

The Benefits of a Good Church Family

by Doug Hamilton

There are many different organizations that people of this community can be a part of. If you want to save some money on your groceries, one can always join B.J.s or Sam's Club. If you want to have some help in your travel, then join AAA or some similar group. If you want to be involved in volunteering, there are many groups at hospitals, soup kitchens and crisis centers. If you wanted to be connected to some fine people you might join the PTA, a gym for working out, a photography club or even stop in for a coffee at the local Starbucks. Boy scouts is a great organization to teach young men responsibility and leadership. There is even a credit card company that has stated for years that "Membership has its privileges". Let's face it, people are designed by God to want to belong to groups of other people with common interests. From the camaraderie of parents of the children of the same sports team all the way to the senior citizens gathering together for their weekly bridge game, people want to belong with other people for the most part.

What typically determines the success of participation of each of these organizations? It is the level of benefits offered by a group that will largely determine the ability to recruit newcomers. Fewer benefits will make it a tough sell to others; Many meaningful benefits make it an easy sell.

What I would like to do this morning is to present to you the greatest group on earth that a person can be a part of. The group that I am referring to has the greatest amount of meaningful benefits of any organization in earth. This group is a great church family. In this group, membership truly has its privileges. I would like to make my first sermon of 2013 with the focused title "The Benefits of a Great Church Family".

Special Note: Obviously it is Jesus that adds Christians to the church when they are converted. When I refer to the "Church Family", it is not the universal church in mind, but the local church family in a community. This is the spiritual family within the universal family of God to which one is closely associated, interacts and grows with. There are some incredible benefits that we need to be talking about in our efforts to reach out to others. What are some of the outstanding Benefits of a Good Church Family?

1. They are a family in which to share news.

a. Good News

Having come from a small family that really was not very close, I never really had someone to share good all those great moments of joy that life can bring. If something great happened like making the varsity team or the Dean's list for college, there was only a couple people that I could share the good news that would be genuinely happy with me. I believe that God causes great moments in a person's life to share in joy because it can lift the spirits of many. In Luke 15:6, the man that lost and found his sheep called his friends and neighbors to rejoice. In 15:9 the woman that lost the coin and found it called her friends and neighbors to rejoice. We connect to these parables because we understand the sharing of good news.

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Since becoming a Christian in 1988, that permanently changed in my life. For example, when I proposed to my wife, it was not in a park or a restaurant, but on a Sunday night at the church building of the Kirkwood Avenue church. It was going to be one of the biggest decisions of my life and I wanted to share that great news from the moment it happened with the people whom I knew would rejoice with me. I simply slipped the ring box into to Jana's purse, she found it while reaching for a tissue and said "Yes". When the preacher asked if there were any announcements at the end of the service, I happily proclaimed our engagement to my church family. It was one on the nicest days of my life for I had a great church family who genuinely cared and celebrated with us.

b. Bad News

Just because a person is a Christian does not mean they will not go through tough times. Sometimes the news is bad, and when it occurs, a great church family can make all the difference. Early last year, one of our couples in the congregation were nearing the due-date of their beautiful daughter. The night before she was to be born, she passed in the womb. Naturally this is the most devastating news any person, particularly to a parent. The account of this traveled quickly through the congregation. Even though there was nothing that would bring the child back, there was much done to assist the family in their grief.

I have learned in my years as a minister that when bad news comes into your life, you better be surrounded by a group of caring souls whom you can share the hurt. Jesus wept (John 11:36) at the death of Lazarus and it brought comfort to the others who were there. In the same way when a family is allowed to share the grief with others who care, it also can have the same effect. The eyes of many can shed a tear more than the eyes of a few.

2. They are a family in which to share blessings.

It says in *Acts 20:35* “*In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’*” Jesus did not say receiving is not a blessing, but that if we work hard and are in a position to help those in need, it carries a double blessing.

a. Giving

There are so many opportunities to monetarily assist others concerning a great church family. Sometimes there might be a brother or sister in dire need and you can come to their aid. I remember years ago there was a single parent mother who was really struggling with making ends meet. As the holiday season approached she barely had enough for electricity and food. One of the church families handed me five hundred dollars in an envelope to anonymously give to her. They watched from afar as she opened the envelope. Meeting her need was one of the happiest times of the their lives they mentioned to me later. It would not have happened if she was not part of a great church family.

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b. Receiving

Paul wrote in *Philippians 4:15-18* *You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; ¹⁶ for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. ¹⁸ But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.*

The apostle was a hard worker and often made tents to provide for his mission support. The Philippians were a good church family that wanted to free Paul to do the mission work. The result was greatly appreciated and brought about many more conversions and congregations in the end. Receiving is a good thing when it is done properly.

