

There are a million and one excuses for *not* going to church. Anyone who has ever been to church could probably list ten, and anyone who has *never* been to church could probably list twenty. If you've ever invited anyone to church or called someone who skipped, you've probably heard your share of them.

But if you know anything at all about the Bible, you know that everyone *should* be "in church" on a regular basis. In fact, we should be there every time the doors are open. But it can be *hard* to make church going a habit, and it's always easy to *stop* going.

This tract simply discusses three very important reasons for going to church. Even if you've had a bad experience of some kind at church, I hope you'll see that these three reasons are *bigger* than the million and one excuses and allow them to move you toward God.

1. TO PRAISE HIM IN THE ASSEMBLY

Some people say they can worship God in private as well as, or better than, they can in public. They criticize "organized religion" and excuse themselves from going to church. They are "maverick Christians," roaming alone, refusing to be "branded" by the Lord or to belong to the "herd".

But godly people have always been glad to worship God in public.

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the LORD." (PSALM 122:1)

Jesus went to the synagogue on a regular basis (Luke 4:16) and is credited for saying,

"I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You." (HEBREWS 2:12; PSALM 22:22-25; 111:1)

First century Christians set the example for us by assembling (at least) every Sunday:

They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. . . So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (ACTS 2:42, 46, 47; See also ACTS 20:7)

You can read the Bible and pray on your own, but some parts of public worship simply can't be done in private:

Fellowship - Christianity is a "one another" religion. The first Christians spent a lot of time *together*, with one another *sharing* both physical and spiritual things as brothers and sisters. (Acts 4:32-33; Galatians 6:6) Notice 1 John 1:7:

If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

When Christians assemble, all sorts of good things can happen. Without fellowship, we walk in darkness.

The Breaking of Bread - This phrase sometimes refers to a common meal (Acts 2:46), but can also refer to the Lord's Supper (as in Acts 2:42 where it is grouped with three clearly spiritual activities).

In 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, the apostle Paul discusses the Lord's Supper. In addition to being a time of self-examination and reflection, it is intended as a communion to be shared with our brethren. The Lord Jesus had instituted His Supper when His disciples were together, and Christians were told to wait on each other so they could take it *together*. (Verse 33)

Prayers - Yes, you can pray by yourself, but if you don't go to church, who else is going to pray *for* you? *Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. (JAMES 5:16; See also Acts 8:18-24.)*

We all need a righteous man's prayers sometimes, and prayer is strengthened when Christians pray together.

Singing - Singing, like taking the Lord's Supper, is directed toward both God and each other.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (COLOSSIANS 3:16)

So if you're thinking of becoming a "maverick Christian," ask yourself how you're going to continue steadfastly in fellowship, the breaking of bread, prayers and singing.

2. TO ENCOURAGE OTHERS

Once we draw near to God through the blood of Jesus and decide to stay faithful to Him (Hebrews 10:22-23), we must

consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (HEBREWS 10:24-25)

How can I stir up love and good works in you? That's pretty hard by itself, and it's virtually impossible if I never see you! But if we have a regularly scheduled appointment (say, at the public worship), then I can get to know you and learn how to encourage you.

In this "one another" religion that Christ established, we must seek each other out and look for ways to help each other. We serve the Lord to a large extent by serving His people.

The King will answer and say to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me." (MATTHEW 25:40)

Non-Body Thinking - The apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12:15-27, talks about two opposite ways of thinking that can cause us to forsake, or neglect, the assembling of ourselves together.

Some people feel *inferior* to others when they go to church. (Verses 15-16) They're not as talented or outspoken or knowledgeable or zealous or *whatever*, and they get down on themselves. They start thinking, "They have no need of me." But "*God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased,*" (Verse 18) and the body needs *all* the members, with all their various functions and abilities. (Verse 19)

Other people feel superior to everyone else at church. They recite the maverick Christian's motto: "I have no need of them." (Verse 21) The only person who was actually able to say that truthfully was Jesus Christ. But in His strength and independence He said, "*They have need of Me*" and came to serve us all. But Paul says to the maverick Christian,

No, much rather, those members of the body

which seem to be weaker are necessary.
(Verse 22)

Even if you're as strong as the apostle Paul, you have a responsibility to use your strength to help your brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul accepted this responsibility. At one point in Jerusalem, he *tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.* (Acts 9:26)

He *could* have said, "That church is full of closed-minded people. What makes them think they're so much better than me? After all, I'm an *apostle*! Who needs 'em, anyway?" If he had said that, he wouldn't have established so many Southern European churches, and we wouldn't have the half of the New Testament that he wrote to encourage us all. (Ephesians 3:3-4)

We need to remember that we're not just individual Christians, but members of a body. "*Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.*" (1 CORINTHIANS 12:27) We are designed to work together, the strong and the weak complementing each other.

If you go to church *only for what you get out of it*, sooner or later you will get discouraged and stop going. But if you go to church to encourage others, there will always be work for you to do, and you will be priceless to the Lord.

3. TO BE ENCOURAGED

Life is discouraging. The forces of evil are *more* (but not stronger) than the forces of good and are much more aggressive, too. We are constantly bombarded by ungodliness and influenced to do wrong (or at least pulled away from doing right) by TV, school teachers, coaches, co-workers, family - - you name it. Just think how many people and activities compete for your time when it's time for church. If you *don't* go to church, then who will encourage you to live for God?

When we go to church in order to praise God and to encourage others, then we will be strengthened and encouraged in turn, simply by going and participating. In seeking to serve others, we are served. In emptying ourselves, we are filled. This holds true even if the sermon leaves us flat, or someone is rude to us, or we have some other bad experience. And besides, there

will also be others present who are there for the express purpose of encouraging *us*.

Let's learn from the campfire. As long as the embers stay together, they can burn all night. When you separate one ember from the others, it dies out quickly. Disciples of Jesus draw strength from each other. The people who were at first afraid of Paul grew to love him and later saved his life. (Acts 9:29-30) Others accompanied him in his travels, brought him good news of the church, supported him financially to preach and prayed for him. They helped him keep his fire burning for the Lord.

SUMMARY

Please let *all* these reasons move you to go to church the next time the doors are open. Praise God openly, in the public assembly, and seek to encourage God's people. The fellowship you establish will, in turn, be an encouragement and a help to you.

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Quotes are from the New King James Version of the Bible.

