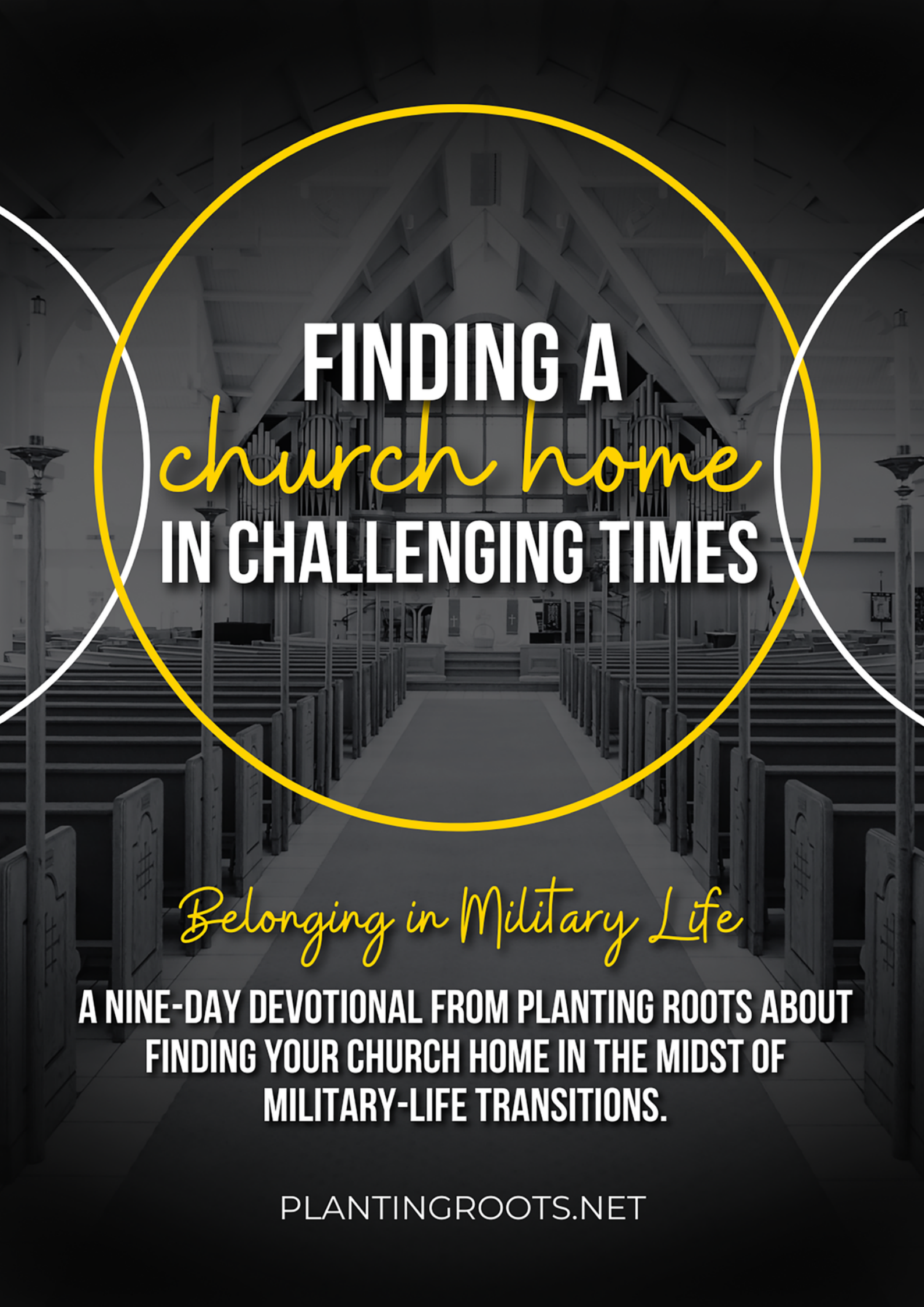




FINDING A *church home* IN CHALLENGING TIMES

Belonging in Military Life

**A NINE-DAY DEVOTIONAL FROM PLANTING ROOTS ABOUT
FINDING YOUR CHURCH HOME IN THE MIDST OF
MILITARY-LIFE TRANSITIONS.**

PLANTINGROOTS.NET

BELONGING IN MILITARY LIFE: DAY 1

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There are few constants in military life. From one set of orders to the next, we move across states, countries, and cultures, unpacking our lives in temporary homes and saying goodbye just as friendships begin to take root. While this lifestyle fosters resilience, it can also lead to spiritual

whiplash if you aren't careful. Each move requires us to restart everything, and one of the hardest places to start over is finding a new church home.

