

# Care to Join

## Our Corner of God's Kingdom

February 26, 2023



**Today we're talking about membership and like-mindedness.** Last week I asked: **Are you an outsider or an insider?** This week the question is: **Are you a fit for this church?** Have you noticed *how many* folks we've been *welcoming aboard* the ol' "membership"? Questions like, **"How do I join?"** and **"Why should I?"** have been coming up a lot; so let's talk about **sinking our roots into this corner of God's kingdom.**

Know where we *are*? My *old backyard*. Literally. I was *two* when we moved into our tiny house ... in a *wrecking yard* on the corner of Pease road. **Our little house is now the Youth House.** But when I was in my *teens*, I couldn't *wait* to get off this *corner*, and out into the "*real world*" ... till I tried it. It turns out, Hollywood and Vine wasn't my kind'a *corner*. You see, we tore down the old building back in 1976 to build a state-of-the-art auto wrecking and recycling facility (**that's Pops in the middle of the showroom counter; in what is now the Mother's Room**). Then he built what would *become* the Ark, to restore and display *classic cars*. Then he won a *national award*! But *then* he found the Lord. Then he sold the *cars*. Then we turned the *wrecking yard* into a *church*. And then we built the Ark. And *here* we are. And *now* I wouldn't trade this *corner* for any other *corner* in the world.

Some wonder what the *big deal* is, about *joining*. **Aren't all believers members in Christ?** Yes. But look how *Paul* identifies two distinct types of Christian membership:

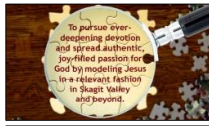
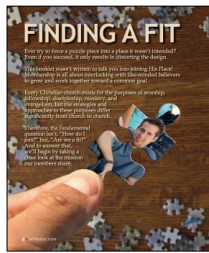
We, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. – Romans 12:5 NAS

[And as "one body"] [You are] fellow *citizens* with [all] God's *people* and members of God's [huge] household – Ephesians 2:19-20 NIV

[And so, as "members one of another"] Let us not give up *meeting together*, as *some* are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – Hebrews 10:24-25 NIV

Membership isn't about adding *numbers* to a *register*, it's about **linking up with like-minded believers**. Which *first* requires *identifying* whether or not God is *calling* you to *join forces* with the *like-minded believers* on *this corner* of His kingdom.

Ever try *forcing* a *puzzle piece* into a place it didn't *belong*? Even if you *succeed*, it only *results* in *distorting* the *design*. And *that's* not good for *any body*. Pretty much *all* Christian churches offer some form of **worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and evangelism**; but **the approaches differ significantly individually**. And believers *must connect* with *kindred Christians* in order to *grow* toward a *common goal*. So the fundamental question isn't, **"How do I join?"** but, **"Are we a fit?"** ... and **"Why would I?"**



Because **a unified church is a healthy church**, with a strong sense of *direction*. **It's not about conformity; it's about unity**. So let's *focus* for a moment on *our* God-given *mission*, which is: "To pursue ever-deepening devotion and spread authentic, joy-filled passion for God by modeling Jesus in a relevant fashion in Skagit Valley and beyond." That's from our *membership manual*.

And we chose words like "pursue" and "ever-deepening" because **devotion isn't a destination**, it's a day-to-day *marathon* that **requires support from those we're connected with and accountable to** – who treasure *transparency*, and *authenticity*; as *opposed* to a church where *masks* are demanded, and *sin* stays hidden in the dark. Cuz you know what grows in the dark? *Fungus* and *moss*.

**[But]** The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. – Galatians 5:22-23 NIV

*Them's our marching orders!* Paul labels these *proofs* of God's *presence* and *power*, "fruit" because they *naturally* grow in hearts that *sink* their *roots* down deep into God's love and grace and Word. **Christ's body must reject an artificial heart**. Because few things are more *repelling* than *plastic personalities*; and few things are more *compelling* than *authentic, joy-filled passion* of those who are *humble* and *honest* about *themselves* while being *transformed*.

