

Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

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Why I Go to Church

Today's society is not a church-going crowd. At least it seems that way to me.

Growing up in the 50s, going to church on Sunday mornings was an activity many Americans engaged in. It was expected, even required in some instances. Some businesses asked you what church you attended as part of the employment evaluation. School teachers were likewise expected to attend church if they were going to work in the school system teaching young Americans.

My mother and father grew up attending a little Methodist church in their home town of Marshall, Texas. After they married in 1933, they moved to New York City. From what I can gather, church quickly fell by the wayside. Later, after my mother married my step father, they spoke often of attending church. So off we'd go on a Sunday morning to fulfill some societal expectation, more than likely. We'd attend for two or three weeks, then begin to miss going until we stopped altogether. My brother, sister and I were always glad to see these church sprees end.

This was also a time in our nation when divorce was still rare, and one did not discuss such a topic in polite society. In fact, some families did not allow their children to play with me because I was from a divorced family. It was not uncommon to have a teacher ask why my last name was different from my parents'. Like I said, it was a different time.

In any event, I never got into the habit of attending church. In fact, I was 24 years old when I surrendered my life to Jesus. Only then did I realize that I needed to attend church.

If you will indulge me, I will list, in no specific order, some of the reasons I find attending church not only important, but essential in my life.

1. I am a traveler heading for Heaven. As an old hymn says, "*I'm just a poor, wayfaring stranger.*" Another says, "*This world is not my home.*" As a follower of Jesus, I know there's a better place waiting in Heaven. But as long as I'm here on planet Earth, I need to be surrounded and embraced, literally, by others who are on this pilgrim road as well. The people in my church are familiar to me. I was their pastor for sixteen years. My wife and I love these folks, and we are loved by them in return. This is why when I retired from the pastoral ministry a few years ago, Isaura and I wanted to continue attending there, with the *proviso* that the new pastor was comfortable having the previous guy hanging around.

2. I need encouragement and refreshing. Living for Jesus is fraught with challenges regardless of where you live on this celestial ball. Coming together with others who face life's daily challenges allows us to draw strength from one another, realizing we are not alone in the journey. As we grow in the Spirit, we lift each other up through prayer, and verse of Scripture, a thoughtful word of

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encouragement. These weekly encounters in a designated place, such as the church, opens up opportunities to gather together around the table to share a meal, such as a church pot luck; or lunch at a nearby restaurant; or having folks over for a home-cooked meal. After all, in Christ, we are all brothers and sisters.

3. I need the blessing of worship. This begins for me each Sunday by singing the old hymns. After finishing seminary, I was serving as youth pastor at a church in San Jose. Our daughter, Laura, was about three at that time when one of the men in the church asked her, "*What does your daddy do?*" Laura spoke right up, saying, "*My daddy wears a suit, and sings loud.*" That about summed it up! And it hasn't changed. Singing, particularly the old hymns of the faith, is nourishment to my soul, and gives life to my bones. I can never get enough of it. I serve in the church on the worship team in both morning services. We have a great time together.

4. I need the challenge from God's Word. I know one thing for sure: without the teaching and preaching of God's Word, I would surely shrivel up and die spiritually speaking. Through pastors who faithfully proclaim God's Word I am invigorated because the Bible rings true in my soul, and I must align my life in accordance with that word of instruction. At times, I am under the conviction of God's spirit, pointing out areas in my life that need his correction. Other times, I'm simply enjoying God's Word. I recount the many blessings I have enjoyed from his gracious hand. Still other times, I am greatly encouraged by standing on the promises of God.

5. I need the life of the church. I'm not talking about a building. I'm referring to the people who are God's church. Several times during the week we have the opportunity to come together in fellowship. I'm comfortable coming into the church because I am a sinner saved by God's amazing grace. And I get to be with other sinners who have experienced his amazing grace as well. I am far from perfect, and so are we all. That's why I need to be with others who know Jesus. He's the one who is perfect, and he leads imperfect people to Glory.

Believe me when I tell you this: You want me to be regularly attending church. Why do I say this? Because when I begin to ignore my walk with Jesus, my old nature has a way of worming its way back into my life. Those things that plagued me before I accepted Christ have a sneaky way of reappearing, such as impatience, a short temper, selfishness, a foul mouth, and various and sundry sinful behaviors that need to always be under the blood of Jesus. If I slip in my walk with the Master, (what used to be called, "backsliding") then I am not someone you would want to be around.

This is why at Advent Season, I am so glad Jesus came some 2000 years ago. He came to save me from the ravages of sin by dying on the cross. I will serve him because he loves me, and I love him. He is the Head of the church, and that's where I belong!