
CHURCH WITH ATTITUDE

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

Don't worry, this is NOT a plea to get you to attend church more often—or stay longer! I'm not trying to convince anyone that they ought to *straighten up* and start going to church. Most of us already have enough books we bought with *every intention of reading*, but haven't gotten around to reading, and exercise machines shoved (unused in months) next to the wall in the bedroom; no one needs another voice adding to their sense of guilt!

For starters, church is an unusual place. It's not exactly a *top-ten* hangout spot, and rarely does anyone think, "*I'm bored; maybe I'll pop by church and see what's happening.*" Fearing judgment and condemnation, most of our society considers church a bastion of self-appointed, self-righteous "*nay-sayers*" whose irrelevant views get spouted weekly to grannies and weenies. Even people who enjoy it and get lots out of it tend to *do* church—like an errand or a routine—and relegate it to specific days/times during the week.

Our language defines church primarily as a place/building or a meeting/service that begins and ends at fairly definite times (even though some services/sermons seem like they will never end). Church can be circled on a map and penciled in on a calendar. As a pastor, I'm very happy about those aspects of church, but neither of them truly gets at the heart and essence of what God has in mind for us to experience in company with one another.

MEETING-PLACE

Biblical language defines and portrays church with fascinating differences from how our culture depicts it. For instance, the New Testament word *church* is closer to our word *congregation*, and it literally means “called out, invited ones”—those who, after sending back their RSVP, are on their way to a gathering point to meet up with their host and fellow guests. Church is more than a meeting, it is meeting-up-with others on the way. Real church isn’t just a place; it is a state of being, *togetherness* with other believers (sometimes referred to as *fellowship*).

True church then, provides a sense of belonging. Being accepted by a group and being honestly accountable with people, defeats most lies in our life. Regular fellowship becomes a proving ground for love and forgiveness between Christians. Being with other Christians regularly will bring impurities to the surface of our heart. God uses church to increase our love and to refine us.

LEARNING-PLACE

Additionally, the New Testament picture of church has very little association with liturgy, sacred sites, or hushed tones of veneration because most of the meeting-up places were temporary, ordinary, and *beside the point*. The real life of church came not from awed crowds participating in ritual performances conducted by someone up front, but from worshipful celebration sung, spoken, and prayed alongside one another, as well as from teachings and stories shared amongst one another.

When church first started happening on the heels of those radical 1st Century conversions, men and women were trying to understand utterly foreign spiritual ways of thinking and living. Everyone who had responded to Jesus’ invitation was profoundly interested in learning from one another—especially from those who were a bit ahead of them in figuring out how things worked in the kingdom. And, more importantly, they wanted to learn more about loving each other! After all, Jesus said that the most telling mark and distinguishing feature of the “invited ones” who accepted His invitation would be their extraordinary love.

The local church is much more than a building or a Sunday morning worship service. It is a vital part of the whole growth and development process in our spiritual life. Every church is unique. God gives each church a special collection of people and purposes. God has always dealt with people both *directly* and *indirectly* through His dealings with whole groups. Church provides additional confirmation, direction, and instruction in our personal search for His will for our life.

GROWING-PLACE

The local church is the most effective environment for growing Christians in their walk with Jesus, and for growing Christ-like qualities in them. What we see modeled in the lives of older believers, as well as all the testimonies we hear, speeds up the process of maturity. Of course, most of what the Lord teaches us will come as a result of our personal Bible reading and through informal conversations with other believers. But in church we get exposed to perspectives and understandings God has already taught our spiritual leaders.

The whole point of church is to make Jesus more meaningful and significant in people's lives: helping those who already know Him become more like Him; and, introducing Him to people who aren't yet aware of His love for them. Church is an ongoing setting God places us in so that we can personally receive from and give to others. He places ministries and people in each church to train and mend people to be better able to minister to still others (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Jesus commissioned His followers to engage in two basic but life-encompassing activities (along, of course, with worshipping God): **loving others** with the same selfless, forgiving heart with which He loves us; and, **teaching others** the same truths and perspectives about Kingdom life that He teaches us. We're *called out* to be communicators of His love and of His life-lessons.

