

Counsel to Those Looking for a New Church

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It seems to be commonplace for people to be looking for new churches these days. With job transfers, moves, students heading away to college, and others who are looking for a new church for any host of reasons, people often find themselves on the hunt for a new church.

But *how* should one undertake this journey? Are there some helps that can guide folks in this search for a biblical church?

This brief write-up will provide some counsel for those looking for a new church.



1) PRAY MUCH, PRAY BIBLICALLY, PRAY FERVENTLY, AND PRAY SPECIFICALLY.

Dealing with the precious and beloved Bride of Christ is no trivial matter. Christ died for His Bride and He jealously loves her, longs for her love and devotion in return, and promises to guard and keep her from the evil one. Since this is the case, in looking for a church, don't treat your search for a church like a 'buffet line' where you pick and choose some things that suit your taste and don't return there if something doesn't meet your preferences. The church is glorious, beautiful, blood-bought, and set-apart. Therefore, as you embark upon the search for a new family to serve and join, you should pray much, pray biblically (saturating your mind with Scriptures) and pray fervently for the Spirit's wisdom & guidance.

2) FIND A SOLID CHURCH ONLINE AND READ THE 'WHAT WE TEACH' OR 'DOCTRINAL' STATEMENT IN FULL.

Some people relocate to a new city, state or area and must find a new church. Others, move to college and need to find a fellowship in that area. Still others leave a church for any myriad of reasons and seek to find a biblical church where they can sacrificially serve. If this is the case for you, one of the blessings of living in the 'online era' is that you can find churches online and weed out many of those that appear to be unsound. But when you find one (or a few) churches that seem biblical, find the '*what we teach*' statement or the *doctrinal* statement on the website and read it prayerfully, carefully, diligently, and thoughtfully. This process cannot be overemphasized. Look for a church with much content online. More information is *always* better. Don't find a church with three bullet points in the doctrine statement. Find a church that takes a clear stance on biblical truth and current issues. In this process, resolve to be a Berean and search the Scriptures with diligence to see if what a church's *doctrinal* statement teaches is in fact faithful to the Word.

3) LISTEN TO SELECTED SERMONS FROM THE LAST TWO YEARS ON THE WEBSITE (if possible).

Another great blessing in this modern era is that you can go to the church's website (after you've read the doctrine, pillars, distinctives, etc.) and listen to sermons at their media/audio page. Nearly every church has

this. Do the hard work. Take the time. Be diligent and vigilant in this step. You should listen to at least a few sermons from the recent weeks/months as well as a few sermons from a year ago (that is, the previous sermon series) and then a few sermons from a few years ago. This will allow you to gauge the kind of preaching, the caliber of preaching, the seriousness of the preaching, the faithfulness of the preaching, and the expository nature of the preaching in that particular church. Don't skim through one sermon; due diligence and devote yourself to this step. Ensure that a church you are looking at faithfully preaches God's Word and pulls the meaning of the text *out of* the Scriptures. And, after explaining the text, see whether the teacher applies the text to the lives and hearts of the listeners. Make sure the *biblical* gospel goes forth with each exposition.

4) ON THE WEBSITE, FIND THE LEADERSHIP/PASTORS/ELDERS PAGE AND RESEARCH ALL OF THE MEN TO GAIN AN UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR THOUGHTS, PASSIONS, HOBBIES, WRITINGS (FACEBOOK, TWITTER, INSTAGRAM, BLOGS).

You can learn a lot about a person by perusing their Facebook page, their Tweets, the pictures they post online, and various blogs and articles they've written. You can ascertain much about a person's hobbies, interests, thoughts, books they're reading, and how they devote their time by doing this step of seeking to know the leaders and shepherds in that particular church. Research them all. Do diligence. Find out what they do online. Find out what they read, what they post to their wall, what they tweet, how they blog, and what they think about. This step is often sorely overlooked in our current day. But this step, when diligently taken and faithfully pursued, might in fact protect you (and your family) from being in a church where the shepherds aren't really holy, above-reproach, godly, biblical men. Brethren, do the work. Follow this step.

5) VISIT THE CHURCH FOR AT LEAST TWO MONTHS (EIGHT SUNDAYS).

