

☞ **Enjoying Church**

It's been said, "Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than standing in a garage makes you a car." That is true. However, it's good for a car to be in the garage. There's protection from bad weather. There's warmth on the coldest of days. It's a good, safe place to check it over for any malfunctions. Church doesn't make you a Christian. Only Christ can do that. But church is good for you. It makes it easier to be a Christian; it's a good place to get warmed up in your faith; and it's a safe place to double check all of your spiritual systems.

Some almost always think the church service is a great thing; others almost always find something to complain about; and most are somewhere in between. Your leaders are always working hard to have the best Celebration possible, but we are flawed human beings and don't score a perfect 10 every time. So, how can we all enjoy church no matter what? I searched online and actually found some very helpful suggestions. Here's just a few:

☞ **Realize that no church is perfect.** *Sounds like an easy out to stop attending church. So, begin by going to church regularly. You will get 100% more out of church if you go than if you don't go.*

☞ **Decide to pray regularly for the staff and church.** *God may surprise you with a deep love and appreciation for your church as you learn to pray for it.*

☞ **Invite your neighbors and family** to join you. *When you invite you're able to see church through fresh eyes. You'll feel proud when someone you care about joins you at church and your love for the church will grow.*

If you really want to get something out of church don't just sit and soak. Give back.

☞ **Serving** is a great way to meet others, discover your gifts, honor Jesus, and be reminded of the beautiful diversity of God's people.

☞ *Regardless if you enjoy the pastor's teaching style, **pay attention** to the message, then follow up with personal study or reflection. It doesn't do you any good unless you do something with what you are taught.*

☞ *Become a financial investor in the church. We believe that you'll grow to love the places where you **invest your money**.*

☞ **Be an encourager.** *Let me tell you something you may not realize. When you are friendly and an encouragement to others and your church staff, it's a BIG deal.*

☞ **Be gracious.** When we're more worried about getting something we want out of our church, we tend to be critical about how things at church operate. So, choose to not be critical about the music, or the way someone lifts their hands, or whatever. Choose to be gracious, knowing that the church is filled with fallible people just like you.

Now, here are my thoughts based on the Bible:

☞ **COME TO CHURCH EXPECTING TO HEAR FROM GOD, Matthew 7:7-8**

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. **8** For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

☞ **You will find what you're looking for.** Looking for faults and flaws? You'll find them. Looking for friends? You can find them. Looking for the Father? You will find him. In

☞ **Jeremiah 29:13** God says, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." Come expecting and looking for God. Listen to these biblical attitudes:

Psalm 122:1

I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."

Psalms 42:1-2

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. **2** My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

☞ **Prepare.** What if rather than just showing up, you showed up ready? Instead of waiting for a couple of songs to warm you up, what if your heart was already in a position of worship? What if you're already tuned in to hearing God's voice?

Be prepared. Read and pray regularly between Sundays. The sermon you hear on Sunday is not some spiritual vitamin meant to somehow get you through the week. Prepare yourself throughout the week for service on Sunday by applying the Word on the days in between.

A young psychology student serving in the Army decided to test a theory. On kitchen duty, he was given the job of passing out apricots at the end of the chow line. He asked the first few soldiers that came by, "You don't want any apricots, do you?" Ninety percent said "No." Then he tried the positive approach: "You do want apricots, don't you?" About half answered, "Uh, yeah. I'll take some." Then he tried a third test. This time he asked, "One dish of apricots or two?" And in spite of the fact that soldiers don't really like Army apricots, 40 percent took two dishes and 50 percent took one! (So, do you want one dose of God or two?)

☞ **COME TO CHURCH TO EXALT CHRIST WHOLEHEARTEDLY, Psalms 34:1-3**

I will extol the Lord at all times; **his praise will always be on my lips.** 2 My soul will boast in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. 3 Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together.

How should we praise God?

Psalm 86:12 says *I will praise you... with all my heart.*

Psalm 26:6–7 says *out loud.*

Psalm 134:2 mentions *with lifted hands.*

Psalm 150 includes *with instruments and dancing.*

Psalm 95:1-7 mentions *singing, shouting, thanksgiving, music, & kneeling.*

So often, we're focused on ourselves or we're focused on the people around us rather than being focused on God...

