

Dear Friends,

Thank you for your correspondence to the Al Denson Show and for tuning in every week to our program. My prayer for you is to be encouraged in your daily walk with Christ through the words of this booklet. Our hope is that in turn you will tell others of what God is doing through our ministry to youth and parents on TV. I am convinced you will not find another program on any network anywhere that deals with issues today's youth and their parents are facing, and provides answers from a Godly perspective.

In addition, we would love for you to help us by going to our web site at www.aldenson.com. Here you can write to us, order additional material like this booklet, check out all my music, have a daily bible study, and stay up to date on the ministry. You can also send us a prayer request and questions for the TV show. But more importantly, please continue to be in prayer with us as we work together to help those that are in need.

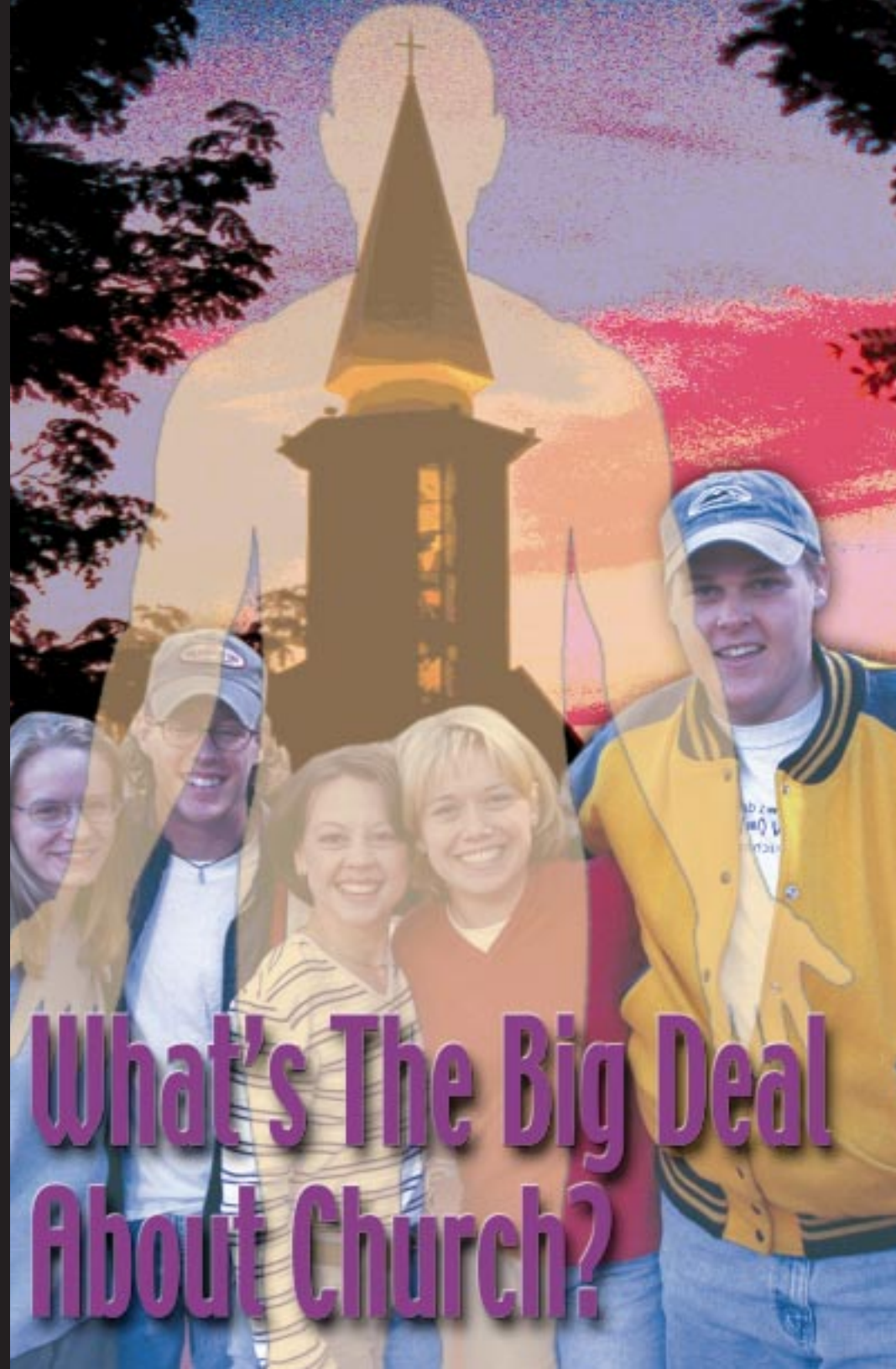
Thanks for watching and God Bless!

