

Looking For A Church Home

by Errol Hale

So, are you looking for a church home? Good! You need to be involved in a local church. Maybe these few tips will help you to find the place that is best for you.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

The most important thing to remember when choosing where to hang your hat is: "Don't be too critical." It has been said before but it bears repeating: "If you find the perfect church, don't join. You will spoil it!"

What you need to seek is a place that, with all of its strengths, and in spite of its faults, you can become an active participating member, both to be served and, more importantly, to serve others. The Church belongs to Jesus and He is the One who has promised to build it. So look for a church that looks to Christ in everything.

GETTING STARTED

The best place to begin is by taking the following two steps—in order:

1. **Ask Around.** Personal referrals by others you know and respect are usually best when shopping for anything. Another satisfied person may be your tip to the place that is for you.
2. **Shop Around.** Look online. Church websites may only show schedules of activities and denominational affiliations, but these things are helpful. For example, if the activity calendar has no Bible studies or Sunday School classes, you may want to look further.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

The Centrality of the Word of God

The first thing of importance in the life of any church is the priority and reverence they give to the Word of God. Acts 2:42 says that the early Church "*continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine.*" Look for a church where the people bring their Bibles and hear preaching and teaching from the Word of God. Do not settle for "life-coaching" through group therapy talks. The Bible is essential since it is the only inspired, inerrant and therefore authoritative source for information about God. Everything else is merely man's opinion.

The Focus and Style of Worship

Whether the worship in a church is more or less formal is a matter of preference. Either way, however, the goal or focus of biblical worship must be to glorify God, rather than to entertain people. Look for a place where the worship is heartfelt, and is balanced between joyous and reverent. Because worship styles are an indicator of the personality of a church, this will be an important item to consider.

The Importance of Fellowship and Accountability

Next to Christ Himself, we need each other most. Look for a friendly church that takes notice of, and welcomes its guests. Look for a church where the people demonstrate their love for one another. Fellowship includes service. Don't look only to be served, but to serve. Look for a church in which you can be a participant, not merely a spectator.

A Desire to Make Christ Known

Jesus commissioned His people to tell others about Him (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8). Does the church encourage its members to share their faith? Does the church engage in any efforts to reach the community? What is the church's world missions emphasis? A church, even a good Bible church, must have heart to reach out or it is likely to become ingrown and stagnant. Sometimes the only reason these kind of things are not happening is that no one has come along with the gifts to get them started. You may be the one God wants to use to get things rolling.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

Watch out for *religious hype or emotionalism*. Much pomp and circumstance may make one feel very religious, but it does little to strengthen one's faith and walk with the Lord. By the same token, watch out for emotionalism. Emotions are a valid part of the Christian experience, but they are not the goal.

Watch out for "man-centeredness" in the teaching and in the worship. The church's goal is to worship God and to teach His Word. A church that aims to make people *feel good* may succeed in doing so, but that alone will not do its people any good.

THE NEXT STEP

After you have looked and prayed and found a church that is faithful to preach the Word, and where you can get involved, talk to the pastor. If it is a large church you may talk to an assistant pastor due to the very busy schedule that many senior pastors must keep. In either case, call and make an appointment telling him that you have visited and are interested in discussing what part you and your family might have in the church.

When you meet with a representative, be prepared to ask questions. Be prepared to listen to the answers as well. Ask questions about the focus of worship and the goal of the preaching and teaching. Ask about the place of children in the church. Ask about the church's affiliation with a denomination or association of other like-minded churches. Ask about ways you can move from spectator to participant. You may also wish to ask to see some printed material about the church and/or denomination if you haven't already received any.

When talking with the leaders of a prospective church, do not complain about your former church and refrain from talking about all you have done for the Lord in the past, or hinting at what you can do for this church. Experienced pastors may be wary of you from the beginning if you do these things. After visiting with the pastor, you should be ready to make a decision.

When making this decision remember what was said in the beginning: DON'T EXPECT PERFECTION! Too many wish to find a perfect church. When they do not, they move on, never developing any roots. Many communities are full of Christians who play musical church, or the "Bless Me" game. They run from church to church never making a commitment and always leaving upset that things were not just so. Often they go to the next church bad-mouthing the last one while sowing seeds of division along the way.

May I suggest you make a commitment of at least one year. Get involved in ministry, praying, working with children, setting up chairs, or even cleaning toilets. Just get involved! Statistically, the average spiritual life expectancy of a believer who is not active in some type of ministry is very short. If the church is one that has an official membership, then join. Give of your time, talents, and money, and be part of the Body of Jesus Christ.

IN CONCLUSION

Do not put off the quest for a church home for you and your family. Each week that you are not in the fellowship of other believers you will be making it that much harder to get started the next week. After missing a couple of weeks it will be easier to miss a few more. Then before you know it, you will be totally out of fellowship. This is dangerous for two reasons. First because the God's Word says:

"And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:24,25

By this we see that it is a *command* to be a part of a church.

The second reason is for survival. As was stated earlier, those who do not get involved in ministry in the local church will not last very long in that church. Worse yet, the believer who does not even attend with a nominal involvement often does not last at all. When the coal rolls away from the rest of the fire, it goes out.

Jesus loves His Church, enough to lay down His life for her. It is only fitting that those who know and love Him will love His church as well.