

5 Reasons I Haven't Left the Church

I recently read Frank Viola's thought-provoking article, "10 Reasons Why I Left the Institutional Church in Search of the Ekklesia," and for that reason, I suppose I should give a description of what I mean when I say *church*.

When I use the term *church*, I mean that thing we do when we sit down with other believers weekly and typically stare at the back of everyone's head, except one—the orator—whose face we get to see for 30 minutes (60 to 90 if you're **Pentecostal** or charismatic like me).

And since Mr. Viola had 10 reasons and I only have five, I guess that makes his argument twice as effective as mine.

It's widely popular to talk about how young adults, from my generation on down (I'm 35—ouch, that hurts to write), are leaving the church. It's a mass exodus of immense proportions (is that redundant?). I've recently seen many talk about their reasons for walking away from church, so I thought I'd share the other side of the coin: five reasons why I *haven't* walked away from church.

1. It's deeply engrained into my identity.

Dad was a **pastor**, which made me a pastor's kid. And while many PKs grow up to hate church and church people, I never did. Dad was always there when we needed him, and I never felt as if the church came before us. So I never resented the church, even when the sheep bit the shepherd, which happened all too often.

And as a PK, when the doors of the church were open, we were there. Sunday morning without a church service would feel completely unnatural. It's hard to fathom life without church.

It's a part of my identity. I'm appreciative of such a heritage.

2. I believe in community.

I hear many who believe they don't need church to be a Christian, and I admit that I agree with that statement. But while I don't *need* church to be a Christian, I find that it sure does help.

Even when fellow churchgoers become backstabbers and legalism overwhelms love and concern for biblical context is overlooked, I am still a part of a Christian family who loves me and is concerned about my Christian walk.

When I cry, they cry with me. When I hurt, they **pray** for healing. And when I need, they give. That leaves me with accountability.

It also gives me an outlet to release the giftings God has placed in my life. And the giftings are not for me; they are for the body of Christ. How can we exercise our giftings in the body if we aren't part of one?

3. I need to remember that it's not always about me.

I was raised in church, and while things undoubtedly went on from time to time that I disliked, overall I feel it instilled a sense of responsibility deep within me for the needs and concerns of others.

There were times when I was not allowed to wear shorts to a picnic because it might offend some of the older generations. (It was either that or the fact that shorts in the 80s were like man-thongs with white trim. Come to think of it, I'd be offended too.) And there were times when I was not allowed to see movies because of the whole stumbling-block idea.

I hated this in my youth, but it made me realize that I'm a part of something bigger than myself. Christianity is not just

about me, my beliefs and my convictions. It's about us—the body of Christ. It's about caring for one another's needs and helping and loving.

So I didn't wear shorts. It wouldn't have hindered my walk with Christ (those shorts could have hindered my pride, though), but it might have hindered somebody else's, and that made me realize that I needed to always be aware of the needs and convictions of others, even when I didn't agree with them. It's not always about me.

4. I do it for my kids.

We have three children. My son is 9, and my identical twin girls are 7. We go to church not only for us, but perhaps even more so for them. My wife and I were raised in church. We believe that we need to pass on the faith that our parents handed to us, and church attendance is a vital part of that. So we go week after week.

We attend church with family. And the kids call a few others who aren't related "Nana" and "Papa." They see young and old worshipping together, praying together and searching the Scriptures together. The old pillars of the faith lay their hands on my children and pray for them. It's a rich experience. I often think this alone should be enough to keep parents in church.

5. I go for a better future.

Sometimes things happen in church that I thoroughly disagree with. Fights erupt over ridiculously petty things. People get upset over nothing. Too much emphasis is placed on performance. And if I had written the books of our doctrine, some sections might read just a bit differently.

Many in my generation have walked away because of these very things.

But here's where my thinking differs—I love the church, and I love it enough to stick it out, even through the rough times (and believe me, sometimes it gets bad). And if she needs to change, then I'm going to see to it that the change happens. I don't want to walk. I want to stay and fight.

I want to make sure that the church walks into the future equipped to successfully pass the faith on to the next generation—my kids and my grandkids. Those who keep walking in and walking out because they disagree with stuff will never bring about change.

If you want to change the system, you don't do it from the outside. You do it from the inside. So I stay—to help bring about a church that can effectively reach the generations to come, and to help make it better.

I believe in church, so I go, week after week, and I fight for it. I want her to live. I want her to be relevant. I want her to reach our society and bring about a Christlike change in our culture—a culture that wants truth but just doesn't know where to find it.

I've always believed that truth is best found in numbers, not in isolation. What better place to find it than in the middle of church?

Who woulda thunk it? Truth—found in church. Crazy, right?

See you Sunday?

Oops, wrong punctuation.

See you Sunday.

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