

Where's the Bread?

My maternal grandmother was a saint. She was the lady who taught me how to pray. She provided me with my first Bible. She took me to church for the first time. I worshiped God the first time with her. She was beyond faithful. She went to church every Sunday morning and evening, including the Wednesday night prayer time. No matter what the function, if the church doors were unlocked, she was there. Kind of drove the rest of the family nuts, but bless her heart, she was a devoted woman. I could tell you much more about her, but we need to address a very important question about our faith.

Why do people go to church? The church I'm referring to is the Protestant Evangelical church. You know, the one that has the modest building with seating for 250, fellowship hall and kitchen, Pastor's office, classrooms with children's art on the walls, paved parking lot and the old school bus parked under the light at night. Or how about this church? The one with seating for three thousand, an outside foyer with stained glass and stone tile. The classrooms rival the public school system. The Pastors are each given their own office with an adjoining conference room and an outside secretary who handles everything. It has a stage in the sanctuary that will support a small rock concert with lighting and sound equipment to match. Then there is the 75 person choir loft and the small orchestra pit. Outside are play areas, landscaping, and a day care. Don't forget the adjoining gymnasium and activity center, banquet tables and chairs for wedding receptions and the full commercial grade kitchen. There's more but I think you get the picture.

So, let's ask the question. Regardless of the size why do people like you and me go to church?

The Righteous Reasons

Before we go any further, let's get rid of the obvious answers and dismiss the righteous reasons why people go to church. We all know that they don't go for those reasons.

The first and most obvious is Jesus the Christ. C'mon let's get honest. People don't go to church week in and week out, every week for that. Maybe that's why they should be going, but we are trying to understand why they really go at all. Seeking forgiveness from God can also be ruled out. Everyone knows you can just ask God for forgiveness anytime, so going to church has nothing to do with that. You don't have to go to church to be saved!

Let's rule out spiritual instruction. The basic instruction that is given in a church is simply learning the party line. People don't really study the Bible at church. It's more like instruction with qualifications. "It's our way or the highway." We are still looking for the real reasons why people go to church.

Most Americans go to a variety of two or three churches in the course of their lives. Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Independent non-denominational, Assembly of God, Charismatic and Pentecostal types are like suits of playing cards (clubs, diamonds, spades, and hearts). They all play pretty much the same way. Each claims to have the spiritual edge. It's pretty much a personal preference as to where people go. That might answer why they go to a particular church. But, it doesn't answer why they go to church on a continuing basis.

I ask the question to understand the truth. Oh No! I went and used that scary word. We'll talk about truth later. Let's answer the first question before us. Why do people really go to church?

The Real Reasons

A good lawyer never asks a question he doesn't have the answer to and the same goes for a good teacher. Consider my answers based upon observations of my grandmother (God bless her soul) and as a former Baptist minister, a church builder and congregational pastor.

Monte's TOP TEN reasons people go to church.

10. Holidays: (the Christmas decorations/music and the Easter Pageant)
9. Group Activities: (the ski trip, youth camping, couples retreats, etc.)
8. Counseling: (emotional support for pending/past divorce)
7. The Music Program: (Sunday morning choir, and special performances)
6. The Youth Program: (teen religious activities along with sports and video games)
5. The Dynamic Preacher: (handsome and dignified)
4. The Children's Program: (just like school)
3. Program Involvement (member of the choir or a particular class)
2. Friendship, Companionship, or Networking (looking for their next spouse or customer)

And the number 1 reason why people go to church –

1. HABIT (they don't want to change anything).

Church leaders know these are the real reasons that people come to church and they plan to these expectations. They know there are more important reasons but in their noble way of thinking they justify all these things by saying, "Get 'em in then we'll get 'em saved!"

I want to share with you what really goes into the planning and thinking of church growth. I think you'll be surprised to discover the real reasons for successful churches. By successful, I'm referring to those described earlier with growing numbers of attendance. Remember, successful churches are based on how many people attend (and their resulting contributions). The more people; the more money; the more successful the church.

The Three Models of Church Growth

Church growth is based upon three progressive models: the Field of Dreams model, the Entertainment model, and the Goods and Services model. A large, several thousand person church has all the models going at the same time. This is the goal for all big time pastors – to build a B-I-G church with all three models of church growth.

