

Thriving as an Artist

| Chapter Eight: "How to Fall in Love with your Church and stay there"

THE FIRST CHURCH PLANT

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.
(Acts 2:42-47)

SURVIVING THE UPS AND DOWNS OF LIFE IN THE CHURCH

Like many of you, I have experienced the ups and downs of church life. I have seen the good, the not so good, the almost good and the really ugly. I have seen heartache, anger, failed Leadership, maliciousness, uncommitted Christians, believers who were questionable "believers", redemption, love and forgiveness. Many of these experiences have played a major role in the determination of what I want to do with my life. There have been times, regrettably, where I have wanted to give up on the church altogether. But thank God, I haven't. I truly believe that the world needs the church. I'm not always convinced that we as the church are up to the task, but I know that Christ has chosen His church to be the vessel to reach our broken world.

WHAT WONDROUS LOVE IS THIS ANYWAY?

Given the churches reputation, have you ever wondered what God sees in the church? Even still, have you ever thought, how could Jesus love my church? Jesus has a much clearer view of the church's shortcomings than we do. However, He sees a very different perspective. Jesus sees the spiritual battle that is constantly raging on. But He already knows the outcome. Satan has targeted the church for annihilation. In all reality, he has been trying to destroy the church for over two thousand years. Satan knows that he cannot defeat God, so he goes for his bride, the church. Even though the church is in a constant battle, we are not alone. God is constantly beside us and with us. Be assured, the church has already won. Matthew 16:18 says that even the gates of hell will not overcome it. The bride of Christ may stumble along the way and appear disheveled at times, but she is still poised for the ultimate victory - to be united in intimacy with Christ forever. In spite of persecution, division and scandal, the church is still very alive.

Jesus' love for the church is characterized by two things - unwavering loyalty and undying commitment. Jesus died for the church and when He empowered the church with its mission, assured us He would be with us always. Loyalty and commitment are trademarks of a true love for the church.

[Loyalty]

Think of something that your devoted to. Maybe it's a band or a sports team or maybe a television show. No matter how many sorry albums they release, games the team loses or no matter how stupid the show gets, you are loyal. Some of us exhibit more loyalty to our favorite sports team, rock group or politician than to our church. We threaten to leave over the slightest disappointment of failure. Others church hop at the drop of a hat. I know that God finds our transient loyalty very disappointing. Hosea 6:4 says God becomes frustrated when our "love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears." Resist the temptation to take your church for granted and dig in to your church and be faithful.

[Commitment]

Being devoted to the church goes beyond mere affiliation. You need to be involved. This does not mean being there every time the doors are open or neglecting real family obligations, but stepping up to serve in whatever ways are possible. Church work was never meant to be carried out by a few professional staff people. Ephesians 4:12 teaches that leaders are supposed to "prepare God's people for works of service." We are ALL called to do the work of the church. Commitment is rarely convenient. You may have to truly sacrifice. But anything done in the name of Christ is well worth the effort. Your commitment is a sign of character and an astounding witness.

HERE IS THE CHURCH, THERE IS THE...

Bottom line is this. We are the church. We are called, chosen, and christened to do the work of God. If we are to really be the church God has intended us to be, we must become loyal and committed Christ-Followers. This is our call, our challenge... *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*

Assignment:

1. After reading Acts 2:42-47, what aspect of the first century church impresses you most?
2. What are specific attitudes and behaviors that, if you saw them in others, would lead you to believe that they are loyal and committed to their church?
3. List two ministries in the church that you will commit to pray for for the next month.