

COMING & GOING
Transitions in the Church



THE SANCTUARY

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*Ask not what the Church can do for you;
ask instead what you can do for the Church!*

Although obvious liberties have been taken with John F. Kennedy's 1961 inaugural speech, these famous words could definitely be applied to the Church in the United States today. President Kennedy, in one of his most well-known quotes, is exhorting citizens to become substantial contributors to the republic. He boldly asked the American people to look within and partner with the nation—as its sons and daughters—instead of living in societal entitlement.

One of the places we see this same entitlement attitude encroaching today, is in the rows of the local church. Statistically speaking the Church in America is shrinking. ¹ While some ministries are increasing numerically, in reality the Church in America isn't really growing but rather going... oftentimes to the newest "attraction" in town. We might see relocation growth, but that's not the same as conversion growth through evangelism.

Before we continue, it is important to establish the differences between the Church and a church. For this writing I will be referring to global Christianity as the capital "C"hurch; representing on every continent and in every denomination - those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, Healer, Baptizer with the Holy Spirit and Soon Coming King. Based on Paul's writings, the Church is also referred to as either the "Bride" ² or "Body" ³ of Christ. The lower case "c"hurch is referencing local congregations or a "flock" of believers meeting together in parish/community, typically led by a pastor or "shepherd." Both of these contexts are what Jesus was referring to when He said, where two or more are gathered in His name He is there, with them, in their midst.⁴

Let's begin by understanding the roots of what has created so many "spiritual vagabonds" in the Church of the United States. It has resulted in congregational vagrants, loitering around bodies of believers, never contributing to the health and benefit of the ministry and mission of the church. They come and go as they please like spiritual hobo's "just passing through", content on "bumming" what sustenance they can; never staying in one place very long, and never really working—they're just "drifters," moving from congregation to congregation.

The devil has been an enemy of the Church since it was established.⁵ For centuries the accuser of the brethren⁶ has been uprooting believers (men, women, and entire families) from the very places God wants them planted. Satan's goals are pretty straightforward: to steal, kill, and destroy.⁷ He does this by isolating his prey, and like a lion on the prowl,⁸ once he separates his victim from the flock, he goes in for the kill. But, when our common adversary fails to displace us, even in the midst of conflict, and we remain connected in community, we spoil his divisive plans of creating entire tribes of exiled, wounded believers all singing the hymn of the wandering, "I used to go to church... now I don't anymore!"

Much of the fluctuation in attendance happening in congregations today could be attributed to what has been accurately described as "transfer growth."⁹ (The term describes the, "I used to like it there—now I like it here" mentality so prevalent in the Church today.) Some families are so fractured and divided they attend different congregations entirely based on preference: a mother at one church because of its prayer and worship focus, while the younger children attend somewhere else because their Sunday School classes and Vacation Bible School programs are so fun, while their older brothers or sisters attend a different youth group because, "that's where all my friends go!" Unfortunately, this malady is also usually accompanied by a lack of familial leadership, leaving dad at home and out of the mix altogether. Although this all may sound extreme and exaggerated in its example, I have watched—in both local and national church ministry—this "smorgasbord" approach taken by many families over the years.

One of the goals of this reader is to address the issues creating this spiritual transiency and give practical and applicable steps to discover and remain in a local congregation and, when necessary, how to properly leave one fellowship gathering for another.

Unfortunately, the overall lack of proper teaching and discipleship in the Church today has moved entire bodies of believers from a spirit of community (found throughout the pages of both the Old and New Testaments) to a worldly commodity approach. This attitude has permeated the Church with a spirit of entitlement creating "cultural Christians." It also can prove to be a challenge for pastors who may find themselves struggling with "congregation-obligation," in competition, not just with the congregation across town, but with the many school, sports or various weekend warrior activities that may draw so many away from local fellowship from week to week. The overindulged cry out, "What's in it for me?"

