



FIRST STEPS

STUDIES TO BEGIN YOUR WALK WITH CHRIST
By Marlon Furtado

“Church Is Very Important”

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THE IMPORTANCE OF CHURCH

You will often hear people say something like this, "I don't need to go to church to be a Christian." While that is indeed true --- a person needs only genuinely to receive Jesus Christ to be a Christian --- it reveals a basic misunderstanding of the importance of meeting together regularly with others committed to growing in their relationship with Christ. The Bible makes it very clear that all Christians are to be regular participants in a local church. Just look at **Hebrews 10:24-25**:

*"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us **not give up meeting together**, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."*

How often do we need to encourage each other? Once a year? Once a month? Once a week? We are told in **Hebrews 3:12-13** that we need to give and receive encouragement daily because any of us can be deceived by sin and begin to cool off in our pursuit of God.

"See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."

I have seen over and over again, people come to know Christ and be excited to learn about Him and His plans for them. We use the phrase, "they are on fire," to describe their enthusiasm and passion for Christ. Like a newborn thirsty for milk, they have an unquenchable thirst for the Bible. They become a regular at church every week. But after some months they begin to miss church. At first, their absence is sporadic, then more regular. Finally, you hardly see them at all, and when you do, the "fire" is gone, the passion and enthusiasm are barely evident. What happened? Think of it in terms of how a lion hunts zebra. It looks for the straggler, for the one who has fallen behind, the one unprotected by the herd. **1 Peter 5:8** warns us that satan attacks in the same way.

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

When a young Christian, or an older Christian for that matter, begins to pull away from the church, they become easy pickin's for satan. That's why it is so important to attend church and get connected with others. The friendships we develop at church will help us to keep walking close to the Lord the rest of our lives.

When the Bible speaks of the church it is NOT referring to a building. Rather, the church consists of the people who gather in a local place. It may meet in a school, or a home, or a store, or a office building. In some countries the church meets under a tree. The Bible doesn't designate where a church meets; only that it do so regularly.

PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

Wherever the church gathers, the Scriptures charge them all with these three purposes.

1. Exalt the Lord
2. Equip the Believers
3. Evangelize the Lost

PURPOSE #1: EXALT THE LORD

The greatest privilege and weightiest responsibility for people is to worship the Lord. He deserves it! He is both our Creator and Redeemer. Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment in all of the Bible. He answered in **Matthew 22:37-38**, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*" This is the first and greatest commandment."

Therefore, one of the most enjoyable parts of church life is the weekly gathering to worship our Lord. Most churches include the activities of singing and prayer and listening to God's Word being preached. God is to be the focus of this time, not the style of music or speaking ability of the pastor. It is a weekly reminder to all of us to refocus our attention on God and His Son. It's an opportunity to reduce distractions and concentrate on our wonderful Savior. Life comes back into focus as we magnify Him.

PURPOSE #2: EQUIP THE BELIEVERS

Every newborn child needs a family to love them, to protect them, to feed and teach them. It's no coincidence that the Bible refers to new Christians as *spiritual babies*. And you need a loving *church family* to help you grow strong in the Lord.

Going to church doesn't make you a Christian, but it is vital for you to mature into a strong and healthy disciple of Christ. Through regular attendance and involvement at church you will find yourself learning and growing in your faith.

You know that people don't necessarily mature simply by getting older. Neither does a Christian mature simply by the accumulation of Bible knowledge. We mature as we apply the Bible to life and our character changes to reflect the character of the Lord.

The church will help you mature through three avenues...

1. Instruction

Each week as you listen to sermons at church you will learn important truths that you can apply to your life. We encourage you to take notes as you listen. This will help you to remember more of what you hear. In addition, it is important for you to attend a small group Bible study. These smaller groups help you learn because they allow for questions and discussion as you study the Bible with others.

2. Friendships

You have probably enjoyed the penetrating heat of a roaring campfire. What do you think would happen if you were to spread out the logs? It wouldn't take long for the fire to die. In close relations with others we can remain "hot for the Lord." But if we isolate ourselves and remain alone, our fire for Jesus will soon diminish to nothing but a flicker. That's why, in addition to the Bible and the Holy Spirit, God has provided you with the people of a church to ensure your healthy growth in the Christian life. In your small group you will develop close friendships with people who will love you and sincerely care about you.

