

STEP OF JUDAH

WEEK 4

JUDAH - יהודה

“Praise, Let Him Be Praised”

THE WEAKNESS WE ARE STRENGTHENING

Many who describe themselves as Christian simultaneously criticize and avoid what they call “organized religion.” Others have fallen out of fellowship in a local church, not considering the **Habit of Fellowship** something that needs to be urgently fixed. The result is a weakened Body of Christ and millions of Christians who are not only backsliding but often feel alone and hopeless as well.

FOCUS

Strengthening Fellowship in the Body

KEY VERSE

*“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.”*
(Hebrews 10:24-25)

KEY POINTS

- The church (fellow believers) is the BRIDE of Christ.
- Fellowship is 1 of the 3 NON-NEGOTIABLE habits of a believer.
- A Christian who intentionally separates himself from fellowship (Organized religion) is like a branch that cuts itself off from the vine. Left with no power, no life flowing through it. No longer part of the plan. **Useless** in the growing of the Kingdom of God.
- We are blessed through fellowship, and God is praised in many ways when we come together in unity.

The Step of Judah is about establishing a strong Habit of Fellowship in a believer's life. Believers should understand that to be separated from the Body is to be separated from Him. We should ensure we are in fellowship with other believers at least once per week if not more.

ICE BREAKER

PLAY Would you rather..?

- Visit the doctor or the dentist?
- Eat broccoli or carrots?
- Watch TV or listen to music?
- Own a lizard or a snake?
- Have a beach holiday or a mountain holiday?
- Be an apple or a banana?
- Be invisible or be able to read minds?
- Be hairy all over or completely bald?
- Be the most popular or the smartest person you know?
- Make headlines for saving somebody's life or winning a Nobel Prize?
- Go without television or fast food for the rest of your life?
- Have permanent diarrhea or permanent constipation?
- Be handsome/beautiful and dumb or be ugly and really smart?
- Always be cold or always be hot?
- Not hear or not see?
- Eliminate hunger and disease or be able to bring lasting world peace?
- Be stranded on a deserted island alone or with someone you don't like?
- See the future or change the past?
- Be three inches taller or three inches shorter?
- Wrestle a lion or fight a shark?

GROUP DISCUSSION

John Piper is a well-known and respected pastor who has written many powerful books. Once, when he was speaking about Christian missions and missionary activity, he said, “*Missions exist because worship doesn't.*”

1.) *What did John Piper mean by that?*

Zack Mason, the Executive Director of Path2Hope Ministries, says, “***The purpose of life is to glorify God and worship Him*** – and we were designed to worship corporately together in fellowship, not just individually.”

Yet, the majority of self-described Christians in the United States today do not attend church regularly, if at all.

2.) *Have you ever heard someone say something similar to, "I love Jesus, I just don't want anything to do with organized religion"? If so, when?*

Yet, the Bible says the Church is the Bride of Christ.

Can you imagine a person walking up to a man and saying, "Man, I love you, love to hang out with you, but I hate your wife, please keep her away from me."? *That friendship probably wouldn't survive the conversation.*

Yet, this is what many self-described "Christians" say to Jesus: "Love you, Jesus, but I don't want anything to do with your Bride!"

3.) *Why do you think so many Christians avoid church?*

4.) *Do you think this lack of church attendance has made the American Church stronger or weaker?*

5.) *Have you ever been hurt by someone in the Church before? What was your reaction? Did it impact your church attendance?*

6.) *What about a positive influence? Tell some stories about Christians who invested in you or made you feel loved or worthwhile.*

Zack Mason tells a story about when he was young:

Next to my father, my middle school youth pastor probably had more influence on me, spiritually speaking, than anyone else in my life. Unfortunately, as I entered high school, my youth pastor and several members of his young family suddenly found themselves passing through some very difficult health circumstances. In the middle of this crisis, for a reason that is still not known to me, my church decided to terminate his employment.

Needless to say, the youth group scattered. I personally did not attend church again for at least 5 years. From 9th grade until my second year of college, I did not attend church anywhere and agreed with everyone that “the church was full of hypocrites.”

Nevertheless, I continued to seek God on my own and read the Bible, and I prayed every single day. I read all the way through the Bible at least 5 times during that period.

