

Back to Church or Back to Bed?

A Churchgoer wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper and complained that it made no sense to go to church every Sunday.

He wrote, "I've gone to church for 30 years now, and in that time I have heard something like 3,000 sermons.

But for the life of me, I can't remember a single one of them. I think I'm wasting my time and the pastors are wasting theirs by giving sermons."

This started a real controversy in the "Letters to the Editor" column.

It went on for weeks until someone wrote this clincher:

"I've been married for 30 years now. In that time my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals.

But for the life of me, I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of those meals.

But I do know this: Those meals nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work.

If my wife had not given me these meals, I would be physically dead today.

Likewise, if I had not gone to church for nourishment, I would be spiritually dead today!"

Hebrews 10:25

"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

Back to church Sunday was established after 9/11.....

Since "covid 19" there has been a pattern of lower than normal church attendance.

It has caused me to wonder, are we engaging in what the writer of Hebrews said, "giving up [on] meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing."

We can speculate on why attendance is down.

We could spend our time here today making one another feel guilty for our absence Sunday after Sunday.

But that would not be of any benefit to any of us.

I also, do not think that is what this passage is telling us.

I believe the writer is giving a word of encouragement, saying "don't give up, don't abandon or desert the church community".

He goes on to say, "As some are in the habit of doing". Christians today need be reminded of their importance to the church.

Your attendance & involvement in the church is vital for your spiritual nourishment.

I realize that Sunday mornings are hard for some people to get to church.

Maybe a late Saturday night watching sports, or you want to do some golfing, a little yard work while the weather is nice or you got called into work. If you allow it, there is always going to be a reason not to attend.

It is so easy to hit the snooze button on Sunday morning when the alarm sounds at seven o'clock, roll over and go back to sleep.

Maybe you had every intention of going to church,...even had your clothes laid out, but your sleepy side wins and you satisfy your conscience with the thought, "Next Sunday." It happens! Perhaps more than you think.

One sunny Sunday morning, Henry Jones awoke to find his wife standing over him, shaking him by the shoulder. "You have to get up," she urged. "We have to get ready for church."

"I don't want to go to church," he replied. "I want to stay in bed." Crossing her arms over her chest, his wife demanded, "Give me three good reasons why you should stay in bed and not go to church."

"OK," he answered. "First, I don't get anything out of the service.

Second, I don't like the people there.

And third, no one there likes me.

Now can you give me three good reasons why I should go to church?" His wife responded, "First, it will do you some good.

Second, there are people who really do like you.

And third, you have to go, you're the pastor! Get up and get dressed."

If going to church can be so difficult;

Why Go to Church?

You go to school to get an education so you can make a living.

You go to work to make money so you can pay the bills.

You go to the gym for exercise and better health.

You go to the mall to shop for clothes and the grocery store to buy food.

You go to the lake to fish, the ball game to cheer, and golf course for fun.

But church? Why go to there?

Why get up early on one of your few off-days?

Why go through the hassle of dressing up and the getting the kids ready?

Why go to the trouble of finding a parking space near the front and pew space near the back?

Why go to church?

If you've ever found yourself wondering about that little question, you're not alone.

Surveys tell us that as many as 79% of Americans identify themselves as Christians, yet only 20% of Americans attend church regularly.

I guess some people look at going to church as a bother—an unnecessary burden to be avoided whenever possible—a perfectly good hour wasted in order to keep a wife or a preacher or a parent off their backs.

Others see it as sort of like punching a spiritual clock or earning brownie points with their Maker.

But to someone who understands church and what it's really all about, going to church can be the most spiritually fulfilling, inspiring thing you do all week.

The Book of Acts tells the story of how the church got started.

The New Testament church began on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the 120 in the upper room waiting for the "promise of the Father." Despite what some modern-day theologians and religious leaders want you to believe, the TRUTH is that the church was founded in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Period. Too many of us have seen abuses or misuses of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, true, but you can't "throw the baby out with the bath water."

I believe all of us desire the same thing, a PURE, AUTHENTIC, and POWERFUL move of the Holy Spirit. **What does that look like?**

First, it looks like Jesus. The buzz word in a Spirit-filled church is JESUS. Everything we do is centered around Him. We don't play church, we serve the Master. We don't control the service, Jesus is Lord and He has the pre-eminence.

John 15:26 "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. 27 And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning."

So, when the Holy Spirit comes (which He does every time we gather in Jesus' Name), He will move in our midst and He will move through people surrendered and submitted to God, and all the glory will go to Jesus. I love how Jesus said to His disciples in vs 27, not only will the Holy Spirit testify of Me, you also will bear witness of Me. He is saying the same thing to us today, "you, disciples of mine, with the Holy Spirit living inside, will tell others what you have witnessed and experienced of Me."

Secondly, it looks like LOVE. Agape Love. It is the God-kind of love. The characteristics of Agape are:

1. Unconditional
2. Unfailing
3. Unchanging
4. Committed
5. Constant
6. Faithful
7. Grace-Filled
8. True
9. Ever-giving
10. Other-centered
11. Sacrificial ...

Fifty days after Jesus rose from the dead, he sent the Holy Spirit to empower his disciples. They went out and began preaching about the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus—the Good News.

Millions of people listened, thousands believed. Then at the end of Acts 2, we find this short snapshot of what life was like in the early church: Acts 2:41-47

When we look at the early church, in the book of Acts, we begin to realize the real purpose of the church and why we meet together every week.

First: Church Helps You Focus on God

Sometimes in life, especially in our trials, we focus so intently on our situation that we forget to focus on God and His goodness. Matthew 14:30 –

Look at Peter walking on water and focused on the waves...

