
CHOOSING A CHURCH TO ATTEND

Romans 10:14-15

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It can be challenging to find a good church; the right church for you when you move to a new community, or when you sense God leading you away from the church that has been your home for the last years. From my many years pastoring and observing other pastors and churches, I offer the following thoughts on how to assess new church possibilities. The point is not to pit one church against another, or develop a ranking system like, the hotel or restaurant industry. But deciding on a church is a huge decision with life-shaping implications.

To begin with, let's remember that God sets in the body just as He wills.

“But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.” ~1 Corinthians 12:11

Even though this scripture is referring to God's arrangement of different ministry “gift-mixes” so that the whole church is adequately equipped for every sort of ministry need, the principle is clear—ultimately, selecting a church is mostly an act of obedience, not preference. God has a congregation for you—or thinking about it more biblically—you are a gift designed by God for a particular congregation. Finding the best church begins with acknowledging that you want to be where He wants you to be.

But how do we discern God's will about church? What can we look for as hints along the way? Here are *some* likely sources of confirmation and leading:

CONNECTION WITH OTHERS

Especially in the beginning of your search, the biggest losses you feel are all the friendships that you built with people whom you knew for years. As they say, “You can't have old friendships with

new friends.” No one can substitute for the close friends you left behind. That part of the equation simply takes time.

But the need you feel for meaningful connections with people who will understand and encourage you is both real and important. Genuine fellowship—not just *slap-on-the-back* greeting and surface conversation—is one of the most important aspects of your life with God. The “Lone Ranger” is not a Bible character. We navigate life most successfully when we open our hearts to one another. That’s why we are “members of one another” to such a degree that ‘when one suffers, all suffer.’ God wants you in a group of believers who actively know how to “*bear one another’s burdens*” (*Galatians 6:2*)—and “*rejoice with those who rejoice*” (*Romans 12:15*).

So as you visit congregations, look for individuals who notice and speak with you. If you walk into a church, and no one greets you in a meaningful way (not counting the official, badge-wearing greeters), I wouldn’t give it more than one other chance before I crossed it off my list. Of course, some churches are so large that most of the people are strangers to one another, and the people from whom you seek a friendly welcome may have been hoping for the same from you!

OPPORTUNITY FOR SERVICE

The whole reason the Lord has designed and gifted us as He has is so that we can be equipped for every good work for the sake of others. Nothing we can do—good or otherwise—will change the inestimable value He already places on us; we cannot add to the meaningfulness we already have in His life. Nothing of serving, attending church or ministering to others with our spiritual giftings will increase our standing in His eyes. He has always looked upon us with unparalleled favor and grace.

But if you long to understand yourself better and appreciate your value to the Lord, there is no better way than through serving a group of people with your unique combination of *giftings*. Being an effective serving part of a local church will revolutionize how you see yourself.

There is no such thing as a perfect church. Every church has its strengths and weaknesses, and all of them have problems. No one church is best for everyone, and that is part of why there are so many styles, varieties, and denominational groups of churches. Depending on the doctrinal bent and leadership style of the main leader, churches will emphasize slightly different issues and no two churches will agree on everything (sounds like people, doesn’t it?). But given all the options of what church looks, sounds, or feels like, how do you find where the Lord wants you to fellowship? ***Here are some helpful questions to ask to help you determine the answer to that question:***

1. Do you sense the Lord leading you to the church?

2. Is Jesus openly worshiped and celebrated as the *only* Savior?
3. Does the teaching speak to you personally, and resonate with your *daily* life?
4. Do you look forward to what God will do in your life the next time you gather with the rest of the church?
5. Is any person or book given an equal or greater weight of authority than the Bible? If so, get out of there as quickly as you can!

Church is supposed to extend **five basic invitations** to anyone who attends. When looking for a church home, see to what extent that body of believers invites you:

1. **To receive mending and nurturing**—valued for whom you are, loved for who you are, recovered from where you have been, and challenged to keep growing in the Lord.
2. **To belong to a family**—welcomed into a context of loving relationships between individual people who are part of something bigger than themselves, but still cherished as unique children of God.
3. **To embrace a vision**—be told what God’s particular assignment is for that church, and how you personally—with your giftings—can add to the fulfillment of it as a truly *contributing part*.
4. **To become a discipling disciple**—shown how you can join the line of spiritual succession among believers, learning from mentors, and then passing along what you learn to others.
5. **To serve as a partner**—mobilized for the sake of others, expending yourself and your resources in a way that gets you under people, not just sitting alongside them while you watch a few others perform.

“How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, ‘HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!’” ~Romans 10:14-15