

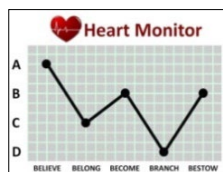


Vital Signs

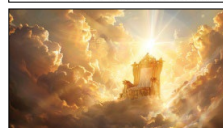
Created to Bond and Belong

April 6, 2025

Last Sunday we examined what it means to truly believe (in the Lord); and today we'll explore what it means to truly belong (in the church).



So, first off: **Are you part of the big picture here?** Or *anywhere* (for that matter)? In our *Spiritual Physical*, we took a look at what *actions* we need to take down here, to properly prepare to stand alone before Christ's throne, up there, to give an account in regard to five opportunities we've been given.



For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ ... for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. – 2 Corinthians 5:10 NIV



And the *first question* will be something to the effect of: **Did you truly believe in Me and thus love Me above all else?** And the *second* will be something like: **Did you truly belong to Me and thus bond with My children?** And *that's* because *life* is all about love! And the *reason* I put these two first is because when asked what tops His list, Jesus said:



"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself." – Matthew 22:37-39 NIV



Thankfully, when our time comes before the seat of our Savior, **it won't be about perfection, but practice and participation!** But, as you can clearly see, our first and foremost created purpose priority is **to learn to love the Lord.** And a close second (just like it) is **to learn to love people.** Guess which is easier! But, why is "the second ... like [the first]"? Well, because:



The entire law [including loving the Lord with all you've got] is summed up in a single command: [to] "Love your neighbor as yourself." – Galatians 5:14 NIV



Know why? Cuz ain't no way you'll truly attempt – let alone succeed – to truly love others, unless and until you're truly sold out on loving the Lord.



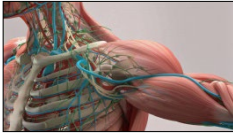
If I gave you a couple Q-tips and some clay, and gave you 30 seconds to build a little church, what would you design? Go ahead and make one in your mind. Got it? Now, did you imagine something like this little structure? Or this little servant? Cuz, **the church is a body, not a building.** And if yours looked like Jesus, you're a bit of an overachiever. But **together we form the body of Christ.** That's what our Jesus mosaic is all about. That's why the plaque calls it the Big Picture. So, **are you part of the big picture on this little corner of God's kingdom?**



Because, members of His family *belong to each other the same way the members of your body (like your nose and ears and arms and legs) are connected and reliant and subject to one another.*



Just as *each* of us has *one* body with *many* members, and *these* members do not *all* have the *same* function, so in Christ *we* who are *many* form *one* body, and *each* member *belongs* to *all* the *others*. – Romans 12:4-5 NIV



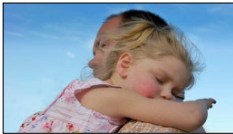
That's what it *means* to *join* and *belong*. So exactly **who do you belong to?** *Where* are you *investing* your talents? **Who's faith do you encourage and strengthen?** Whose *secrets* do you know? And *who* knows yours? And **who will call you when disaster strikes?** Or a loved one *dies*? Or temptation comes *calling*? Most believers know John 3:16 by heart:



"For God so loved the world that He gave His *one* and *only* Son" – John 3:16 NIV



But, how *many* are *that* familiar with *First* John 3:16?



This is *how* we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His **[one and only mortal] life** for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our *brothers* and *sisters*. – 1 John 3:16 NIV



Because we are *created* and *called*, to *not* just *believe*, but to *belong to*, and *bond with*, those for *whom* He laid down His *life*. Because:



His *unchanging plan* has *always* been to *adopt* us into His *own family* – Ephesians 1:5 NLT



This is such a *vital aspect* of our *created purpose*. Because, **we weren't just created, we were formed and fashioned for His family.** Throughout *Scripture*, our *Father* is *knitting* His people *together*, to *build* a *family* who'll *love* and *honor*, *Him* and *each other*, and *live together forever*.

[You] like *living stones*, are being *built into* a *spiritual house* – 1 Peter 2:5 NIV

[Hold that thought, because] [You are] *members* of the *household* of God, *built on* the *foundation* of the apostles and prophets, **[with]** Christ Jesus *himself* being the *Cornerstone*, in *whom* the *whole structure*, *being joined together*, *grows into* a *holy temple* in the Lord. **[And] In Him you also [on this little corner of the Cornerstone's eternal kingdom] are being built together** into a *dwelling place* for God by the *Spirit*. – Ephesians 2:19-22 ESV

Or do you *not* know that your **[church]** *body* is the *temple* of the *Holy Spirit* who is *in* you ... and you are *not* your own? – 1 Corinthians 6:19 NKJ

When we're *born*, we can't *grow* and *develop* without the *support* and *care* of a *nurturing family*. **Same goes when we're reborn.** We gotta have *rock-solid relationships*. Cuz you're no angel. But:

[Christ] makes the *whole body fit together perfectly*. **[But only]** As *each [imperfect] part* *does its own special work*, **[because that's the only way]** it *helps* the *other parts* *grow*, so *that* the *whole body* is *healthy* and *growing* and *full of love*. - Ephesians 4:16 NLT



