

“I Will Build My Church!”

I freely admit my bias here. At twenty-five, I was born again in a rural church in Kansas and immediately began following Jesus passionately. I learned a number of spiritual lessons that still carry weight for me today. Here is the one I want to highlight now.

Jesus' plan to reach the world is local churches passionately following Jesus and cooperating with other Christians churches as far as our current faith level allows.

As a key ingredient in a healthy spiritual foundation, believe Jesus about the importance of a vital living faith-community. The church is not popular today, even with Christians. *“Jesus I like. The church not so much.”* If you like and trust Jesus as His follower, the local church provides necessary nutrients for your spiritual health.

In the late 20th century, “para-church” groups sprung up for most every aspect of the church. They were Christian and many did a great job. I thank the Lord for them. Yet their ministry focused on a part of what Jesus called the entire church to do. No better environment exists for healthy growth than a properly functioning local church that raises up more followers of Jesus.

Today it seems to be popular to drop out of the church as irrelevant. Or perhaps define Jesus' local church by one aspect only, like feeding the poor or gathering in small groups of two to four. Nothing...in my belief from the NT and from my experience ...is an adequate substitute for the church Jesus promises to build.

“And I tell you that...I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it”
(Matthew 16:18).

I believe Jesus and believe that His plan is face-to-face relationships in local faith-communities. A friend recently asked me why I think the local church is so crucial. Four answers came immediately to mind. *Why is the local church important?*

First, because Jesus promised to build His church (Matthew 16:18). He's involved. He's praying. Whatever Jesus is doing, I want to join Him and make what Jesus is doing a crucial part of my life. And He promises that the “*gates*” of our enemy's dark forces can not prevail against His local church.

Second, we need each other to spur us to love and to good works (Hebrews 10:24-25). For me, this means a high value on meeting together over an extended time so I can become all Jesus plans for me. What a delight to watch those who began as children taking their places as young adults! We need this open, honest, transparent interaction with one another even more when difficult times assault us (“*as the Day approaches*”).

Third, the local church is the primary vehicle for the evangelization of each unique community of neighbors. In Jesus' prayer to His Apostles as the seed of the church, Jesus prayed that they would be “*one*” just as Jesus and the Father are. When a local church is “*one as we are one [in] complete unity*,” this visible representation of Christ is the most eloquent witness that Jesus is who He claims to be (John 17:20-23).

Fourth, the prayer at the end of Ephesians chapter three is the most powerful, expansive prayer I know in Scripture. And the longing of my heart. This can **only** be accomplished “*together with all the saints*” (Eph. 3:18). Don't fool yourself by thinking you discovered a better way. For me to see the relational Trinity in as much glory and majesty, power and love, that I can handle, I need other members of Jesus' church. The variety in a local church displays aspects of God that

we may be blind to. I can't grasp Him in isolation from other Christians. I need others pursuing God passionately in order to grasp more of His love.

Fifth, Jesus gave a commission to all His followers for all time to “*make disciples of all people groups*” (Matthew 28:18-20). Jesus concisely gives us both His vision and the process of training towards that vision as His gathered people. We are together on mission and can't do this as well in isolation.

Do you value life-on-life relationships in multi-generational churches as much as Jesus does? If not, please take some leisurely time with Jesus and ask if *control* and *pride* play a role in your tepid response. If this is Jesus' plan (unless we are into *control*), the question is not: “*Are they working?*” If it's not working well, a better question is: “*How can I get involved so it works better?*”