

Avoid Empty Religion With This Core Attitude

Imagine that you showed up to church on Sunday morning and everything was gone.

The room had no stage. There were no speakers or amplification. No musical instruments. No video screens, no lights, no cameras. All you had was a room and a few people. Imagine there was nobody to watch your kids for you, no coffee in the foyer, no comfy seats to sit on, and no air-conditioning (good Lord, NO!!). Imagine, for a moment, that everything was gone.

But, as everyone is standing around staring at each other, your pastor gathers everyone together in the middle of the empty space and says, "Let's worship."

Would you stay? Would you worship? Would you pray? To be honest, I'm not sure what I would do ... "Well, I guess let's just go to breakfast?"

It would be an interesting experiment, however. What would your church do? It would certainly expose the crutches that we lean on every week without realizing it.

What expectation do you carry into church every week without even knowing you do? What do you subconsciously need to take place at a gathering for you to feel like God "was there"? What kind of crutch do you lean on that, if it was taken away, you could no longer worship, pray and engage your heart with Jesus?

This quote from A. W. Tozer struck me particularly hard this week.

"There is grief in my spirit when I go into the average

church, for we have become a generation rapidly losing all sense of divine sacredness in our worship. Many whom we have raised in our churches no longer think in terms of reverence—which seems to indicate they doubt that God’s Presence is there Much of the blame must be placed on the growing acceptance of a worldly secularism that seems much more appealing in our church circles than any hungering or thirsting for the spiritual life that pleases God. We secularize God, we secularize the gospel of Christ and we secularize worship.” – A.W. Tozer

I guess the question I am really asking is this: What happens when God is not enough? I can tell you what happens. We get busy replacing what we think is missing with things that give us a similar feeling. The result, however, is far more deadly than we realize.

We will start to equate the wrong things with God’s presence.

We will begin to think the emotional high that comes from a certain musical progression is the presence of God. Now, hear me out. I love a good musical lift. I love the crescendo in music that lifts the soul. I am a musician and a songwriter and there is no more powerful thing than being able to lift people with the power of music. The problem is, my soul being lifted by music is not always a good indication of the tangibility of God’s presence. And, if we train ourselves to believe that it is, we will end up like Pavlov’s dog, salivating because of a trained behavior and not because of the real presence of God.

We will begin to think that another great sermon is what will change the world. Well, bad news: If sermonizing was going to change the world, it would have been changed already. We do need great teachers to encourage us, challenge us and guide us but the responsibility is always on the individual to do something about it, not on the preacher to compel you.

We find ourselves needing more and more props to keep our attention. More lights, more videos, more creative elements, more distractions.

And, as we keep adding those things into the mix, we create a context for spiritual dullness because we have trained people to be satisfied with junk spirituality instead of offering them something real.

Say, for example, you woke up in the morning and needed to grab something to eat as you ran out the door. On the table in your kitchen was a plate of eggs and a doughnut. Let's be honest. Unless you are really committed to your health, nine times out of 10 you are going to grab the doughnut.

Why? Because it is quick, it is easy and it provides temporary fulfillment. But, about three hours later, you are going to sugar crash...

When God is not enough, we start to offer people doughnuts.

Now, let's be real. I love a good doughnut. But, if I ate a doughnut every day ... I think you can see where I'm going with this.

So what are we to do? What you can you do personally to make sure that you are not pounding down spiritual doughnuts each week? Most of us will not have an opportunity to change the world, but we can change ourselves. We can't always take on the establishment, but we can change what we do when we show up to church. Here's what I would do if I were you.

1. I would bring an offering of praise no matter what it sounds like, looks like or feels like.

Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms (Ps. 95:2).

2. I would make sure that no matter what church I go to, I

am there because of Jesus and not because the worship is “amazing,” the teaching is “life-changing” or the place has an indoor coffee shop.

But I fear that somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve through his trickery, so your minds might be led astray from the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Cor. 11:3).

3. I would commit to live a daily life with Jesus and not rely on a church to fill me up so I can face the big bad world each week. Living a life of devotion will enable you to gather with your church family each Sunday without the expectation of them having to meet all your needs (because, in reality, they can't).

Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In everything, give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you (1 Thess. 5:16-18).

Most importantly, however, I would make sure I asked myself this question on a regular basis: Is God enough for me?

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