3. They are a family in which to share life's burdens.

Philippians 4:3 informs us that Eurodia, Syntyche, Clement and many other "fellow workers" shared in Paul's "struggle in the cause of the gospel". Christians are always to aid in whatever struggles they have; and life is filled with them. Here are just four in which a good church family can make a difference.

a. Depression

There are countless Christians whom are struggling with depression. It might be from mental illness, stress, a chemical imbalance or something else. When this happens, that person needs a group of patient and understanding friends. Even though a good church family is not perfect, they are more likely to be the fit for the need at hand when it comes to depression. They are more apt to be understanding because of recognition of the preciousness of the soul which is in that individual.

b. Disease

There will be many people in our lives every year that will receive a diagnosis of cancer, heart disease, Alzheimer's or any of a hundred other conditions that are life-changing. A good church family can provide needed hospital and nursing home visits. They can provide rides to the doctor and hot meals in a time of lingering. The Camp Hill Church of Christ has done remarkably well in this area over the last decade which we have been present.

Just south of here at the Catoctin church of Christ, there was a brother that desperately needed a kidney transplant. He was nearing the end of his life. A sister in Christ donor-tested and was found to be a match. The transplant occurred. Both are alive and well today. Thank God for great church families.

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c. Disaster

Sometimes there are disasters that happen in life and a good church family can also make a difference. I once knew of a family that lost their home in a fire. Everything they had was gone and they were left destitute. Within a short time, their church family had donated furniture, clothing and funds to get them back on their feet. This is something that has occurred thousands of times in our lifetimes. Whether it is a hurricane, tornado, flood, fire or blizzard, a good church family can make all the difference in the world. The person who does not have one might likely be on his or her own. That is the greatest disaster of all.

d. Death

We are all going to lose someone in our lives at one time or another. Whether or not you are in a good church family can make all the difference. Your local church family will often provide meals, cards of encouragement, flowers, visits to the home and telephone calls just to see how they are doing. Long after the funeral director is paid there remains follow-up for the person who mourns the loss of a loved one. I personally have always been amazed at the job the saints of Camp Hill have done.

4. They are a family in which to share worship.

Jesus said in *John 4:23-24* “*But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.*”²⁴ “*God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*” We were brought into this world with the need to bow our hearts and minds to the one true and living God. This is something that no club or organization on earth is going to be focused on any better than a great church family. There are two types of worship in the New testament, personal and corporate.

a. Personal

We all have those times away from the church building which we are personally worshipping God in our own way. Often we might want to invite a few friends into this realm of our life. It might be a small group Bible study or a fellowship meal. It could even be a prayer group that meets occasionally to minister to the needs of others through prayer. When you are part of a great church family it is not too difficult to share these moments.

b. Corporate

Then there is the first day of the week which we meet together to worship God according to a pattern set forth in the New Testament. This is something that can only happen with a church family. When you are among a great church family the worship experience is much more rewarding and edifying to the spirit.

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5. They are a family in which to share eternity.

The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 4:7-8 to "*discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; ⁸ for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." The early Christians clearly believed that godliness was something which served on both sides of life, the present and the afterlife.*

a. This life

The apostle Paul claimed in Ephesians 4:4-6 there are seven absolutes to the Christian. There is one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one Father and yes, ONE hope. The word for hope is *elpis*, which means expectation. The Christian has one primary hope that stands out above all others. What is this hope? Paul later identified this universal hope of the Christian in Titus 1:2 "*in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago*". He indentified it again with the definite article in 3:7 as being "*the hope of eternal life*". It is our hope in the expectation of having eternal life which acts as a great force in the present for Christians.

We experience this life when mutually share the expectation of eternal life to which we are communally joined. It is what lifts us up when we are down (1 Thes. 4:17). It is what keeps us moving in the right direction (Phil 4:21). It is the goal of eternal life that keeps us energized under every circumstance. When a person is in a great church family, they can always be uplifted in the soul, knowing they have an expectation of eternal life.

b. The life to come

What makes a great local church family a great family? It is because they are tied into the universal church family of God. Won't it be great to know the many people in your local church family will be a part of your family in heaven? If you loved them here, won't it be great when we can share heaven and eternity together? Long after we are gone from this earth, there will be the opportunity to see each other again. We could never do this if we were not seeing each other in this life. This is something that only a great church family can provide for you.

In Closing:

There are many different groups in this life which we can belong to, but it is the membership a great church family that really packed the benefits . They are a family that we can share our news, our blessings, our burdens, our worship and our eternity. The more we make that evident to our members and the outside world, the more people will want to have one. You have done well in your efforts to make this a reality. Keep it up and share it with others. Preach Christ and show them the church family. Together you will change the lives of many.