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Daily Devotional, Tuesday, May 16, 2017 - The Church: God's Design

MAY 16TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Hebrews 10:23-25

When you hear the word *church*, do you picture a little white building full of smiling people in fancy clothes? As lovely as that image may be, God's design for church is unrelated to it. He created the church to be a unified fellowship of believers who encourage each other and carry out His ministry to the world.

The Bible clearly defines the following as ministries of the church: worshipping the living God, instructing and edifying believers, making disciples of all nations, and serving the needy. Unless the leadership is careful, however, these purposes can all too easily get out of balance, with the unfortunate result that the body ends up malnourished. For example, a church with too heavy an emphasis on praise could become introverted. Congregations that overemphasize teaching might lose their joy, and those that evangelize to the neglect of the other areas could miss out on great faith.

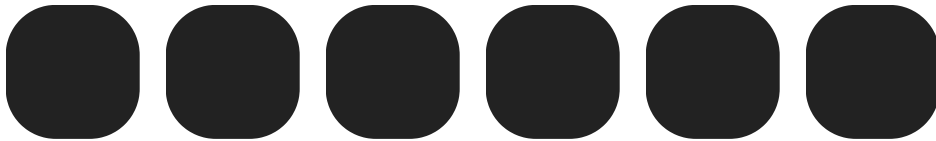
Because of sin and human imperfection, we do not experience church as it was originally intended. Instead, there's a tendency to overemphasize certain ministry areas. What's more, divisive arguments—many of which concern minor issues, such as music preferences or clothing choices—too often destroy church unity. Greed, pride, selfishness, and gossip can also tear a congregation apart.

Since they're composed of imperfect people, churches will be imperfect too, and expecting anything else will lead to disappointment. Nonetheless, we should strive for God's original design, continually measuring ourselves against Scripture and correcting course to realign with His purpose.

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Daily Devotional, Monday, May 15, 2017 - The Church: What Is It All About?

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[Colossians 1:18](#), [Colossians 1:24](#)

Church buildings are plentiful in our country. Locating one may be easy, but wisely deciding which to join involves more thought. God’s Word gives us some specific instructions in this matter.

First, let’s explore the original biblical meaning of the word “church.” The term *ecclesia* meant a group of people who are called out of the world’s system by God’s grace for the purpose of assembling to worship and serve Christ. [Ephesians 5:22-30](#) further specifies that believers are the body and Jesus is the head of such a fellowship. Under His leadership, we can enjoy the unity and purpose that He intended.

God’s design for this sacred gathering involves worship, instruction, encouragement, evangelism, and ministry to those in need, both within the fellowship and outside its walls. A healthy, vibrant congregation is possible when members rely on the Holy Spirit’s guidance. The work of the church is to be done in His power, in humble and prayerful submission to the Lord.

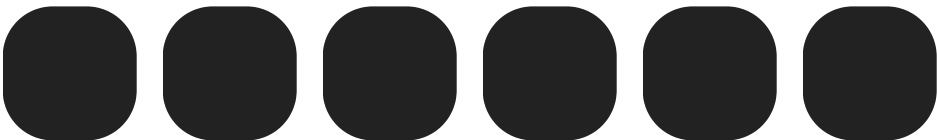
To help you determine whether a church is following the design laid out in Scripture, here are some important questions to ask: *Do they believe God’s Word is infallible and inerrant? Is the church discipling her people? Does the fellowship have some kind of missionary or evangelistic program?*

Joining a congregation is an important decision, as a fellowship of believers is one tool God uses to mature and encourage His children. Those three questions can be helpful in discerning God’s will. Listen for His Spirit to warn or direct as you prayerfully investigate your options.

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Daily Devotional, Friday, May 12, 2017 - Why We Hesitate to Trust

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[Luke 5:1-11](#)

On the Sea of Galilee, the optimal time of the day for fishing had passed hours earlier, so the fishermen were now cleaning their nets along the shore. But at the request of an itinerant preacher, one lowered his into the water. The reward for Peter's trust was a record-breaking—and net-breaking—catch.