You see, **our walk with God is personal, but not private.** Because **our Father comes with a family.** And just as an arm can't fulfill "its own special work" if it's dismembered, *neither can we.* Let me give you a nauseating, horrifying, perfect example! Back in 1997, a mass tug-of-war took place in Taipei. Over 800 men on opposing ends of a 2" nylon rope capable of withstanding 57,000 pounds of force. Turns out, 1,600 men produce three times that. And two wrapped the rope around their arms for leverage. And the rope snapped. And the recoil instantly severed their arms. It's a very gruesome news photo; but it makes an incredible, Biblical point. So if you're squeamish, look away. Cuz here it is. Okay. That's enough. So: **Why is this so disturbing?** Cuz it's so wrong! Because, **limbs aren't supposed to ever be disconnected from a body!** The limb quickly dies and withers away. And **the body is left crippled.** This is how upsetting it must be to Jesus – and should be to us – whenever we see a believer detached from His body. Because, He fervently warns and implores all of His limbs, to:

"Remain in Me, as I also remain in you. ... [Because] I am the Vine; [and] you are the branches. ... [So] If you do not remain in Me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers ... Now remain in My love ... so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ... Love each other as I have loved you. [Cuz that's how you "Remain in Me, as I remain in you"] ... This is My command: Love each other." – John 15:4-17 NIV

[So] Woe to him who strives with Him who formed him ... Does the clay say to him who forms it, "What are you making?" ... [Well] "Will you command Me [or submit to My command] concerning My children and the work of My hands?" – Isaiah 45:9-11 ESV

[Well then] Do not neglect to attend your assemblies, as some do, but rather encourage one another, especially since you can see the Day approaching. – Hebrews 10:25 NCB

I made a comment to a fellow follower, last week, about getting older, and she said, **"We're not getting older, we're getting nearer."** And I said, "I'm totally stealing that for Sunday!" Remember:

[Every] commandment there may be, [is] summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ... The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. [And time goes fast] The night is nearly over; [down here; and] the day is almost here. [When you'll wake up, up there] So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. – Romans 13:9-12 NIV

[Because] "Your love for one another [not a building or a doctrine or a denomination] will prove to the world [down here] that you are My disciples." – John 13:35 NLT

Because people are hard to love. But, **limbs need a body and a body needs limbs.** So don't buy the enemy's lie that you don't need to commit to any corner of the Cornerstone's kingdom. You may feel more virtuous when no one's close enough to frustrate you; but **that's just a virtual virtuousness!** Which is why Christ commands us to have close fellowship with irritating, frustrating, imperfect people, like ourselves, to develop the discipline of loving them as He loves us. So:

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. *[Like our Ministry Fair; and] Let us not give up meeting together* – Hebrews 10:24-25 NIV

It's so easy to fool ourselves into thinking we're spiritually mature when, in reality, there's just no one challenging us or spurring us on. Which is why **we're called to love real people not ideal people**. The devil must delight in withering, dismembered limbs, detached from Christ's command.



What do the dying want to be surrounded by in their final moments? Money? Trophies? Books? You know the answer. **Family. Friends. And loved ones.** In our final minutes, we're finally ready to receive our final lesson before we go before the throne: **the realization that life was all about relationships.** Well, I say: **Why wait till it's too late?** Let's calculate how we're spending our pre-deathbed minutes! Ideally, but realistically, how many minutes a day would you like to be able to say that you're spending on **praying**, and **praising**, and **hearing God's Word**, and **giving and getting spiritual support**, and **sharing meaningful moments** with family and friends, and **serving or helping others** in the name of Christ? How many minutes per day? Come up with a number. And remember, there're 60 minutes in an hour.

Each day, we're given 1,440 minutes of life to spend however we like. So, how are you actually spending 'em? If we deduct 8 hours for **sleep**, and another 8 for housework, schoolwork, yardwork, and/or vocational **work**, we're left with **480**. But if we deduct an hour for **bathroom time** (personal care), an hour for **eating**, and an hour for **driving** and running errands, **only 300 remain**. Watch **one movie** and it drops to **180**. Minutes. And that gets divided between **sports** (playing and/or watching) and **hobbies** and **TV** and **gaming** and **reading** and **recreation** and **exercising** and **shopping** and **phone time**. So just do the math and **ask yourself if you're spending your time wisely**. Because, **we will have to answer for how we fill our time**. And so why wouldn't we:

Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. [Cuz] He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, [which was] a pleasing aroma to God. - Ephesians 5:2 NLT

And so, dear brothers and sisters, [writes Paul] I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind He will accept. [Because] When you think of what He has done for you, is this too much to ask? – Romans 12:1 NLT

It sure won't seem so up there! But, sadly, down here, **when our calendar gets crowded, we cut back on all things eternal** – for which we will give an account and be overjoyed if we can give a good answer. So, **don't let the urgent detach you from the important**. But, because of our busy schedules, **when we give our time, we're sacrificing our life**. Because we only get a set amount. **Unlike giving your money, you can't make more time**. So, what will you have to say when you're asked how you spent the time of your life on all things eternal? Because:

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. – Hebrews 4:13 NIV

So keep your eyes on the prize by keeping in mind that **we're called to belong to His body**. Because **we're being formed for His family**. Because **life is all about love**. So squeeze it in wherever you can. Because, **whenever we make time, we make a living sacrifice**. And sacrifice is the essence of love. And love is the command of Christ. Because love is the point of ... well, everything.

Father God, thank You for loving me in spite of my sin; forgive me and cleanse me by the sacrifice of Your Son, my Savior; and free me and lead me by Your Spirit and Word, as I seek to trust and follow Jesus Christ, as the Lord of my life. Amen.