

It's Time for the Church to Let God Out of the Box

The church as we know it has had its day. God has been in a box for thousands of years.

The box is the church.

This new decade is ushering in new challenges. One new challenge for the church in America is how to stop the bleeding.

We have closed out two decades of the contemporary church. Not much has changed.

We shifted from paneling to drywall, pews to chairs, Scriptures to stories and well-lit sanctuaries to darker rooms. This worked for a while but ran its course.

We dressed it up and made it pretty, only to realize we were doing the same things in a change of clothes.

People Want an Experience with God

The same old, same old is not attractive any longer. People are searching for a genuine experience with God.

Barna research has reported:

"While a majority of churchgoers said that enjoying church was a motivation for them to attend (65% of churched adults and 82% of practicing Christians), around half (57% of churched adults and 45% of practicing Christians) said people they know are tired of the typical church experience."

Notice that people said "the typical church is tiring."

Most churches are so predictable, with three songs, three announcements and a three-point sermon. Even God is tired of

that! Is this not what we have defined as insanity?

People Are Dealing With Real Problems

This is not the age where chewing gum in the classroom is our most pressing problem. This is the age where our teenagers are getting pregnant or addicted to pornography. Gender issues and suicide are normal struggles for this generation. We must have answers.

The Search for More

Church people are searching for a real God who handles real problems. The church must show their competence in handling the most difficult of life's challenges.

There are legitimate answers in God's Word to the most challenging things in life

People have problems. We go to Walmart because it solves a problem; We drive by Chick-fil-A for the excellent food and the convenience. They solve the problem.

The church must solve the problems of its members. Yes, then they will come.

Traditions Are Not the Answer

Some traditions have value. Others, not so much. When we perform religious acts from tradition, we miss the experience of the action.

To pray because it's tradition is not a great reason to pray. To pray and connect to God leads to life.

The Spirit of God is the agent who gives life to our worship and our religious activity.

"And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God" (Rom. 8:10, NLT).

The Spirit gives life. Many are seeking life. Churches that are offering lifeless traditions will become less effective and less attractive. Attendance will continue to decline, and the church will die or only survive.

Many churches are on life support.

What Can Church Leaders Do?

Stop relying on yesterday. Refusing to change is a step toward death.

Singing songs from 2,000 years ago is noble but irrelevant. Yes, they have meaning, and we should preserve them. But we can sing them with cultural relevance to this generation.

And we do not need singers or song leaders with talent alone. We need modern-day psalmists with hearts to connect to God.

These men and women do not just sing songs; they connect to God in worship. Their goal is to sing songs in the throne room and take others there with them.

Our church members need a touch from God. A touch to get them through the week—a tangible moment where God's presence is real.

No, not an emotion. But if God is near, our emotions will be unlocked. Emotions are not a sure sign of God's touch.

But when Jesus touched people in the Scriptures, they displayed emotions.

"One Sabbath day, as Jesus was teaching in a synagogue, he saw a woman who had been crippled by an evil spirit. She had been bent double for eighteen years and was unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, 'Dear woman, you are healed of your sickness!' Then he touched her, and instantly she could stand straight. How she praised God!" (Luke 13:10–13, NLT).

Did you see it? She praised God. If you received your healing after 18 years, are you going to praise God? I think you would.

Would churches accept this behavior today? Most wouldn't.

What Was the Bible's Response?

But the leader in charge of the synagogue was indignant that Jesus had healed her on the Sabbath day. "There are six days of the week for working," he said to the crowd. "Come on, those days to be healed, not on the Sabbath." But the Lord replied, "You hypocrites! Each of you works on the Sabbath day! Don't you untie your ox or your donkey from its stall on the Sabbath and lead it out for water? This dear woman, a daughter of Abraham, has been held in bondage by Satan for eighteen years. Isn't it right that she be released, even on the Sabbath?" (Luke 13:14–16, NLT).

Make note that we have progressed little. Jesus would say the same words to us today.

Can you see it? Religion says God can't do that. Not today.

Religion cannot handle what cannot explain.

John Burton said, "The days of predictable, scheduled, ordered church services must come to an end. We have become so enamored with human order in the church that Holy Spirit, biblical order, is completely rejected."

God Desires to Do More

God is alive and has never been dead. Do our churches resemble that truth?

Jesus was in a tomb. A borrowed one. Jesus only needed that tomb for three days.

And on the third day, He rose. And He is alive.

Just like Jesus told others to loose Lazarus and let him go, it's time the church loose God and let Him out of the box.

Because ... "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Eph. 3:20).

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