

Are You Wearing a Spiritual Mask to Church?

There are great churches with great programs, great ministries, and outstanding volunteers. We all love churches like that. But more than what a church has to offer me, what I really want is to feel connected with a group of people, to find a place of belonging, and do life together.

A few days ago I asked on my Facebook page:

Do you feel like you have a “core” group of friends? Friends that are always available in time of need, and for whom you are available in turn? Or do you feel like those relationships are lacking in your life?

The overwhelming response was that these relationships were lacking, yet everyone wished they had them. Perhaps loneliness is more common than we realize.

I wonder if, at the core of who we are, we are desperate for friendship. Longing to connect with someone with whom we can share the deep places of our hearts. With whom we can be vulnerable, honest, transparent, real. Someone that is willing and *wanting* to listen.

So I think about the Church, and the people that walk through church doors. Sending their children to the Kids' programs, participating in a great worship/music service, and listening to a gifted preacher. But what if at the end of that Sunday morning service they're as alone as they were when they came in?

Because my husband is a pastor, we have left family behind. My girls are growing up away from their grandparents, their cousins, their aunts and uncles. It also means that my husband

and I are away from our parents, our family. And the thing is, while we have each other, we also need other people in our lives. We need that connection, we need community!

Church, of all places, should be the place where we come to find the friendship, support, connection, acceptance, and sense of “family.”

What good is a church with outstanding programs and ministries if our hearts continue to feel lonely?

What good is it for us to preach about “loving our neighbor,” when we fail to reach out to the person sitting by us in the pews?

What good is it for us to talk about a “Church family” when there is no sense of actually doing life together? Of getting to know each other? Of investing in each others lives?

What good is it to attend a church if we feel like we have to be “perfect” or have it “together” rather than allowing people to see our messy and our broken? We are all messy and broken, all of us.

As a church, should we not model what it means to belong? To be accepted? To find meaningful friendships? To do life together?

If we did this, we would not need church programs, we would not be scrambling to find volunteers. We would do life, hand by hand, covering the needs as they come.

We follow Jesus, we talk about His unconditional love, about His sacrifice for us. It should change us, it should make us more loving and accepting. It should change the way we interact with people.

Church is the place where we grow in our relationship with God, where we learn, where we pray... **together**.

If life is tough right now and you cannot pray, then I can pray for you. If your child is having surgery, then I want to come and sit with you in the waiting room as we wait and pray and laugh (because everyone needs a friend to bring you a smile or a laugh when you are waiting during surgery). If you don't live close to family, then I want you to sit at my table for Thanksgiving. If you need someone to talk to, what is a good time for you to come over to my always messy home? We can talk amidst naked Barbies on the floor and a dirty kitchen sink.

If we are the "salt of the world" then let's do this, let's start doing life together. With so many people hungry for authentic relationships, let's have the church be the place where people find a real sense of belonging, a core group of friends, a family, and the unending, never-changing hope of Christ.

*Adapted from **Ellen Stumbo's** blog. Ellen is a pastor's wife and she writes about finding beauty in brokenness with gritty honesty and openness. She is passionate about sharing the real – sometimes beautiful and sometimes ugly – aspects of faith, parenting, special needs, and adoption. She has been published in Focus on the Family, LifeWay, MomSense, Not Alone, and Mamapedia among others.*