This farmer tells a veterinarian, "My horse walks normal *sometimes*; but *mostly* limps. What should I do?" The vet says, "Next time it walks *normal*, *sell* it!" Let's *don't* do *that* with *Jesus*: when I'm stumbling around, I don't really talk about Him; and when I'm *walking well* – I try to *sell* Him!

But God *chose* the *foolish* things of the world to shame the *wise*; **[and]** God *chose* the *weak* things of the world to shame the *strong*. – 1 Corinthians 1:27 NIV

Our *weakness* can be a great *witness*, *IF* it's coupled with *humility*, *transparency*, and *authenticity*. **The better the singer, the less we relate ... till they make a mistake**. I tell our singers those are *golden moments*! Cuz **that's when we relate to the person rather than persona**. In the same way, **our foolish mistakes and weaknesses allow others to watch God work**. The Lord said to *Paul*:

"My power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore **[Paul said]** I will *boast* all the more *gladly* about my *weaknesses*, **[and my Lord]** so that *Christ's* power may *rest* on me. ... For when I am weak, then I am [made] strong. – 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NIV

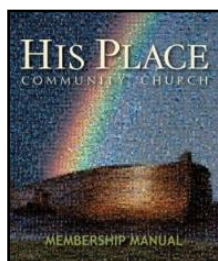
Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love ... make my joy complete by being like-minded ... being one in Spirit *and* of one mind. ... In humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. – Philippians 2:1-4 NIV

Many ask about the *benefits* of *membership*. But, **the primary reason isn't to gain a personal advantage, it's to give a personal advantage**. Cuz we're not joining a *club*. **We're reinforcing and supporting one another**. *Your fruit are my benefits*. And *my fruit are yours*.

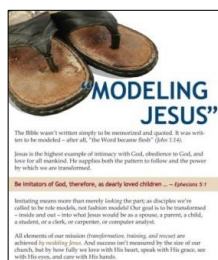
Did you notice **“joy” is second on Paul’s list of proofs, right after love?** By definition, the *Gospel* is *Good News!* And people who possess *good news* share it *joyfully* with *enthusiasm* without *effort*.

[And *that’s why*] The joy of the Lord is your *strength*. – Nehemiah 8:10 NKJ

[And *therefore*] Strength and gladness are in His place. – 1 Chronicles 16:27 NKJ



Our *membership manual* gives us the *words* to help us *express* what we *experience* here. Check it out at [HisPlaceMembership.com](http://HisPlaceMembership.com). And whether someone reads it and says, “Wow! I want to be a part of *that!*” or, “Wow! I *do NOT* want to be a part of *that!*” it’s done its *job* – it’s a *success*. Cuz it’s meant to help us *recognize* and *realize* the specific things the Lord is doing on this corner. So that **we can appreciate what He’s doing**; cuz He’s *in our corner*. And so that **we can articulate what we’re doing** (whenever we’re *cornered*).



And *if we’re going* to spread *authentic joy-filled passion*, our approach can’t be *unnatural* or *contrived*. **It must be anchored in authenticity and flowing with genuine joy**. Scripture wasn’t written simply to be *memorized* and *quoted*, but mostly to be *modeled* – and *not* on the *surface*, like a *fashion* model, but **put into action and lived out in the real world as a role model**. With Jesus as the Super-natural-model of *intimacy with God*, and *obedience to God*, and *love for all God’s children* (lost and found).

