

## "Come Back to Church"

The Lord Jesus purchased the church with His own blood, because He loves people. But many today think church is unimportant. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders. And join us In Search of the Lord's Way to find out what God says about worshipping with the church.

Welcome to *In Search of the Lord's Way*, we're here to search the Scriptures to find the Lord's way to be saved and to live the Christian life. Thanks so very much for spending this time with us. We love knowing that you're watching or listening. And we want to be a part of your life each week.

The Pew Forum researchers say 55 million adults in America identify themselves as having no affiliation with religion. In all there are nearly 100 million Americans who are "unchurched," that is, they haven't been to church in quite a while. Even though they're not going now, most of the unchurched used to go to church. Many folks feel that you can be a good Christian and not attend any congregation. The Bible, however, places a high priority on active membership in church.

In Psalm 122 David sang, I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!" David and others would sing this song as they were walking up to Jerusalem to the temple to observe the feast. It was a psalm of ascent. Many people would walk for days to worship God. They had no car or chariot, but they wanted to be in the temple in the presence of God.

When brothers and sisters in Christ meet together for worship, they are meeting with God and with Christ. The church belongs to them; it's their family. Of course, the Lord wants to meet with every member of his family regularly. He loves each of you. And when you stop coming to church, the Lord and His people miss you. We're here to encourage you to live the Lord's way.

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The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Hebrews 10 verses 22 to 25, and then we'll explore the need to be an active of the church.

Our scripture reading today comes from the epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 10, verses 22 to 25. "Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." That's a great encouragement from scripture to attend worship regularly at church. Let's pray together.

Oh Father we're grateful that we can meet with You whenever the church meets, that we can be in Your presence. And Father we pray that our love and our praise will go to You during those times. And Father may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

Recent studies say that large numbers of young adults have stopped attending church. Some find church boring or irrelevant. Some say the church is full of hypocrites or is so judgmental. Some don't feel as connected as they would like, and others say that they're just too busy to go to church. Life can certainly become difficult, but attending and participating in church offers an amazing opportunity to find spiritual strength and help with the most difficult tasks of life. I want to spend some time responding to some of the objections that people give for not going to church.

First, *there are hypocrites at church*. Now a hypocrite is someone who pretends to be something he doesn't intend to be. Yes, there are some pretenders at church; but most people come to church because they genuinely love God and want to live good lives. Everyone is weak; and everyone sins; but that doesn't mean that they're pretenders or actors. It means that they're human. Jesus told the apostles at the garden of Gethsemane, "that the spirit is indeed willing but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26 and verse 41); and you know what, that's still true of people today.

Now think with me: before we start pointing fingers at others, perhaps we should look at our own lives. Do you really want to let someone else's bad behavior separate you from God? It seems much wiser to let God deal with the hypocrites and to make sure that we remain right with God. The Lord Jesus had to deal with hypocritical Pharisees during His entire ministry, but He never let their hypocrisy keep Him from doing what was right! He kept right on teaching and preaching in the synagogues and loving people. Don't let someone else's sin infect your heart and turn you away from God.

Second, *some say church is boring or it's irrelevant*. Well when people use the word "boring," they're really describing their perspective or attitude. Now any activity can be boring or exciting, depending on the attitude of the person speaking. People usually get out of a worship service what they put into it. Give me the Word of God to nourish my soul.

David describes the "law of the Lord" in Psalm 19 verse 10 as, "More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb." Well this inspired psalmist was speaking about the Law of the Old Testament, which can be found in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. He found them desirable, valuable, and sweeter than honey. He found them so, because they were meaningful to him.

My friend, the Word of God is also meaningful, and it can be meaningful to you. It'll teach you where you came from, why you're here, and where you're going after this life is over. The Bible has the words of eternal life (John 12 and verse 50) and it has the truth that sets people free (John 8 and verse 32). Now the gospel is a message of grace, and hope, peace, and love, it's good news. It will teach you how to live victoriously in this life and how to face God on the Day of Judgment with confidence. The Bible is God's message of love and a message of truth. It'll teach you how to avoid the pitfalls of life and it will give you purpose and direction. Now as the Divine book, the Bible will open the Lord's will for your life. And a sincere study of God's Word can never be boring to one who wants to know and to please God.

Third, *people at church, some people say this, that people at church are judgmental*. Well it may seem that way, but again think with me. Actually, people everywhere are "judgmental." Have you ever been to a ball game where an umpire made a controversial call? Well everybody gets excited about the call. Was he "in" or was he "out"? Well one group thinks the referee is blind, while the other group defends him. Conservatives judge liberals, and liberals judge them right back. Everyone makes judgments. And one of the greatest ironies of our time is the way people view judging. It goes like this: Well I can judge you, but don't you judge me!

As for judging, the real basis for making judgments about right and wrong is God's Holy Word. The Lord Jesus said in John 7 and verse 24, "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment." Now if God calls something sin, it is sin whether we agree with God or not. God knows His will, and He only calls things sinful because they are evil or hurtful. Now God said through the prophet Isaiah, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" (This is Isaiah 5 and verse 20).

Now the people at church love others enough to tell them the truth about sin. Sin will cause a person to lose his soul. Romans 6 and verse 23 says, "that the wages of sin is death." Now if I care about your soul, I'll talk about sin and I'll also talk about salvation. Now I don't say this to be hateful, but because I know how dangerous sin is to your soul. If I didn't care about you, I'd simply ignore the subject of sin and let you bear your consequences. I'd tell you, well sin is "no big deal"; or, "there's nothing to worry about!" To remain silent about sin or to lie about sin is cruel and it's uncaring. Telling people the truth about sin is kind. Don't be so quick to judge your neighbor at church.

