

QUICK THEOLOGY

How to Choose a Church



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Introduction

Maybe you've moved to a new state or city. Maybe you went through a church upheaval and are choosing a new family to gather with! Whatever the situation, you probably have some questions about choosing a church. I hope this book is helpful as you navigate those questions and find a family of God with whom to gather!

First, I want to emphasize how much I champion the local church. I have a ministry that is mostly online. It is international, but the local church is where I am known, loved, and held accountable. The local church is where my work is grounded and seen. As the author of this resource, I want you to know that I am deeply connected to my local church and am an advocate for the beautiful (and imperfect) family of God! My pastors, elders and friends at church are wonderful people who have been so helpful and inspiring to me in my own ministry. They have taught me so much about what it means to

be a healthy leader and how to keep the gospel front and center.

Before we begin, though, I want to talk to those of you who have been hurt by the church. When we talk about choosing a church it is inevitable some of you have been wounded by people who claim to be Christians (or who are Christians and who were not walking in the Spirit). I am so sorry for your pain. I am so sorry people did not act in the way they were called to act, that they slandered the name of God and His Body by their actions.

As we talk about finding a church, it can be hard to separate the people who hurt us from other Christians, or even from God himself. Jesus died for all people - His whole church!. He loves the family of God He longs for your pain to be healed.

Jackie Hill Perry once said, "Do you want to know who healed my church hurt? It was the church." I have been through a church split. My husband and I have been in four or five different churches over the course of our marriage. I have been in or visited over a dozen denominations over the course of my life in ministry. I have been deeply hurt by Christians and by people in my church. If I were to get into the list of ways I have been hurt it would be long! I have seen how ugly church can get. And yet... I still champion the local church. She is the

bride of Christ. I do not get to tell Jesus that His bride isn't important.

I hold out hope that people in the family of God will continue to grow and be sanctified and humble themselves and repent. Even if that means leaving one particular local body for a healthier one, I will always champion the local church.



Core Doctrines

For those of you who are looking for a church and wondering, “What do I do? Where do I go? How do I choose? There are so many different denominations!” I understand! When you’re looking for a church, the first thing I suggest is to think about your personal and theological priorities. When I say personal priorities I don’t mean, “I like this color of carpet or this style of worship.” Think about the core doctrines of Christianity and the practices that are important to you. Determine those core doctrines and make sure the churches you visit teach them!

Secondly, consider your theological preferences.. For example, a charismatic church will likely have an expressive environment and a continuationist view of spiritual gifts. They might practice worship differently than you are used, to or believe things about tongues and prophecy that you don’t believe. In that case, attending a charismatic or Pentecostal church would be a difficult

choice; you don't agree on how those doctrines are being worked out. Or maybe you visit a Baptist church; it has a preaching style and community emphasis you love, but you don't agree with their views on women in ministry.

Your views on these theological issues will help determine what denomination or type of church you are most comfortable in—and that is okay. There are many different denominations that still unite around the core doctrines of the gospel, holiness, what it means to be a Christian, the ethics of life and love and honor for the body, the soul, and God. With a solid theological core you can proceed forward, giving grace for some of the differences. I encourage you to give that grace and even to study the differences between these denominations! Seek to understand why they believe what they believe. Read their doctrinal statements to learn more. There will be differences in the churches you visit, so I usually recommend visiting several churches when you move to a new city.

Finding a church community is a process and you have to be okay with a little discomfort along the way. You will probably try a few churches before you find one that you connect with! Just remember, the church is not designed just to serve you. It is a place for you to grow and learn, and it is also a place for you to contribute and

disciple. When you check out a church, don't come with a consumer mindset. This is not a restaurant; you are not looking at a menu. The church is filled with real people who are your brothers and sisters in Christ. You want to look at the church as a place where you could potentially labor together for the gospel. Can you join the mission?



Centered On The Word

With a missional mentality in mind, here are some questions to ask as you begin your church hunting process.

First, “Does this church preach the Word of God?” Does the church you are visiting open the Bible at all during the sermon? You might laugh, but there are churches that do not open the Bible! There are churches out there who teach topical messages that are little more than self-help with a Bible verse pasted on the screen. Look for a church that encourages you to know the Word and sets an example of this from the pulpit. This doesn’t mean you can only go to a church that preaches expositionally (we attend a church that has done topical sermons!). You can preach topically while being true to Scripture, so don’t run away from topical sermons! Just look discerningly at how the sermon is structured. Not whether it is centered on the Word of God. That is the important thing to consider!