As followers of Jesus, we are not meant to be satisfied with the things of this world. As a result, we may become discontented and unable to gratify our ongoing cravings that can make us a "slave" to our calendars. We become so busy that it can begin to cause physical, spiritual and emotional burnout in trying to "keep up

with the Joneses.” The chronically busy believer may have little time to be involved in partnering with and serving in and through the local church. A second goal of this reader is to address this plague of discontentment and give the necessary tools to dig up this root, which has troubled and corrupted so many. ¹⁰

OUR PLACE IN THIS WORLD

At one time it was presumed every believer understood the need for a local church home where they would connect regularly, fulfilling the basic need to know others and be known. A quick survey of Scripture proves unmistakably how fellowship is necessary for Christian maturity. Over the last three decades of pastoral ministry I have realized a very different reality for many Jesus followers. If you are not currently a part of a local church, I pray this reader would be invaluable to your journey.

We all have a basic need to know we belong and to be part of something bigger than ourselves. In a word, we need to be connected in community, and that connection is created and sustained in several different places.

The **FIRST** place is the home. Belonging is defined, created and sustained by those with whom we live. Families play an essential role in the formation of social interaction and the home holds primary influence in the social structure of responsibilities and roles. Most of all it is here, in the home, where our identity is forged.

The **SECOND** place is the workplace (for young people it might be school or extracurricular sports). Many people actually spend most of their time at work; it's a place of contribution to the world. For others their job is simply a means to an end; and that end is the weekend where fun can be experienced.

The **THIRD** place is much broader and more conceptual. ¹¹ When considering this environment, think of a community-wide context, separate from the home and the workplace. This setting is an “anchor” of community life and facilitates and fosters a broader, more creative interaction. All societies have these informal meeting places. What is new in modern times is how people have begun using social media as a place for this interaction, but in doing so actually miss out on the true connection that happens through transparency, vulnerability and proximity.

Some of the important qualities, while not essential, of a Third Place are:

- They're highly accessible: close in proximity for many (often within walking distance).
- They involve “regulars” or those who habitually gather there.
- There's usually free or inexpensive food.
- They have a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere.
- They're where new friends can be made, and old friends can be found.

If a coffee house comes to mind, you would have a great example of a Third Place. Many of these establishments have taken the primary position for the Third Place in people's lives. Comfortable couches and tables line the walls in these high-octane cafés. They come in a variety of shapes and styles and are equally creative in their names: Brewed Awakenings, Sacred Grounds, Jitters, and Bean Around the World. People meet, connect, counsel, and commemorate here. Starbucks has become a household name and phone apps have been created to find the closest caffeine supplier at the push of a button.

Still others will depend on extracurricular activities to fill their Third Place needs. Adults have become creative in meeting their requirements. What once was couple's bowling night or pinocle has turned to various sports leagues, where "she's got indoor soccer Tuesday night and he's got softball Thursday after work." Kids are competing year-round in their activity of choice; enforcing the "idle hands are the devil's workshop" idiom. Parents will enroll their kids in endless hours and a variety of activities, adding to a young person's already full schedule of honors classes and the homework load associated with it. Is it any wonder that by Sunday morning, the fatigued populace just wants to sleep in

Everything listed here has taken the place of what was once the role of the local church. Read the list of qualifiers for a Third Place again, it actually sounds a lot like a local church. That's because, for centuries, the Church WAS the Third Place. When someone new moved into a community, the first place they would connect would be the local church to make friends, learn about schools, and find introductions to teachers, doctors, politicians, and local business owners. The local church was not only the community anchor but also offered an outlet for people's Unique Kingdom Contribution.¹² New and old friends got together and supported one another through good times and bad... in the local church. And of course, plenty of food was always close at hand through potlucks and picnics.

But all of that has changed.

