

Why I Go To Church

Because we drive by the farms on the edge of town and the tinies watch for sheep. Because I almost always consider pulling over on the side of the road just to take photos of our **Sunday** drive: the crisp blue sky and the sharp green rolling hills, the turning-red blueberry bushes squatted across the fields, the rise of the mountains in the haze of morning, but how can you Instagram the rush of cold air in your lungs and how it makes you feel so beautifully, so fully, alive?

Because we walk in and Pat will hug me while she hands Joe the bulletin. Because after a week of Facebook and school pick-ups and drop-off lines, a week of writing and laundry, a week of working and to-do lists, I hear my name called out in the lobby and, maybe for just a moment, someone sees me.

Because we laugh with one friend, ask how another one's health is doing, figure out who needs a meal this week. We exchange quick hugs as placeholders for the conversation that might unfold this week or next, maybe next month. We engage in all the small talk that precedes the heart-talks. I hear about a dear young couple whose baby might be coming home soon and now I've got a little tunic to knit for a beloved and longed-for baby to cast on later this afternoon.

Because someone is always glad to see my tinies. Because these are their **friends**. Because my tinies head for the kid table of colouring pages and crayons just to offer up a high five to their children's pastor, they are home.

Because we sit in folding chairs in a rather drafty school gym and our tinies sprawl on the floor at our feet or perch on our hips or stand beside us and watch it all, all, all, taking it in. This is what we do on Sundays, we tell them, we live it with them, we gather.

Because my friend Tracy leads **worship**, she wears biker boots and sometimes her hair is pink. Because when she begins to stomp those boots on that wooden stage and when she stretches

her arms out wide, tips her head back and **cries out to God** like she believes it, it makes me want to sit down and cry. Because the guy who play the piano sings old Keith Green songs, the same ones I used to sing to my babies in the sleepless nights. Because my son wants to sit in the front row. Because my toddler raises her hands up and warbles and hollers a song, she thinks she's singing along, and no one gives her a dirty look. Because my eldest is twirling in the back with her best friends, eager for the **worship dance class** starting in November.

Because that couple over there just got married and that other one has been married for 40 years. Because that dad has his arm around his teenage son and that lady took my exhausted friend's little baby right out of her arms with a gentle smile and said, go on, you go on and sing or sit down, I'll look after her for a little while, and I saw my friend's eyes well up with thankful tears. Because this guy is in recovery and that guy is his sponsor. Because all these **teenagers** like to sing their hearts out and because I can hear babies and restless toddlers making noise without restraint.

Because I love to sing and where else in our lives do we get to sing communally anymore? Because I love happy-clappy choruses and sober **hymns**, because "I love you, Lord" sounds so beautiful in my own mouth. Because I love to worship with my people, and these are my people.

Because I chat in the always-long line-up for tea and coffee. Because I sit beside my husband and we whisper back and forth during the sermon, it's the closest we get to date night some months. Because we know and love our **pastors** for their humanity, not in spite of it, for their expansive pastoral hearts that make room for all of us, because of the way they show up for us. Because sometimes it's an amazing sermon and sometimes it's, um, not. Because we pass the bread and the cup, and we give each other **communion** and there is room at the table for everyone in this room.

Because I'll see this little group of people on Thursday night for our **Bible study**, and that is where we'll talk about the

real stuff, show up, be disappointed and forgive, love each other a bit more every week. We're friends now, but I see the promise of a sense of family coming.

Because even though the phrase "**going to church**" kind of bugs me (we don't go, we are), and even though it's messy and imperfect, even though I've let them down and they have let me down, even though there are disappointments, even though I don't agree with everybody and they probably think I'm crazy sometimes, too, even though I don't think we need an official sanctioned Sunday morning thing to be part of the **Body of Christ**, because even though I think the Church crosses a lot of our self-made boundaries and preferences and gatekeepers, I keep choosing this small family out of hope and joy.

Because I want my children to grow up with the imperfect community of God like I did. Because I want to reclaim my heritage of faith as worthy of intention. Because I need to receive and I need to give. Because I want the tinies to know that however much I mess up, however much I fall short of my own ideals, I was planted in the house of God because this is where I practice it, learn it, start all over again. Because I want my tinies to know what my voice sounds like when I sing Amazing Grace.

Because at the end of the service, they practice the priesthood of all believers and anyone can pray for anyone else. Just go ahead and pray, go ahead. Talk to each other, you don't need a sanctioned commissioning, you are already part of this Body so go on then. Because I need to be around people who love Jesus, too.

Because I know Jesus better when I hear about Him from other people who follow Him, too. Because I almost always encounter the Holy Spirit in a profound, sideways sort of way when we're gathered together in His name. Because then I leave and I go back out into my world, my neighbourhood, my life, and there is always the promise of next week. Because some of my greatest wounds have come from church and so my greatest healing has happened here, too.

In a fractured and mobile and globalized world, intentional community, church, feels like a radical act of faith and sometimes like a spiritual discipline. We show up at a rented school and drink a cup of tea with the people of God and remember together, who we are, why we live this life, and figure out all over again how to be disciples of The Way, because we are people of hope.

Sarah Bessey is a wife, mama of three tinies, a writer, popular blogger, and a happy-clappy Jesus lover. She lives in Abbotsford, British Columbia. Her first book, *Jesus Feminist* (Howard Books) will be released in November.