



## A Publication of the Winnetka Ave. Church of Christ

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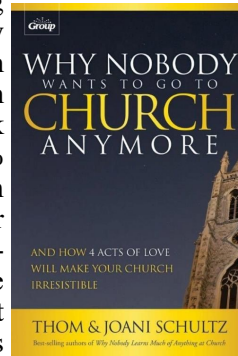
## “I WAS GLAD WHEN THEY SAID...”

Even to the most casual observer of our culture, it is evident that churches of every form and stripe have taken a real gut punch the past two and a half years. But according to a study done a few years back by the Hartford Institute of Religion Research, all churches have been reeling for quite some time. A stark finding in the study is that while 40% of Americans claim they go to church every week, the fact of the matter reveals that fewer than 20% do actually attend. Also uncovered in the study was that annually two point million members of the various churches decline into inactivity.

Ed Stetzer stated in gist that church is not dying, but it is in transition and that transition is not the same as dying. Stetzer set forth his premise in an article that appeared in “Christianity Today”. Steve McSwain, who holds a PhD and is viewed as an “authority” with respect to trends in the religious world and things that lead to growth, recently wrote about “Seven Trends” facing churches. There is a plethora of books, articles, and so forth that cite reasons as to decline and what can be done to staunch the flow. *“But beyond this, my son, be warned, the writing of many books is wearying to the body”* (Ecclesiastes 12:12) What needs to be done is to get back to the Bible; nothing more and certainly nothing less.

If only as we view congregational growth, we should make it personal. If there exists a feeling of malaise within the congregation, what are you doing on an individual level to up lift up others? One of the first things that can be done is seen in what David penned in Psalms 122. *“I was glad when they said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord.”* (v 1) That psalm is one of ascent and was sung by those ascending the hill that lead to the temple. A joyous occasion. Couple this with what is

seen in Hebrews 10:25, *“not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.”* If you make it a priority to be in attendance, the encouragement it offers to others is present.



Sadly, even among those who claim to be members of the Lord’s church there is the lament that worship service doesn’t connect with them. Short answer to that, is that worship is what God wants, not what we want! Ego-centric worship is hardly what God desires (see 1Corinthians 11:23-34; Ephesians 4:23; Colossians 3:10). Think back to Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus chapter ten. They were more concerned what they wanted than what God desires. In order to entice others, again make it personal. *“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”* (John 4:24) One will get as much out of worship as they are willing to put in. Remember it is all about God; be fully engaged in praise to Him.

While it may be true that there is a precipitous decline in people “going to church”, and that something so simple as you making weekly worship to God a premium for you, may have an influence on others to follow suit. That is a side issue. The real issue is what it does for you, the individual. It should be a time of renewal, revival. *“Wilt Thou not Thyself revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?”* (Psalms 85:6)

At the risk of being redundant each one needs to develop a strong relationship with God. Make it up close and personal. *“My God and I go in the fields together, we walk and talk as good friends should and do...”* If we were in such a relationship with God, to congregate with others to worship Him would be embraced and welcomed. (wbe)

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THE BULWARK