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Why Church?

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Why Church?

Paul Simon sang in “I am a Rock”: “I have no need of friendship; friendship causes pain...If I never loved I never would have cried. I am a rock, I am an island.”

The Church, at its heart is about relationships—relationships with others and relationship with God. But relationships are hard and being truly open in a relationship involves the risk of getting hurt. It’s safer to avoid vulnerability—to be an unfeeling rock.

Or why not be an island, why not go it alone? Many of us desire spiritual experiences, want to connect with God, or even sincerely desire to follow Jesus, but we’re skeptical and suspicious of church.

The church, after all, has been guilty of all sorts of terrible things: the crusades, the inquisition, witch trials, siding with oppression, not to mention how individuals have been hurt by judgmentalism, abuse, scandal, and just plain old meanness. Being an invulnerable rock seems pretty appealing in the face of this kind of church. Or for others of us, church seems like a club that requires thoughtless adherence to rules and prescribed ways of thinking. Wouldn’t it just be easier to follow Jesus as a blissfully independent island and forget other Christians? For many of us, Jesus is inspiring and intriguing but Christians are petty and hurtful. [[Read “Being the Church to One Another”](#)]

One of the primary ways the Bible talks about God’s people is as a family. Indeed for the entire history of God’s people, up until Jesus, God’s people were a family—a nation proud of having descended from Abraham. With Jesus, this literal, blood-related family was expanded to include those of other races. This inclusion had been the point all along—it was the fulfillment of God’s ancient promise to Abraham, *“Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”* (Genesis 22:18)

In Jesus, anyone can receive the blessing of being saved from sin. But even though the Church doesn’t exclude all non-Jewish people, the family metaphor hasn’t changed. Non-Jewish Christians are described as: children of Abraham (Romans

9:8), children of God (Luke 20:36, John 1:12-13, Romans 8:16-17), and adopted children (Romans 8:14-15, Galatians 4:5, Ephesians 1:5).[1] So if we follow Jesus, we're family.

Family is the place where we learn, grow, are loved, and form our identity and foundation for experiencing the world. As Christians it seems easier and less risky to avoid other Christians or at least those not like ourselves.[2] So the only way it makes sense to do the hard work of paddling off our islands or breaking our rocky shells is if we see the Church as a network of relationships—that, like a family, give us life and growth precisely because they occur in the nitty-gritty of life. If, however, we see the Church as a product to be used for our individual benefit, we begin to desire the benefits without the messy and difficult work of connecting to imperfect people as part of an imperfect church. This disconnection can happen even when attending a church, if we aren't also vulnerably connecting with real people at that church! [[Read "Discernment in Finding a Church"](#)]

The church plays an additional role apart from its family role of providing identity, growth, love, and learning. The church also connects us to God's work in the world and the part we play in that work. It's through the church (that network of relationships extending around the globe) that we get glimpses of the work of God that is so much bigger than us as individuals. [[Read "God's Call to Reach Out"](#)]

Family and purpose. Christianity is not an individualistic religion. That's what makes it different than a philosophy or ideology. Take relationship out of the doctrines and practices and it's not Christianity. We are meant to grow together, to pursue God's purposes in the world together. For this reason it says in Hebrews 10:24-25, *"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."*

We are not islands or rocks. We are a family—vulnerable in our openness, obviously imperfect, but given the incredible opportunity to love God and love others together.