

# Private Faith vs Church | Versus #3

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Is the Christian faith essentially a personal relationship with Jesus, or do Christians need to be connected to some formal body like a church? Consider the two sides of this question.

## A private relationship with God is important, but not enough

Many people have been burned by church and savor a purely individual relationship with Jesus. Our culture emphasizes individualism. So people often approach faith as “just me and Jesus” without feeling a need for any connection to a faith community.

The Bible does teach that Jesus wants a personal relationship with each of us.

***John 15:4-5** Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*

Jesus envisioned a close, intimate connection with his people, like branches grow in and draw their life from a vine. In fact, Jesus died on the cross to remove the barrier of our sin that came between us and him. But when we focus on a personal relationship alone, faith can become self-centered. It's easy to make Christianity all about me or to turn it into what I want it to be.

[\[Related: 5 Practices Christians Do Together\]](#)

## A connection to a church is important, but not enough

For others, faith is mainly about the church experience. Going to church conveys a positive image to ourselves and others. The church has great activities for the family. It's a good place to make friends.

The Bible does emphasize the priority of being connected to a local church.

***Hebrews 10:24-25** And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

When you get in relationship and meet regularly with other Christians, some good things happen. But sometimes people think that going to church automatically makes them Christian. It's easy to get involved in church attendance and activity without truly being saved. Many people just go along with the crowd without cultivating their own growing relationship with God.

[\[Related: I'm a Christian...But Do I Need Church?\]](#)

## The local church is essential to your relationship with God

In reality, a relationship with God includes the church. Jesus died to reconcile us, not just to God individually, but together ([Ephesians 2:14-18](#)). The church is God's family ([Ephesians 2:19](#)). For those who are in Christ, the church

is part of our core identity – not just something we do. So every Christian is part of the church, whether they participate or not. Yet there are important reasons to participate.

*[Related: [How Do I Choose a Church?](#)]*

First, the church is God’s vehicle to help us connect with him more deeply. God gave us his church for our care and nurture. In order to truly grow, we all need the self-awareness, challenge, and encouragement that relationships provide.

Second, the church is also God’s means to help us follow him more fully. God’s family is a laboratory where we can find and develop our gifts and strengths, because there is always someone who needs what we have to offer. The church is also a community with a grand, noble purpose. By working together, we can certainly do more to make a lasting difference in the world than we can alone.

It’s possible to have a personal relationship with God without ever connecting to the church, just as it is possible to be involved in church without knowing God well. But neither is God’s plan. A vibrant individual faith and a strong connection to a local church are both important to experience God’s best for your life.

*[Related: [How Can I Have a Fruitful Life?](#)]*

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. *Watch the video together or invite someone to summarize the topic.*
2. *What is your initial reaction to this video? Do you disagree with any of it? What jumped out at you?*
3. *What are some reasons why people avoid going to church? What reasons have you given?*
4. *Read [John 15:5](#). What do we learn about the kind of relationship Jesus wants to have with each one of us?*
5. *Talk about some ways a relationship with God can become self-centered.*
6. *What are some reasons why people go to church? How have your reasons changed over time?*
7. *Read [Hebrews 10:24-25](#). How have you experienced the benefits mentioned in these verses?*
8. *Read [Ephesians 2:14-19](#). What do you think it means that Christians are “one new people” and “members of God’s family”? How does this change how you think about church?*
9. *What are the marks of a healthy family? How can the church be “family” to you? How can you be “family” to others at church?*
10. *What are some ways being part of a church can enrich our individual relationship with God?*
11. *What are some ways we can make a difference in the world together as a faith community better than any of us can alone?*
12. *Write a personal action step based on this conversation.*