

The Compass

a tool for disciplers



Equipping Believers for Ministry

The Importance of Church

Conversation On the Journey

The Greek word that we translate into “church” is used to describe a local group of Christians, never a building. And yet, when we use the word today, what images come into mind? Stain-glass windows? A steeple and bells? A large gymnasium with folding chairs?

“Church” as we know it is pretty similar to what it’s been like for years around the world. People come together, taking comfort in their friends who are experiencing some of the same persecutions and sufferings. During the time together, a respected and trained leader reads from the Holy Scriptures and then a time of explanation, encouragement, and challenge usually follows. Somewhere during this “service” is a time for corporate and/or personal dedication, through prayer and often music.

So a church is a local gathering of Christians. A group of people. But why go to church? What is God’s purpose for the church? How can I find a good church? A good place to start with your disciple would be to ask him these very questions. Listen to what he has to say and then head to the Word to find the answers together.

Purposes for the Church

To Glorify God

As we learned in “First Things First” in *The Compass*, the purpose of everything is to bring glory to God and so it is no different with the church. Ephesians 3:20-21 is just one of many passages that mentions this.

God is a Relational God

God created us to be in relationship with Him and with each other. Church is a community and community is an expression of God’s nature. More important than what you’ll learn there, or what kind of friends you meet, or encouragement you get (all of these being great and important things) is the fact that, somehow, God is present in a community of Believers in ways that He is not with an individual. Matthew 18:19-20, Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 Peter 2:4-8, and Acts 2:42-47 are great places to look to discuss this truth. We are individual parts of a structure and God inhabits the structure, not just the individuals. As a community, we are the dwelling place of God. And if churches are the dwelling place of God then it’s the closest thing to Heaven we can get until we experience the real deal.

This Week’s Excursion

Today you get to help your disciple learn about church. Your goal today is to talk about the importance of church and to help your disciple understand God’s purposes for the church, why we should be involved in one, and how to find a good one.



Build Up the Believers

Ephesians 4:11-12, Acts 11, and Acts 20:28-32, and really the whole book of Acts go in depth about this. What are some ways being involved in a local body of believers builds us up? It deepens our fellowship with other believers. It enlarges our service by giving our passions and giftedness “tracks” to run on. It holds us accountable to walk with God: keeping us from going astray, strengthening our testimony, and deepening our prayer life, to name a few.

It also builds us up by exposing us to different people. We can find a lot of role models in church, too. If you didn’t grow up in a Christian home, you can learn about how Christian families work by watching some of them each week. Ever wonder what a Christian marriage looks like? Churches are full of couples figuring that out for themselves. What does a Christian mom or dad do? Get around some of them to figure it out.

Churches are usually made up of people from different parts of life. Have you wondered how your faith intersects with your career? There’s probably someone in your field at a local church. Why not get lunch together after a service, and ask questions about career planning and dealing with work issues?

It’s really amazing that God would show us His manifold wisdom through the creation of “one new man” out of all races and classes, with Christ as the head. That’s the church, the Body of Christ. Check out Ephesians 4 for more discussion on the diversity of the Body (Church), and our responsibility in it.

But to really meet people means getting involved in church and not just being a pew-warmer. Join a Sunday school class. Teach a Sunday school class or volunteer in the nursery. Tithe to your local church, for they shepherd and feed your Christian walk each week. Introduce yourself to a family, an older couple, or a few young people, and invite them to join you for lunch. Sign up for a conversational dinner. Ask questions at the information booth about how you can get involved and meet people. Then you’ll begin to see the beauty of Christ in a way that you’d never see if you weren’t involved in a local church.

Not only that, but you’ll discover another source for Biblical teaching in your church pastor. Take your own Bible each week and look up the text to make sure you agree with the interpretation and application. Take notes to really digest the content.

In Hebrews 10:24-25, the author is getting at a commitment, a customary habit of joining with others for corporate worship. It is another reminder that we were meant for relationships, and not for solely solitary spiritual moments.

Protection of Truth

Take a look at 1 Timothy 3:15.

Draw People to Christ

Acts 2:47, Acts 1:6, Acts 13, and Matthew 28:18-20 are just a few of the places that discuss this.

Next Steps

Take your disciple to church, if you haven’t already invited them to join you.

Talk about why you chose that church to attend. Help your disciple find a church home by grabbing a phone book and looking up churches in the area. Discuss some of the listings. Which ones are within walking distance? Discuss worship styles and doctrinal statements. Suggest some good churches, and discuss your concerns if you think your disciple is interested in an unhealthy church.

Here are some additional questions that may be helpful:

1. What might you miss out on if you weren’t involved in a church?
2. What do you like/not like about the church you attend?
3. If you had to, how would you describe the difference between denominations?
4. From what you know of the scriptures, what are the most important things to look for in a church?
5. How would you know if a church was not one you should attend? What would be the clues?



A Few Easy Guidelines for Choosing a Church

1. *Does the church demonstrate love?*

In John 13:34-35, Jesus says that the world will know that we are His disciples by our love. So, how does that church give evidence of being a group of His disciples? Do you see the following: forgiveness, mercy, reaching out to others when they are in need, not showing favoritism, being open to people who may be “different,” etc.?

2. *How does the church use the Bible?*

Is the Bible the main part of the sermon, or is it used as an after-thought to undergird an idea or philosophy?

After a sermon, you should walk away with a better understanding of what the Bible says, not the argument the pastor wants to make.

3. *What does the minister talk about?*

What are his passions and interests?

4. *What do the members talk about?*

Do they understand the pastor’s vision? Are they interested in learning more about how to put their faith into practice and living out what they hear in the sermon?

5. *What does the Statement of Faith say?*

You can request this from the Pastor or church secretary. Read it over and make sure that you agree and understand it. If you have questions, call the pastor for an appointment to discuss it.

Conclusion

Hopefully by the time you’re done your disciple will have a greater picture of the role of the church in the world and in his life. You can leave him with these questions for further study...What are the different word pictures God uses to describe His church and what can we learn from them? (Rock, Building, Field, Body, Bride, Flock, Vine, Temple, Pillar, House, Candlestick).

Side Trails

The Measure of a Church. Gene Gentz. Gospel Light.

Order at christianbook.com

End 