As believers, we likewise want success in overcoming doubts so that we can courageously follow God. But sometimes we rely on our own faculties to decide whether or not we will trust Him. Perhaps what He is asking of us seems unreasonable. For instance, the principle of tithing goes against human wisdom: When we give God one-tenth of our income, He makes the remaining 90 percent spread further than a hoarded 100 percent could.

In other situations, we hesitate to trust the Lord because our knowledge or experience contradicts His plan. All of Peter's expertise indicated that fishing at such an hour would be useless. Sometimes God challenges believers to act even when they do not understand how they can be successful.

Listening to others' opinions is another stumbling block to unswerving faith. There is a time for seeking godly counsel, but when the Lord makes His will clear, we are to act. We're not to pick up the phone to ask a few friends what they think. No opinion matters except that of Jehovah, who does not make mistakes in presenting His plan.

The next time you find yourself in doubt, think about what is causing you to hesitate. Then you can pray specifically to overcome the faith hurdle and move on, knowing that God blesses steps we take to follow Him.

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Daily Devotional, Thursday, May 11, 2017 - Telling It Like It is

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Psalm 126

People love inspiring stories. Biographies of the down-and-out who make great use of a second chance tend to top best-seller lists. But few people have a life of such

drama—most of us are quite ordinary. Sadly, some believers think that being a “regular Joe” makes their testimony unexciting and therefore less valuable. Nothing could be further from the truth. What the Lord has done for any of us is just as extraordinary as what He did by redeeming those with a past of more noticeable sin.

A personal testimony is a way of expressing what God has done and is doing in one’s life. It is a powerful tool for getting an unbeliever interested in spiritual matters. No matter how commonplace our words may sound compared to someone else’s, the Lord will see to it that they impact the hearers who need them.

Let me give you an example. Suppose a 6-year-old girl named Tina receives salvation. When she is 18, she will be able to tell her friends of God’s greatness. She can explain that He makes the gospel clear to a child and yet reveals something new to her every day. When Tina is 80, she will have a lifetime of service opportunities to share. Her testimony may not be exciting according to the world’s criteria, but it is spiritual gold.

You have no idea how far-reaching your testimony can be. God says that His words will not return to Him without completing the work He sent them to do ([Isa. 55:11](#)). When believers share their faith, they are carrying His gospel to a needy world. And the story of Jesus’ saving grace is always inspiring.

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Daily Devotional, Wednesday, May 10, 2017 - Genuine Awareness

MAY 10TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

Daily Devotional, Wednesday, May 10, 2017 - Genuine Awareness

2 Kings 6:15-17

If someone were to ask whether you're aware of God, you would no doubt exclaim, "Of course I am! I go to church, read my Bible, and pray all the time. I'm quite aware of God." Now, let's take it one crucial step further: *Are you aware of God's presence and activity in your daily life?*

This second question makes it a bit more personal, doesn't it? *In my daily life? Right here, all the time?* We would like to have that constant awareness of God's presence, but it is difficult. When hardships and trials strike out of nowhere, we often feel bewildered and wonder why the Lord has left us alone.

During times of difficulty, we might pray even harder and longer. We plead for help but see little result. We cry, "Help *me*! Give *me* strength!" Or perhaps, "*I* believe this" or "*I* can do that." Do you notice the common factor there? The focus is all on *me, me, me, I, I, I*. Even during prayer, we may be aware only of ourselves, leaving the Lord out of the matter entirely.

At that point, we may find we're not really talking to the Father at all; we are talking to ourselves. Perhaps we are focusing on the *problem* and actually wishing for the ability to handle it on our own. We can, in effect, become completely blind to how God may be working.

2 Kings 6:15-17 gives us a wonderful picture of what can happen when we remove our self-centered blinders and truly see God's hand at work. Open your eyes. Like Elisha's servant, you may be shocked to discover the help that God has already sent your way.

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