

## How to Be a Church That Pleases God

Psalm 95:1-6  
Acts 2:42-47

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What are your memories of church as a child? Some might say, "I don't have any because I never attended as a child." Others might say, "I remember my parents rushing around trying their best to get us there on time." Some might say, "I remember the donuts and they were great." Others might say, "I remember the sermon stories; the minister spent time with us in the big church plus once it was done we were outta there."

Now over the years our concept of the church is shaped and molded by other experiences as well. However, unless something very special happens, our memories of church, as pleasant or unpleasant as they may be, fall short unless we have learned what pleases God. To put it bluntly, unless we have learned what God expects out of His church (and that's us), we may have been institutionalized by the church, but not internalized. That is the power of humanity versus the power of God. For unless the church leads us to a closer relationship with God our heavenly Father, it has failed in its mission and failed to be the church.

What is your primary purpose in coming to church? Unless it is to be awestruck by the presence of the Lord, you have been robbed, spiritually speaking. Note what verse 6 of Psalm 95 declares, "Come, let us bow down in worship let us kneel before the Lord our maker."

You see, our first and foremost thought when we walk into the sanctuary, not just this sanctuary but any sanctuary, ought to be I've come to worship with God - the one who gave me life and the one who alone can give me life eternally. Do you remember what the Lord said to Moses? "Take off your sandals for this is holy ground." The point was Moses, when you enter my presence there can be no other distractions - nothing that comes interferes with your learning more about me.

I must admit to you that sometimes I think the 21<sup>st</sup> century church, in its efforts to be all things to all people, in order to entertain, cajole and attract sometimes forgets who is supposed to be at the center of our worship. I remember a parishioner a few years ago who came back all excited about a church she worshipped at in California. "Pastor, they had thousands of people, an amphitheater setting, professional singers, three screens, a glass pulpit, it just oozed with class, I was energized." What I wanted to say, but refrained from saying was - do you think God could be found or operate in Pennsylvania with people who just want to sing, some paint chips on the walls and a guy without mousse in his hair, without a designer suit and who preached behind a wooden pulpit?" The scriptural reminder here is that wherever we worship and in whatever context, we are to worship God.

The early church described in Acts 2 obviously did not have a fancy building or a great organ or acoustic guitars, but three priorities mentioned in this passage speak to the church of all ages. Verse 42 says they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, in other words they were students of the word. These early believers knew that if they were going to become mature in the faith, they had to become familiar with biblical truth.

Recently, I was working on a home project. Admittedly, I am not the most gifted when it comes to mechanical aptitude. However, after careful attention to the directions and I suspect with a little help from above, I was able to complete the project correctly. The key of course was reading the directions thoroughly. If you want to be a good golfer it requires practice. If you desire to be a great musician there is no substitute for lessons and practice. If you envision yourself as a great chef there is no substitute for time spent in the kitchen.

That's right. You know where I am going. If you want to be alive in Christ you must spend time in the word and also with those who have also spent time in the word. It is no coincidence that as Luke describes these three characteristics of the early church he points to "time in the word" first.

The early church, we are told, also enjoyed times of fellowship. Now the cynic might say, well they couldn't go to the movies, or ball games or a host of other activities that are available to us. And I suppose there is truth in that. However, one cannot read this passage and not realize that these early believers wanted to be together, depended on each other, and even shared common meals together in each other's homes. Their experience undoubtedly went beyond the level of the church coffee hours, however good that experience, together with TNT, or hot dog fellowship, or home small Bible studies, or Breakaway provide each of us with opportunities to be with others who are like-minded in the Lord and who truly care about us.

The whole concept of leaning on and learning from other believers did not begin with the Pentecostal Church; it began with Jesus and his disciples. That is where we receive the model. Jesus spent three years in community with his disciples so that when Easter came they could gain strength from one another and establish his church.

I hope you see our fellowship opportunities in that light; a shelter from the storms of everyday life. You may have had a tough experience, a belly full of people complaining all day at the office you will not experience at Christ's table of fellowship. You may have had enough of political campaigning, the polls, and the promises. However, a few moments eating and sharing with brothers and sisters in Christ will create a different climate. You may have had a difficult week at school with deadlines, homework and stress, but at Breakaway you can simply be accepted for who are.

You see, the early church knew that if they were to withstand the persecution and challenges that awaited them, they had to have a support system. They learned to encourage each other. Can you imagine how you would feel if you were told by your government that you couldn't worship with others; that you could no longer have times of Christian fellowship? There are Christians who experience that reality on a daily basis in certain areas of the world. An article in *Mission News Network* reported that "one man who

worked as an evangelist was executed after being caught with two Korean New Testaments in his possession.” In that same article, “a woman and her grandmother were washing clothes when a New Testament fell out of the woman’s clothing. Somebody reported it, and both she and her grandmother were quickly executed.” I share that with you not to be gruesome, but to remind us what a privilege fellowship is to the church. It is for that reason that the writer of Hebrews shares this timely reminder. Hebrews 10:25, “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

The third important spiritual lesson that we are reminded of through the witness of the early church is that they prayed together. As your pastor, I have a unique vantage point to hear about what your prayers have meant to others. When Christians pray, it is like electricity because you cannot see it though you can experience the result of its power.

Let me ask you, have you ever been the recipient of intercessory prayer? A friend or people from your church covenant to pray on your behalf, and lo and behold, your prayers are answered. You begin to realize, as this happens more than once, that this is no sheer coincidence but the power of prayer.

Every Sunday when I come in to rehearse my message at 6 o’clock, folks from the Seoul Church are gathered here in the chapel for prayer. It is a great example, an encouraging example, of the privilege and power of prayer. What would possess them to be here so early on a Sunday morning if they did not find it to be spiritually uplifting and necessary?

In spite of the fact that the early church was not high-tech, it was surely highly contagious. When you go home today, either on the drive or perhaps at the dinner table, I want you to discuss this question. What are three great things about my church experience? Then, in quiet reflection, thank God and ponder what you can do to help this church be all that He intends us to be!