GOD'S PLAN: A CHURCH WITH YOU IN MIND

All of this was God's idea. He was the first to say, "It is not good for man to be alone."¹³ He knows what we need, and He is quick to meet that need. In the Old Testament there were tribes where people belonged and found identity; each tribe had specific responsibilities in the overall kingdom contribution. In the New Testament Jesus instituted the Church.¹⁴ Much of the New Testament is filled with letters written to local churches with instructions on how to live in community. With more than fifty references to "One-Anothering"¹⁵ in the New Testament, it's evident we're to be in relationship with others.

Diversity in the Church is God's plan! Just look at 1 Corinthians 12 and hear Paul describe the similarities between a human body and the Body of Christ. At one-point Paul makes it clear that God places each "part" where He wants it (v. 18) making the connection to the Body of Christ and its members.

God's intention and specialty is to place us within the Church. The following are some things to consider as you look for and integrate into the local church. Ask for ears to hear and eyes to see what the Spirit is saying and doing. ¹⁶

HOW TO FIND A GOOD CHURCH

- **Look prayerfully.**

As with all aspects of a Christian's decisions, we must begin our pursuit for a church by seeking the Lord's direction. The Bible promises, "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths." ¹⁷

- **Look extensively; consider your whole community.**

You might look on the Internet for websites and social media for church suggestions. Always look for a congregation that is reaching out to the lost (more on this in a moment) and is Bible-based. A referral from a trusted Christian friend is the most frequent way people are introduced to a church. A visit or two is helpful, but there is no way to fully evaluate a church without attending most services for at least a month or more.

- **Look for the camaraderie and friendship of believers.**

A church is not a building, ¹⁸ nor is it just a ministry; it is the Body of Christ. So, seek people who love the Lord and who love each other—people that will know and love you and people whom you can know and love. Connection and relationships are so important that many Christians may refer to it as "fellowship," an association of shared interests.

- **Look for a church that preaches/teaches the Word of God.**

Seek a ministry that has sound doctrine, proclaims the Word, and sincerely lifts up Jesus in worship and in all they do. Much of this can be discovered by observation, but most congregations will have a section on their website or a printed statement of their doctrines they will provide to you if you simply ask. For further clarity, you can speak with leadership about their beliefs or practices. Call the office and make an appointment with the pastor.

- **Look for a church that has good character.**

Seek a loving, peaceful, stable church, which has a pastor devoted to godliness, prayer and the Bible. All of this is far more important than their eloquence, education or charisma. Look for a body of believers that is friendly. Watch how they greet one another. And more importantly see if they greet you, as a guest in their home, were you welcomed warmly and genuinely or are they unaware of your presence?

- **Look for a church that will help draw you closer to Christ.**

It would be nice to find a congregation where the music is flawless, the seats are padded, and the pastor dismisses promptly before lunch. But more importantly, you need a fellowship that cares about you and one that will help meet your spiritual needs – that will inspire you to grow in Christ, and will motivate you toward God-objectives. You need a church whose preaching and teaching will not merely appease or entertain you, but will boldly challenge you to move beyond inspiration to perspiration in living toward God’s high ideals.

- **Look at the opportunities available for growth and connection.**

Review the bulletin check out their APP or website for small group discipleship and fellowship opportunities. Is there a place to “plug-in,” where you can know and be known? What are the topics of Bible studies or the mid-week service series titles? These will all tell you the spiritual direction of the church, and where fellowship is intended to build relationships within the congregation.

- **Look for a church where you can become committed.**

In many ways, your relationship with the church is similar to a marriage – you won’t get any more out of it than what you put into it. The only church in which you will ever grow and mature spiritually is the one where you commit yourself and get involved—in partnership, where the people submit themselves to God and to one another and where you can experience both encouragement and accountability.

- **Look for a church that isn’t church-centered.**

There are many congregations settled into maintaining and focusing on the life of those already a part of the congregation, and while it is good and right to offer discipleship opportunities for the believer, it is just as important that the Church be a place where unchurched people love to attend.¹⁹ Look for a place where the weekend experience is so compelling and helpful that even the most skeptical individuals in the area would walk away with every intention of returning the following week... with a friend! Find a fellowship that is seeking to reconcile people back to God through Jesus, both in their community and cross-culturally, on foreign mission fields. Such a church understands its purpose and will provide a healthy environment in which to grow.

