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**10 Ways Pastors can Encourage Church Attendance**

**January 20, 2020 – Phil A. Newton**

Since coming to faith in Christ at age 15, I’ve had a strong desire to gather with the body of Christ. Even hearing not-so-stellar preaching and being with cantankerous people, I always loved gathering with God’s people.

When isolation due to chemotherapy kept me from church for four months in 2019, my deepest longing was to be with God’s people. I even asked our tech director to leave the livestream on after the service so I might see the people mingle. Gathering with the body seems natural.

Yet church members are wired differently, face varied issues, battle individualism, and struggle with numerous spiritual matters. So while church participation should be an automatic for Christians, it doesn’t always happen. Nevertheless, attentive shepherds can help spur faithful participation.

Here are 10 ways I’ve found useful in 40-plus years of pastoral ministry.

### 1. Teach on the nature of the church.

If a believer understands the nature of the church as body, family, temple, and bride, it seems they’ll desire to participate in church life faithfully. [These metaphors (and others)](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-metaphors-for-your-church-membership/) give us a clear picture that church is not about me, but about my relationship to the gathered body.

The extensive use of plural pronouns in the Gospels and epistles instruct the body more than the individual. Help the church to read Scripture with an eye to plural details about the church (e.g., [Rom. 12](https://www.esv.org/verses/Rom.%2012/); [1 Cor. 12](https://www.esv.org/verses/1%20Cor.%2012/); [Eph. 2](https://www.esv.org/verses/Eph.%202/) and 5).

### 2. Emphasize ‘one another’ passages.

“One another” passages line the New Testament: love one another, serve one another, be kind to one another, accept one another, and so on. There are at least 45 “one another” commands.

Call attention to these passages in preaching, counseling, prayer, and exhortation. We’re living in disobedience if we’re neglecting relationship to one another ([John 13:34–35](https://www.esv.org/verses/John%2013%3A34%E2%80%9335/); [1 Thess. 5:11](https://www.esv.org/verses/1%20Thess.%205%3A11/); [Eph. 4:32](https://www.esv.org/verses/Eph.%204%3A32/)).

### 3. Champion corporate worship.

Our common bent toward individualism excuses absence from corporate worship by assuming the ability to worship anywhere by ourselves. No doubt, we want believers worshiping privately. But the weight of Scripture falls on corporate worship.

Again, Scripture uses mostly plural nouns and pronouns with reference to worshipers, and foreshadowing heavenly worship in the gathered body leaves no room for neglecting corporate worship (see Exodus; Ezra; Nehemiah; [Acts 2:46–47](https://www.esv.org/verses/Acts%202%3A46%E2%80%9347/); [Heb. 10:24–25](https://www.esv.org/verses/Heb.%2010%3A24%E2%80%9325/)).

### 4. Practice theologically robust liturgy.

Pastors should never use entertainment or manipulation to fill seats. Instead, make sure your worship liturgy is robustly theological. Nothing warms Christian hearts more than seeing Christ in all of Scripture—reflected in corporate readings, prayers, confessions, hymns, and preaching.

Worshipers should expect to experience Christ revealed in every aspect of worship ([John 4:23–24](https://www.esv.org/verses/John%204%3A23%E2%80%9324/); [Luke 24:32](https://www.esv.org/verses/Luke%2024%3A32/)).

### 5. Apply biblical exposition.

Why would anyone want to attend worship where the preaching is dull, dry, passionless, and irrelevant? Many things can be excused in a church, but not poor preaching.

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Work hard to be faithful to God’s Word, expounding and applying the week’s text to the congregation ([2 Tim. 4:1–5](https://www.esv.org/verses/2%20Tim.%204%3A1%E2%80%935/)).

### 6. Develop touch points.

Pastors must know if people are present in worship gatherings. As much as possible, I try to speak to those in attendance. When preaching, I pay attention to who is present. If I notice patterns of absence, I’ll send a handwritten note or text or email or make a phone call to check on them.

It’s amazing how taking a few minutes to write a note encourages those who’ve grown a bit neglectful ([Rom. 12:10](https://www.esv.org/verses/Rom.%2012%3A10/); [1 Thess. 5:11](https://www.esv.org/verses/1%20Thess.%205%3A11/)).

### 7. Keep shepherding.

Members can struggle with a range of issues that affect faithful participation: patterns of sin, discouragement, depression, family crisis, bad examples, fatigue, physical illness, mental health, relational conflicts, work problems, lack of assurance, and more.

Rather than reacting to or taking their absence personally, pursue them. Your gentleness in coming alongside, praying, offering counsel, and showing compassion may be just what they need to return to corporate gatherings. Enlisting other members to encourage them can help bring an absentee member back into a healthy rhythm of participation ([Acts 20:28](https://www.esv.org/verses/Acts%2020%3A28/); [1 Pet. 5:1–4](https://www.esv.org/verses/1%20Pet.%205%3A1%E2%80%934/)). As Bobby Jamieson [writes](https://www.amazon.com/Going-Public-Baptism-Required-Membership/dp/1433686201/?tag=thegospcoal-20), “Church members should knit their lives so tightly that if you try to pull one out of the body, another dozen come with him, pulling him back in.”

### 8. Live the Christian life joyfully.

Pastors and elders are the face of the worship gathering. If they don’t reflect a joyful relationship to Christ, the contagion may spread. Concentrate, then, on living in joy. Fight for it.

And let your worship services be marked by joy. That’s one reason I so deeply missed corporate worship for four months. It’s a gathering of joy in the Lord that I both longed for and also needed ([Phil. 1:12–26; 2:14–18; 4:4–14](https://www.esv.org/verses/Phil.%201%3A12%E2%80%9326%3B%202%3A14%E2%80%9318%3B%204%3A4%E2%80%9314/)).

### 9. Establish expectations for participation.

It’s probably best to establish expectations for participation during membership classes. I’m not suggesting it be done in a legalistic fashion. But it seems crucial to explain the nature of the church as a family, the necessity of corporate participation as a means of grace, and the ordering of priorities to be engaged in the church.

**Communicate regular participation as the normal practice of healthy Christians.**

We should reinforce these truths in everything from the regular exposition of Scripture to weekly communication with the church and welcome and announcements in the services. Communicate regular participation as the normal practice of healthy Christians ([Heb. 10:24–25](https://www.esv.org/verses/Heb.%2010%3A24%E2%80%9325/); [Acts 2–4](https://www.esv.org/verses/Acts%202%E2%80%934/)).

### 10. Cultivate an atmosphere of love and encouragement.

I’m not suggesting anything artificial. Instead, through Word, prayer, worship, service, mission, and living out the faith together, a church family’s mutual love will slowly deepen. Members will love one another by encouraging and serving—it’s just natural.

This also means fighting against complacency, ill tempers, disunity, gossip, and the other sins that threaten an atmosphere of love. We use the means of grace God has given the church to cultivate an atmosphere of love and encouragement ([Rom. 12:9–13](https://www.esv.org/verses/Rom.%2012%3A9%E2%80%9313/); [1 John 4:7–21](https://www.esv.org/verses/1%20John%204%3A7%E2%80%9321/)).

### Pastoral Patience

These recommendations will take time to work into the life of the church. It requires patience to lead a congregation to see itself as body, family, temple, and bride—not an optional religious organization to make them feel better about themselves.

But it’s worth the labor and worth the wait.

**This article was originally published on The Gospel Coalition website and is used with permission. The original can be found here:** <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/10-ways-pastors-encourage-church-attendance/>.