Fourth, people say, *Well I'm so busy I don't have time for church.* You know when I hear this, and people say it, I find it's usually an excuse. Most people can determine their priorities and their schedules. And if you're too busy to add God to your schedule, just remember one day time will be no more, and you won't have any more time. God will require your soul of you, and you'll wish you could go back in time and change things.

Now the Lord Jesus knew that people would be busy making a living and needing food and clothes and shelter. And the Lord said in Matthew 6 and verse 33, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Putting the Lord first means spending time with Him and His family the church in worship and in service.

The Bible says in James 4 verses 13 to 17: Come now, you who say, "Oh, today or tomorrow we're going to go to such and such a city, and we're going to spend a year there and we're going to engage in business and we're going to make a profit.' Yet you don't know what your life will be like tomorrow. You're *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. (He says) instead, *you ought* to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.' But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin." My friend, the right thing to do is to attend worship, to not could be sin.

Fifth, some people say, *well I don't feel connected at church.* Well some folks find it hard to make friends at church the way they would like. And the best way to make friends is to be a friend. Proverbs 18 and verse 24 says, "That a man *that has* friends must show himself friendly." That is, if you come to church late and you leave as soon as the final "amen" is said, you'll probably never make many friends at church. Instead of waiting until everyone comes to you, reach out to other people. Get involved at church, get involved in some good work. Learn people's names. Attend Bible classes. Volunteer.

People say they aren't as close to God as they used to be. And we ask the question, "Well who moved?" Did God leave you or did you leave God? People can easily drift away from God and the church. The Bible says in Hebrews 2 and verse 1, "that we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away *from it.*" Now it's easy to allow the world and its ways to cause our love for God and His church to grow weak. And I hope that you haven't done that.

Through the years I've grown close to a number of people who came back to church after being absent for a time. They were always so glad that they came back. From the time they left they felt empty and distant from God. They were miserable and spiritually unfulfilled without Him and needed to find their way home.

You know when people return to church, *they find that they grow closer to God.* The Lord wishes all people "might grope for Him and find Him, though He's not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist" (Acts 17 verses 27 and 28). God is the Father of your spirit (Hebrews 12 and verse 9). He created you and has heard your prayers all your life. God gave His only Son, His only begotten Son Jesus for your sins because He cares about you. He gave you the Bible so that you might know Him and love Him. Now church will help you know Him even better.

When people return to church, they find that they improve their personal understanding of what the Bible teaches. The Word of God is an amazing book filled with hope and truth. And a lifetime is not enough to know everything the Bible teaches, but many people waste their minds on everything but this great treasure of spiritual knowledge. The Bible says in 2 Timothy 2 and verse 15, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." Now if you want to know God's Word better, then attend Bible classes and worship at church.

When people return to church, they find *help in the religious training of their children*. Raising children in our nearly pagan society is tough enough, and parents need all the help that they can get. The church provides an environment where people want to serve the Lord and to live righteous lives. Churches provide moral and spiritual examples and make a lasting impact on young lives. Churches provide Bible classes, camps, retreats, and youth gatherings with opportunities to be around other Christian young people.

When people return to church, they *discover ways of handling daily challenges*. Now the Bible says in 1 Peter 5 and verse 7, "casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you." At church you can pray with brothers and sisters in Christ and learn from the Bible how the faithful people of the Bible dealt with their problems in life. I've found people at church are "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another" (Romans 15 and verse 14).

Christians everywhere face struggles yes. And they've found the comfort of God and are by finding it they're able to comfort others and help them through their struggles. The apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 1 verses 3 to 4, "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

I tell you, the church is a blessing to us all. The Bible says in Ecclesiastes 4 verses 9 to 12, that "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm *alone*? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three *strands* is not quickly torn apart." Oh, the church can keep you spiritually strong, able to resist all the temptations and pitfalls of life. My friend, you need the church. If you've wandered away, come home. Let's pray together. Oh heavenly Father we pray that we may come to value the church as much as Your Son Jesus did when He purchased it with His own blood. And Father as we live for You, we pray that Your will may be done in our lives on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

Hebrews 10 verses 24 and 25 says, "and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." Church is where people build each other up spiritually and grow close to God. We all need that strength and encouragement that comes from being around the people of God.

Occasionally I hear of someone who's had a bad experience at church. Someone has offended them or overlooked them. They react to this disappointment by quitting the church. Now if someone wrongs you, rather than quitting the Lord or the church, why not try a different approach. The Lord said in Matthew 18 verse 15, that "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. And if he listens to you, you have gained your brother." This is the Lord's way.

When you quit church on these reasons, you're actually letting someone come between you and God. Or when you push Christ out of your life, you also are putting your soul in jeopardy. Listen again to Hebrews 10:25 and now verse 26, "not forsaking our own assembling together, as the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." My friend, don't push the Savior out of your life. Who else will shed His blood to save you?

God wants to bless you. And if you're not yet a Christian, you can come to the Lord in faith and love by repenting of your sins, confessing the name of the Lord, and by being baptized. Now in baptism the Lord washes away your sins and He adds you to the church, His church. It could be that as a Christian you've become one of the unchurched. My friend, come back to the Lord and don't let anything keep you from the church. Don't let anything make your heart grow hard. Come back and find the love of God.

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