

What to Look for in a Church

*Visiting different churches is a good way to find one that is right for you.
Here are a few suggestions that we hope you find helpful.*

1. Clarity on the Gospel of grace. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were purposeful events in God's plan to redeem a people for Himself. By faith, Christ's righteousness, forgiveness, and victory over sin and death are made possible. There are many counterfeits, not least the distortions that make salvation something you earn and sin something you need to work off or ignore. Listen carefully for the comfort and the call of faith and repentance to the Gospel.

2. Christ-centered preaching from the Bible. God's word should be used in an honorable way. The Bible should be central in the preaching from the pulpit. The careful exposition of Scripture is the means by which we get to Jesus. No message that fails to make much of Him is complete.

3. Theologically informed public worship. Are the basic elements of worship present: reading of Scripture, teaching from Scripture, songs, prayers, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper? In addition to these basic elements, look for songs with lyrics that exalt Jesus Christ and deepen your appreciation for and understanding of the Gospel.

4. Hospitable people. If the Gospel is really doing its work in a community of Christians, they will love strangers, and not in that fake, "I'm-glad-you're-here-because-I'm-supposed-to-be-glad-you're-here" kind of way. I mean that you feel genuinely welcomed and loved by the people as you meet them and spend time worshipping with them.

5. Mercy for the poor. First John 3:17 says that if we who have the world's goods and behold our brother in need and close our hearts against him, we don't have the love of God in us. Thus it is a test of real Christianity that the church cares for its poor. More than that, our care for the poor, though it should prioritize the believing community, should move beyond the church to the broader community: "Let us do good to all people, especially those who are of the household of the faith" (Gal 6:10).

6. Concern for the lost. Is the church committed to personal evangelism? And by "committed to personal evangelism" I don't mean a church that has evangelistic programs, but that the people love their neighbors enough to tell them about Jesus. So look for a sincere interest in reaching the lost with the Gospel on the part of the pastor and the people in the pew, not as a notch in their belts, but because they are truly lovers of people as people, not merely evangelistic prospects.

7. Ministry minded. Is the church active in Christ-exalting ministries? Is there Bible teaching for all ages? Are there opportunities for service? Is the church intentional about reaching out to non-believers and calling people to follow Jesus? Are there opportunities to build and strengthen relationships with others in the church?