



SEVEN QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN LOOKING FOR A CHURCH HOME

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We live in a world today where everything, including people, devours our time and demands our attention. At the end of each day, we're lucky to have time to assess the impact of how the world affected us and how we reacted to situations, news or people and did we make the right decisions. In a world where truth seems illusive, we continually seek answers, direction, righteousness and hope because very little makes sense to us. To compound things further because of this ever-changing world, people often find themselves in a position where the culture, the politics, or their present job doesn't align with one's moral compass, or belief system. As a result, their search for direction and true guiding principles causes them to look for something or some place where the values and beliefs of that organization are in alignment with their moral compass. Some will try a new job, a new church, new location, new friends, new TV channels and new activities in effort to find something that will align with their beliefs or principles to help them navigate through each day. All of these things can be helpful with wise choices and the proper due diligence is done.

Making wise choices certainly applies when looking for a church home, because being associated with the right church can provide the solid foundation for beliefs, morals and actions that are needed in our society. The need for knowing how to select the right church has never been greater because there are more unchurched people in our nation than ever before.

Regardless whether a person is just church shopping or a regular church attender, being an active part of a church offers multiple benefits. Below are just some examples.

With the Right Church

Community	verses
Encouragement & Love	verses
Message of Hope	verses
Promise of Eternity	verses
Message of Value	verses
Message of Truth	verses
Realizing our Purpose	verses

Without Church

Isolation
Being unappreciated and used
Constant "no hope" worldly messages
Short temporary life
Low self-esteem caused by the world
Constant distrust in organizations and news
Searching but always finding emptiness

To find what we are looking for in a church we need to ask what does "proper due diligence" look like? It is extremely important for people who are seeking for something real and permanent in a church to have information, wisdom and discernment as they search for a church to regularly attend.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to help guide those who are seeking a church to find a church home that is on a solid spiritual and operational foundation. Just as in purchasing a home, the buyer needs to be keenly aware of the foundation's integrity and structure. People who are searching for a real lasting hope in a Savior may or may not know the questions to ask or what to look for in order to make the right decision for where they and their family can attend church regularly.

Although there are no perfect churches, using the below "vetting" process, combined with prayer and guidance from the Holy Spirit you will discover that God has led you to a solid, healthy church

home where you can become involved and blessed. Below is a helpful list of questions for people who are seeking a church that does not aspire to be “woke” or bend to the world system. Why would a person want to be part of a church that conforms to the same worldly “woke” system from which they are trying to move away? This article will help you get past “the new car smell” and guide you through items to check out under the hood.

One quick word of caution. Many people who are church shopping rely upon their friends or family for suggestions on where to church shop. This is fine because we are all influenced by people, but do your own vetting because it is likely that your friends and family do not have the answers to all the seven questions below and if they did, they might change their recommendation. Unfortunately, part of their church shopping contains a degree of skepticism due to the news stories and TV documentaries they have seen about church pastors and the programs they run. These situations are the exception rather than the rule, so be willing to move forward in earnest knowing that once the right church has been found, the benefits and blessings are innumerable.

Don't Give Up

Fortunately, there are churches who are founded upon the guidelines established in the New Testament, who operate based upon that early church model, who are spiritually feeding their congregations, who are not preaching strictly a “God has a wonderful plan for your life message” and as a result those churches are growing. In simple terms, these churches are giving the truth of God’s Word that convicts and changes people without the preacher utilizing “fire and brimstone” messages from the pulpit. These churches are correctly revealing the depths of the sinfulness of each person listening in the audience and revealing their need for repentance and acceptance of Jesus. Sadly, too many churches talk more about God’s love than about our sin. If people don’t believe they are sinners, they question why they need God’s love or the benefits of a church home.

Therefore, to help people who are “looking for a church home” find a church that is founded and operates on the principles established by the early church, read the questions below and as you answer them, you will see the wisdom in why they are asked. The answers to these questions along with the Holy Spirit will help steer you toward a church that is doing things “Gods-way” and which will be blessed by Him. And if the church is blessed by God, so will its congregation be blessed. Each church has the ability to do things based upon biblical principles. The question is- Do They? The following seven questions will help provide the answers.

Question 1- Programs for Kids

For families with kids, getting them involved in Christ-centered programs and activities, can be life-changing. Proverbs 22:6 (NIV) says, *“Direct your children onto the right path and when they are older, they will not leave it.”* Getting your kids regularly into bible study and activities that reinforce Godly instruction is critical in today’s world, where there is so much secular pressure to conform to the worldly systems. Parents need every type of Godly help they can get to counter-act the blatant acts of Satan that are happening right before their eyes in schools, in television shows, in movies, in internet content and their phones.

