

Church membership helps you to know who your companions are



The Christian life is like a journey and all Christians are headed to the same destination – heaven. But there will always be certain Christians we're closer to. Have you ever thought about who your companions are?

If you've ever been out bush walking or hiking with a large group, you'll know that even though the group moves together, you don't walk next to each person. It's not as if you cuddle up in a big human ball and shuffle along together. Some will be further up ahead, some behind. And if you stumble along the way or need a break, those around you are the ones that will be there for you. They're your real group.

When it comes to the church, there's the one Universal Church, the large group that's headed for heaven and then there's the local church, the particular group that you journey alongside. Now you won't find the Bible speak about the idea of church membership. However, it makes sense of a number of teachings in the New Testament. And these teachings fit well into the idea of the church being your hiking companions.

The Bible commands us to:

- **Love one another (John 15:12; 1 John 3:23)**
This is about especially supporting those you are walking closely with.
- **Bear with one another (Romans 15:1-2; Colossians 3:13)**
This is about learning to get along with others who may walk differently to you.
- **Forgive one another (Matthew 6:12; Ephesians 4:32)**
This is about dealing with the inevitable hurts and disappointments your companions will cause you.
- **Care for one another (Galatians 6:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15)**
This is about picking up those who stumble and resting with those who are tired.
- **Keep watch on each other (Matthew 18:12-15; Galatians 6:1)**
This is about calling strays back to the path and seeking out those who wander off.
- **Submit to our leaders (1 Thessalonians 5:12; Hebrew 13:17)**
This is about having people who set the pace for us and ensure we are properly equipped for the journey.

This last two are related to church discipline and authority, which are topics that make people nervous. But ultimately, they are about knowing who's got your back, who's going to help you stay on track. When it comes to the crunch, surely you want to have a group of Christians who love you enough that they will support you and challenge you as they journey with you. That's what church membership is about.

