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FOREVER FAMILY

Did you get together with family over the Christmas and New Year holidays? How are you related? Some 30 percent of American families are said to be touched by adoption. Probably everyone knows someone with adoption in their family. And maybe you know, that if you are a child of God, YOU are adopted.

It's even part of the Christmas story. Joseph, husband of Mary, is the adoptive father of Jesus. Galatians 4:4 says *"When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman...so that we might receive adoption as sons. God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"* So all who receive Jesus as Lord and Savior are spiritually re-born and adopted into God's family.

Maybe you know someone legally or genetically part of a particular family, but they don't participate. In Scripture, God's family is called the "church." God's forever family will live with Him eternally in heaven. But first we live with one another on earth. And all believers are equipped and exhorted to be active participants in His family. Here are five primary aspects of being part of God's family - intentionally.

1- State your FAITH - Every person is made in the image of God as a member of the one human race, the family of mankind. Many people think simply being born makes you a child of God. But Jesus said *"you must be born again."* John 1:12 says all who received Jesus by believing in Him as Lord and Savior have been born again by the Holy Spirit and so become *"children of God."* Romans 8:15 and Ephesians 1:5 talk about the believer's *"adoption in Jesus Christ."* And Ephesians 2:19 says believers have become *"members of the household of God, being built together for a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."* Your confession of Christ (Romans 10:9) is also the basis of membership in a local church family.

2- Share your TESTIMONY - First, you are born again into God's family, joining all believers everywhere who are re-born as His children of faith. Then, you intentionally join a group of like-minded believers, the sheep of His flock. Scripture never suggests lone ranger Christians hitchhiking through life without being part of a local church. Ephesians 3:6 says believers are *"fellow members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ"* and 4:22 says *"put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life"* and instead *"be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness"* because we are *"members one of another."* Be intentional and relational.

3- Support your RESPONSIBILITY - Jesus designed His church to function like a body. The parts of a body need one another, with mutual accountability to one another. Ephesians 4:16 says Jesus equips His body the church so that *"when each part is working properly, it makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."* He designs the process for a purpose: intentional healthy Christian growth. This is of such cosmic importance that Ephesians 3:10 says it's *"through the church the manifold wisdom of God is made known"* to all creation, *"according to the eternal purpose He has now realized through Christ."* Wow!

4- Strengthen your UNITY - Scripture says the mark of a Christian is Christ-like love for one another. Some call it "the golden rule of mutual love" which marks members of the body of Christ. This comes naturally by the Holy Spirit, but you also must be intentional to express it and live it. Ephesians 4:1 says *"with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."* Because God has *"made us alive together with Christ"* and is making us one in Christ. Verse 5:1 says *"therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a sacrifice to God."* Be intentional about unity.

5- Serve your MINISTRY - New life in Christ comes with a new purpose. You no longer live for yourself, but for Him who saved you. Ephesians 4:12 says the Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts *"to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ."* Jesus designed the church like a body, so that each believer is a member *"to grow up in every way into Christ"* because *"when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."* You are saved to serve. You need each part of Christ's body to minister to you, and you must minister to them. Healthy Christian growth.

These descriptions of Christ's family rely on the Holy Spirit. He's the internal power making you intentional as a child of God, as part of His forever family. You state your faith in Christ with your whole being. You share the testimony of your church. You support the responsibility of your church. You strengthen the unity of your church. You serve the ministry of your church. After all, that's what family is for!