Sincerely,



An Outreach of Celebration Ministries

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**What's The Big Deal
About Church?**



Most artists create for only a brief moment in time. That phenomenon was once known as “15 minutes of fame”. Yet even in a fickle world, there still emerge a talented few that transcends time and trends. With nearly 15 years as a major label recording artist and seven hit

albums to his credit, Al Denson is that kind of artist.

But the attention and acclaim his artistry has brought him over the years are anything but the routine rewards of worldly success. Rather, they are the fruits of a life of purpose and passion, and a mission that has always reached far beyond merely making music.

The millions of young people Al has performed for, befriended, counseled, consoled and clowned around with in his career already know that. And thousands more are finding out every day.

This past year has seen Al expand his efforts to a global audience through the reach of his daily syndicated television production, “The Al Denson Show.” “You’ve got to reach out to people where they are with the most powerful means and this form of media allows you to build trust and a rapport,” says Al. “This has all been so amazing. I can’t imagine what lies in store when the Lord finally calls me home, but I don’t have to wait for heaven to receive rewards. I get them every time a kid comes up to me and says, ‘I heard what you said, and I accepted Christ.’ You can’t ask for anything more or better than that.”

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What's The Big Deal About Church?

The birth of the church is recorded in the New Testament book of Acts. It was born on the day of Pentecost as a result of the disciples obedient response to the Great Commission Jesus gave them before He ascended back

into heaven. The early Church was the vessel by which the message of the Gospel changed the world. Now, two thousand years later, the Church in America is quickly losing its influence faster than any major institution in our country. Studies conducted by the respected Barna Research Group indicate that a majority of people who make a first-time “decision” for

Christ are no longer connected to a Christian church within just eight weeks of having made such a decision! It is no secret that far fewer people attend church on Sunday than claim to follow Christ. Author Phillip Yancy wrote a book called, *Church: Why Bother?* The title sums up fairly well what seems to be the attitude of many Christians today. Is church really important or is it outdated and obsolete? What is the big deal about church, anyway?

Augustine once said, “He cannot have God for His Father who does not have the church for His mother.” More recently someone said it like this, “You cannot be in love with Jesus and be divorced from His church.” Neither of these statements is to imply that

church membership is essential to our salvation, but what they are saying is that the church, with all its flaws, faults, and problems is important to God, so that means it should also be important to those of us who claim to

be His children. Christ established the church, He purchased the church with His blood, and He is coming again for the church. The church is not a building; it is people. The Greek word, *Ekklesia*, is translated “church” in the New Testament, and it never refers to a building, but rather to a gathering, a public assembly of people.

The word, *ekklesia*, is used some places in the New Testament to refer to all of God’s people worldwide, but in other places it is used to describe a local congregation of believers. No distinction is made in Scripture between the worldwide church and the local church because the New Testament writers knew that to be part of the church in one aspect was to be part of the church in all aspects. This shows us that to be saved automatically means that we are not just a part of the body of Christ worldwide; we are to be a part of a local community of believers. It is very clear in the New Testament that God’s plan for fulfilling His mission on earth is for believers to gather into particular local communities.

“You cannot be in love with Jesus and be divorced from His church.”

