

3 Things to Consider Before Leaving Your Church

Cindi McMenamin 2015 14 Oct online at Crosswalk

If I asked you why you left your last church what would you say?

If you relocated your family out of the area, I would understand. We all need a church in our own community. If you had unresolved conflict with someone after doing all you could to resolve it, I would extend grace. Even when we attempt to reconcile, that can still happen. And if you left because you were hoping to find a better program for your kids, I would ask what you are doing to shape the lives of your children.

But chances are your reason for leaving was: "I wasn't being fed spiritually." And that would make you like most people I've talked to.

As a pastor's wife for more than 20 years, I can't tell you how many times I've heard someone say they are looking for a new church because they weren't being fed. I didn't hear it being said about my husband (at least not directly) but from others about why they were checking out our church, why they hadn't yet found a church, or why they have nearly given up on church altogether.

I fear we are becoming a society of selfish Christians when we base our reasons for staying in or leaving a church on the question "what's in it for me?"

Here are three things to consider the next time you are thinking about leaving your church:

1. Church is about more than your pastor.

Is your pastor's teaching -- or whether or not you like him personally or are feeling connected with him -- your reason for staying or leaving? If so, you have placed an unfair and unreasonable burden on him. Your pastor is certainly not capable of being ALL things -- a great teacher and expositor of the Word, a top administrator, a superb vision-caster, a gentle and compassionate counselor, a dynamic people person, a detail-oriented leader, and so on. And therefore, he can't possibly meet all your expectations. It is inevitable that he will eventually disappoint you in one way or another. He is human. And prayerfully he will be the first to admit it. A true man of God is humble in his calling and wouldn't want to be the reason you stay at your church, either. If the Word of God is not being taught, that's reason to find a church where it is being taught. But if it's taught in a different style, or you don't feel you're getting enough of the Word to grow spiritually, read the second point.

2. Church is about where you serve.

Some friends of mine just received news that their pastor of 16 years accepted a call at a different church a few thousand miles away. He came to California to plant a church on the West Coast and now that he has faithfully done what he was called to do, he is moving his family back to the South where he and his wife grew up to pastor the church in which he was raised and to be near their aging parents in this season of life.

Once I talked with my friends I heard their reservations. "We came here for his preaching. We need to be in a church where we are fed. We'll see how it goes. We'll see if the new guy will feed us."

If our idea of spiritual food is a 40-minute sermon on Sundays, then we need to learn to feed ourselves, not find another church – or pastor – to do our feeding. It isn't a pastor's responsibility to keep you

spiritually fed and healthy on a weekly sermon. Prayerfully, you are feeding yourself through regular reading and study of the Word of God, discipleship and accountability from someone other than your pastor, and service that is shaping you into the image of Christ.

Also, If you trust that God led your pastor to your church in the first place, can you trust when He leads him out of your church and brings someone else to fill his spot? Instead of asking "Will the next guy feed me?" a better question to ask is "How can I encourage and serve this body while we wait for God's appointed person to arrive?"

Hebrews 10:24 instructs: "and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds" (NASB). If everyone who comes through the doors of your church merely sits and listens, rather than exhorts and serves, you have a lecture series, a comedy club, or a weekly Bible class. Church is more about where you serve, than where you're fed.

3. Church is about a sense of family.

The church – a body of believers – is about a sense of family and community. It is about being with those you love and serve because God has called you to a family. When we have problems with a family member, we work it out, instead of leaving the family. When we find other people we like better than our family we don't just ditch the family. If we are truly functioning as the New Testament commands a church to function, every part of the body is needed and if one part of the body hurt – or leaves – the rest of the body will feel it (1 Corinthians 12:18-20). Do you see your church as your family? Your community? Christ's extended body through which we can know and serve Him better? If not, chances are you won't see your next church as a family either.

If you are thinking about leaving your church, I would ask you to consider three questions:

- 1) Is the Word of God still being taught, obeyed, and honored here?
- 2) Is my service, encouragement, and spiritual giftedness needed here?
- 3) How can I most effectively help build up this body where God has placed me?

Sometimes God will call us elsewhere to serve Him because of what we can uniquely offer another body of believers. But God will not call us away from a church for our own personal gain. When we take the focus off of ourselves by no longer asking "what's in it for me?" and start asking God "where can I serve You?" we might have a clearer indication of where He is calling and how He wants to use us.

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