

☞ **Making the Most of Church – Look Ahead**

On occasion we've gone to an independent church where we didn't know anybody, we didn't know any of the songs, and we didn't know the typical order of service. The preaching style was different than what we're accustomed to. Yet, we were able to worship God and be encouraged. You can make the most out of any situation.

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... getting some good out of the service and finding some flaws all at the same time. 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 look ahead to prepare for church and make the most of it no matter what?

I searched online and actually found a number of blogs talking about this with some very helpful suggestions. Here's just a few:

☞ **Realize that no church is perfect.** *If you're looking for perfection that actually 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. *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.

Become a financial investor in the church. If you believe in the mission, then be a part of
☞ *funding it. We believe that you'll grow to love the places where you **invest** your money.*

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

☞ **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 that church operate. This Sunday—(and*

every Sunday)—choose to not be critical about the music, or the way the pastor talks, 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.

☞ **Be an encourager.** Who can you encourage when you interact with your church family? I say the first 10 minutes at the close of service should either be in seeking God at the altar or in reaching out to encourage others, especially newcomers.

☞ Approach the day with **humility**, realizing that no matter how long you've been a Christian, no matter how much Christ has changed you, no matter how much you know, you've still got an infinitely long journey ahead before you are made like Christ. Also remember that everyone around you is on the same road, and they might just be looking for a helping hand from you.

Now, here are my thoughts based on the Bible: Make the most out of church...

☞ **Look Ahead: Come Expecting**

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. Listen to these biblical attitudes:

Psalms 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?

If you come expecting to hear from God, then you'll need to listen... **listen for God's voice** in the worship, in the sermon, in prayer, and even in conversations. If you're paying attention spiritually, you can hear God in a wide variety of ways. One of the best ways to be prepared to hear his voice is to regularly read your bible.

God speaks to those who have time to listen. So, be prepared. Read and pray regularly between Sundays, knowing that the sermon you hear on Sunday is not some spiritual

vitamin meant to somehow get you through the week. Scripture was given to us by God to be woven into our lives and have an impact on every thought, act, and decision. Prepare yourself throughout the week for service on Sunday by applying the Word on the days in between.

☞ **Look Up: Come to Exalt Christ**

Last week we talked about Preparing to Praise. **Ready yourself** and **recognize who God really is**. He's the Creator who loves you and welcomes you into his family. **Remember who you are** – a child of the King of kings! So, **rejoice and glorify God!**

We recently talked about the various ways we can glorify God... sing; shout; clap; raise your hands; give thanks; surrender yourself to God. When we gather together for church our main focus should be on the Lord. 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 a very liturgical church in which a person of notoriety attended but did not kneel at the appropriate moment. His enemies hurried to the bishop and demanded he be punished for his sacrilege. But he 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 3:1-2**

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. **2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.**

☞ **Look Around: Come 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, and I may not believe you. Criticize me, and I may not like you. Ignore me, and I may not forgive you. Encourage me, and I will not forget you.

Proverbs 11:25

He who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.

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**.

Work on building real relationships with others at church. You may never get to know everyone, but you should start building real friendships and strong bonds with at least some of your fellow members. These are the people who will not only help you bear your burdens, but will also need you to come alongside them and support them through the ups and downs of life.

Hebrews 3:13

encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

☞ **Look Out: Go Employ what you received**

James 1:22

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

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.

☞ Employ what you receive. Do what it says. **Let the Lord change you.** As you apply what you learn at church and in your daily bible reading, he will change you. And it's all good!

How can you make the most of church? Look Ahead, Look Up, Look Around, Look Out ...Expect; Exalt; Encourage; Employ

One online blogger... My prayer is that you choose to do more than just attend church. My hope is that you will become a fully-engaged member of the church and contribute to make it even more vibrant than it already is.

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 great multipurpose building, great music, great small groups, great 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? And even in some areas where perhaps OBC is not the greatest, we can still make the most out of church.

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, Encourage someone before you go.