

Church Shopping

I asked some friends why they were leaving their church. “Oh, it’s just not meeting our needs anymore.” I’ve heard this reasoning before (or the corollary: “We’re looking for a church that meets our needs”), but it distresses me because it implies that it’s all about us, that we are simply consumers shopping for the best spiritual deal – what will give us the most bang for our offering buck.

Shopping list: great youth program, feel-good music in my preferred style, charismatic pastor who gives inspiring sermons, and friendly folks that are a lot like me, all at a convenient location and time. Sound about right? And if one church fails to measure up, then there’s another one down the road.

But guess what. It’s not all about us; it’s about God. It’s about worshipping and serving Him wherever He calls us to do so. Sometimes that means being okay with not getting our way – giving up our own preferences out of love, for the sake of others and in service to the gospel. Jesus, who is our example in all things, modeled serving sacrificially.

...Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mt. 20:26-28)

To paraphrase a famous quote, “Ask not what your church can do for you but what you can do for your church.” So how about looking for a place where you can really give of yourself, one that may desperately need the gifts you have to offer. Or better yet, find a meaningful way to serve where you are. After all, God probably placed you in that church for a reason. If there’s no youth program, start one! Or contribute your efforts to the music team, if that’s your passion. Or maybe God has in mind stretching you a little by having you serve in a way you hadn’t planned or expected. If your church has problems (and all churches do), try being part of the solution rather than making the problems worse by bailing.

A church isn’t a social club; it’s a family, and we don’t go looking for a new family when our current one disappoints us. We stay and work out the problems. We stay because we love and care for each other (1 Cor. 13:4-8). We stay out of obedience to God and loyalty to others. We stay to serve and bring glory to God. He will richly bless us for it. So stop shopping and start investing, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Mt. 6:21)

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