

Why Go to Church?

by Vickey Pahnke-Taylor

www.ldsmag.com/candoyouth/070419church.html

We have a block of time reserved each Sunday for church attendance. When I joined the Church as a teenager, there was not a three hour “block” of time. Many of you are asking, “What is she talking about?” Ask your parents or a leader and they’ll fill you in!

There were some Sundays when, as a young person, I would rather have stayed home. I went, though, because I wanted to be “adult” about it.

As an adult, there have been Sundays when I would just as soon stay home. Fatigue, illness, sour mood, fear that a lesson was not properly in order or that I was insufficient for a task — any number of reasons would have kept me away. Had I not been determined to partake of the sacrament and properly discharge the calling I had at the time, I may well have bailed. Illness or other conflicts naturally nudge us to stay at home, but on some occasions, I have wrestled with my feelings — when there was no reason to skip Sunday meetings.



I found a formula to help. It was created out of taking each excuse (and we know when we are making excuses) and then thinking through that excuse. Would I make a different choice if some other activity were involved? Were my feelings founded in proper principles? Was there some bullying by the devil going on? Was I undermining myself? Did I need further reminders of why we go to church to being with? Using this kind of logic, I was able to combat those issues that would keep me away from the spiritual nourishment available each Sabbath.

Maybe this thought process will give you a boost as well, if ever you wonder about playing hooky from church:

Excuses:

- Fatigue: Say it was Saturday and my husband invited me to attend some great movie I had been wanting to see. Would I go? Yes!
- Illness: I am acquainted with serious illness. These are times when we should keep ourselves home — in order to recoup for ourselves, or as a kindness in not spreading it around when we have something that is contagious. But say it was a trifling illness, it was a weekday, and there was a great “Three hour only” sale at my favorite store. Might I make the effort to get out? Yes.
- Sour mood: Emotions can play havoc if we do not keep them in check. I long ago realized that the adversary will use them against us if we are not careful. Keeping myself away from church because I am bothered, upset or feeling foul? Not a logical thought! The Spirit I would feel at church would surely lift my dour mood. Should I go? Yes!
- Fear: Having been taught that fear is from the devil and is an opposing principle to faith, I realized that I had little leverage in allowing this particular feeling to keep me home. Say I had a presentation to make for work — a necessary but worrisome one. Would I make it, anyway? Yes.

- Feeling insufficient: I remember that President Gordon B. Hinckley said: “The Lord doesn't call the qualified. He qualifies the called.” In and of myself, I can do little. But with the Lord's help, can I perform my duties in a loving manner and learn as I go? Yes. Certainly, I cannot rid myself of fretful feelings of insufficiency if I ignore my responsibilities.
- What if I just read and studied scriptures at home? I remember thinking this thought a couple of times. I cringe now, realizing I was setting myself up for spiritual failure by disconnecting myself from the strength of gospel friends, and forgetting the two essentials for church attendance: worship of my Lord, and partaking of the sacrament!

We can come up with all kinds of reasons to stay away from church, but the Sabbath is supposed to be a holy day and not a holiday. Keeping myself away for any frivolous reason violates covenants made. Who loses out on blessings and insights? I do! These Sunday meetings are necessary as well as nourishing.

Here is what President Spencer W. Kimball had to say on the matter:

We do not go to Sabbath meetings to be entertained or even solely to be instructed. We go to worship the Lord. If the service is a failure to you, you have failed. No one can worship for you; you must do your own waiting upon the Lord. (Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball , p.220)

My cousin once forwarded an email regarding church attendance that made me grin, but strengthened my resolve to be there on Sundays. I have kept it in my files, and now share it with you:

Why Go To Church?

A church-goer wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper and complained that it made no sense to go to church every Sunday. “I've gone for 30 years now and in all that time I have heard something like 3,000 sermons. For the life of me, I can't remember a single one of them. So I think I'm wasting my time.”

A real controversy ensued, with many opinions written in to the editor over the next few weeks. Someone finally wrote the following letter — a real clincher — which seemed to settle the debate:

I've been married for 30 years now. In that time my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals. For the life of me, I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of those meals. But I do know this — they all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me those meals, I would be physically dead today. Likewise, if I had not gone to church for nourishment, I would be spiritually dead today!”

Without debating the finer points of this email, it is a great reminder that church is there as a blessing for the welfare of each of us. Programs change or are removed, people change or move, but the principles which would take us to church and strengthen our testimonies never change. If we are obedient to the commandment to be there, the only changes we notice will be positive ones, quiet ones that build within us the desire to honor our Savior. From this desire we will not be moved!

The Lord has given us a church organization to bless us. It helps anchor us to Him. Being at church is one simple way to worship Him. Blessings will follow. No excuses justify our disobedience to this simple commandment. Just go!