

CHURCH WITH ATTITUDE-*OUTLINE***Adapting the Essence of Vital, Local Ministry for Any Era or Culture**

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

INTRODUCTION

Today, I'd like to talk about church. Don't worry, it's not a plea to get you to come 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*, and exercise machines shoved, *unused in months*, next to the wall in the bedroom. No one needs another voice adding to their *already sense of guilt!*

To begin with—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 (who can blame them?), most of our society considers church a bastion of self-appointed, self-righteous naysayers 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/durations.

Our language defines church primarily as a place/building or a meeting/service that begins and concludes 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.

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 and, "togetherness" with other believers (sometimes referred to as fellowship).

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, when 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, in loving each other! After all, Jesus said that the extraordinary love between invited ones who accepted His invitation would be their most telling mark and distinguishing feature.

JESUS' PATTERNS

Jesus commissions 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.

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 you to understand why our church is arranged the way that it is. I explain WHY to guests who comment on how friendly and warm people are in our congregation (“whoever has been forgiven much, loves much”); WHY to people who feel such profound emotion during worship (“where the Spirit of the Lord is..”); and WHY to individuals who are surprised at the acceptance they sense regardless of choices they've made (“Jesus didn't come to judge but to forgive”). So, I want to explain some Why's to my own congregation.

Despite all the mistakes, human failings and imperfect attempts—our arrangements for meeting up with others are intentional: ICU's, weekend services, mission teams, CM, staff, etc. always serve the purpose of connecting people one with another. I hope everyone enjoys the understandings behind what's going on around here...

I. Grasping God's Tools of Choice.

A. 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). [Agape = welcome and honor]

B. Kingdom Advances Usually have Organic Implications—Especially in Maintaining Ground Gained by Spiritual Breakthroughs.

1. Moses' spiritual victory over the Amalekites would not have been possible without Aaron and Hur, a rock and Joshua (Exodus 17:8-13).
2. 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).
3. New spiritual leaders, like Stephen and Philip, were trained (for miraculous ministry) through basic servanthood (Acts 6).

C. Kingdom Leadership is Primarily About Developing other People Into their God-Intended Places of Ministry and Significance.

1. The real work of church is in transforming lives and deepening people's relationship with the Lord. We are editors of heaven-inspired "manuscripts."
2. Why is it to "our advantage" that Jesus has gone away (John 16:7)? Why did Jesus tell us to pray for more laborers (Matthew 9:37-38)?
3. The goal is to put more ministry into the hands of more *spiritual* people.
4. Our role is to model what others can do and be—to play "Follow the Leader."

5. 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 (Matt. 25:21), from “have not” to “give away.”
 - a. *Foolish* = unremarkable, not noticed vs. obvious, clear to all.
 - b. *Weak* = lacking intrinsic strength vs. inherently powerful and able.
 - c. *Base* = no connections ‘high up’ vs. tied in with world system.
 - d. *Despised* = unimpressive, inconsequential vs. impressive.
6. Spiritual significance and fulfillment come (only) as a direct result of meaningful, transforming communion with God, and transformational engagement with other people (Isaiah 60:22-61:4).