He is the image of the invisible God, the *firstborn* over all creation. – Colossians 1:15 NKJ

Therefore be *imitators* of God as dear children. – Ephesians 5:1 NKJ

For in Christ Jesus you *are all children* of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized *into Christ* have *clothed yourselves with Christ*. – Galatians 3:26-27 NRS



Because **being imitators doesn’t mean being imitations**. Think of a *young boy* imitating his *dad*. It means **becoming the real thing by emulation**, which means *far more* than merely *looking the part*. We’re here to be *transformed, inside and out*, into what *Jesus would be* if *He were me*, as a *spouse, parent, kid, student, carpenter, candy maker, or canoe inspector!* And **the success of mental-transforming, spiritual-training and role-modeling, isn’t measured by the size of a church**, but by how *sincerely* and *completely* **we see with His eyes, serve with His hands, love with His heart, and speak with His grace**. That’s what we’re *striving together* to *become*. That’s the *goal*. Not *hiding* from the *world* in a *spiritual sub-culture* of our own *fashioning*, but *engaging* our *secular culture* in a *relevant fashion*. Cuz we’re called to *build bridges*, not *barriers*. So **we make every effort to stay contemporary without compromising truth**. This church has been on this *corner* for 40 years this *April*. And I’ve been on this corner for 59!

And I’ve witnessed many *transitions* and *transformations*. In the *people*, the *approach*, and the *place itself*. Because, **substance should never be hindered by style**.





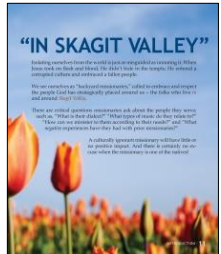
Here's an *embarrassing* photo. I'm spray-painting parts in the center aisle, about three rows from the back; 46 years ago. *This* is why cultural *relevance* is so *fundamental*! My *substance* would be *greatly hindered* by that *hair style*! Jesus chose *teenage* apprentices because **He needed those willing to engage a corrupt culture and embrace a fallen people.** And He said:



"Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in [My] name to *all* nations, *beginning from Jerusalem.*" [Which was *their* backyard] – Luke 24:47 ESV



[And He said] "You *will* be My witnesses in *Jerusalem* and in all *Judea* and *Samaria*, and to the *end of the earth.*" [Which is *our* backyard] – Acts 1:8 ESV



**For believers, isolating from the world is just as misguided as imitating it;** because we're called to *embrace* the people placed around *us*, in and around Skagit Valley. We tend to think of the *mission field* as anywhere *outside* our own *zip code*, but that's *actually* the *exception* to the *rule*. **Our mission field begins in our own home.** And as *any* *foreign* missionary will tell you: **the best missionary is always one of the natives.** That's *us*. Backyard missionaries.



[So] "Open your eyes and look at the fields! [Jesus *urged* and *encouraged* His shortsighted disciples] They are *ripe* for harvest." – John 4:35 NIV



We're called to the *mission field* that *surrounds* us. **So open your eyes and recognize your significance on this corner of God's kingdom.** Which just happens to *literally* be my *old backyard*.

Point is, **your mission field begins wherever genuine relationships grow,** providing a *natural setting* to share your *life* and *love* and *faith*. So *open* your eyes! **A Christian who doesn't care if others come to Christ is a contradiction.** They're either **complacent, compassionless, counterfeit,** or **cowardly.** So *this* is one of *things* we *link up* to *encourage* one another to *do*! Because *this* is the *character* of the church on this *corner* of God's kingdom. And you're *corner* is the *center* of your *preordained* mission field. So, as we read last Sunday:

We urge you, *brothers* and *sisters*, to [love each other] more and more, *and* to make it your *ambition* to lead a quiet life: [i.e.] You should mind your own business ... *so that* your daily life may *win* the *respect* of *outsiders* – 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 NIV

But *in* your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. [And] *Always* be *prepared* to give an answer to everyone who asks *you* to give the *reason* for the *hope* that *you* have. – 1 Peter 3:15 NIV

Scripture places *such* significance on our *normal ordinary*. But do *you*? *Some* missionaries are *called* to *go*. But, **if you weren't called to go,** [I guarantee] **you were called to stay.** So let's *stay put*, and *put down* our *roots*. And stand *together* to show those *around* us, the One who lives *in* us. Right *here* in our own *backyard*. Because **joining a church isn't about compensation or convenience; it's about a conviction to advance a Kingdom.** And there're *countless* ways. So the question *isn't*: "Should I *join* a church." That's a "Yes!" The question is: **"Am I a fit for the church on this corner?"**