

Learning to Appreciate Your Church

Recently, an elderly woman in France, preparing to sell her home, had its contents appraised. The auctioneer took special notice of a 10x8-inch painting of Jesus hanging in her kitchen. She reported that it had been there for many years, and although she liked the piece, she thought it had no real value. However, it turned out the picture was rare original artwork that later sold for 26.6 million dollars. Needless to say, the woman developed a new appreciation for that painting!

We can live around something our whole life without appreciating its inherent worth. Those who grew up in the church can easily take it for granted. We know all its flaws and can list the things we would like to change. Although we do not need to ignore problems and pretend everything is fine, we can sometimes become unbalanced in our perspective, seeing only the negative and overlooking the positive. It can be beneficial to take a step back and look at things in a new way.

One way to do this is to go on a “treasure hunt.” List all the ways the church has positively impacted your life. For example, you could list the people in the church who have blessed and encouraged you. Also, our church schools provide a Christian education, and the brotherhood fund meets material needs within the congregation. But, most importantly, it is the first place many of us heard the gospel and the call of God that led to our salvation. Once you start looking, you may be surprised at how long the list becomes and how much God has used the church to bless you.

Learn the history of your church. Why and how was it formed? What storms has it weathered? Learning this history can help you understand why your church may have developed some of its practices.

Another way to appreciate the value of your church is to count the cost that has gone into its formation and continuation. A church is not just supernaturally placed at a location. Some people have sacrificed time, money, and energy to partner with God in establishing the congregation where you find yourself. As the painting mentioned earlier, we tend to appreciate things more when we understand their cost.

In America, we often think of our worth in terms of the individual. Jesus went to the cross for you and me to save us from sin and hell. While true, this falls short of the totality. Jesus also suffered and died to make us a community - a family. You may not think the church you are part of is worth bleeding for...but Jesus did.

While we are often quick to see our worth, we are often too quick to shift blame to others. We say things like, "My church does not do enough outreach," or "The people in my church are too superficial," etc. Perhaps we should instead ask, "Am I reaching out to others enough with the gospel?" or "Am I being open with my brothers and sisters?" etc. Rarely is the church keeping you from becoming what you were intended to be in Christ. Perhaps change in the church will start with a change in you.

We will appreciate the church more when we look at God's Word and take seriously what He says about His love for the church and how we are to relate to each other. Let's take a quick look at two Scriptures. *Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins* (1Pe 4:8). *And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you* (Eph4:32). The church is made up of imperfect people like you and me, and offenses will come, but becoming bitter will rob us of appreciation for God's church. He commands us to forgive others, just as He has forgiven us. This is not easy, but God will give us proportionate grace.

God cares about the local church and intends it to bless you. He also intends for you to be a blessing to His church. If your church loves God and does its best to build a community following Jesus in obedience to the Scriptures, you should thank God for this blessing. Give yourself to build that church up and serve your brothers and sisters. As you sacrifice for the church, you will see it through Jesus' eyes and find your appreciation growing.

~Steve Long