has the potential to shipwreck a person’s relationship with God. Here’s why: when a person believes a church is a place, then to join it is like joining a gym. I go to the gym to work out, I go to the church to be spiritual. In other words, if I need something spiritual- I go to that place to get it. This is not community, this is consumerism. Consumerism is the opposite of spirituality. It begins with- what do I want? Community begins with- who is my family? As you can see, this is a different beginning point, and it makes all the difference.

Community is a sense that the people you are connected to need you as much as you need them. The church is not a place where you go to pick up your weekly supply of spirituality, it is the place where you live out community- seven days a week. If consumerism takes root in a person’s heart, it allows them to believe they are “connected” to the Body of Christ without actively participating in the Body of Christ. They look at it like, there’s the church and if I need it, I go. This attitude has the potential to shipwreck your faith. Faith in Jesus Christ is about who you are, not what you do. If you begin with a false notion of faith, then that faith often will not grow and strengthen. The Bible teaches that the way we know we are connected to this global Body of Christ is through our active participation in a local Body of Christ.

Now you understand why we say we are a community of faith- a church. Let’s explore the importance of this local community of faith regarding your own spiritual journey with Jesus Christ.

Your faith depends on your local community

I hope that you are beginning to see the importance of a local community of faith in growing your relationship with Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches there is a specific link between your connection to a local church and the health of your relationship with Jesus. Did you know that Jesus said the two most important things you will ever do in life is love God and love one another? These two simple principles are the essence of faith. They are found in Matthew 22.

37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

38 This is the first and greatest commandment.

39 And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

As you can plainly see, they are both linked together. As a matter of fact, the Apostle John, in 1 John 4 has a wonderful way of connecting the two principles:

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. .

11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

When you are a part of a local church, you are given the opportunity to love your brothers and sisters in Christ. This is how you experience God. This is how you know that Jesus lives in you and through you. If there is no community where you can actively love your brothers and sisters in Christ, then there is no growth in your faith.

You Will Grow Strong

When you are connected to a local church Jesus actively grows your faith. The Bible teaches that you are not growing your faith, Jesus is the one growing your faith. This is an important distinction. If love comes from God, and you are loving others, then you become an active pipeline for Jesus. Your faith will grow, you will experience new things, and you will know God.

If you are trying to grow your faith yourself, then you are simply filling yourself with knowledge. The end result is that you are not more connected to Christ, just more knowledgeable. Remember what Jesus said in John 15.

5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers."

Jesus is directly telling you how your faith should grow - by being connected to Him and remaining in Him. Two important ways in which a person remains in Jesus Christ.

- He says, "If you follow My teaching, you will remain in me." John 15:10
- "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34)

As you can see, our faith grows strong when we remain in Jesus. We "remain" in Jesus by loving one another and following His teaching. People who are actively loving one another and following His commands in their local community of faith grow strong in their faith.

You Will Live Better

Did you know that research shows that people who are connected to a local church live longer, happier, and healthier lives? Proving once again the wisdom of God and how we were meant to be connected in Jesus Christ. It reminds me of the verse in the Bible that quotes Jesus,

*"The thief comes only to steal and destroy.
I have come that you may have life,
and have it to the full." John 10:10*

Even though we have an eternity in heaven to look forward to, Jesus came in order that we may have a more full life here on earth.

When you are a part of a local community of faith - or church - then you will live a healthier life. Why is this? Does God give you a spiritual anti-aging drug when you join a church? Absolutely not. You live longer because when you are connected to people you have more to live for, have less stress in life, and experience greater joy.

You also live a healthier lifestyle because you are around people who want to grow and be challenged. The body of Christ is a place that is constantly growing and you become a part of that growth. Finally, you live a healthier life because your life has a deeper meaning and sense of purpose.

You Will Live Stronger

Every life is filled with challenges. It is the strength of one's heart that make it possible to overcome them. Where does the strength of heart come from when you are a Christian? The Bible says,

*19 This is how we know that we belong to the truth and
how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: 20 If our
hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our
hearts, and he knows everything."
1 John 4:19-20*

Our strength comes not from us, but from God. So how does this strength of heart come into our lives? Notice the verses right before the ones above:

16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.
1 John 4:16-18

As we actively love our brothers and sisters in Christ, our hearts are strengthened by God.

You Will Live More Active

When you are a part of a church, there is no end to what can be done or accomplished. You will be challenged to serve, to work, to love, to give, to make a difference.

One of the goals in our church is to see every person discover their God-given ministry. This is based on your spiritual gifts, your passion in life, the talents God has given you and the century in which you live. The ministry God has for you is called your "life purpose". I believe every person has a purpose in life and I want them to discover what it is and start doing it. When you start living out your purpose in life you will no longer wonder how to fill up the time each day but you will pray for more time because your life is filled with so much joy.

You Will Live Deeper

Everyone desires deeper roots, deeper connections, but so few actually ever experience them. Why is this? I believe it is mostly due to the mobility of our society. We constantly move and move on. If there is someone in our office we don't like, we get another job. If there is a neighbor who is a bother, we move to a new neighborhood.

