



# The Tri-Cities Edifier

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## Membership

by Terry Caldwell

Most of us have been, or currently are, participants in an organization based on personal interests and pursuits. Such groups focus on hobbies, recreational activities, sports or community services. Reflecting on involvement in these groups, and our respective continuation in them, we can probably agree on how and why we're part of the organization.

The group first of all meets a personal need or interest. We join because such association connects us with others who have skills or knowledge we wish to acquire or develop. We join because the members are socially accepting and we make new friends. We continue with such a group as long as it continues to meet our needs and interaction with other members is positive. While an active member we remain loyal to the group and promote interest and membership to others who may have similar interests.

We expect the group or organization to continue to meet our personal needs as a requirement of our ongoing support. If any of these attributes no longer work for us we drift away from the group, discontinue associating with other members and in cases in which we're dissatisfied, may terminate our identification with the group. That makes sense. We have the freedom to seek these types of clubs and organizations and we have the freedom to terminate our relationship with them when they no longer satisfy us.

This mentality sometimes gets applied to our involvement with the Lord's church especially at a local or congregational level. In spite of what we might think there are significant differences we need to be aware of.

First, we don't join the church. We're members of the Lord's body because God added us to the church when we responded to the Gospel in faith and completed our obedience to the Lord through the pattern found in the New Testament. Membership was given to us as a blessing as a child of God (Acts 2.47). When we place membership at a local congregation we're not conditionally attaching ourselves to a local group. We're acknowledging that God wants us to assemble with the saints and we've made a commitment to the work in a specific location (Heb 10.24-25).

Our membership doesn't exist to meet our desires. Involvement in a local body is for the joint encouragement and support of other Christians (Rom 12.5). We benefit from this arrangement as we engage in worship, study and practice evangelism. When we allow ourselves to start evaluating the local congregation, or the church in general, in terms of what we want and like we've missed the point. Our membership is to honor and worship God and Christ, serve others and reach the lost.

We may find ourselves at odds with other members in a location. At least two reasons for this can be identified. One may be that another is teaching or practicing something not supported in the scriptures. If that's the case then we must take care to approach the situation with the intent of correcting and edifying the other if they're open to it (Gal 6.1). The second reason to not get along with others in a local body is if we've placed more emphasis on what we want or desire and see others as falling short of that (Rom 12.3). It doesn't matter what we want. We're a collective body that worships and serves the Lord. When we forget that and place ourselves first we've lost sight of our identity as children of God. We can certainly become disillusioned, angry or disappointed and withdraw our presence from a local group but we've really turned away from God, lost sight of our true purpose and elevated ourselves above others. Our membership is a blessing given to us by God and we need to remember who gave it to us and why.

# Just Plain Shamgar

Robert F. Turner

"And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who smote of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also saved Israel" (Jdg. 3:31).

Troy Mulhollan, one of our faithful members, used this as his text for a Wednesday night talk recently. He announced his subject, A Man Named Shamgar, and commented, "That isn't a household name around Burnet." True!

The man is mentioned only once more in the Bible — in Judges 5:6. And yet he, with Othniel (Jdg. 3:9-11), Ehud (3:15-30), and others more widely acclaimed, "also saved Israel." Does it really matter about "credits" if the deed is rightly done, and the doer serves his purpose in life?

Was Shamgar a simple working man-an ox driver? If so it wouldn't be the first or last time God used plain ordinary folk to accomplish His work. Jesus called fishermen, a tax collector, and such to announce salvation to the world. The potential in just plain folk, when serving God, is a sleeping giant. But **your** part can be played only when you throw off the debilitating concept that "God surely wouldn't use a nobody like me." In humble earthen vessels the glory is clearly seen to be of God (2 Cor. 4:7).

Why did Shamgar use an ox goad? It may have been the only type of weapon available (1 Sam. 13:19-f.); or it may have been God's way of showing that the victory is not in armor but in the Lord (1 Sam. 17:47). Brother Troy said there was no way of knowing, but suggested this plain ordinary oxen driver may simply have **used what he had**. It is not a bad though with or without specific information.

If every plain, ordinary person could be persuaded to take what he or she has — in talent, money, opportunity — and put it to work for the Lord, we would begin to recognize the power of leaven in meal, of salt spread throughout the world, of tremendous candlepower. And, a dedicated worker will sharpen the goad, trim the candle, do whatever is possible to make the best use of what is available.

You exist for a divine purpose. There are no little people with God.