Reference to the church is made throughout the New Testament as “the bride of Christ” and “the body of Christ. The church is made up of those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Jesus established the church and commissioned those who believed in Him to “make disciples” (Matthew 28:19-20). It has always been the assignment of the church to bring others to faith in Christ and into a personal relationship with Him. Jesus came to redeem the lost. Those of us who believe in Him became the church and took on the responsibility that comes from belonging to Him—to continue the work He began. To truly grasp the importance of the Church, it is imperative that all Christians understand that the Bible is to be our guidebook for identifying and defining a Church. A true local church, accord-

ing to the New Testament, will be comprised of six elements. These are:

- Worship
- Evangelism
- Service
- Education and Training
- Building community (fellowship)
- Stewardship (giving).

With this in mind, Hebrews 10:23-25 says, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.” Anytime we choose to ignore the Word of God and be disobedient to God’s commands, there will be very serious consequences. When Christians choose to forsake the church, these are two of the most destructive:

~ A WEAKENED WALK ~

The book of Hebrews was written to new Jewish believers because the writer knew how hard it would be for these Christians to remain faithful to their new faith. He challenged them to “hold fast;” then he went on to tell them to help one another hold fast. He knew it would be easy to drift away from the truth, and he also knew they would need other believers to help them stay on track. The author was instructing them to watch out for one another and take responsibility for one another. It was in that context that he told them not to stop meeting together because they needed one another.

God commands His children to meet together on a regular basis because He knows the mutual encouragement and accountability

will help keep us from drifting off course. We live in a world whose sole purpose is to knock Christians off course and keep us from being what God wants us to be. No child of God is an island, and none of us is so strong in our commitment to Christ that we can go it alone. Without the Church, the Christian life would be like a man alone in a power boat trying to cross a huge lake during a storm. He lines the bow of his boat up with the particular harbor he is trying to reach and desperately wants to reach his destination, but the storm is raging and the wind and the waves keep slapping the side of his boat, knocking him off course. The man is going at full power, but unless he is constantly making the necessary course corrections, he won’t reach his destination.

...watch out for one another
and take responsibility
for one another.



If we are going to come to the end of our lives being the person God wants us to be, we must continually be evaluating our lives to see if there are “course corrections” we need to make. The world will tell us that all is well and that there are no corrections needed in our lives. The church is the only institution on the face of the earth that will tell us the truth and help keep us on course. Choosing to separate ourselves from the body of Christ will shipwreck our lives. Paul Tournier says, “There are two things we cannot do alone. One is to be married and the other is to be a Christian.” The church fills a very vital and necessary role in the lives of Christians that no other group or organization can fill.

God designed spiritual growth in such a way that it requires that we be accountable to other believers. The apostle Paul understood the importance of accountability when he wrote in Romans 12 that Christians are to watch out for one another, warn one another, challenge one another, encourage one another, and rebuke one another. We all need brothers and sisters in Christ who will love us enough to hold us accountable for our decisions, standards, ethics, values, vocabulary, and lifestyle. We also need to be held accountable for the level of commitment we are displaying in our relationship with God. If we refuse to be accountable or not allow the body of Christ the opportunity to encourage and support us, we will never have a consistent walk with God.

Being an active, participating member of a local church is an act of obedience to God, but it also is a way to safeguard our personal fellowship and growth as a Christian. If we separate ourselves from the fellowship of the family of God, it will only be a matter of time before our fellowship with God will suffer as well. Saint John of the Cross wrote, “The virtuous soul that is alone...is like the burning coal that is alone. It will grow colder rather than hotter.