When you are an active member of a local community of faith, you will be challenged with people who rub you the wrong way. This is an opportunity to develop maturity in your own life. The more mature you become, the deeper your life will be.

Conclusion

These are just a few of the benefits that occur in your life when you actively participate in a community of faith. There are too many to list here. The most important thing to remember is that God created you to be connected- first to Him and second to His family. If you are not connected, then you are living life out of sorts. Therefore, the benefits you experience on a personal level when you join a local community of faith are overwhelming. Your life will never be the same.

What Kind of Church Is This?

You may not realize this, but the global church has been around for over 2,000 years. Over that period of time nations and empires have come and gone. Kingdoms have been built and fallen into decay. Nations and rulers seeking to stamp out the church have failed and dictators seeking to control it all pass away. The church has a tremendous resiliency to it.

As the centuries came and went, various local churches have chosen to emphasize different things in the way they worshiped, or served their community. These differences became woven into the fabric of life for these followers and has resulted in different denominations, or groups, of churches. Instead of seeing these differences as a blessing, many began to see them as a threat. The result was a divided global church where people were not unified by a common faith in Jesus Christ, but divided over how a person must worship Him.

When one of the first groups of settlers came to the Americas it was a wild and fierce land. What would cause these pilgrims to brave an ocean crossing, severe weather, constant sickness, and almost certain death? The promise was the chance to worship in a manner that would not get them thrown into prison. Too many followers of Jesus Christ have been hurt by the divisions within the global church.

Foothills Christian Church is a part of a movement that seeks to emphasize the unity of the church. One of our core values is that we should look at the church as Jesus looks at the church - one body.

When a church seeks to see the church in the same manner that Jesus views His church, what does it look like? How is it different than other local churches?

First, we seek to be non-denominational. Our goal is to be known only as Christians - or followers of Jesus Christ. We do not believe we are the only Christians in the world and we do not seek to be known under a denominational label. We are completely independent. We have a charter with the State of Idaho and have been recognized by the Federal Government as a Independent Religious Body (501 3c) since 1925, so we have been around awhile.

The main point in being non-denominational is that we are seeking unity with all other followers of Jesus. Basically, we try to come together instead of divide. This requires greater tolerance, greater forgiveness, greater service, greater humility, greater love. These are the goals we are working towards.

Second, we seek to be as much like the first century church in the New Testament as possible. We aren't trying to wear togas, or play lyres, but we want to have the same attitude and devotion those first century followers exemplified. When you read the book of Acts (the New Testament book on the history of the first 30 years of the church) you see that it was very dynamic, open, vibrant, and willing to change. They were completely devoted to following Jesus. Our goal is to be like that early church. We constantly ask ourselves what would Jesus want us to be doing? How can we focus our efforts and ministry in a way that honors Him the most and builds His kingdom? Our hope is that, when we set our minds on these things, we will experience the same vibrancy the early church experienced.

Third, we seek to teach only the Bible and remain faithful to its meaning and message. A phrase often used is "If the Bible speaks, we speak. If the Bible is silent, we are silent". The Bible is very important in everything we do and every decision we make. If our goal is to do what Jesus wants us to do, then the next question is "how do we know what He wants us to do?" We know because the Bible tells us what He wants. It also tells us what He said, how He said it, and who He said it to. By studying the Bible we discover more about Jesus and what He is calling us to do in this world. Therefore, our goal is to remain faithful to the Bible.

Finally, we ask for unity in the essentials of the faith as revealed in the Bible and freedom in all other matters. In other words, if you have a differing opinion on a spiritual matter that is not essential to the faith, that's fine with us. We don't believe that how you dress, or the songs you like to sing to God, or the manner in which you sing them should be matters that divide us. The leadership of the church regularly discuss how to keep the essential matters of the faith front and center and then allow freedom in areas of opinion. As long as it is not an essential matter of faith in Jesus Christ, then we should be able to be unified with one another even though we have differing opinions on some things.

There you have it. If you are a member of Foothills Christian Church, then you have pledged yourself to pursue these things with other followers of Jesus. As you can see, there are not a lot of rules and regulations, dress codes, hidden secrets, creeds, and positions you must adopt. You simply need to want to follow Jesus, come to Him in faith, and seek to be like those early Christians.

What Does This Church Do?

It may sound simple, but what we do is love Jesus and love people. The Bible calls this making disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). Here are some specific actions we take in order to do it:

We preach the Gospel. Our goal is to take the message of Jesus Christ and give it to all who will hear it. We don't charge money for it, we don't peddle it, we don't trick people into listening to it. The Bible quotes the Apostle Paul as saying, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God that brings salvation to all who believe..." (Romans 1:16). We are not ashamed of the message of Jesus Christ crucified and raised from the dead.

Our goal on Sunday mornings is to preach the gospel. Preaching the gospel is different than teaching the Bible. Today, many churches spend their time teaching the Bible. While this is laudable goal, it over looks the Biblical mandate to preach the gospel. In the original language, the word preach comes from a Greek word, *euangelion*. It simply means to proclaim the message of Christ. Therefore, our goal is to preach the message of Jesus Christ into the lives of people living in the world today.

