



Choosing A Church  
How To Find Your Spiritual Family

By  
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## **Introduction**

I still remember the painful process of choosing a church in Tampa, Florida. My wife grew up Southern Baptist and I grew up United Methodist. So we'd try one from her denomination one week and then one from mine the next.

We considered all kinds of factors as we did this. We had a one-year old, so we considered the nursery and children's ministry. We considered the distance from home and the look of the building. Was the parking sufficient? Were they a friendly church? Did the building smell funny? Did they have good signage?

Honestly, we didn't really consider what was most important. We just went with our gut and chose a church after several visits, much prayer and conversation.

I wish someone had shared with me a short book like this one by Dr. Zell. He walks us through five

criterion that help you choose a good, healthy church family. After all, you're looking to grow spiritually. It makes sense to think through what criteria is most important to you as you make your decision.

So I encourage you to prayerfully read this book, as you search for your church family. "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness" as you do and He will not let you down.

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## **Choosing a Good Church: How to Find Your Spiritual Family**

“I just got a promotion, Pastor! I’m moving to Heaven-on-earth, Montana.” Whenever I have heard this phrase or one like it in my 25+ years of ministry, my first question to the happy Christian is about the churches in their new town. “Is there a good church in the area?” Nine times out of ten, the response is one of ignorant bliss. “I don’t know,” they reply. In rare cases, people are willing to sacrifice their spiritual lives for financial gain but usually, people just don’t know how to choose a good church. That is what this resource is for. It is to help you to find a good church in your area.

You might not have had to move before and don’t know what it’s like. Or, you might be reading this booklet after some wearying church-hopping, wondering if you’ll ever find that perfect church. I’ve got two messages of

good news for you. First, there is no perfect church and if you find one, don’t join it because it won’t be perfect anymore. Second, there are a few good criteria to look for in a church and I’m willing to share those with you. The first of the criteria is sound, biblical teaching. Unfortunately, this is not a given even in evangelical Christian churches.

### **1. Biblical Teaching**

One clue that your preacher is delivering sound, biblical teaching to you as a hearer is if he or she uses the Bible every week. This used to be standard operating procedure for all Christian churches but it is becoming rare these days.

There is nothing wrong with using a Bible app on your phone, tablet or other device. What I am referring to is whether the sermon is based on the Word of God or if it just starts with a verse of Scripture and then

springboards into whatever rant or tirade that the preacher is interested in lately.

Timothy Keller says that all preaching should be about Christ and I wholeheartedly agree. It is very easy for preaching and teaching to become moralistic platitudes. You know what I mean. It is easy for us to wander into a list of “shoulds” and “moral steps” of self-improvement or success to follow. If we aren’t careful, the Good News of Jesus becomes the Bad News of human self-effort. If the preacher is not talking about Jesus in some form or another, he or she is not being faithful to the biblical text. Does the book of Ruth talk about Jesus? Not exactly but the example of Boaz being a kinsman-redeemer is a good model of how Jesus Christ ransoms His bride.

## **2. Relatively Close**

Years ago, the distance that people would travel to attend church was much smaller

than it is today. A neighborhood church was one that you could walk to. Some people would come to church by cars but, by in large, church goers would not travel very far. As a result, you knew your neighbors and you knew the people sitting beside you at church.

With the addition of modern highways where people can race around a beltway and the explosion of the information age where you can find most churches on a website, people have been willing to travel farther to attend the church of their choice.

In the real estate world, they have a saying about what is important in buying a home. They say “*Location, location, location.*” That mantra relates to the cost and demand of the home market. However, it also applies to the distance you live from your church.

Why is location so important? Well, if you have to drive too far away to attend a church, you will not get involved and

therefore, you will not experience our next principle which is community. Let's look at the criteria of community.

### **3. Community**

When two or more people are in the same situation and they can relate to each other and identify with each other, we say that they are "in community." One pastor said that fellowship is "two fellas in the same ship." When we commit to caring for a smaller group of people as family, we will experience community as God intended it. Our spiritual family should be more important than our earthly family. Does that mean that we don't love and care for our immediate family? No! Of course not. What it means is that our Christian brothers and sisters will become closer to us than blood relatives. Let's not forget that those who have surrendered to the Lord Jesus Christ and been adopted into the family of God will

be with us forever. We might as well learn how to get along with them now! A fourth criteria is the particular ministry or ministries that people in our family need.

### **4. Service Opportunities**

A paraphrase of President John F. Kennedy's famous speech applied to the church would go something like this, "Ask not what your church can do for you but what you can do for your church." You will not grow as a Christian just sitting and soaking biblical principles. The only way that you can truly develop as a servant into greater Christ-likeness is to serve others.

Some churches do not let others serve in their church until the newcomers have attended...for years! A certain length of time to get to know a new person's character and run a background check, if the worker would like to serve in children's ministry, is healthy and wise. However, beware if the church

does not allow newcomers to serve for an unusually long time. You will become frustrated and they will hold onto their offices long enough to drive away all natural leaders. Only the followers and “yes men” will be left at a church like that.

## **5. Ministries**

If you have children, then children’s ministry will be most important to you. If you have teens, then it might be a youth ministry that would appeal to you and your family. Maybe you are struggling with an addiction. Then, you would want to look for a church with a thriving recovery ministry. Maybe you are a single mom. You’ll want to look at how the church that you are looking at cares for weary parents. Are you a senior citizen? Some churches have ministry to get connected with other seniors.

Many in today’s culture start with this principle. It is not wrong but you might miss

out on the quality of the first three criteria. When you start with this criterion, you are looking for what the church can give, not how you can plug into what God is doing around you.

## **Conclusion**

I hope that you can find a church that has all five of these criteria for you and your family. Pray to God who made you purposefully so that you know exactly where He wants you to be planted. God is looking at the big picture. He doesn’t want us to be petty or to look for the easiest ride or the most comfortable chair. He is looking to mold us into the image of His Son Jesus and He does that through other people. The church is not the building that shields us from the elements. The church is a living organism. The church is God’s people. I pray that you will find your niche in that living building whose maker is God!

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