In Acts 2:41-47 the Bible gives us a beautiful picture of the early church. It says, “those who accepted his (Peter’s) message were baptized, (not only as a sign to the world that they had been forgiven but also to signify their entry into the church) and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer...All the believers were together, they had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

When first century Christians gathered together, they became known as “the communion of saints.” These local bodies of believers were communities bound together by a mutual love

for Jesus Christ. The unity, commitment, and obedience of these local bodies of Christ changed the world. Too often today, we make the mistake of seeing Christianity as simply as private transaction with Christ. Of course being born again is an individual, personal experience with Jesus, but that is only the beginning. Salvation not only places us “in Christ” but it places us into the “body of Christ,” the community of believers, the family of God, the church. When we are saved, there is no way to distinguish between our commitment to Christ and to the church because in the Scripture, Christianity is corporate. The church is not a social club or a civic group, it is as Carl Henry calls it, “the new society of God’s people, the new society of the twice-born.”

There is a popular belief today that one can be a Christian apart from the church. This idea is not substantiated anywhere in Scripture. To be a Christian makes us a part of the church, worldwide, and according to the book of Acts, each person who comes to faith in Christ is to publicly confess that faith, be baptized, and become a part of a local congregation for accountability. God’s Word makes it clear that church membership and active involvement are not an option. It is impossible for a believer to fulfill what it means to be a Christian apart from church membership.

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...lack of commitment has left the majority of Christians weak in their faith...

There can be no Christianity in its truest, most Biblical sense apart from a local community of believers. To be independent of that body is to deny what God Himself has ordained. When Christians don't understand what it means to be a part of the family of God, they will have no sense of "ownership" or connectedness to the church. The church is only something to take from, not something to invest in. These kinds of Christians are "spectators" not participants, and they have no sense of loyalty or commitment to the local body of Christ.

One reason this happens is because the majority of Christians today seem to have embraced society's "me-ism" way of thinking:

What is in it for ME?

What will it cost ME?

How will it affect ME?

This "me-ism" has spilled over into the church. Many Christians believe that following Christ is only about what they can get—what Jesus can do for them. As a result, they are very shallow, self-centered Christians who know nothing of service or of giving their lives away. Jesus said in Mark 8:34-35, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for My sake and the

gospel's will save it." And in Mark 10:43-45 He said, "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant...for the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."

John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." God so loved the world He gave, and Jesus so loved He sacrificed His life for us. What Jesus has already done should be enough to make us want to be obedient to Him and follow His example with no thought of "what's in it for me." But because so many Christians in this country have chosen to have either no commitment, or at best, a half-hearted commitment to the church, they have cut themselves off from the systematic teaching of the Word of God. Therefore, they are without a solid Biblical foundation on which to build their lives and they also have eliminated any accountability for their beliefs and behaviors.

This lack of commitment has left the majority of Christians weak in their faith and unsure as to their purpose for living. As a result they are buying into the same set of values the rest of our country embraces, such as:

- Avoid long-term commitments.
- Maintain your independence.
- Let your feelings be your guide.

Christians weak in their faith...

- Recklessly pursue love and acceptance from others.
- Have fun, seek pleasure, and avoid pain at any cost.
- Don't waste your time on anything that doesn't produce immediate gratification or reward.

Americans are embracing values today that give them control. They don't want anyone telling them what, why, how, where, or when to do anything. Many people in our country today have rejected Christianity because they believe its principles to be restricting rather than liberating. This is a lie straight from the pit of hell and from the one the Bible calls, "the father of lies." Jesus said in John 10:10, "The thief (Satan) comes only to steal, kill, and destroy; I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full." Satan offers to us what looks like unlimited freedom, but in truth, he is the one who robs us of our freedom and makes us a slave to our own selfish lusts and desires. Jesus doesn't come to take away our freedom but to set us free from ourselves.

Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life..." (John 14:6) but to most Americans, truth is relative to their circumstances. Only about 25 percent of all adults, and even fewer teenagers, believe there is such a thing as absolute moral truth. They believe the Bible is just a book of suggestions, and their own reasoning and emotions are enough to determine what is right or wrong. Without absolute truth, and a clear definition of right and wrong, there is no such thing as sin. Without sin, there is no condemnation and no judgement, and most importantly, no need of a Savior.



