

The Surprising Reason People Leave Their Church

A lot has been written lately about millennials leaving the church. Many reasons have been suggested for this. We're told millennials are wary of anything that hints at consumerism, and then in the next breath we're given reasons for attending church that center on what we can get out of it. It's no wonder we are leaving the church—we're not even sure what it's for.

This post isn't really about millennials leaving the church. It's not about millennials at all, actually.

The consumer mentality of church members and church-goers is not unique to my generation. It can be found in nearly every demographic in almost every church. Where I most often see it, and where I am most often guilty of it myself, is in the area of service.

Using Our Gifts

My husband and I started attending our church nearly eight years ago. We were there just a few months before people were volunteering us to serve in various areas. We found ourselves part of a newly formed greeting ministry, I was working in the nursery, and we were teaching kids on Wednesday nights. It was a little overwhelming. We didn't know how to say no, so we "served" begrudgingly.

Truth be told, we were both pastors' kids, and we were unsure how to function as normal church members. It was easy to think, *I'm not sure this is my gifting. Maybe I should find something that uses my talents and abilities better.*

There's nothing wrong with wanting to use our gifts to serve our church family. But then again, who would say they have the

spiritual gift of changing diapers? Holding doors open? Setting up chairs?

Thankfully, the Lord revealed the selfishness of my heart to me. I wasn't serving anyone, really. I was performing needed tasks, but my heart wasn't in it. It's still easy to slip back into the mentality of considering the Sundays I'm singing with the worship team as more valuable than those Sundays when I'm a substitute teacher in the preschool department.

Why Are We Serving?

When our gifts are unneeded or we go unrecognized for some God-given ability, often we decide we'll go somewhere else where we're "needed." We leave a church with a need for workers in every children's department because we just don't feel that we're being used there.

Ultimately, I think it comes down to this: Are we serving for the benefit of the body of Christ or for our own self-fulfillment?

Love for Christ is accompanied by love for His bride. My church family is just that—my family. I can't imagine saying to my husband, "I'm sorry, I just didn't change our son's diaper today because it really isn't my gifting, and I'm not sure if it would really use my talents well."

No, I love my son, and I love my husband. If the diaper needs to be changed, I change it. It's a simple way to serve in love and meet a need. This doesn't mean my gifts aren't important. What it means is that sometimes the need for a servant is greater than my need to use a specific gift.

Love for the church means a heart that desires to give. There are weeks I'm tempted to go to church, sit back and be served. Now, sometimes being served is necessary. If we're always giving, but in pride refusing to receive, that's not OK. There's reciprocal joy in allowing others the chance to serve

us.

At the same time, if we refuse to serve in the nursery because Sunday is our one chance to get away from kids, we're thinking of church wrongly. The Bible speaks strongly about the church being our family, even more than our flesh and blood families. Sunday is not a chance to take a break from family—it's a chance to serve our true family.

When you're part of a body that loves and serves and gives, a beautiful bond forms. You see people serving in the background, and you praise God for them. You see the joy of service in others, and you want to follow suit. You see a need, and you long to meet it.

Serving in our local church is not meant to meet our needs for self-fulfillment or self-worth; it's about the joy found through self-denial.

Because of Christ

The church is the bride of a Bridegroom who emptied Himself and took "the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7). He humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross. Our Savior did this for us—on our behalf. He freed us from trying to one-up each other. He freed us to serve in love just as He did. He freed us to rest in the knowledge that our service does not earn our salvation.

We love because we have been loved, and we serve because we have been served. Churches are looking for people to serve in a wide array of areas. Let's not wait to be asked.

How can serving in areas that might not be your "gifting" benefit others? What needs exist in your local church that you could help meet? {eo}

Copyright © 2001-2016 *Revive Our Hearts*. Reprinted with permission. During nap times and between loads of laundry at

her home in Nashville, TN, Catherine Parks is a writer. At other times of the day you can find her either pretending to be a cheetah wrangler with her two small kiddos, or trying to convince her husband, Erik, to become a coffee drinker. Catherine has a BA in English literature from Bryan College and has finally put the degree to work in A Christ-Centered Wedding.