- **Look for a church where you can contribute.**

I’ve often heard the comparison made between a church and a restaurant—a place where you get served a meal (thus we have services). But actually, the church is more like a potluck or family picnic. What you bring with you to church is added to the overall content of the meal. Your contribution to the gathering helps to make it what it is. Therefore, seek a church where you can roll up your sleeves and help minister to others. Always remember, a church is the sum-total of its people. So, if you want your church to be the best it can be, you must be the best you can be. A church collective can never rise above the contribution factor ²⁰ of a congregation’s individual members.

- **Look for and be ready to accept the individuality of a church.**

Frequently people will look for a church like the one they grew up in, or where they first experienced salvation, or maybe like what they've seen on TV or online. But this is futile, because even though a church might have the same beliefs or similarities as another, every church is distinct and different in its personality, just like people are. Always use the Bible to measure a church—not other churches.

- **Look with reasonable expectations.**

Don't start looking for a perfect church, because they don't exist. In every church you will find people who are wonderful and some who aren't. Jesus taught that it was common for weeds to be found growing together with the crops.²¹ Every church will do some things well, and other things not-so-well. Don't try to find a perfect pastor either, they're all human and will all make mistakes.²² In looking at a pastor/shepherd look for a leader who is sincere, who is trying their best to live a godly life, and who is proclaiming the uncompromised Word of God.

NATURAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT

Because of the many transitions in and through local churches, since the early 1970's millions of dollars have been poured into what was called the Church Growth Movement. The advertised promises and guaranteed principles for growing a congregation spiritually and numerically left many leaders disillusioned and sincere believers immature. Now, fifty years "into the program," leaders are acknowledging the ineffectiveness of its principles and practices to produce lasting conversions. C. Peter Wagner, a leading author and spokesman for the Church Growth Movement states:

"I don't think there is anything intrinsically wrong with the church-growth principles we've developed, or the evangelistic techniques we are using. Yet somehow, they don't seem to work, ...maybe something else is needed."²³

The "something else" beyond Church Growth that is needed is Church Health! The idea is that just because something is growing doesn't necessarily make it healthy (ie. a tumor, or a swelling sprained ankle). However, the by-product of something that is healthy is always growth... and reproduction! In botanical terms: if you want the fruits focus on the roots!

One organization solidly focused on Church health is Natural Church Development (NCD). First published in 1996, Author Christian Schwarz not only opened a new chapter in the international discussion on church growth, but also initiated a vibrant theology and practice of church development principles published in more than 40 languages. NCD presents practical conclusions drawn from the most comprehensive research ever conducted on the causes of church growth —more than 70,000 churches in 70 countries on all six continents have participated in the study. The most important finding? Church health is the key to ongoing growth and multiplication!

Here is a brief introduction to Natural Church Development.²⁴

Eight Characteristics of a Healthy Congregation

As you read through the following principles discovered by NCD, keep in mind in each of the eight characteristics, the ADJECTIVE is always the KEY! (Every church will have leadership, but is it empowering leadership? Every church will have a worship service, but is it an inspiring worship service?)

1. EMPOWERING Leadership

Effective leadership begins with an intimate relationship with God, resulting in Christ-like character and a clear sense of God's call. As spiritual maturity increases, effective pastors and leaders multiply, guide, empower and equip disciples to realize their full potential and work together to accomplish God's vision and encourage God's people.²⁵

The pastor exerts firm and clear leadership, defining reality, casting a compelling vision, and offering hope. The leadership is clearly trusted by the congregation and has developed close cooperative relationships with other leaders, elected and informal.