Check out the kid’s programs when you are church shopping. Go to the children’s pastor and request a meeting and tour of the kid’s area. If possible, try to meet some of the teachers to get an idea of their heart and attitude toward impacting your child for the kingdom of God. If all your due diligence satisfies your criteria, then start having the kids attend the kid’s programs and then listen to them after each time they are involved with kids church or activities to get feedback as to how they are liking it and what they learned. If kids are enjoying their church experience, it is definitely easier for the entire family to become actively involved in church.

Question # 2- The Pastor(s)

The Pastor of a church is defined as a minister or shepherd having spiritual charge of a congregation. A shepherd tends to the flock. He should lead and tend to the flock (the congregation) and the church staff based upon biblical principles and scripture. Larger churches sometimes delegate this role to associate pastors. Probably one of the best ways to assess and determine your interest level in a church is to request a meeting with the lead pastor to get answers to your questions as well as answers to the following questions below. If you are told the lead pastor (shepherd) does not meet with prospective members or even members who request a meeting, this should give some insight as to the pastor's view upon shepherding the flock. During your meeting ask the pastor some key questions regarding how he or the staff tend to the flock. For example, questions like how many hospital visits or contacts (physical or electronic) are made weekly to members of the congregation by the church staff; how many counseling sessions does the pastor or staff do weekly relating to starting or saving marriages; how many home visits or phone calls does he or staff do to those in need? How are prayer requests and follow-up handled by the church staff? Answers to these questions show the true heart for pastorate shepherding and tending to the flock.

Upon getting your questions satisfactorily answered, it is advisable to attend a church service several times to hear and discern the type of message that the pastor gives to the congregation on a normal weekend service. Some pastors prepare a message that is based upon a theme which is divided over a period of weeks. Other pastors will prepare their messages by using a book in the Bible and go verse by verse. Regardless of the method used, the main question which should be answered is "does the preacher use scripture references throughout his message that convicts a person of their sin" or is it a three-point message for selfimprovement. Be careful when a preacher develops their message first and then looks for a scripture reference to support or "sprinkle" upon what is being said. Also be careful when a preacher references contemporary books to support their message or as suggested reading. The only book that has the ability to change your life permanently is the Word of God, called the Bible.

After attending some church services, the prospective member might feel like they just attended a self-help conference or just heard a message from the pulpit saying that all you need to do is accept Jesus and your problems will be no more! Beware of this type of preaching. Too many churches preach this type of message. The true message that should be preached is that we are all sinners who, without accepting Jesus and having Him in our lives as our boss, will be judged and sentenced by a righteous God to eternal separation from Him upon our certain death. We can't earn salvation and we can't be good enough, (even though we think we are) to be part of his eternal heaven that He has prepared for those who love His son, Jesus. Look for a church whose preacher emphasizes and preaches this message continually. A "feel good" sermon will not save your soul. Pastor's messages should confront us with the fact that we are worse off than we think , but God's grace is available to those that realize that they are in need of it. Romans 3:11 says "there is no one righteous, not even one. . ." Only when a person realizes they are condemned by God's moral law, do they start to thirst for righteousness and become truly interested in church.

Lastly when evaluating the pastor of the church try to find out how many weeks each year he preaches. Remember, most pastors chose their profession and knew going in, that "church" is held fifty-two weekends each year. Most secular jobs get two to four weeks of vacation as tenure increases. If the pastor is, by definition, a minister or shepherd having spiritual charge of a congregation, it is hard to do that effectively if the pastor is taking an inordinate amount of time off away from his responsibilities and duties as shepherd.

Question #3-Worship

We are made to worship. You may not have thought about this, but what are people doing screaming and cheering with other people at a football arena or concert. They are giving their praise and adoration to the sports team or the performers at the concert. That's worship. Worship is defined as the devotion accorded a deity, an idol or a sacred object or ardent admiration or adoration. When people eventually realize their team, an organization, their political party, their employer or their current church is primarily self-focused and interested only in perpetuating their organizational empire or life-style in which they have become accustomed, it becomes a sincere personal motive to find someone or some organization that is interested in you at the deepest level. When that realization hits home in a person's life is when the possible search for a church starts to enter the mind and heart of that person. And that's a good thing!

The first question to ask when seeking a church home is how sincere and authentic is the worship? Are they worshipping God? Many churches feel they need to put on a production in order to "entertain" people attending the church service. They use bright lights, hazers which fog up the stage and loud music to create a concert environment. Other churches offer a more subdued worship time. Both methods have their place and appeal differently to people. Praise and worship music can be led by one or more worship leaders depending upon desires of the church leadership. Some churches pay their worship leaders, musicians and singers to perform at these church services which by definition, is a job, where skills and talents are exchanged for money, while other churches utilize volunteer members with musical talents to lead the worship time. Regardless of the method, the motive for worship leaders should be to utilize and demonstrate quality and talent in leading people to a point of praise, inspiration, conviction and participation, where the minds and focus of the congregation are on the goodness of God, not the goodness of the musician or those on stage. As you are seeking a church home, ask yourself if the selected music and the person leading worship draws you closer to God where your focus is on Him and not those "on stage."