Field of Dreams Model

The Field of Dreams model is the famous "If you build it, they will come" model. People like to have a little space around them when they are seated and unless you provide a lot of seating, then don't expect a lot of people. This is where bigger is better. Besides, church building funds bond the congregation together. It gives the people a shared purpose. Of course, it's more material than spiritual bonding. The color of new carpet will dominate the business meeting.

Entertainment Model

The Entertainment Model is both the music and preaching service. The service needs to begin on time with stirring music and presenters. It also needs to end on time to support Sunday lunch, the football schedule, etc. Sunday dinner after church is one of the most important events of the week. Ask any local sit-down restaurant. Choir specials and music solos are excellent crowd pleasers. You move into the big time when you host concerts with professional artists accompanied by your own musicians. If by chance you can get a very dynamic speaker with the music, this flushes out the entertainment model. If the speaker is famous, has written books, and doesn't appear to read his speech, then people will come just for the 25 minute devotional. Stirring music and a stimulating speaker will always keep the

faithful in line and they have a reason to invite a friend to church.

Goods and Services Model

However, the Goods and Services Model is the really B-I-G one when it come to church growth. If a church really wants to have the big numbers of people coming then it has to have the goods and services model. You have to have something for everybody in the family. From nursery to day care, big church to children's church, activities and programs galore. Then, ... you make it a package deal. It's set up a lot like the country club or the health spa. In fact, this kind of model is really a poor man's country club. With your one tithe, you can come to any or all of the varied activities. This is what really brings people to church.

The Three Principles of Sustaining Church Growth

Once you start getting the numbers up for attendance, then there's the problem of keeping them. This is a little like the act of juggling. Church people are high maintenance items and the Pastor and his staff will have to stay on their toes to keep everything calm, cool and collected.

Keeping everything Calm

The first principle of sustaining church growth is keeping everything calm. This is done by asserting unity of the church over any principle. Sometimes keeping everything calm is confused with compassion or love of the brethren. Unity of the church is paramount. If an individual begins to question authority or a small group emerges, pastors will try to soften the issues and preserve unity. Ignoring the problem completely and acting like it is not happening is best. When all else fails, send them packing and accuse them with attempting to steal the church or better yet, "Sowing discord among brethren."

Keeping the Cool

The second principle for sustained church growth is keeping the cool. This principle is all about the grace of God. Grace covers a multitude of mistakes. Whenever a mistake is made by key personnel, then keep the fires of judgment nice and cool by asserting good ole grace. This is especially important when the worship leader has an affair with piano player. Remember, that God forgives all. God also says that we ourselves are forgiven even as we forgive others. So, the Pastor, staff, and large tithing members of the church should also expect forgiveness from other members of the church since grace covers it. If key people object, just tell them to "Cool it." Of course, there are exceptions when righteous indignation has its day. That would be when the person is not part of the church council, staff, or a prominent tithing family. That person, should be silently judged guilty and smiled at like they are a leper. This works very well on newly divorced people. You're just being cool towards them.

Keeping Everything Collected

The third principle of sustaining church growth is the most important. Keeping things collected means passing the offering plate every time the church doors are open. It means pledge cards are distributed and collected each year. It means impassioned teachings on stewardship. It means heartfelt prayers immediately prior to and after the collection plate is passed. It means playing of melodic music to enhance check writing over cash contributions. It means teaching the people to believe that the blessing comes as they bless the church. It's about "seed faith" money and "prosperity teachings." It's about measuring God's blessings by the amount of dollars that come your way. It's about collections. It's about money.

Soap Operas, Women's Magazines and Sliced Bread

Large churches are based on these models and principles with Jesus being the overall marketing theme.

Think about it. Isn't church more like watching a favorite soap opera. You can get into the program for awhile, leave, and come back anytime. Everything will be the same. Oh sure, some of the characters will be different, but there will be the same interpersonal conflicts and social events happening. Or consider this parallel. Churches are like back issues of a women's magazine. No matter the year or month, you can expect to find articles on better make-up and health, how to help your husband to be more romantic, and another recipe using canned soup. Church is set up like sliced bread; it comes in a package.