2. GIFT-ORIENTED Ministry

The Holy Spirit gives to every Christian spiritual gift(s) for the building of God's kingdom.²⁶ Church leaders have the responsibility to help believers discover, develop and exercise their gifts in appropriate ministries so that the body of Christ "grows and builds itself up in love."²⁷

Is the congregation trusted to conceive and implement ministry within the bounds of the vision and mission statements of the church? Is there minimal control from the pastor or governing bodies?

3. PASSIONATE Spirituality

Effective ministry flows out of a passionate, contagious spirituality. Spiritual intimacy leads to a strong conviction and expectation that God will act in powerful ways.²⁸ The nature of this characteristic becomes evident by examining the prayer life, use of the Bible and other factors affecting personal spirituality.

Are there clearly defined partnership responsibilities that give substantial opportunities for offering our "prayers, presence, gifts and service" within the church community?

4. FUNCTIONAL Structures

As mentioned in the beginning, the Church is the living Body of Christ, and like all healthy organisms, it requires numerous systems, which work together to fulfill its

intended purpose.²⁹ In order to develop functional structures, look at organizational structures and systems, leadership oversight, vision, goals, planning, creativity and managing change.

There is a clearly defined plan (core process) for enrolling, teaching, training, developing, deploying, and nurturing disciples with the strong expectation that all are invited to be involved at levels appropriate to their place in life.

5. INSPIRING Worship Service

Inspiring worship is a personal and corporate encounter with the living God.³⁰ Both personal and corporate worship must be infused with the presence of God resulting in times of joyous exultation and times of quiet reverence. Inspiring worship is not driven by a particular style, but rather, the shared experience of God's awesome presence.

6. HOLISTIC Small Groups

Holistic small groups are disciple-making communities which endeavor to reach the unchurched, meet individual needs, develop each person according to their God-given gifts and raise leaders to sustain the growth of the church.³¹ Like healthy body cells, holistic small groups are designed to grow as they divide to multiply.

7. NEED-ORIENTED Evangelism

Need-oriented evangelism intentionally cultivates relationships with pre-Christian people so they can become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ who are actively participating within the life of the church and community. Using appropriate ministries and authentic relationships, believers can guide others into the family of God.³²

Need oriented evangelism reflects the impact the church has on a community. Are the church facilities and its people legendary on the community grapevine?

8. LOVING Relationships

Loving relationships are the heart of a healthy, growing church. Practical love builds authentic Christian community and brings others into God's kingdom. Sincere, practical love has a divinely generated magnetic power. People do not want to hear us talk about love, they want to experience Christian love;³³ they won't care how much you know, until they know how much you care!

There are many good churches in your community. Trust the Lord to guide you to the fellowship where He wants you and become faithful there. Don't be a religious nomad—bouncing around from one church to another each week. God wants you to be submitted to the accountability of spiritual leaders who will help you and even correct you when necessary,³⁴ and this isn't possible unless you are rooted in relationship somewhere. Don't have a neglectful attitude, gathering with other believers only when you feel like it. ³⁵ Attend faithfully and show up on time. Serve

the congregation at least as diligently as you would your employer. Remember, the Lord views your attitude toward His Church as your attitude toward Him,³⁶ so serve the Lord in a way that if He were your employer, you wouldn't get fired.

WHERE DO WE "GO" FROM HERE?!

The last section is written for those who are looking for a local church where they are able to be an active and maturing participant. This next segment is written for those who feel the Lord is transitioning them from the current church they attend. Just as looking for and finding a good church must be done with much prayer, the same should be said regarding leaving a church – maybe even more so!

One of the easiest ways to know that an individual or a family's congregational transition is imminent, is that God is calling you TO somewhere: "I feel it is time for us to go." And not just FROM somewhere: "I feel it is time for us to leave." Can you see the difference in directional focus? One is looking to the future: going, while the other is focused on the past: leaving.