*Then, one day, God spoke to me and said, “**Zack, you don’t go to church for other people, you go to church for Me!**”*

That made it clear to me how important fellowship was to Him, how much He cared about it, and I’ve been back in church ever since.

7.) *What do you think God might have meant by “you go to church for me”?*

8.) **READ** the following passages:

Acts 2:42- “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching **and to fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

1 Thessalonians 5:11 - “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”

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.”

Fellowship is one of the 3 non-negotiable habits of a believer!

Have you ever seen a Jewish *Menorah*? Menorahs are replicas of the original Golden Lampstand in God’s Temple in the Old Testament.

God commanded the original Golden Lampstand be placed in His Temple because it symbolized believers unified in one body. It had seven branches. Six of the branches (we’ll recall the Book of Revelation says six is the number of man) branched out of the seventh, central branch that rose taller than the other six. This pictures us as believers abiding in Christ. It also shows that apart from Him we can do nothing.

God instructed Moses regarding its construction, saying:

*“... Their branches shall be of one piece;
all of it shall be one hammered piece of pure gold.”*
(Exodus 25:36)

So, we see God specifically required that the Menorah could not be made of multiple pieces of gold hammered together. It had to be a single, solid piece of gold from the start, formed into its shape by a master craftsman.

This teaches us about the spiritual concept of unity within the Body of Christ. We are one with Christ and one with each other. We must operate as one Body!

Scripture teaches us that we are *all* part of the Body of Christ, and that Jesus is our Head. Can you imagine a person saying to Jesus, “I love your head, Jesus, but I want nothing to do with your body!”

In the previous session, we learned that, in nature, God designed trees as an intentional symbol for believers rooted in His Kingdom. We also learned that a tree’s need for water points us to our need for regular prayer.

Yet, that is not all trees need! They also need soil!

Trees rooted in the soil represent Christians rooted in fellowship with the Kingdom of God.

9.) *How well will a tree do if it refuses to be rooted in soil?*

You can water a tree all you want, but if its roots are pointed up in the air, it’s going to wither.

A “Christian” who intentionally separates themselves from “organized religion” is like a branch that cuts itself off from the vine. No power. No life flowing through it. No future. No longer part of the plan. Of no use whatsoever, except for the fire. (John 15:6)

So, fellowship is essential!

NOTE: The soil must be healthy soil! Poisonous soil will also hurt or kill a tree.

Yet, we are also not looking for *perfect* soil. As Kevin Myers of 12Stone Church says, *“If you find the perfect church, don’t attend because you’ll mess it up.”*

10.) READ the following PRAYER OF JESUS in the Gospel of John:

John 17:20-23 – “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

11.) *What are many of the reasons or benefits you can think of why fellowship is important? Why does God care about it so much? Why should we care about it?*

The FOURTH Step in the Path 2 Strength is the **STEP OF JUDAH.**

The name of Judah means “Praised” or “Let Him be praised!”

When we come together in fellowship, we lift up powerful praise to Him together in worship!

We receive blessings through fellowship because opportunities (jobs, housing, etc.) come through people, i.e. other Christians. In other words, fellowship helps us get our needs met. These blessings then cause us to praise Him too.

We are also blessed through fellowship because God corrects us and speaks wisdom to us through other Christians. This produces a more blessed life in us, and so we praise Him!

In fellowship, we learn wisdom and come to know we are not alone, that others care for us. Through them, we feel God’s love for us in tangible ways, and so we praise Him!

In fellowship, we learn how to coordinate with other believers as a team, each one of us using their spiritual gifts and fulfilling their God-given purpose, and so we praise Him!

And so, God is praised in many ways when we come together in unity, in fellowship.

The Step of Judah is about establishing a strong Habit of Fellowship in a believer’s life. Believers should understand that to be separated from the Body is to be separated from Him. We should ensure we are in fellowship with other believers at least once per week if not more.

ACTION STEPS & HOMEWORK

Action Steps

COMMIT to regular, weekly fellowship. If you're not already attending a church weekly for worship, begin doing so.

COMMIT also to staying in a small group of some kind after completing this Path2Strength semester.

Homework

MEMORIZE 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.” (Hebrews 10:24-25)*

GROUP PRAYER NEEDS
