

I Love My Church. Week 1

Acts 2:46 The 4 Habits of Healthy Church Members:

1. Love the Word
2. Love My Church
3. Love Prayer
4. Love My Connect Group

Ephesians 1:22-23 (MSG) “At the center of all this, Christ rules the church. The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ’s body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence.”

Ephesians 5:25-27 (NLT) “For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God’s word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault.”

Revelation 19:7 “Let us be glad and rejoice, and let us give honor to him. For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb, and his bride has prepared herself.”

Introduction: A tale of two church members

1. Story of Walter and Linda. Loved church, great life, powerful influence. Then began to let it change. Began to look for what was wrong instead of **being** what was right. Drifted away because there is no church good enough when you are looking for perfection. Divorced, no influence. God’s design, His order, is for our local church to equip and empower us for the other areas our life. When we ‘re-define’ membership and make church all about what we want, we stop the divine flow into the other areas of our lives. **The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church.**
2. **The “Church Member Slide”**
Once we make our own decision to become members of a church, we do so because of something Jesus has done for us. Salvation, or a conviction that causes us to return to Him, or a connection to Godly friends, or a decision point in our lives. But no matter what caused us to seek out a church, when we start the membership journey, we usually start it with Him at the center of it all. It’s all about Him and His place in our lives. So we join, we find our place to serve, our church friends become our best friends, we start giving our time, talent and resources, we don’t like missing anything and think our church is the best church in the world. And every time we come together we experience Jesus. Then, we start doing the “Church Member Slide”.

The focus shifts from being all about Jesus to making some room for all about me. Not all at once, it's a slow dance. The same imperfect people, the same imperfect leaders are still there, but now the imperfections seem more noticeable. We served long enough, let somebody else serve. I don't mind missing as much. I'm finding more and more stuff I don't like. In fact, I'm looking for things that bug me. So I start backing off on giving my time, talent and resources. And fortunately for me, I have surrounded myself with more people who either aren't in church or are unhappy with church. So, they know what I'm feeling and can help me make this slide. And after a while, church membership is no longer about Jesus, it's all about me. I'll keep coming for a while, not expecting much and understandably sharing my concerns with those who will listen. But most likely, I will eventually just slide right on out.

Incredibly, there are people who never see all that's wrong with the church and they won't dance with me. They've been there longer than me so I know they've seen all the imperfections and by now they should have learned the Slide, but somehow they just keep dancing the happy dance.

The difference? Who's your partner in your membership dance? Jesus or yourself?

When your partner in this Church Membership Dance is Jesus, when He is leading and it's all about Him, membership has a whole different meaning. Let's look at that meaning, let's look at the way people like Ralph and Jesse Bryant just keep doing the happy dance.

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

12 The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. 13 Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.

14 Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. 15 If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear says, "I am not part of the body because I am not an eye," would that make it any less a part of the body? 17 If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?

18 But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. 19 How strange a body would be if it had only one part! 20 Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. 21 The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."

22 In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. 23 And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, 24 while the more honorable parts do not require this special

care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. **25** This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. **26** If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.

27 All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it. **28** Here are some of the parts God has appointed for the church: first are apostles, second are prophets, third are teachers, then those who do miracles, those who have the gift of healing, those who can help others, those who have the gift of leadership, those who speak in unknown languages.

29 Are we all apostles? Are we all prophets? Are we all teachers? Do we all have the power to do miracles? **30** Do we all have the gift of healing? Do we all have the ability to speak in unknown languages? Do we all have the ability to interpret unknown languages? Of course not! **31** So you should earnestly desire the most helpful gifts. But now let me show you a way of life that is best of all.

1. Membership means we are all necessary parts of the whole

- Biblical membership versus culture's definition of membership
- Biblical definition of membership - **1 Cor. 12:27-28**
- "God did not give us local churches to become country clubs where membership means we have privileges and perks. He placed us in churches to serve, to care for others, to pray for leaders, to learn, to teach, to give, and, in some cases, to die for the sake of the gospel. Many churches are weak because we have members who have turned the meaning of membership upside down."

2. Membership means we are different but we still work together

- Each part of the Body has to do its own work
- The Body suffers when we fail to do our part - **1 Cor. 12:26**
- "With a country club membership you pay others to do the work for you. With church membership, everyone has a role or function. That is why some are hands, feet, ears, or eyes. We are all different, but we are necessary parts of the whole."

3. Membership means everything we say and do is based on a Biblical foundation of love

- Biblical definition of love - **1 Cor. 13**
- We do not love because people are loveable
- Love is the foundation of church membership
- "We are not to love fellow church members just because they are lovable. We are to love the unlovable as well. We are not to pray for and encourage our pastors just when they are doing things we like. We are to pray for and encourage them when they do things we don't like. We are not to serve the church only when others are joining in. We are to serve the church even if we are alone in doing so. Church membership is

founded on love. Authentic, biblical, unconditional love.”

4. Church membership is functioning membership

- Country club membership (pay your dues) versus biblical church membership (give abundantly and serve without hesitation)
- Biblical membership is a functioning membership - 1 Cor. 12:12-26
- *“The concept of an inactive church member is an oxymoron.” The idea that you can be a church member without serving and giving cannot be found in the Bible. “One of the ongoing questions you should ask yourself and God in prayer is: ‘How can I best serve my church?’ You should never ask yourself if you should be serving your church.”*

5. When the Local Church is full of Functioning Members, Heaven applauds!

Ephesians 3:8-10 “And so here I am, preaching and writing about things that are way over my head, the inexhaustible riches and generosity of Christ. My task is to bring out in the open and make plain what God, who created all this in the first place, has been doing in secret and behind the scenes all along. Through followers of Jesus like yourselves gathered in churches, this extraordinary plan of God is becoming known and talked about even among the angels!”

It's important that we get this 'church membership' thing right. We are God's plan for transforming the world.