...and unsure as to their purpose for living.

Many Christians are coming dangerously close to embracing these values and this mindset, and there are some good reasons for this. The average Christian spends more time watching television in one evening than he or she spends reading the Bible during the entire week. Only four out of ten people who claim to be Christians also claim they are “absolutely committed” to the Christian faith. Two out of three born-again believers say there is no such thing as absolute moral truth. The majority of Christians view their salvation experience as a “fire insurance policy” to use when they die instead of a lifelong process—a long obedience in the same direction. Too many Christians tend to evaluate their lives against other people, not the principles and standards found in the Word of God, so by comparison, they feel pretty good about themselves.

When Christians begin to think like the world, they begin to act like the world. This is the reason we are seeing little difference in the behavior of Christians and non-Christians.

Is it any wonder that unbelievers see Christianity, for the most part, as weak, outdated, and irrelevant to their lives? A church that teaches absolute moral truths, the authority of the Bible, and holds its members accountable for their adherence to its teachings is the only option for anyone who claims the name of Christ.

~ A WEAKENED WITNESS ~

Americans today are more devoted to seeking spiritual enlightenment than at any previous time in the last century. Yet, the Christian church is having less impact on people’s perspectives, values, and behaviors than ever. The downfall for the Church is not its message, but its failure to apply what it believes.

George Barna says, “Christians have become their own worst enemies when it comes to showing the world what authentic, biblical Christianity looks like...Those who have turned to Christianity and churches seeking truth and meaning have left empty-handed,

confused by the apparent inability of Christians themselves to implement the principles they profess.” Friedrich Nietzsche was once asked what made him so negative toward Christians. He said, “I would believe in their salvation if they looked a little more like people who have been saved.” In a court of law the character and credibility of a witness are as

important as the testimony that witness gives. Before we can share effectively, we must have a foundation of character and credibility on which to build our witness. As long as Christians are complacent and self-centered and live no differently from anyone else, our witness will be weak and hollow.

One thing that will make our witness totally ineffective to the world is when Christians fight among themselves. Jesus said in John 13:35, “By this will all men know that you are my disciples if you love one another.” He said that the way the world will first know who we are and whom we represent is by the way we treat each other. In other words, the unsaved world will either be attracted to Jesus or turned off to Jesus, largely based on our actions and attitudes toward our brothers and sisters in Christ. The way we treat each other in the body of Christ will either give the world an accurate or an inaccurate picture of God and may determine whether or not they will be receptive to the Gospel.

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We must understand that our first witness to a lost world is going to be how we treat our brothers and sisters in Christ and how seriously we take being a member of the family of God. It is imperative that every Christian protects the unity of the body of Christ. Unity in the body of Christ is an important part of our collective witness to the lost. When siblings fight and call each other names in public, it gives others a distorted idea of what the family they come from is like. The same is true when Christians treat each other unkindly. More physical bodies are destroyed by what is allowed on the inside than anything that happens to them on the outside. The same thing is true in the body of Christ. Nothing is as important as the health and unity of the body of Christ, and we need to take seriously our part in protecting it.

One of the great things about the body of Christ is that it operates just like our physical body. As one part of the body gives to the other parts, the part that is giving is helped in return. When a hand gives food to the mouth, the hand is also nourished by the food. When one arm helps the other lift a heavy object, the muscles in both arms are strengthened and become healthier. We have been placed in the body of Christ and are to

be dependent on one another through the Holy Spirit. When one member hurts, the whole body hurts. Believers should never have a “personal crisis.” Any crisis in life should be seen as happening to the whole church family. The different gifts and abilities that each member of the body have are to be used to serve and help one another in times of crisis. When we prevent the church from sharing in times of need, we rob the church of doing what God designed it to do.

