

Why Do We Go to Church?

By Mike Glenn

According to all of our research and surveys, by any measurement, church attendance is down. Some denominations are down more than others, but every brand of Christianity is losing members.

The experts have offered a number of reasons for the decline. The pandemic wreaked havoc on families and communities. People got used to staying at home on Sunday morning and they've developed new habits. Getting back into old habits, much less starting anything new, is difficult at best. Even the most faithful of us have realized that we really don't need to go to church every Sunday. Attending a couple of times a month will do us just fine. Every now and then, it does a body good just to sleep in on a Sunday morning. If it's raining or cold, we'll just stay home and watch the online service.

The growth of the "nones" and others with various levels of unbelief is noted as another reason church attendance is down. According to some surveys, less than half of any given community will be engaged in a local church. When you push against the statistics, you'll soon realize that only about twenty percent of any neighborhood would be considered actively engaged in a local church.

After forty years in the ministry, here's why I think attendance is down: People have stopped coming.

While everyone has their own reason every Sunday, they make a decision. Something else is more important on that Sunday than going to church. More and more people are choosing not to go.

Before I move on, I want to write a few sentences in defense of those who don't attend. First, church is boring. I've attended enough worship services to honestly say that there are some days that, if I wasn't paid to go, I wouldn't have attended either. In this day and time, there's simply no excuse for poor sermons and clumsy worship services. People deserve better. The God we serve deserves better.

And after all of the talking in church, what's different? Few of our people are ever challenged to do something great for God. They're never called to attempt the impossible. We ask them to come and sit. Most of our church members are bored.

I don't blame them and I could go on, but then I wouldn't get this blog written. I'll save that subject for another blog.

Now, let's talk to those of you who claim to be followers of Christ. I want to talk to those who would consider themselves to be members of the family. Why do so many of us who claim to be Christians never attend church? I know everyone has their reasons, but here's the hard truth: Jesus loves the church. He gave His life for the church. Jesus considers the church to be His bride. I don't care how close you are to Jesus, you can't tell Him His wife is ugly. If we love Jesus, then we love His church. If you don't love the church, then there's reason to question if you love Jesus.

We go to church because the church needs us. We don't go to church "for what we get out of it." I can't find anywhere in Scripture where it says that we will get something every time we show up. I can show you a lot of passages that talk about what we are to bring when we come to worship.

Worship happens best when we come to celebrate what we have seen God do in our lives and from that, anticipating what God will do in the days and weeks to come. The sad reason most of us feel disconnected in church is because God hasn't done anything in our lives. But again, that's another blog.

We go to church because we are needed. On every pew in every church, there's heartache. If you knew the stories, they would break your heart. We show up because people need us to bear a little bit of their burden. We pray with them. We listen to them. We provide resources if needed. We're there because, in life, everybody gets a turn. Right now, it's their turn.

We go because our turn is coming. The American dream of a solo hero taking on the world is a twisted nightmare. No one makes it alone. Life's too hard. We go because we know one day the phone will ring for us and in a matter of seconds, our world will fall apart. We go to church to find those people who will walk with us when life caves in.

We need Jesus. We need each other. And yes, we need the church.

I know. The church is filled with hypocrites and self-righteous pretenders. This is what happens when you open the door and don't charge admission. The church isn't perfect, but then again, a perfect church wouldn't let us in.

This Sunday, go to church. Go home. Mama needs you. We need Mama.

And who knows? Maybe this Sunday the gospel message that has rung true for 2000 years might ring true for you this Sunday.