

“Why Go To Church?”

09-21-14

So why do we go to church? You go to school to get an education so you can make a living. You go to work to earn money so you can pay the bills. You go to the gym for exercise and better health. You go to the lake to fish, the forest to hunt, the mountains to ski, and the ballgame to cheer! But why do we go to church?

Why get up early on one of your few days off? Why go through the hassle of getting the kids ready and looking nice on the weekend? Why go to the trouble of finding a parking space near the front door and pew space near the back of the church? Why go?

If you've ever found yourself wondering about this question, you're not alone! Surveys tell us that 79% of Americans identify themselves as Christians, but only about 20% of them attend church regularly. After all, it's a perfectly good hour to get ready before the games come on. 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. Acts tells the story of the church as it began.

Open to Acts 2. Millions listened, thousands believed! If we looked closely at Acts 2, I think we'd see the real purpose of the church and Five Reasons why the Church Exists, and why you should be a part of it.

First, The church gives us a place to belong. This passage in Acts is absolutely flooded with fellowship! Look at verse 42, *“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”* Jesus gave these new believers a sense of community, belonging and togetherness at a level that you can't find much 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. Vance Packard calls America *“a nation of strangers”* and studies show that 4 out of 10 people experience a feeling of intense loneliness as they live their lives. Our American culture produces people who more closely identify with characters on a weekly TV series than with their next-door neighbors. We've become a nation of the automatic garage door!

This fall when you see geese heading south for the winter, flying along in V formation, please know the whole flock flying that way adds at least 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew on its own. Christians who share a common direction and a sense of community can get where they are going quicker and easier, because they are traveling on the support of one another.

Secondly, the church is a place to give praise. Look at verses 46-47, *“And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.”*

In case no one's ever told you this, it's not all about you! It's about Jesus! Church gives us an opportunity to worship God the Father, our Creator. Jesus Christ, our

Savior Who suffered and died in our place, and the Holy Spirit our guide who leads us through the mountains and valleys of life.

Life is busy and hectic, and we're so easily distracted. All of life should be worship, but usually it's not. Church gives us a set-aside time each week of focused worship and attention on Jesus Christ. Look how David described worship in Psalm 34:3, "*Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together!*"

When we worship and exalt God, He becomes bigger in our hearts and lives as we stand in awe of His indescribable majesty, splendor and incomprehensible power. If you let yourself be truly immersed in worship, no matter what style of worship service it is, you'll feel God's presence and it will stay with you the rest of the week.

Third, the church is a place to grow. Re-read verse 42, "*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*" 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.

We don't study the Bible so that we can sound smart in Bible Class; we study the Bible so that, through it, the Holy Spirit can change us and make us more like Christ. The Holy Spirit uses many ways to lead us into Christ-likeness. He often uses the circumstances of life to shape our character. He also uses other 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're changed. 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.*" The church helps us grow to spiritual maturity.

The church is a place to serve. While the Apostles were out healing the sick, blind and crippled, other Christians were helping the poor and looking out for one another. Look at verse 45, "*And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.*"

You were put on earth to make a contribution. God designed you to make a difference with your life. While many best-selling books offer advice on how to get the most out of life, that's not why God made you! You were created to add to life on earth. God wants you to give something back!

Ephesians 2:10 says, "*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*" These "good works" are your service. God has a way for you to serve, and the best place for that service is doing it in the church and the world around you! God's given you special gifts, abilities, experiences and interests for service.

If you love to cook, you can make meals for shut-ins. If you've got a heart for kids, you were probably made for children's ministry, K.I.C.K.! If you've been through the tragedy of cancer or divorce, God can use you to comfort others who are experiencing that same heartbreak. The possibilities are limitless.

If you're not involved in any service or ministry, why? After all, Abraham was old, Jacob was insecure, Leah was unattractive, Gideon was poor, David had an affair and

all kinds of family trouble, Elijah was suicidal, Jeremiah was depressed, Naomi was a widow, the Samaritan woman had five failed marriages, Thomas had doubts, and Timothy was timid. Yet, God used each of them in His service. He'll use you, too, if you let Him.

Finally, the church is a place to be in mission. When you're baptized, Jesus welcomes you into His family, and His mission needs to become your mission! In church, we all have the same mission: to share the Good News of Jesus and His saving grace with a bent-up and broken world.

You might carry out your mission by telling people the Good News, explaining the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and what that means to them. Or maybe you'll accomplish your mission by simply helping and showing Jesus Christ in all you say and do.

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 belong to His family, praise Him for Who He is, grow and mature in His image, serve others with the gifts He's given, and be a missionary of His grace to a world in need!