Just as you have one physical body with many different parts, there is one collective body of Christ which also has many different parts. Just as the human body must function in unity and harmony with itself in order to be healthy, so the body of Christ functions in unity and harmony. The Bible says in I Corinthians 12:12, 25-27, “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. There should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, each part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

God stakes His reputation on us, and every time we choose willfully to sin, it makes the lost world think that our God is weak and powerless. And if that were not bad enough, none of us ever sin without hurting others in the body of Christ. We are all so supernaturally connected that what we do affects every member of the body. Sin is not a physical act limited to the time and place where it is committed. It is something that happens in the spiritual realm and transcends time and space. Sin cannot be confined and we cannot put a lid on it. Every time we sin, it spills out all over the whole body. The choices we make affect each member in the body of Christ. What people think of God and whether the church is able to impact our world for Christ will be determined by the choices we make every day. When Christians seem to have an interest in spiritual things, but have areas in their lives where actions, attitudes, words, and values conflict with those of Christ, they send a confusing message to unbelievers.

Jesus said in John 14:21, “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me.” In other words, Jesus was saying that we can’t say we love Him and live in a way which contradicts His Word. The majority of Christians believe they can pick

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and choose which parts of the Word of God they want to obey, and disregard the rest. They think as long as they are keeping more commandments than they are breaking that God will ignore

all the times they are striking out—like God is not interested in the specifics of their obedience, only in their “spiritual batting averages.” Jesus says, “not so.”

Too many Christians want to know how much they can get away with. What they are really asking is, “How close can I get to the line between right and wrong, between pure and impure, without going out-of-bounds?” Is it any wonder the world is so turned off by most Christians? Too many of us are advertising something with our lives to an unbelieving world which is very confusing. A Christ-like lifestyle cannot be defined by an activity, it is an attitude which involves our bodies, minds and spirits. Instead of asking, “How much can a Christian get away with?” We need to ask, “How much like Jesus can we be?” The Bible says in II Corinthians 5:14 says, “The love of Christ compels (motivates, propels) us...” The great unconditional love of Christ and what He has already done for us should be enough to motivate us to live obedient, Christ-like lives.

The only entity on the face of the earth that is going to encourage us to do this is the church. The only place where we can carry out the function for which Christ left us here is the church. Is the church perfect? Of course not. It is made up of brothers and sisters who are perfect and complete in their position in Christ, yet who are still imperfect in their performance and are still in process of becoming what God wants them to be. Someone said the church is sometimes like Noah's ark: The smell inside would at times be unbearable if it weren't for the storm outside! In spite of its imperfection, the church is still the best thing Christians have going for them in this life.

There are many Christians who have been deeply hurt and disillusioned by the church. In our earthly families, brothers and sisters can wound and disappoint us but we are still family. God's kids can hurt each other, as well, but we, too, are still family. Sometimes a local church can become a dysfunctional family and

be unable or unwilling to be what God wants it to be. When this happens we should find a community of believers who are functioning as Christ intended, but we should never abandon the family of God. It is much easier to understand, and to have sympathy for, the church and its failures when we are contributing to them! The church was God's idea, and He promised that He would build His church and that even the gates of hell would not prevail against it. We should never take lightly or for granted that which Christ purchased with His blood for us.

A few years ago, at the Seattle Special Olympics, nine contestants, all physically or mentally disabled, assembled at the starting line for the 100-yard dash. At the gun, they started out, not exactly in a dash, but with a relish to run the race to the finish and win. All, that is, except one little boy who stumbled on the asphalt, tumbled over a few times, and began to cry. The other eight heard the boy

cry. They slowed down and looked back. Then they all turned around and went back—every one of them. One girl with Down's Syndrome bent down and kissed him and said, "That will make it better." Then all nine linked arms and walked together to the finish line.

This true story is a perfect picture of what God intends that the church be. Loving each other enough to link arms with those who have fallen, helping each other up, kissing wounds and making them better, and encouraging one another to keep on, keeping on. We do it all so that

the body of Christ might all cross the finish line together, and say with Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but to all who have longed for His appearing." (II Timothy 4:7-8)

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