People with Needs

Before we leave this discussion completely, I should also tell you that not everyone is welcome in the church. People with real needs should not plan on placing their membership in a church. Churches are not set up to help that kind of thing, especially if you need a lot of help. Churches are for nice people that smell good. Have you ever noticed the smell in a church. It's a collage of perfumes and after shaves that makes for its own kind of incense. Church people tend to look at people with needs like they smell funny. Plus, it's hard to join into the social fabric of a church when you can't afford the ski trip garb or the Sunday dinner at the restaurant.

Seeking the Truth

Also, you should not go to church if you're looking for the truth. Looking for the truth in a church will get you into a lot of trouble. It's like barbecuing a sacred cow. People will be insulted and offended if you are caught asking or sharing the truth. Churches are not institutions set up to seek and find the truth; they are set up to promote and sustain themselves. Churches don't like raw truth. The church recipe for truth is tenderize well, season with other flavors, and fry to a crisp. If you bring up raw truth too much, they will use you as garnish when they serve up their version.

The First B-I-G Church

Okay, so where's the beef (bread)!?! What is the point of this article? Do I have some deep hidden resentment against church and church brethren? Of course not. We needed to ask why people go to church so we could ask this next question. If Yeshua came to build the CHURCH, then why didn't he build a CHURCH up in Galilee or in Jerusalem? Why didn't Yeshua build the first CHURCH to "get 'em in and get 'em saved?"

Actually, Yeshua almost did have one of these B-I-G churches up in Galilee. In fact, He had one that had 5,000 people. The funny thing is, He shut it down and said they were coming for the wrong reasons. Let's examine that story a little closer. You will discover that it has a lot to do with the church today.

The Feeding of the Five Thousand

Yeshua was teaching in the Tiberias Galilee area and large numbers of people came to hear him. This was a great location for a church. Jews and Gentiles lived there. In fact, there is a church there today (nobody goes to it, but it is there just the same).

Yeshua therefore lifting up His eyes, and seeing that a great multitude was coming to Him, said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?" And this He was saying to test him; for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little."

John 6:5-7

The problem was that it was lunch time and the people were hungry. The disciples were trying to figure out how the crowd and they could have lunch. Remember, this is was a test. It was a test by Yeshua.

One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?" Yeshua said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

John 6:8-10

Can you imagine a church with 5,000 men (with wives and children this was a very large group). So, Yeshua had the B-I-G church there in Galilee. Yeshua then proceeded to serve them lunch.

Yeshua therefore took the loaves; and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted. And when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments that nothing may be lost." And so they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, which were left over by those who had eaten.

John 6:11-13

Based upon the evidence of the twelve baskets afterward, this was not a mass hypnosis of making the people think they had eaten. He really gave them abundant food and there was more after than when they began. The response of the people was overwhelming.

When therefore the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is of a truth the Prophet who is to come into the world." Yeshua therefore perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force, to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.

John 6:14-15

What sign had they seen? What is it about providing food to a large number of people that signifies that Yeshua is "the Prophet who is to come into the world?" The answers have to do with Moses. Moses led a large multitude into the wilderness and God provided meat and bread for them. Moses prophesied that God would raise up another from among their countrymen who would be like Moses (Deut 18:18-19). He is referred to as the Prophet who is to come into the world. Yeshua gave them the sign just like Moses did and they wanted to make Him king.

Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, and after getting into a boat, they started to cross the sea to Capernaum. And it had already become dark, and Yeshua had not yet come to them. And the sea began to be stirred up because a strong wind was blowing. When therefore they had rowed about three or four miles, they beheld Yeshua walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat; and they were frightened. But He said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." They were willing therefore to receive Him into the boat; and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

John 6:16-21

The Apostle John isn't so much trying to describe the miracle of walking on water as much as he is trying to describe how the disciples and Yeshua got to Capernaum. Remember, the people chased Yeshua into the mountains. The disciples, however, loaded up the twelve baskets of bread, themselves and proceeded to Capernaum by boat. Yeshua then met them at sea during the night in a storm before they all arrived in Capernaum.

The next day the multitude that stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other small boat there, except one, and that Yeshua had not entered with His disciples into the boat, but that His disciples had gone away alone. There came other small boats from Tiberias near to the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks. When the multitude therefore saw that Yeshua was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves got into the small boats, and came to Capernaum, seeking Yeshua. And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You get here?"

