

You mean church is not something we do for God, but he does for us?

Yes! God doesn't need our worship. We're not doing God a favor by going to church. If he wanted to, he could raise up children from stones!

Hearing his Word is like resting at a desert oasis. Living water. Burdens lifted. "He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul" (Psalm 23:2). He comes to restore you. The Word is for you.

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. I make excuses: I'm busy. I'm tired.

If the pastor gave you a \$100 bill each time you came to church, would you be too tired, too busy? Of course not! If you'd go for money that's here today and gone tomorrow, consider how the Lord "is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think" (Eph 3:20 KJV). God makes you his heir!

Some churches claim to produce "changed lives."

What about that?

Such claims are misleading. On the one hand, it's great when people straighten out their lives. This can happen in church but also elsewhere. As a result they do less damage to themselves and others.

On the other hand, the Christian life is not visible in specific deeds or life changes. It cannot be measured or judged by us. The Holy Spirit works in us, to be sure, but

there is no visible "more-ness" to the Spirit. All experiences and feelings are ambiguous. As Paul says: "I do not even judge myself" (1 Cor 4:3-4; 2 Cor 11:14).

A lot of people seem to get along fine without going to church. They're nice. They do good things. What about them?

Some of the worst diseases in life have no symptoms until the person is near death. The same is true for sin. Many live in denial of sin and death. Sometimes a crisis wakes them up, but not always. What happens to them? Only God knows. But we know that only in the cross is there certainty of salvation and freedom from sin and death.

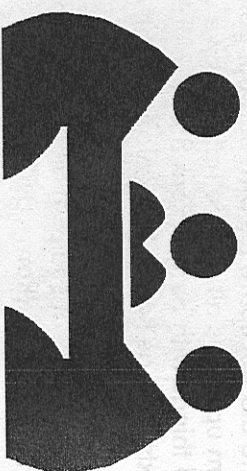
I was "forced" to go to church as a kid; I don't want to do that to my kids!

But you teach your kids habits like brushing their teeth, obeying traffic rules on their bikes, don't you? Habits that protect them for life. You don't say, "My kid doesn't need to brush his teeth until he's 18 years old, and then he can choose for himself what to do." Going to church is a good habit, too!

So what's next?

Give church a chance! You have nothing to lose and everything to gain, because faith comes through hearing the preaching of Christ and his promises!

Why Go To Church?



Simple Answers from a
Lutheran Perspective

How about a church of one? If I read the Bible alone in my room, does that count?

You can't preach to yourself. It's rationalizing to think you can. You are worse off than you think. You can't read or think your way to freedom – you can only be freed through the intervention of others, through preaching.

That's how God works. Someone's got to do it to you. Someone's got to preach it to you.

Preach what?

Not just any God-talk will do. Only the Word of the cross will do: "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2).

Christ did it *all*. He freed us from sin and death. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Gal 3:13).

No other message will do. If a church implies this Word merely kick-starts the process of salvation, but it's not all-sufficient, shake the dust from your feet. If it is preached that more must be added, such as required good works or the right kind of priest, it's time to move on.

Find another church where the gospel is purely preached. There is no "pure" church, but there is pure gospel! Only this gospel gives us certainty and freedom. Don't settle for less. Salvation is at stake.

Can't I just go on Christmas and Easter?

Going to church does matter!

First, salvation comes through the promises of God: "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom 6:5), and "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?" (Rom 8:32; see also texts such as Rom 14:7-9; John 14:6).

Second, faith only comes through hearing. As Paul said: "Faith comes from what is heard" (Rom 10:17), and

Third, "what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ" (Rom 10:17). The Holy Spirit creates faith, when and where he chooses, in those who hear the gospel (Augsburg Confession 5).

What kind of church is best?

Size doesn't matter. It can be large or small, a cathedral or house. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (Matt 18:20).

Can I find God in nature – a glorious sunset, a mountaintop, a misty lake?

You can find beauty in nature, but also terror – in flood, fire, and wind. But you can't find what you need the most – the Word of the cross. Mountain top experiences cannot free you from sin and death and clothe you in perfect righteousness (2 Cor 5:21).

Does it work to watch "church" on TV? Could I worship the Lord from the comfort of my own couch?

If you are hungry, can you be fed by watching people on TV eat? God rescues you through Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and preaching – all of which happen in church. He works through these earthly means to adopt, brand, and redeem you. Not just part of you, but the whole you.

Does "Remember the Sabbath" (3rd Commandment) mean it's our duty to go to church?

Not your duty. In Christ you are free from required works. At the same time the purpose of the Sabbath is to give rest from work. Rest includes resting in the hollow of God's hand. Church is properly a safe haven for hearing what God has done, is doing, and will do for you.