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## Epworth Student Ministries

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Students With A Task

Service Worship Accountability Teamwork

A 24/7, 360° Jesus Community

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## I have a Bible .....what's the big deal about church ?

Every society and culture has its strength and weaknesses. Perhaps American culture's great weakness is the false value it places on independence. What's the number one goal of most teenagers? To become independent. Finding oneself and becoming themselves is usually part of the cause of conflict and heartburn between teens and their parents. The necessity of independence is a myth so intertwined with the American psyche that most of us don't think to question it. We listen to "Miss Independent" by Kelly Clarkson and "Independent" by Webbie. We read historical accounts of solitary men, pioneers that they were, such as Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett. We watch movies and read comic books that feature solitary heroes like Batman, Superman, Wolverine, Dirty Harry and Lara Croft to name just a few.

On one hand, that individualistic, self-sufficient attitude has helped build America as a successful nation. On the flip side, that same individualistic, self-sufficient attitude has played havoc with our spiritual growth, both individually and collectively.

Many Christians in our country believe that attending church is optional – that, if we choose to, we can pursue Christian growth independently, apart from other Christians. "I don't need to go to church – I have my own personal relationship with God" is a repeated mantra of many. That's a dangerous myth. First of all, independent Christian growth is possible, but usually such study is not very fruitful on an individual

basis. The reality is that few who say they are going to do independent Christian study actual stick with it for longer than a week or two max. The Bible tells us that the Kingdom of God is NOT a place of isolation. Bible religion is not solitary, between you and God. Bible salvation is corporate. We live out our faith in community, not all by ourselves. Secondly and perhaps more importantly, no one who seriously studies the New Testament could ever conclude that church involvement is optional. Every book, every chapter, almost every verse conveys the fact of our dependence – both on God and on the church. All books about growing in Christ place great emphasis and importance of the church, the church community along with community worship.

Teenage years are riddled with struggles to answer the question: Who am I? This struggle occurs for the Christian teen as well as the non-Christian. Teens are trying to decide (among other things) what you like, whom you like, and what you want to do with your life. However, when a person becomes a Christian, the foundation of his or her identity becomes fixed. We believe that when a person professes their faith in Christ Jesus, that day is the most important day of their life. When you profess Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you become a Christian which means you are part of the family of God. Professing that you are a Christian now becomes the most important component of our identity. It's far more important than where we were born, or our gender, our weight, our height or our skin color. It's more important than how much money we have or what kind of cars we drive. Being a member of God's family is more important than our talents, our skills, our likes and our dislikes. Professing our Christian belief should impact whom we marry or not marry, the type of job or profession and even the company we are employed by along with every important life decision and choice that we make.

When we profess Christ Jesus as our Lord and Savior -- we are first and foremost Christians. Is that how you think of yourself? Are you a doctor, or teacher, or banker or attorney that happens to be a Christian ---- or are you a Christian who happens to be a doctor, or teacher, or banker or attorney or whatever your job is? Your job or profession is NOT WHO YOU ARE. The male gender is notorious for identifying themselves with the identity of their job or profession. Perhaps you are still trying to define yourself by other things. You're part of the family of God. You're a child of the King. That's your most valuable identity.

So what is the church? Is it a bunch of Christian friends hanging out and talking about God? Is it a building with a steeple and stained glass windows, standing tall in the middle of town? No and no. Those things may be part of the church, but they don't define it.

In actuality, defining church is very difficult to say the least. Can you define yourself? I can't define myself. You and I are both complex beings. The church is also complex. The truth is that the authors of the New Testament never really defined the church either. However, the New Testament writers gave us numerous metaphors to help us better understand it.

One of the most beautiful and challenging images of the church in the New Testament is that of a body, with each member serving as a part. Apostle Paul gives us great detail with this metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. Pull out your Bible and read this passage several times.

Paul wrote those words to a divided Christian community – one that is similar to ours today. Christians were jealous of each other's spiritual gifts and financial resources. The Christian community was splitting into factions over doctrinal beliefs. Paul described the image of the church as a human body. There can be no disunity in a body. Your hand never decides it's going to leave the rest your body. Your heart never stops beating because it's mad at your lungs. The true importance of each part of your body is the function it provides for the whole body.

Paul's image of the body highlights two issues that Christians struggle with: interdependence and unity. If the Christian community is a body, then I have to depend on you and you have to depend on me. Every Christian is a part of a body with a specific set of functions and responsibilities to fulfill. Members of our church are not replaceable cogs in a machine --- we are hearts or livers or toes or fingers. Regardless of the body part we are, if we aren't serving the community of faith with our lives, then the body as a whole suffers. If I'm the liver of the Body of Christ, if my liver shuts down, then I can't just replace it. My body will soon begin to die. Likewise, if I quit serving the church, the church will be gravely damaged.

That's true of every member of the church ---- including YOU. If you don't serve the church, if you choose not to be involved, then your decision will ultimately hurt me and every other Christian. We all lose

something valuable when you're not around. The church is hemorrhaging because too many of its members believe their presence is optional. It's probably horrible to say, but many churches look more like disassembled Mr. Potato Heads than a living body. Most Christians accept that we are all sons and daughters of God, yet many Christians fail to see that the church depends on them. We're all interconnected in a deeply spiritual way. Again, as stated earlier, the Kingdom of God is not a place of isolation. We live out our faith in community, not all by ourselves.

The heart pumps blood so the stomach and the muscles and the brain can all do their jobs. We need to understand that in the body of Christ, just like the human body, the purpose of individual body parts is to serve the body, not themselves. Anyone who serves because of what it can do for them is serving for the wrong reason. Many of us wrongly believe that you have to have certain gifts in order to serve God or the local church. We all have different gifts. My gifts are different than yours and vice-versa. But if we were all eyes, then where would the sense of smell be?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:21-32 again. Reflect on your own gifts and how necessary they are to the functioning of the body of Christ. Don't waste your time and energy being jealous of others' gifts. Throw your life and talent into the church by serving others in the name of Christ!

Christ is counting on you.... and so are we!

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Life has many choices. Eternity has two choices.

What's yours?

God

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