3. Service

One of the most observable characteristics of a healthy child is *activity*. Children like to be moving, doing something, anything but sitting. In your spiritual life, God wants you to be active in serving Him. The church has many opportunities for you to get involved in giving your time, talents and treasures to help advance the name of Jesus.

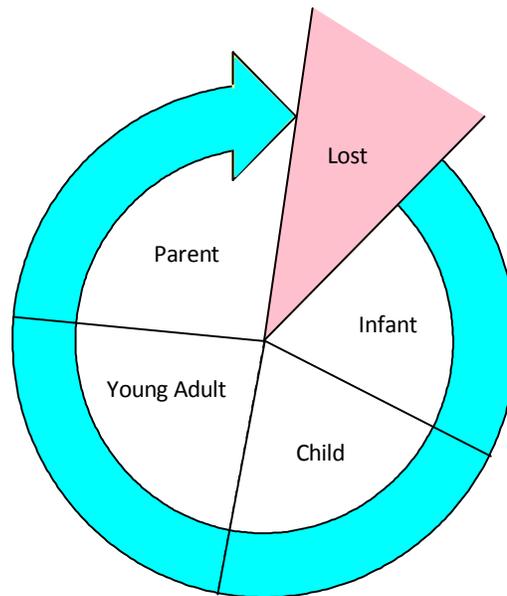
PURPOSE #3: EVANGELIZE THE LOST

The church is to help you reach your lost friends and relatives. Through your church you will learn ways in which to communicate the Gospel. But the church can partner with you by being a welcoming, friendly place to invite your friends. At church your friends will be exposed to other Christians who reinforce the message you've been sharing with them. **1 Corinthians 14:24-25** says,

"But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying [speaking intelligible words], he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!'"

WEEKLY PITSTOP

The church is like the "pitstop" for race cars. It's a place to rest, refuel, make some adjustments, and get encouragement for your upcoming week. You will enjoy the added dimension that group worship brings. There is something unique and powerful when you study the Bible and worship the Lord Jesus together with others who love Him.



This diagram is based on **1 John 2:12-14**.

*"I write to you, dear **children**, because your sins have been forgiven on account of His name. I write to you, **fathers**, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, **young men**, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear **children**, because you have known the Father. I write to you, **fathers**, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, **young men**, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one."*

These verses illustrate the pathway of spiritual growth, paralleling that of natural growth.

- **New Believer** is like a **spiritual infant**, just beginning to learn and grow.
- **Growing Believer** is like a **spiritual child**, taking responsibility to feed himself/herself from the Word.
- **Serving Believer** is like a **spiritual young adult**, taking an active role in ministry.
- **Multiplying Believer** is like a **spiritual parent**, helping lead others to walk with Christ.

LET'S OPEN YOUR BIBLE

Look up the following references.

Acts 2:42-47

Members of the very first church were devoted to the apostles' _____, to the _____, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Verse 46 states that _____ they met together in the _____ and in their _____.

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

In the human body, all the parts are needed to form a whole body; no part is unnecessary. But neither can any one part say that it doesn't need the others. Verse 27 states that the entire church is the _____ of Christ, and that _____ believer is a part of it.

Ephesians 4:11-16

According to verse 11, what are the five types of people God has given to the church to help it fulfill its mission?

According to verse 12, what job description are given to these people?

According to verse 13, what are some of the characteristics of mature Christians?

According to verse 14, what happens if we do not grow up, but remain spiritual infants?

According to verse 15, as we speak truth to one another in love, what will be the result?

According to verse 16, how important is each one of us in this process?

NOTE: This passage begins by identifying individuals God has given to help lead the church. But it ends with identifying the importance of every single believer, including you.

Let me encourage you to get involved in a small group Bible study at your church if you haven't done so already. It's in that context that you will continue to grow in the Lord and with His people.