

# LIVING



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## Week Five: Membership Matters

### THE MISSIONARY TASK

#### Component Three: Discipleship

## INTRODUCTION

How do you know if you are reading your Bible correctly, growing in godliness, utilizing your God-given talents, leveraging your life for the Great Commission? How do you know if you are making progress in becoming a more fully-devoted disciple of Jesus?

### ANSWER: THE LOCAL CHURCH

## BIBLICAL MATERIAL

There is no New Testament command that “thou shalt join a church.” However, when we read the NT (much of which was written to local churches), the Scriptures assume church membership. The newly minted disciple of Jesus is to be a publicly marked disciple through baptism (Matt. 28:19), which signals the joining of the kingdom of God. As the local church is a visible, local expression of such a kingdom, membership is therefore how the world knows who represents the kingdom.

What evidence does the New Testament give for church membership?

### LANGUAGE

The local church is referred to as a spiritual house, a flock, a household, and a body, (1 Peter 5:2; 1 Cor. 12; 1 Tim. 3:15) each of which are collective nouns of which members are a part (i.e., flocks assume sheep).

### NUMBER

The early Christians were an identifiable people. The Jerusalem church counted their members as “there were added that day about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). Further, in terms of “church” discipline (cf. Matt: 18:15-20), in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 Paul uses the language of “among you” which attests to a numbered (named) group of people.

### MINISTRY

The local church is seen as the context for which God equips the Christian for ministry. Passages like Ephesians 4:1-11, and all of 1 Corinthians 12 speak to the spiritual gifting of a follower of Christ and their usefulness inside the local church.

## MISSIONARY TASK RELEVANCY

As you may have noticed, each of the six MT components build upon one another. They are progressive competencies for multiplication. Missionaries must learn how to “Enter” (build relationships) before they engage in “Discipleship” (teach the Bible). As we build out what we might think of as little competencies under the six MT components, we too strive to strategically align them to show a progression. Inviting people to church on Sunday to expose them to God’s gathered people and to the preaching of the Word is surely the first step of teaching the Bible.

But as we come to the last of five weeks on “Discipleship,” the topic is membership. To be sure, it is one of the twelve characteristics of “Healthy Church Formation,” our next MT component. So why single it out as worthy of a week’s discussion, and why cover it now under “Discipleship”? For two reasons:

1) the first and last little competencies tend to smell like the component to which they are closest. Baptism, for instance, was the last of five under “Evangelism,” with “Discipleship” forthcoming. Thus, to talk about membership paves a path to a study of “Healthy Church Formation.”

2) Out of all the twelve characteristics, membership is the one that is most directly related to the idea of discipleship. To be a “member” is to recognize who you are as a disciple and that your life as such is never divorced from and always expressed within the context of the local church. In short, the NT does not separate discipleship from membership. The church is the primary space where disciples are made, and thus membership is the platform for discipleship. So, let’s talk about it!



## LIFE APPLICATION

Christians need to belong to a healthy church. The Bible cannot be obeyed without it, from participating in the ordinances to performing the “one anothers” (e.g., Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:11, etc.) The local church is the primary context in which God applies his word and will to the Christian life. As Christians are commanded to be baptized, they are also to study and submit to Scripture within a covenant community of other believers. The church is not only the primary means through which the Christian life is lived, but also the only means by which a Christian can have their confession and conduct validated as being in accordance with biblical Christianity.

In short, the Christian life cannot be lived to its full NT expression, that which Christ designed, apart from regular membership in a local church. There is no such thing as the lone ranger Christian. The Bible therefore assumes that Christians are part of a local church. As members we are to help people assimilate into the body of Christ upon their profession of faith in him.

1. Many times, one may think he or she has to be “involved” in a ministry to express one’s service to the Lord and his church. But the NT seems to frame a job description for every church member. As a part of a congregational church, how would you define your job?
2. Two primary documents define (or fence) a church’s membership: their confession of faith (what they believe) and their covenant (how they behave). Why are these important, and why is it best to have a process for receiving new members into the church?
3. Let’s say you have a friend who professes to be a Christian but says, “I don’t need to be a member of a local church.” How would you respond?
4. Describe some of the benefits and blessings that come with actively being involved in your church as a member.
5. What is one way that you can make your membership more meaningful?