We teach the Bible. The Bible says, *"The scriptures are inspired by God and profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness."* (2 Timothy 3:16). We focus on teaching the 66 books of the Bible. Our primary place of teaching the Bible is found in our community groups. Groups often focus their studies on Biblical principles, Biblical topics, or specific books in the Bible. There are study guides, discussion guides and study aids available in these groups for going deeper.

We build community. We are constantly developing community groups for people to join. We seek to start new community groups every time we start a new series of Bible studies on a Sunday morning. One of the most significant ways a person grows strong in their faith is in a community group. However, finding and connecting with a community group takes time and much effort. Therefore, we work to make it as smooth as possible. And remember, even though it does take time and effort, it will be the most productive effort you ever put forth.

We worship. Our goal is to experience the living Jesus Christ in a real way. We are not simply going through the motions or trying to manufacture something in order to feel good. We intentionally focus on experiencing Jesus in a real way in the midst of our worship services. This is one reason why we change the order regularly while observing the Lord's Supper every week.

We Give. We give as much as God gives us. We give opportunity to our young people to be seen as leaders, we give our children a top notch children's ministry experience, we give our teens the chance to experience missions work by helping pay for them to go, we give food and clothing to people in our community. Our goal is to give, give, give.

We seek to make a difference in our world. We believe that the church is called to come together and be a force for change in the world. When we saw a need for food in our part of town, we started a food pantry. When we saw a need for young people to play athletics, we opened our gym to the community. When we saw a need for developing parenting skills, we started a Love and Logic course. When we saw people struggling with money, we started Financial Peace University.

When we heard of the need for schools in India, we started supporting a school there. When we saw the need in Haiti, we began supporting a missionary there. The list goes on and on. Suffice it to say - our goal is to make a difference in the world today, right now.

What Should I Do Next?

1) Connect to a smaller community within the church. The first goal we would have for you to focus on would be to connect to a smaller community of people. We want you to develop friendships with other people walking the same path as you. You can do this in two basic ways.

Join a community group. Take time to find one that is a good fit for you and your family. Often people visit 3 to 4 different groups while trying to find the one that best fits them and their schedule. You can get a list of groups from Foothills Central, the info booth in the atrium, or check out the brochure on Community Groups.

Find a place to serve. Often, the best way to get to know people and connect is to serve alongside them. Look for an opportunity and then jump in.

2) Attend each of our Spiritual Growth Classes. 201 Spiritual Habits Class: Understand and practice the habits that Jesus wanted every follower to do. Reading the Bible, memorizing God's word, meditating on it, having a daily time with God, communicating with God through prayer, Tithing, being in community, and taking care of your families spiritual needs.

Seek to discover the ministry, or purpose, Jesus has for you. You can begin doing this by simply taking a class we call 301 SHAPE. It stands for:

Spiritual Gifts

Heart

Abilities

Personality

Experience

When you go through this class, it helps you begin to discover your unique shape and Jesus moves through your SHAPE to do ministry. It is a great place to start.

Learn how to give away your faith to friends, family, and the people you come in contact with. The 401 Sharing Your Faith Class, helps you identify where people are on their spiritual journey towards Christ and helps you know how to respond appropriately in each situation.

3) Give. One mistake people make when they become a member of a local church is they do not invest themselves through giving. The result is that they never feel connected and they become frustrated because their faith is not growing. The reason for this is twofold. First, Jesus said, *"wherever your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* (Matthew 6: 21). So when a person does not give, even though they may want to be a part of the community, will never feel like they are a part of it because their heart is somewhere else. Secondly, Jesus specifically states that you cannot grow deep in the faith until you learn how to master your money. He said it like this, *"No one can serve two masters, they will either love one and hate the other or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."* (Matthew 6:24). In order to follow Jesus, you must learn to master your money. Why? So that your money is never able to master you.

The way a person connects to a church and gains mastery over their money is through the act of regular giving. When you give to your church on a regular basis, you are giving to Jesus and His kingdom. It is a powerful spiritual principle.

There are many ways to give to your local community of faith. In today's world many people are doing more than just giving a weekly check. They are choosing to have funds automatically withdrawn from their checking account - it is easy to set up and can be cancelled at anytime. Or some use online banking and set up a recurring reminder in their billpay section.

Whatever method you choose to give, the most important thing to remember is that it be regular. The reason for this is because money is so powerful. It has the potential to rise up and master us at any moment. Regular giving is the only way to keep you master over your money.

One day, one of my children and I were discussing how to deal with friends. As we were wrapping up our conversation I said, "It is important keep these things in perspective. You see, some friends stay, some friends going the end it is only your family that stays with you forever."

Jesus Christ has the same goal for you. He wants you to have a family that stays with you forever. Your local church is your beginning point. The place where you start experiencing all that Jesus desires to do in you and through you.

So we welcome you to this community. We challenge you to connect and experience all that Jesus wants to do in you and through you. Pray for this community, be close to this community, invest time, service and finances in this community. As you do, you will discover the work of Jesus Christ in your life.

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