There's a story about the poet Dante Alighieri who was so immersed in meditation during a church service, he failed to kneel at the appropriate moment. His enemies hurried to the bishop and demanded that Dante be punished for his sacrilege. Dante defended himself by saying, "If those who accuse me had had their eyes and minds on God, as I had, they too would have failed to notice events around them, and they most certainly would not have noticed what I was doing."

I remember as a kid, noticing that my sister didn't close her eyes during prayer... What is instantly revealed about me?

☞ **Colossians 3:2**

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

I don't want us to just gather and sing some songs and hear a nice talk. I want us to put our hearts into it and really express our love for the Lord. I want each and every one to experience a personal connection with God.

--Matthew West, *The Motions*

I don't wanna go through the motions; I don't wanna go one more day

Without Your all consuming passion inside of me

I don't wanna spend my whole life asking, What if I had given everything,

Instead of going through the motions?

Let's not just go through the motions. Let's genuinely go after God! Challenge yourself to sing along wholeheartedly and then take notes during the sermon. Bring your bible and read

☞ along. **Be a participant, not just a spectator.** Make up your mind beforehand that you are

going to worship. Don't wait for your favorite song or epic keyboard riff or perfect lighting. Lead yourself. Cry out to God. When Naomi and I travel, we often visit churches we are unfamiliar with. We often don't know the songs and the sermon style and overall vibe of the church is different. But, we still worship God and are strengthened in our faith.

Sometimes people sit on the sidelines and squawk about secondary issues instead. Refuse ☞ to be critical. **Focus on the positives, not the negatives.** One blogger said, "I've become a consumer and a critic of worship services; shame on me."

☞ --**Accentuate the Positive (audio clip)** Johnny Mercer and the Pied Pipers
You've got to accentuate the positive; Eliminate the negative; Latch on to the affirmative...

☞ **COME TO CHURCH TO ENCOURAGE OTHERS, 1 Thessalonians 5:11**

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

--William Arthur Ward... *Flatter me, & I may not believe you. Criticize me, & I may not like you. Ignore me, & I may not forgive you. Encourage me, & I will not forget you.*

Proverbs 11:25

☞ **He who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.**

Acts 20:35

the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Here is a great truth. When you focus on encouraging and helping others, you, yourself, will be encouraged. It's when you are constantly waiting for someone else to reach out to you that you become discouraged. You take the initiative! You be the encourager!

Ephesians 4:29

☞ Do not let any **unwholesome talk** come out of your mouths, but **only what is helpful** for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Everyone needs encouragement, but few people make the need known quite as clearly as the little boy who said to his father: "Let's play darts. I'll throw and you say, 'Wonderful!'"

Work on building real relationships with others at church. These are the people who will not only help you bear your burdens, but will also need you to support them through the ups and downs of life. Get out of your group of immediate friends and speak to others. Speak to a new visitor. Sit by someone who needs encouragement. Shake hands with a person you don't normally speak to. God will use you.

☞ Another way you can do this is to **pray for each other**. This can even occur during the Celebration. One person said, “When I feel distracted, I’ll pray for others in the congregation. True worship will always be marked with a sense of reaching out – moving beyond your personal experience to crying out for others. Try it.”

☞ **GO FROM CHURCH TO EMPLOY WHAT YOU RECEIVED, James 1:22**

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

☞ Employ what you receive. **Do what it says. Let the Lord change you.**

Be open to change. At the center of Christ’s work on the cross is the reality of radical change. If you’re a believer in Christ, somewhere along the way you were made to realize your deep need for Christ and the kind of life only He can offer. This life is one of change as we

☞ *become less like who we were yesterday and **more like Him.***

Remember, church is not about us. It’s first and foremost about our relationship with Christ as we strive daily to become more like the Savior. It’s secondly about how we can love one another in many different capacities. Then, we are personally built up. This will lead to

☞ ***J.O.Y. = Jesus; Others; Yourself.***

I believe we have one of the best churches in the area. We stick to the Bible and work to live by the truth. We welcome the Spirit of God to move in us. We have a nice multipurpose building, good music, good small groups, good kids and youth programs, and on and on. We have a lot of good people who help make this church great. Will you join me in working to make this church even greater?

☞ **How can you best enjoy church? Expect; Exalt; Encourage; Employ**

Now, employ what you have received. Before next Sunday, prepare yourself and come Expecting to hear from God. Come with a plan to Exalt Christ wholeheartedly no matter what. But today, right now, Employ what you have heard and Encourage someone before you go.