

## “How to Really Want to Go to Church?”

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Have you ever noticed that it's not hard to go to places you want to be?

- How hard is it to get folks to a Green Bay Packers game?
  - They have a season ticket wait list that is several years long.
- How about getting folks to go to a Iowa Hawkeyes game?- not too hard.
- Why because there's an excitement and passion there?
  - “Fan” is short for fanatic – people are crazy about the team.

Now church is not a sporting event. Yet it's worth considering the same question: “How do you really want to go to church?”

- You see – if you really want to go somewhere, it's no problem getting there. In fact it's hard to stay away.
- Not only that – you want others to be there.
  - You go to a restaurant you really like and you spontaneously tell others.
  - You go see a great play or a movie, and you can't wait to tell others about it.

When I was around 13 or 14 some very important things happened to me. They taught me some thing about wanting to go to church. I'd like to tell you part of my story. The first part is sort of negative.

- I became very restless and disillusioned with our church. It seemed to me that people were mostly playing religion. They put on a mask – a façade - when they came to church. They weren't real.
- This was made worse by the style of our pastor. Of course my attitude as a young intolerant teenager affected this, but still it drove me crazy.
  - Our pastor's long sonorous prayer in this affected holy tone drove me nuts. It would have put me to sleep if it didn't irritate me so much.
  - His sermons were an amazing sleep aid. In fact Miss Carrie Bell routinely fell immediately asleep when he started to preach. Sometimes she would snore right there on the second row.

But around that time I began to read a modern translation of the Bible. Scripture began to come alive. I felt as if God were speaking to me.

But, there was positive also. I read a powerful book by pastor & teacher Jack Taylor entitled Much More. It was based on the idea that there's much more to life in Christ than we typically think. He focused on "much more" passages of Paul's letters.

- **Romans 5:10** For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, **much more**, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.
- **Romans 5:17** For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; **much more** they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.
- **Romans 5:20** But where sin abounded, grace did **much more** abound.

So, I guess at that point, I decided not to settle for the Christian life as usual. I decided I wouldn't settle for church as usual. I became convinced that we could do better and that I was called to preach and teach that.

I actually think I preached my first sermon in 8<sup>th</sup> grade speech class. It was a speech about having the courage to be real and not hide behind a mask or façade.

- I used the word façade repeatedly. I had read the word and knew what it meant but I didn't know how to pronounce it. In my speech I repeatedly pronounced the word "fa-shade" and stressed how this took genuine courage (which I was in fact doing in my speech).
- Everyone was a little shocked by my little talk. At the end my teacher, Mr. Thompson seemed mildly impressed, but also took the opportunity to correct my pronunciation – "It's façade."

Some years later, just a few months before we got married, Debbie read these verses at my ordination in 1986.

Ephesians 4:11-16. So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may

be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. 14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (NIV)

So what's a church like "where you really want to go."

- Unified
- Mature – it looks and feels like Jesus
- Real – "speaking the truth in love"
- Loving – "builds itself up in love"

So how do you really want to be there?

- You find it a positive, encouraging, loving, grace-filled, edifying place. Paul puts it like this,
  - Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. Romans 15:2 (KJV)
  - Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, "How can I help?" Romans 15:2

The Message

Now, "To really want to go to church" a church has to decide it's going to be a positive, encouraging, loving, encouraging, edifying place – a place where you want to be.

In a way, it has to decide not to settle for less. It decides it's culture is going to be different.

- Let's face it, it can become easy to accept gossip, back-biting, grumbling, and division as the norm. Then we say, "Well that's just the way churches are." We're human like everyone else.
- We can't settle for that. We can do better. There can be a sweet spirit in this place. It can be a place where, love, grace, forgiveness, selflessness and edification reign.

- A church can grow up. Just like a family can become a place that cares for, enjoys and nurtures all its members – a place of love and vibrant warmth, a church can be different. That's how we got our name, anyway.

The New Testament word for church is ek-klesia, or “called out ones”. The first Christians were known for this. Believers were first called Christians at Antioch. (Acts 11:26) They didn't give themselves the name, but rather outsiders gave it to them.

- Christian meant “little Christ.” People saw how believers loved others, and they said, “hey, they're like Christ.”

Becoming an edifying church is a choice that a church makes. Why? Because it's a matter of simple obedience. This is what Jesus commands. And commands are not optional.

- John 13:34  
"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.
- Colossians 3:13  
Bear with each other and **forgive** whatever grievances you may have against one another. **Forgive** as the Lord **forgave** you.
- Matthew 6:14 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

To say we follow Christ, yet we don't do what he says doesn't mean anything. To follow Jesus, means to follow him as Lord.

- The Kingdom of God, means our lives and our church becomes a dome in which Christ is King.

George MacDonald put it this way,

“Instead of asking yourself whether you believe or not, ask yourself whether you have this day done one thing because He said, *Do it*, or once abstained because He said, *Do not do it*. It is simply absurd to say you believe, or even want to believe, in Him, if you do not do anything He tells you.”

So are we building an edifying culture within our church? What kind of place do we want this to be? Do we really want this to be a place where we want to be, or where others want to be?

So how can we really want to go to church: Live in these questions. Measure our attitudes and whatever we do or say by these questions.

- “What is the loving thing to do?”
- “What will build up others?”
- “What will build unity?”
- “Who do I need to forgive and be reconciled to?”

We can be a church where people really want to be. It’s up to us – will we be a church that refuses to settle for less? Jesus calls us – let’s follow.