Many people leave a local church setting without any specific direction. More often than not, this is problematic of something more. It possibly reveals that an offense has occurred and been unresolved. This happens when individuals or families "slip out the back door" without notifying leadership of their transition. These veiled departures from congregations often lead to a self-imposed exile, where the unreconciled simply cannot find a new church home.³⁷

Transition from one congregation to another should be surrounded in blessing. Those who are leaving go out with blessing, as they leave behind blessing at the same time. They will go out with joy and be led forth with peace.³⁸

BEFORE YOU "QUIT" YOUR CHURCH

There are many things that would cause a person to consider leaving a church; some healthy like job transfer or relocation. And there are some not so healthy. That list could include—but not be limited by—poor financial stewardship, controlling or manipulative leadership, lack of vision and direction, myopic ministry focus, etc. This next section is dedicated to asking yourself if you're leaving for the right reasons.

Many times, the Lord may reassign a person to another church so they can bring ministry or encouragement to another congregation—that's the best reason to leave a church. In other situations, people may discover that their church actually inhibits their spiritual well-being and may find the necessity to withdraw. Frequently, people leave a church simply because they are disinterested, dissatisfied, or feel they can find something better.

Before doing anything, it's a good idea to pray about your situation and seek the Lord's leading.³⁹ If you feel the Lord genuinely wants you to leave and go elsewhere for good reason, go to the pastors and discuss it with them. Don't just stop showing up for church. Keep in mind, leaving one church always means finding another. The Lord does not lead anyone to simply stop going to church.⁴⁰

If you are presently in a church that...

- Is scripturally sound
- Is reasonably stable and loving
- Has godly, moral leadership
- Is doing their best to exalt Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and
- Is making a reasonable effort to minister to you and your family

...THEN HANG IN THERE AND REMAIN FAITHFUL!

You are very blessed to be a part of a healthy church. If you're unhappy with a church that fits this five-fold description, you may want to prayerfully consider if you're hung up on an issue, your feelings have been hurt, or you struggle with discontent from other personal problems.

Some things to consider before leaving a church:

- **Don't leave a church out of discontent.**

If discontent is rooted within you, it will follow you wherever you go, regardless of what church you attend. Many years ago, a woman who came into our congregation came to speak with me. "Your church is so refreshing from all the other churches around here," she complemented. Curious, I asked, "Just how many other churches have you attended?" "Oh, I think all of them." was her reply. Privately, I realized that we were going to have problems with this woman, because when it comes down to the basics, most Christian churches aren't that much different from each other. Sure enough, it was a matter of weeks before she eventually became discontent and left our congregation as well.

- **Don't leave a church out of frustration.**

Avoid pushing off your feelings of disappointment from other areas of your life onto the church. Sometimes unhappiness toward the church is from other personal problems such as family or marital difficulties, job dissatisfaction, personal offenses, memories of childhood abuse, mental stress, emotional illness, and so forth. People who struggle with deep internal problems sometimes develop a distorted estimation of the people or situations around them, and may blame them, including the church, for their anguish. Generally speaking, in these cases, the church is not the problem. Remember that a church, its ministers and ministries are there because they genuinely love God and desire to love others and want to help others, not hurt them.

- **Don't leave a church because your feelings got hurt.**

Hurt feelings are a "violation of self-interests" and may be a result of being too self-sensitive. In any church or gathering of people there may be many offensive things said or done, mostly unintended, but you don't have to let yourself become offended.⁴¹ Those who are easily offended may simply retain self-sensitivities due to past festering wounds. Hurt feelings are probably the greatest reason why people leave churches... but deepening your roots in Christ and His word can immunize you against such tenderness.⁴²

- **Don't leave a church over trivial criticisms.**

People sometimes have a remarkable ability to make relatively small issues into quite large ones. I've known people to change churches merely because they didn't like the pastor's facial hair, the length of the services, how the bulletin was typed, or other seemingly trivial issues. Of the many excuses that people use to leave a church, these are among the shallowest.