I've walked into many sanctuaries with hope in my heart and my Bible in my hand, praying this would be the place where my family could worship, serve, and belong. Sometimes we found that place quickly.

Other times... we didn't.



But one thing has remained true: finding a church home is not optional. It's essential.

The Bible gives us two beautiful, interconnected truths about what the church is meant to be. In Greek, the word *ekklesia* refers to the gathering of believers, the collective identity of the Church under the authority of Christ. It's both universal (all Christians across time and geography) and local (the church down the street or on the installation). Then there's *koinonia*, the shared fellowship among believers. This is the authentic, relational, day-in-and-day-out life of the body of Christ.

Greek Term	Meaning	Importance in Military Life
Ekklesia	The gathered body of believers, structured, mission-focused	Helps us anchor our faith in truth and accountability, no matter where we live
Koinonia	Relational, intimate fellowship; shared life in Christ	Meets our deep need for connection, encouragement, and spiritual family

This 9-day devotional explores the letters to the seven churches in Revelation as a guide for discerning what to look for in a church. The Book of Revelation, revealed to John through divine vision, is most known for terrifying depictions of the coming end times to include marks on foreheads, giant beasts, the sky being rolled away, and confusing symbolism. It's not the first place you would look when beginning a search for a new church home. In between these pages, however, there is great wisdom on what God Himself views as worthy (and unworthy) attributes within the walls of a church. Whether you're walking into a chapel on base or visiting a local congregation off post, these reflections will help you ask the right questions, notice the right fruit, and walk in with both discernment and hope.

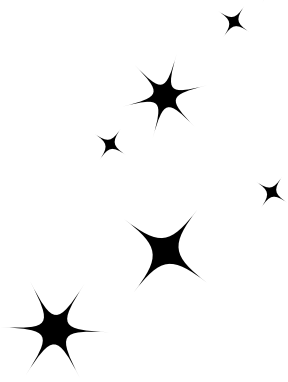
No matter where the military sends you, you are part of Ekklesia.

You already belong.

At Planting Roots, we walk this military journey together because we've lived it, every PCS, every chapel visit, every season of searching and settling. As you seek a church home, we pray that the Lord will lead you with His wisdom, rooted in His Word. You're not alone in this. We are right here with you, coffee in hand and faith on the move.

Prayer: Father, You walk with us through every move and transition. As we begin this devotional, give us wisdom and insight. Help us recognize sound teaching and genuine fellowship. Lead us to the place where we can grow in our love for You and serve Your people with joy. Amen.

Readings: Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:7, Hebrews 10:24-25



EPHESUS: DUTY OVER DEVOTION DAY 2



To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Revelation 2:1-7

Before having my second son in two years, I had struggled with the decision to leave my home chapel when the teachings there no longer aligned with the word of God. As we learned yesterday, there is no Koinonia without Christ. That, combined with the fugue state of two-under-two, led to my intense need for fellowship and a safe church home. I dug into online research and used my 'gut' to find the right place. I found a church that offered multiple ministries, programs, and outreach initiatives. It was medium-sized so that I wouldn't feel lost, but it had structure and oversight, two of my favorite things!

I rolled my double stroller into the lobby on our first Sunday morning at our new church. Before I even set eyes on the pews, a volunteer coordinator popped up from the coffee station with a greeting and encouragement to sign up for a serving committee. Always one for service, I provided her with my information and settled my kids into the pew.

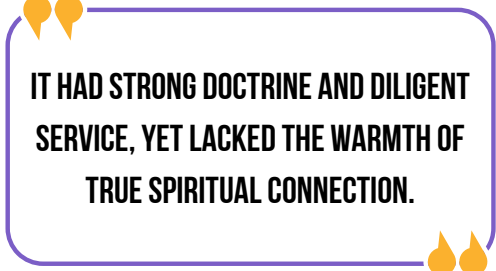
There, I found what I was looking for, what I needed: a QR code to scan for community groups. I filled it out with hope.