Clemson vs. Boston College football game...11 seconds to go in the ball game, Will Harper fires the ball to his favorite receiver, an outstretched Aaron Kelly...sailing across the goal line for the go-ahead touchdown...the only problem...he lost his focus at the last second and the ball ricocheted off his hands to the ground...Clemson lost the game. When you lose focus, you lose games.

Being in church, hearing God's word and singing songs gives you a renewed perspective about your situation and keeps our focus on God.

Having a weekly "Church Attendance Rhythm" is important.

Even God took a rest after working six days.

Think about it: boxers need rest between rounds & race car drivers need to refuel after so many laps.

Church helps you refuel and get focused for the week.

Second: Church gives us a sense of Belonging

The church brings into our lives a place to belong.

The passage we read in Acts is absolutely flooded with fellowship.

The Bible says, "All the believers devoted themselves... to fellowship, and to sharing in meals...and all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had."

Jesus gave these new believers a sense of community, belonging and togetherness at a level that you cannot find anywhere else in the world.

All of us need a place to belong. All of us need to be a part of something bigger than ourselves.

All of us need to experience family and fellowship.

So many Americans are lonely, a study showed that 4 out of 10 people experience feelings of intense loneliness.

Our American culture produces people who more closely identify with characters on a weekly TV series than with their next-door neighbors.

Everywhere you look, there are signs that people are hungering for fellowship, community, and a sense of family.

Beer commercials don't sell beer; they sell fellowship.

Advertisers don't portray someone drinking alone; it's always in the context of enjoying each other's company.

People long to be connected.

Third: Church Helps You Find Encouragement in Life

The church is not a building; it is made up of people, Believers. God's people give support and encouragement during life's problems. We receive strength from each other.

Mark 2:1-5 – 4 men bringing their paralyzed friend to Jesus. They tore a hole in the roof for their friend...Radical!

Have you ever seen geese flying south in V formation?

Science has discovered about why they fly that way.

It has been learned that as each bird flaps its wings, it creates uplift for the bird immediately following.

By flying in a V formation, the whole flock adds at least 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew on its own.

(Christians who share in a church community can get where they are going quicker and easier, because they are traveling on the power of one another.)

Have you ever heard those geese in their formation.

The geese honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

(Christian friendships are designed to honk words of encouragement to those who are flying with them)

Did you know that when a goose gets sick, or is wounded by a shot and falls out, two geese fall out of formation and follow him down to help and protect him.

They stay with him until he is either able to fly, or until he is dead, and then they launch out on their own or with another formation to catch up with their original group.

We need each other! A football player needs a team; a soldier needs a platoon; a sheep needs a flock.

But the most understandable and biblical picture is that of a child needing a family.

That family is the church. A Christian without a church family is an orphan.

Fourth: The Church helps us to Spiritual Maturity

The church helps lead us to spiritual Maturity. Jumping back to Acts 2 again, the Bible says, "All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to prayer"(vs. 42 NLT).

In other words, they were committed to learning more about Jesus, who was the focus of the apostles' teaching, and growing to become more like him.

Let me explain something that I don't think a lot of preachers say:

We don't study the Bible so that we can sound smart in Sunday school; we study the Bible so that, through it, the Holy Spirit can change us and make us more like Christ.

God want to develop in you the kind of character described in the beatitudes of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, the fruit of the Spirit and Paul's great love chapter.

The Holy Spirit uses a variety of methods to lead us into Christ-likeness.

He often uses the circumstances of life—trials and tragedies—to shape our character.

He uses worship—as Emerson once noted, "It behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming."

He also uses other people—fellowshipping with people who are more spiritually mature than we are helps us to grow.

He definitely uses prayer—the more time you spend talking with God, the more you start to sound like him yourself.

But I still believe the tool he uses more than any other is God's Word.

In fact, the Bible calls the Word of God, the Sword of the Spirit. As Rick Warren puts it, "The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to make you more like the Son of God."

When you come to church—into the fellowship of other spiritually growing people—and hear the Word of God being preached, it teaches you what it really means to be like Jesus, it challenges you to follow in his steps, and hopefully it inspires you and equips you to be able to do it. Church helps us grow to spiritual maturity.

Fifth: Church Helps You Fulfill God's Mission

Returning to Acts 2 one last time, the Bible says, "And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47 NLT).

The church's mission is the same as Christ's mission—to seek and save the lost.

When you get saved, Jesus adds you to his church and, therefore, his mission becomes your mission.

In church, we all have the same mission: to share the Good News of Jesus and his saving grace with a bent and broken world.

You might fulfill your mission by sharing your testimony—the story of how you came to Jesus and what he's done in your life.

You might carry out your mission by telling people the Good News—explaining the sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection of Christ and what that means to the world.

Or maybe you will accomplish your mission by simply inviting people to church and letting them hear the Good News there.

The church in Jerusalem grew from 120 to 3000 in just one day. By Acts 4, that number had risen to 5000 and, by Acts 6 there were too many to count—all because they knew they had a mission and they set out to get it done.

Is anyone going to be in heaven because of you?

Will anyone in heaven be able to say to you, "I want to thank you. I'm here because you cared enough to share the Good News with me." Imagine the joy of greeting people in heaven whom you helped get there.

The eternal salvation of a single soul is more important than anything else you will ever achieve in life.

I hope that I've given you enough reasons to get up and go to church next Sunday!

The truth is church isn't just something you attend; it's something you are.

When you understand what it means to not just go to church, but be the church, you discover your life's true purpose—you were made to be a member of his family, to magnify his glory, to mature in his image, to be a minister of his mercy, and a missionary of his grace.