- **Don't leave a church over its style or individuality.**

One of the most common explanations people give for switching churches is their "disagreement with certain beliefs." However, there are many instances where people used this reason even though the church they were about to attend believed and taught the same things. In reality, it was a dislike of the personality of the church—its teaching methods, the style of worship, the structure of the services, or the pastor's preaching style, etc. Many churches actually believe and teach the same things, but each might have a slightly different method, structure, or style, which makes up its unique personality. Be sure to differentiate between principles and preferences.

No two churches are alike in their personality or methods. Our estimation of a church should be based on more spiritual, substantive issues, such as beliefs, love for one another, or commitment to reach the lost, etc.

- **Don't leave a church when faced with self-conflict.**

Many people do not understand that spiritual growth requires confronting and overcoming conflict with our self-willed nature.⁴³ The environment of the church provides two important features of growth-producing conflict: (1) authority who challenges/corrects—with truth—our weaknesses and sin, and (2) an environment of believers, many whose imperfections and rough edges serve as "sandpaper" to smooth out our wrinkles.⁴⁴

Another good analogy is that people are like "mirrors" in which we can see ourselves as we really are. If there's bitterness or a lack of love, it will become exposed. It doesn't matter how agitating, rude or unspiritual another person might be, it does not justify intolerance or impatience with them. These attitudes are characteristics of our own immaturity. This is why some people run from

church to church - sometimes fellowship exposes our own weaknesses. They see their own sins and blemishes revealed in their relationships within the proximity of other Christians, or they become frustrated when their self-willed desires or sins are challenged through convicting preaching or correction.⁴⁵

If a person remains an “island unto themselves” they will never have the opportunity to confront the spiritual immaturity within them. But exposure to the environment of the church will cause them to face conflicts that must be overcome in order to mature. A sign of a spiritually mature person is that they can be loving and patient with anyone,⁴⁶ and they can humbly submit themselves to truth and the correction of authority.⁴⁷

- **Don't leave a church until you have contributed in some way to helping make it better.**

Oftentimes the most critical people in a congregation are the ones who do the least. Have you prayed for the leaders? Have you made yourself available to serve or help in areas of ministry? Have you expressed helpful suggestions or brought your concerns to the leadership, (in a non-judgmental fashion)? Go to the leadership and share your heart without harsh criticism; verbal assaults and nagging complaints can cause even good leaders to become defensive.

- **Don't spread your “unhappiness, criticism or dissatisfaction” to members of the Body.**

If you find yourself unable to reason with people or resolve the situation, it would be wise, and justified by scripture, to leave the fellowship.⁴⁸ Don't spread discontent (gossip) to other people in either the congregation you're leaving or the one you're going to. This really doesn't do anything to help, and stirs up discord in the church, a sin God hates.⁴⁹

CHURCH SHOPPER VS. CHURCH HOPPER

One of the beautiful things about the Body of Christ is its diversity. The personality of each congregation is different as is its culture and expression of worship. The differences in the look of each congregation can be as varied as the people who make up the church itself. In this way, if we look towards the above suggestions, we can find a church culture and personality in which we can plug-in, serve and grow. And, despite what may be practiced by many, we can stay a part of one congregation for years to come, raising our families, developing deep-rooted community and making an impact on our neighborhoods, cities and world through a local church Body for Christ.

Prayerfully and carefully consider the reader as you plug-in to the local church. Take your time, and once the Father has confirmed your new home, stay put until He moves you on. The Church is beautiful and strong when we humbly serve one

another from week-to-week and extend ourselves outside the church to reach more, because there are more!



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Endnotes

1 The religious landscape of the United States continues to change at a rapid clip. In Pew Research Center telephone surveys conducted in 2018 and 2019, 65% of American adults describe themselves as Christians when asked about their religion, down 12% over the past decade. Meanwhile, the religiously unaffiliated share of the population, consisting of people who describe their religious identity as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular,” is up at 26%, from 17% in 2009.