Before I got home that same day, I received an email from the volunteer coordinator asking if I was interested in volunteering in the children's nursery area during Sunday school.

One week turned into four, and I didn't hear anything from the community group coordinator; however, I did receive two more emails from the volunteer coordinator. I reached out to the community group coordinator in person, and he informed me that the QR code is not always checked, and that the best way to get involved is to meet people organically. I faithfully attended for three months ... and served in the nursery, which ironically, kept me from meeting people and building the community I was so desperate for.

I was quickly pushed toward roles of service without first being shepherded into a relationship.

Like the church in Ephesus, which worked tirelessly but had lost its first love, this church prioritized function over faith, duty over devotion. It had strong doctrine and diligent service, yet lacked the warmth of true spiritual connection.



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Even the most well-intentioned of churches can miss the mark, and we need to remember to maintain our passion and devotion to Christ as the foundation of all ministry and life. Jesus' message to Ephesus is a reminder that a church can be busy, well-organized, and doctrinally sound but still miss the heart of the gospel love for Christ and one another.

QUESTION OF THE DAY: As we search for a church, we must look beyond well-run programs and structured service opportunities to ask: Does this church cultivate love—first for Christ, then for one another? Is this a place for the body of Christ or is it a place for community service hours?

PRAYER: Father, help us find a church that prioritizes LOVE, love for you and others. Remind us that we are more than service to a building, although that service shapes us and connects us in so many ways. But it must be in balance and always out of love for You and others. Thank you for creating a church of Spirit-filled-and-led believers who hone one another but who also care for and connect with one another. Thank you for the help that we receive in this church. Thank you in advance for the help that we can give in this church. And thank you for the seasons of giving and receiving that ebb and flow and help us find a church that can support both. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

READINGS: Revelation 2:1-7, Acts 18-19



SMYRNA: STAND FIRM IN THE FIRE DAY 3

To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown.

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.

Revelation 2:8-11

Does anyone else feel like the world has been in chaos for the last few years?

Like, enough with the unprecedented times already. Can I have some precedent-ed times? Is that a thing?

Either way, all of this chaos has created a lot of division within the church. Without trying very hard, you can find division among just about any theological concept, despite being told that there should not be division within the body of Christ! All of that division comes just from looking within our American protestant faith institutions; that doesn't even begin to take into consideration the things happening outside our church walls.

In the current political landscape, many Christians, including pastors and church leaders, are hunkering down into ideological camps that worship their chosen Caesar. It is encouraging, then, to see the Christian communities that are refusing to participate in the idolatry (whether through adoration or hatred) of government officials. The body of Christ must refuse to align with one particular political mascot, but instead stay focused on loving God and loving others, regardless of societal pressure. Remember, we belong to the King of Kings, not the leaders of this world. We select Christ over cultural allegiance, prioritizing faithfulness to the gospel over societal approval. Our church needs to choose Christ over political or cultural allegiances, prioritizing faithfulness to the gospel over societal approval. Even if it hurts.

Like the church of Smyrna, which endured persecution and hardship yet remained spiritually rich, we want to choose a church today that refuses to compromise its faith for worldly power. How do we know that they do that? They select Christ over cultural allegiances, prioritizing faithfulness to the gospel over societal approval.

Unlike most other churches in Revelation, Smyrna receives no rebuke from Jesus, only commendation for their endurance.

QUESTION OF THE DAY: When choosing a church, we must ask, Is this a place that will stand firm in truth even when it costs something? True spiritual wealth is found in a church that prioritizes faithfulness over popularity, even when the world (or the political climate) makes it difficult.

PRAYER: Lord, guide us to a church helps us grow strong in our faith, keeping our eyes fixed on You and You alone as our King. Let this church be one that sees the eternal power of loving one another as You loved us as the most transformative power in the universe. Remind us that we are all one at the foot of the cross, that our lives are but mist, and that our purpose is to bring your gospel into all the world. Regardless of the current crises that surround us. Thank you for such firm, safe footing. Amen.

READINGS: Revelation 2:8-11, Galatians 3:23-28

ENJOYING THE SAMPLE?

You can find the full 9-day devotional
on YouVersion, available beginning Nov. 10.

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