
CHAPTER 16 : WHERE TO FROM HERE

“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” (Eph 4:15,16)

“So, now what?”

“If the church is central to God’s purpose in history and the gospel, it must surely be central to our lives. How can we take lightly what God takes seriously” John Stott

“Do you want to know that your new life is real?” Asks Mark Dever. “Commit yourself to a local church of saved sinners. Try to love them. Don’t just do it for three weeks. Don’t just do it for six months. Do it for years. And I think you’ll find out, and others will, too, whether or not you love God. The truth will show itself.

The local church is where our new life in Christ is lived out and proven. “Joining a local church won’t save you, “Dever states emphatically. “It’s only the death of Christ that saves you. He alone is our righteousness. But if He really is our righteousness, if we really love Him who we have not seen, it will show itself by us loving those we do see.”

A profile of a biblical community

The New Testament gives us a clear and helpful teaching on what passionate involvement in a local church should look like. Let’s look at what you and I need to do to make commitment to Christ the profile of our lives:

1. You join.

When we are passionate we want to sign up. We want to belong, to be identified as a member. In the same way it’s not enough to just go to church or sample from several churches in your area. You need to officially join and hook in- so that the pastors and others know you’re part of the team.

Hebrews 13:17 urges Christians to obey their leader, thereby receiving spiritual benefits that come from having pastors who watch over our lives. But you can't do this well if you haven't joined a church. Becoming a church member gives you specific accountability, care, encouragement, and leadership. Once you've joined you put down roots. Christian martyr Jim Elliot once said, "Wherever you are, be all there." Adopt this mind-set with your local church. Be all there with your heart.

2. You make the church a priority

We build our lives around our priorities; building your life around the church means making it the kind of priority that secondary concerns flow around, not over. For us the three core meeting times that we place a high value on that we ask you to commit to in your journey with us are: our Sunday Celebration, Neighbours and Nations (our family prayer and worship time) and being actively involved in a Life Group. We place a high value on these times where we are strengthening our vision of God and encouraging one another, and we ask for a culture of honour by letting each other know if we aren't able to be there.

3. You try to make your leaders job a joy

An important part of commitment involves supporting and faithfully following your leaders. Heb 13:17 encourages us to "obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not moaning for this would be of no advantage to you."

How can you do this? First, embrace, obey and love God's Word personally. Nothing makes a leader happier than to see a member of their church growing in godliness. When you make your leaders job a joy you will benefit spiritually.

4. You find ways to serve

Serving is spending yourself- energy, time and gifts- for something outside of yourself. 1 Peter 4:10 says "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to faithfully serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." Serving and being involved is the fastest way to feel a sense of ownership in your church. It's also the best way to build relationships. Membership does not mean spectatorship. No part of the body can merely observe the work of others- it has to continue. The church "grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work" (Eph 4:16)

5. You give

Money is a tangible return for what we have invested of ourselves- time, abilities, business choices and other personal resources. So for a Christians, giving financially is a very meaningful and biblical expression of worship. It's a way to offer up our lives to God. When we tithe (giving ten percent of our income) and sow money in other ways to our local church, we're telling God that we trust Him and that we acknowledge that all we have belongs to Him. God challenges the Israelites in Malachi 3:10:

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. "Test me in this" says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." We Believe that all we have comes from God and so for us the tithe is just the bottom-line of obedient giving. The ten-percent should be converted into a 100 percent of faithful stewardship and generosity to God and His purposes.

We have created separate banks accounts for each of the areas we taught into earlier (See chapter on Finances and Giving) labelled '*Tithes*'; '*Offerings*'; '*Mercy*'; '*Apostolic*' and '*Building*'. At our info table you should find envelopes clearly marked for these various areas you can sow into. We ask that you pray and ask God to make you generous in heart with your finances so that you sow into each one of these areas. Many worthy ministries exist around the world. But because the local church is the place you're nourished spiritually, it should be the place where you invest financially. Jesus promises in Matthew 6:19-20 that everything we give to Him is converted into treasure and reward in heaven and will never fade, rust or be stolen. Jesus also said that where our treasure is that is where our heart will be. So by giving financially and are honouring and being obedient to God and affirming that our heart is with our local church.

6. We connect with others

Passion for the church involves diving into the community of the local church. It means pursuing and nurturing relationships that extend beyond the building and our meeting times. The New Testament word for this experience is called "fellowship".

John Loftness writes, “Fellowship means participating together in life and truth made possible by the Holy Spirit through our union with Christ. Fellowship is sharing something in common at the deepest possible level of human relationships, which is- our sharing of God Himself. Fellowship means “belonging to each other.” The New Testament is full of instruction on what it means for us to belong to each other. Have you ever noticed the “one another” commands in Scripture?

We’re to:

- Love one another (John 13:34)
- Be devoted to one another (Romans 12:5)
- Honour one another (Romans 12:10)
- Rejoice with one another (Romans 12:15)
- Serve one another (Galatians 5:13)
- Carry one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2)
- Forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32)
- Encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
- Offer hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9)
- Confess our sins to one another (James 5:16)
- Pray for one another (James 5:16)

Every “one another” command shows that the church isn’t merely about programs and meetings, but about shared life. That is why we have small groups that meet together which we call Life Groups. These groups are there to encourage us to share life together and enjoy God together.

As you reach out to others don’t just limit yourself to people just like you. The beauty of the local church is the opportunity to grow close to people from completely different backgrounds and cultures.

7. You share your passion

People who have been captured by an idea or product almost instinctively try to get other people excited about it too. In the same way, when you're transformed by the gospel and you're passionate about the church, you want others to experience your joy. Passion spills out and is contagious. You can't keep it inside.

Passionate involvement in the local church should never be seen as a way to escape the outside world. The local church is God's primary way to reach the outside world! That's why a very important part of the local church is expressing a heart for the lost. Look for ways that you can creatively, naturally and enthusiastically reach those who don't yet know Christ personally, to win them Jesus and glorify God.