John 6:22-25

The Apostle John gives us a certain amount of detail about how the people were searching for Yeshua. First, they looked in their area, then they got into boats themselves and headed for Capernaum. Ask yourself something, "Why did they go after the disciples when they knew Yeshua did not leave with them and was somewhere else?" Did they think that they would eventually see Yeshua by finding the disciples? Why were they stunned to find Yeshua there? Why did they really go to Capernaum?

Remember the original question in this article? Why do people really go to church? Wait till you hear Yeshua's answer to them.

Yeshua answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves, and were filled. Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you, for on Him the Father, even God, has set His seal."

John 6:26-27

The people weren't really seeking Yeshua, nor were they looking to confirm the truth of who He was. They were following the trail of the twelve baskets of bread. I sincerely believe that if Yeshua were to show up in one of those churches we have been talking about, the people would ask the same question, "When did You get here?" I believe that Yeshua would say the same thing to them. "You are not seeking Me or the truth; you're here for the bread [goods and services]."

Yeshua has taught us that life is more than bread (goods and services). This was the same lesson for Israel in the wilderness. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God does a man live. The problem is that church people still don't believe the words. Let me give you the opportunity to think about this a little deeper and consider this truth. People, including professing believers in the church, are more interested in the baskets of bread than the true bread from heaven. They're using the assembly of Yeshua to organize and conduct the business of bread distribution. But Yeshua said it very straightforward and profoundly.

Yeshua said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

John 6:35

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life.

John 6:47-48

Churches hear these words but they don't believe them. They are a metaphor at best and serve as part of the church decorum along with stained glass and communion cups. I submit that the words of Yeshua are worth more than being the engraved text on a dust collecting artifact. Believing them means living life with the Spirit of God. Not believing His words means that you're following a trail of bread

crumbs never to be satisfied.

Whenever I hear a believer speak of their church and say, "I'm not getting fed there," I remember what Yeshua said of Himself. Either Yeshua overstated when He said that He is the bread that is truly satisfying, or those believers have never eaten the bread. I am convinced that churches don't serve the bread of Yeshua; they're following the bread in the twelve baskets. They are looking for a field of dreams, to be entertained, and for the goods and services in a package deal. They want to be calm, cool and collected.

Even in Yeshua's day, those of the five thousand didn't accept His words. They couldn't make the transition from earthly bread to manna from heaven. They want that which satisfies but they follow their eyes. But don't get down on yourself or others too much. Even His disciples struggled with what Yeshua said.

Many therefore of His disciples, when they heard this said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?" But Yeshua, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble?"

John 6:60-61

I am sure that this article has described the church of many. It may be the church that you love and respect. My comments may well have offended you. Questioning why you go to church and exposing those realities may be difficult for you. But, it can't be anymore difficult for you than it was for those looking for the baskets of bread, or for the disciples who carried the baskets. Remember, this was a test. It is a test that many don't pass the first time.

The fact is that Yeshua wants our following to be about Him and the truth, not about great numbers, entertainment, nor goods and services. Yeshua is not interested in how many show up for the assembly. He is much more interested in you showing up and being reconciled to Him and the truth.

As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore. Yeshua said therefore to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?"

John 6:66-67

The growth that Yeshua wants in us spiritually is qualitative not quantitative. Yeshua wants us to believe in Him. Yeshua described the church of today in His last letter to the churches. Specifically, He said of us.

Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,

Revelation 3:17

A Final Question

Maybe you don't go to church for the same reasons as others do. Maybe you go to church for the right reasons. Maybe you truly believe in the Messiah and have eaten of His bread. If so, I have a final question for you. Why are you not in fellowship with like minded believers? Why are you still going to church knowing their purpose differs from Yeshua? You need to be in the assembly of the twelve with Yeshua, the true bread, not with the five thousand out to lunch.

So, where is the bread? It's not where you expect. It's not in a basket; it comes from the hands of the Messiah. It won't look like other breads that are leavened and puffed up; it's unleavened bread and crushed flat. You won't be able to buy it; it's given to you. It's not sliced; it's broken. It's not served with butter; it's the dessert. It does not come in a package; its served at the feast of the Lord. It's found at the Passover table wrapped in a linen cloth with the cup of Redemption. It has the taste of eternal life.

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