<https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>

2 2 Corinthians 11:2

3 1 Corinthians 12:27

4 Matthew 18:20

5 Matthew 16:18

6 Revelation 12:10

7 John 10:10

8 1 Peter 5:8

9 Perhaps church growth’s greatest challenge in North America comes from research that shows that more than 80 percent of all the growth taking place in growing churches comes through transfer, not conversion. The statistic strikes at the heart. In a revealing study of 3,000 people who joined 20 evangelical churches in Calgary, Alberta, Canada researchers determined that 70 percent were evangelicals who transferred from other evangelical churches.

Denyse O’Leary, “Study Deplores Supermarket Religion,” *Moody Monthly*, (April, 1988), p. 97.

10 Hebrews 12:15

11 In his influential book *The Great Good Place*, Marlowe & Company: 1999. Ray Oldenburg argues that third places are important for civil society, democracy, civic engagement, and establishing feelings of a sense of belonging. “Third places,” or “great good places,” are the many public places where people can gather, put aside the concerns of home and work (their first and second places), and hang out simply for the pleasures of good company and lively conversation. They are the heart of a community’s social vitality. These settings of informal public life—coffee houses, cafes, bookstores, hair salons, bars, bistros, and many others both past and present—are essential for the health both of our communities and ourselves. This book offers a vision for their revitalization.

12 “Unique Kingdom Contribution” is an unambiguous phrase borrowed from Dr. Dennis Easter. He is an empowering leader in the Foursquare movement, specifically in Southern California. This great leader is both strategic and insightful as a practitioner in the oversight of 200+ local congregations.

13 Genesis 2:18

14 Matthew 16:18

15 Wayne Jacobsen and Clay Jacobsen *Discover the Lost Art of One-Anothering*, Lifestream

Ministries: 2000.

16 Matthew 11:15

17 Proverbs 3:6

18 The term translated "church" throughout the New Testament is ekklesia. (ek-lah-see-a) An ekklesia refers to a gathering or an assembly of people called out for a specific purpose. Ekklesia never referred to a specific place, only a specific gathering. Often today, the term church refers to a building, facility, or campus where Christians gather ("I'll meet you at church.") rather than the Christians themselves.

19 Andy Stanley, "Deep & Wide" Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend, Zondervan: 2014.

20 An easy way to discern the contribution factor in a congregation is to observe its leadership spectrum. Is it varied and diverse? Is everyone related to the pastor? Are there contexts to cultivate other leaders being raised up? Who is involved in the celebration service? If the pastor is leading the worship, presenting from the pulpit, receiving the offering, closing the service, as well as the only person people go to for prayer... this scenario could be a sign of micro-management, short-sighted vision, possible disorganization or maybe a lack of strategic leadership implementation, etc.

21 Matthew 13:24-30

22 For more on the biblical qualifications and characteristics of leaders pick up the reader: Leadership At The Sanctuary—living to influence a community at our resource center, or download a PDF at <http://TheSanctuaryChurch.com/>

23 Ken Sidey, "Church Growth Fine Tunes its Formulas," Christianity Today, (June 24, 1991), p. 46.

24 Christian A. Schwarz: Natural Church Development (church health vs. church growth) <http://www.ncd-international.org/public/>

25 Ephesians 4:12

26 1 Corinthians 12:7

27 Ephesians 4:16

28 Acts 2:42-47

29 Acts 6:2-4

30 John 4:24

31 2 Timothy 1:6

32 Matthew 28:19

33 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

34 Hebrews 13:17

35 Hebrews 10:25

36 Matthew 25:40

37 John Bevere, The Bait of Satan, Dealing With The Deadly Trap of Offense

38 Isaiah 55:12

39 Proverbs 3:6

40 Hebrews 10:25

41 Proverbs 19:11

42 Psalm 119:165

43 James 1:3-4

44 Proverbs 27:17

45 James 4:1

46 1 John 2:10, Gal. 5:22-23

47 Hebrews 13:17

48 Proverbs 22:10

49 Proverbs 6:19

We grow a *community* of maturing lives
one at a time by first *understanding* then
helping each person fully embrace
God's love + truth.



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