How sad it is when a visitor comes to a church, meets the pastor and a few families, sits down for the service, shakes a few hands on the way out, and then never comes back again. In their mind, the music was not very good. The sermon was too long. They did not have a baptism. They did things a bit differently. But then again, you were only there for *one* Sunday. It would greatly profit you to visit a particular church for at least two months (that is, eight Sundays). Why? This way you can experience the rhythm of corporate church-life. You can see how and when they take communion (typically, if it is once a month, you'd see this done twice during the eight weeks you visit). You can know how the preacher exposit through various texts of Scripture. You will understand the church's philosophy of music over these weeks. You will know the church's view of God and how lofty their understanding of God really is. But it's nearly impossible to gather all this information *in just one visit*.

6) GET INVOLVED IN THE MINISTRIES, ACTIVITIES, EVENTS, OUTINGS, OUTREACHES.

Don't just be a 'Sunday-attender-visitor'. Plug yourself in. Go to the men's breakfasts. Involve yourself in the ladies' tea fellowships. Go to the mid-week prayer meeting. If the church offers home groups/care groups, find one and attend the group. Even stay around after church for a bit and chat with families, individuals, pastors, young people. *You* take the initiative and talk to people. So often we think that if no one reaches out to us that they are an 'unfriendly church'. But this is simply selfish thinking. You take the initiative and go up to folks, shake their hand, ask how long they've been at the church, what they enjoy about it, how they've grown, how their love for Christ has deepened, and how their zeal for holiness has

been enflamed while serving in the church. In a word, dear friends, when you go visit, *involve* yourself in the ministry. This is the *only* way to really get to know the ‘life of the Body’.

7) INITIATE A MEETING WITH THE PASTOR AND AT LEAST TWO OTHER ELDERS TO KNOW THEM BETTER.

If you don’t receive three phone calls, two texts, four emails, and five Facebook friend requests, don’t think the church is cold, unspiritual, dead, and mean. Hopefully the church sends you a kind greeting and thanks you for visiting them. But the responsibility still rests on *you* to reach out to the pastor and elders to initiate a meeting with them (individually, or with their wives, if this is appropriate). You offer to take them out. You offer to buy them coffee/a meal. You offer to serve them. Ask them how Christ saved them. Ask them what they are currently reading in the Word of God and in other Christian literature. Ask them what their home-life is like. Seek to know what their prayer life is like. Ask them what their goal, vision, purpose for the church is. Get to know them better as *shepherds*; not their hobbies, but their heart. Do some diligence before the meeting and write out some important questions to ask them. Then, attentively listen, be slow to speak and even take notes if this helps.

8) KEEP COMMUNICATION OPEN WITH THE PASTOR/ELDERS SO THEY ARE REGULARLY AND SPECIFICALLY INFORMED OF YOUR THOUGHT PROCESS AND HOW YOU SENSE GOD IS LEADING YOU (EVEN IF YOU DECIDE TO LOOK ELSEWHERE). COMMUNICATION IS BENEFICIAL.

Since you have taken the pastor and some elders out already to get to know them, you have already opened the door for communication. Keep this up. Don’t stop visiting after a month, never respond to their emails, and cease all communication. Remember, you are, after all, part of the larger body of Christ! Communicate! Speak truth to your neighbor, for you are members of one another. Even if, after the eight Sundays of attending that particular church, you feel that God is leading you elsewhere, be honest, be open, be clear, and be up front and communicate. This is not only polite; it’s just simply helpful for the shepherds of that church to know how to best care and pray for you.

9) AFTER MUCH PRAYER AND SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES, BECOME A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH AND RESOLVE IN YOUR HEART TO SERVE CHRIST AND HIS FLOCK SACRIFICIALLY, DILIGENTLY, REGULARLY, AND JOYFULLY.

After visiting a particular church and you sense that it is a biblical church — though not a perfect one! — you should inquire about their process for membership and seek to begin the process of joining the church. This not only is most beneficial for your own accountability and shepherd oversight but also for the local church to know *who* its sheep are. If you plan to make that your ‘home’ church and serve alongside of those Christians, then you should pursue membership because it’s biblical, it’s the best way to welcome accountability and pastoral oversight, and it’s a profitable way for the church leadership to know who ‘their flock’ is among them that they are to shepherd and care for. Meanwhile, resolve in your heart to serve faithfully in the local church. Recommit yourself, by God’s power and through the Spirit’s enabling, to faithful obedience in the body of Christ and promote unity, grace, joy, and gospel-centeredness in all that you do and say. Never gossip, slander or backbite. Always support your shepherds. Care for Christ’s precious Bride with heartfelt love, tangible sacrifice, diligent service and fervent hospitality. Then, watch as you grow.