One-on-one discipleship is more effective than large group teaching for getting at the specific issues of our lives, but such discipleship is even more effective within the context of an entire group of people who are being led in the same direction and being taught similar truths.

OUR GOALS FOR CHURCH

Over the centuries, church has adopted different forms and structures. I'm not necessarily interested in commenting on historic patterns, or making observations about how any of our contemporaries may pattern church. But I do want to explain why our church is arranged the way that it is. Though they can be stated in many ways, the reasons why our church, The Coastlands, exists—why we bother with the hassle of “*having*” church week after week—are profoundly simple (but easy to lose sight of):

1. To introduce people to the love and the (eternal) life of God, through Jesus Christ—exalting Jesus as Lord in worship and witness.

2. To disciple and train people in kingdom principles, so that they can do the same to others—teaching from the Bible, the revealed and definitive word of God.
3. To provide an embracing context within which people can be truly known and unconditionally accepted—loving one another like the Lord loves each of us—accepting and nurturing people without pre-conditions.
4. To honor and welcome people as vital and unique parts of the whole body of Christ—enabling everyone to serve (minister) according to their God-intended design and capacities.

COASTLANDS' MINISTRY PHILOSOPHY

Through the years we have coined an expression that captures our sense of what church is supposed to do to and for people. We will do everything we know how to **love, mend, train and send** people into more ministry than they would be able to do on their own...

Despite all the mistakes, human failings and imperfect attempts, our meeting-up-with-others arrangements are intentional: ICU's, weekend services, mission teams, CM, staff, etc. Hope you enjoy the understandings behind what's going on around here...

PEOPLE ARE GOD'S TOOLS OF CHOICE

God does most of His work on earth through human beings, rather than by sovereign (solo) intervention (without human participation).

1. God stakes His reputation (glory) on His kind ability to restore human beings (Isaiah 8:18; Ephesians 1:1-14).
2. He is a proud Father. Because He loves us, He wants to share His ministry business with us (Genesis 1:28; 1 John 3:1).
3. Kingdom advances usually have organic implications—especially in maintaining ground gained by spiritual breakthroughs.

4. Jethro's advice to Moses comes on the heels of testimony about God's miraculous intervention that delivered His people from captivity (Exodus 18:1-27).
5. Moses' spiritual victory over the Amalekites would not have been possible without Aaron and Hur, a rock and Joshua (Exodus 17:8-13).
6. New spiritual leaders, like Stephen and Philip, were trained (for miraculous ministry) through basic servanthood (Acts 6).
7. Kingdom leadership is primarily about developing other people into their God-intended places of ministry and significance.
8. The real work of church is in transforming lives and deepening people's relationship with the Lord. We are editors of heaven inspired "*manuscripts*." Our role is to model what others can do and be—to play "Follow the Leader."
9. Why is it to "our advantage" that Jesus has gone away (John 16:7)?

"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you"

Why did Jesus tell us to pray for more laborers (Matthew 9:37-38)?

"Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.'"

The goal is to put more "ministry" into the hands of more "spiritual" people.

1. God specializes in unlikely, inadequate candidates who are not yet as they will be, so they need lots of mending and training (1 Corinthians 1:26-29; Luke 5:8-11; Ephesians 4:11-12), and they go from little to more (Matthew 25:21), from "have not" to "give away."
2. Spiritual significance and fulfillment come (only) as a direct result of meaningful, transforming communion with God, and transformational

engagement with other people.

“The smallest one will become a clan, and the least one a mighty nation. I, the LORD, will hasten it in its time.”

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of the LORD and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn in Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified. Then they will rebuild the ancient ruins, they will raise up the former devastations; and they will repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations.” Isaiah 60:22-61:4