One purpose of church worship is to get you to continue your worship all week long. Music can have a great influence on the mind and heart of an individual. There are some churches who select and play either newly released Christian songs or select their own self-composed music for their weekly "worship experience." There are two problems with both of these approaches. First, hardly anyone initially knows the melody or the words of these songs and therefore they do not participate with singing or praise during the worship time. That's not worship. Secondly, if you don't know the words or the melody to a song, your mind is not going to carry that song throughout the week, which is what good worship music should do. By visiting a church for several weeks, one can tell if that church uses familiar or "seasoned" worship songs in which people can participate and recall throughout the week by singing or humming. That promotes worship all week long.

If you visit a church where you feel the focus is on the singer or the musicians instead of changing the heart condition of the people sitting in church, plus you have a hard time participating in the songs selected you may need to continue your search. Remember, worship is all about pleasing and adoring an audience of "one," that being God. It should not be an uncomfortable time or a non-participatory time.

Question #4- Bible Study

When shopping for a church, one of the fundamental questions that needs to be asked is what type of bible studies are offered by the church on a regular basis. It is good to be in church each Sunday, when possible, but the message that is given usually lasts between 20 and 30 minutes. If you looked at the time we either hear or read God's Word the same way we look at eating, you would be quickly mal-nourished if you only physically ate 30 minutes each week. So it goes, with feeding on God's

Word and thus the reason why actual bible study is so important to the spiritual feeding of someone looking for answers that aren't found in the secular world.

The best bible studies are those that actually utilize God's Word. There are many so-called bible studies offered by churches today that are really self-help studies that use a little scripture to support the central theme. There are also celebrities who offer up bible studies filled with their personal experiences to illustrate a possible biblical point. The purpose of these comments is not to disparage anyone, but the truth is that God's Word telling us about Jesus Christ's sacrifice in order to convict and save unrepentant souls is what any good bible study should have as its focus. Only God's Word will change lives.

Therefore, when shopping for a church, go to the churches website and look at what bible study events are being offered to see if they cause the student to get deeply into God's Word. Some so-called bible studies are thematic in nature or they offer up solutions to your life's problems, if you will just take the course or buy the book. The best bible studies are those that cause the student to get into God's Word, memorize scripture and create a new habit of daily bible study, which will only tend to draw the student into a closer relationship with God. Therefore, look for scheduled bible study events on the churches website that are spiritually focused.

Bible studies also offer people an avenue to meet people within the church and make friendships with like-minded people. Therefore, bible studies can be a good spawning ground to create on-going life groups.

Question #5- Accountability

Does the church have a group of non-compensated elders or deacons who govern, guide and who are responsible for the staff selection, employment of staff, disciplinary actions of staff (including the pastor) and overall church operations? Be careful! Some churches say they have a group of elders or deacons, but in reality, groups of elders or deacons can be just figure-heads. Also, it is important that the elders or deacons are comprised of an active voting group, to whom the pastor reports.

Some churches are operated as a monarchy, led by the pastor and possibly one main elder or advisor. Whenever the pastor does not have accountability from an active governing body ("group") of true mature believers you have a recipe for the spiritual, moral and operational foundations of that church to crumble. In order to get answers about accountability, request a meeting with one or more of the elders or deacons to gain insight on how the church is operated and what measures of accountability are in place or attend a new member class or orientation meeting. Additionally, question other people in the congregation to affirm what you heard from your elder or deacon meeting or in the orientation class.

Question #6- Favoritism

How many people on the church staff are related to each other? If a church allows people related to each other to hold paid positions in the church organization, this may lead to an inefficient or politically biased organization that is operated on feelings or power rather than upon experience or adopted, proven guiding principles based upon God's Word. However, having members of one family working for the church's ministry's is not always bad. After all, Jesus selected two sets of brothers as apostles to be part of the catalyst for the early church. Unfortunately, some churches have succumbed to the world's system regarding staff positions that result in who you know and not on experience. This sometimes results in the experienced people giving way to the internal political pressure that can exist because of nepotism or favoritism, causing decisions to be made that are not in the best long-term interest of that church. Without accountability in place (mentioned in Question

5 above) it is important for the person looking for a new church home to ask questions relating to favoritism or nepotism.

When shopping for a church, ask how many people from the same family are serving as church leaders or part of the staff. Ask what their former experience was before they became part of the church leadership.

Hopefully, if the church has a governing group of elders, they have vetted and approved each person on staff, to ensure that they have chosen the right experienced person for each position within the church, regardless of whether the chosen person is related to an existing church leader or staff member. Churches must be careful to avoid possible problems caused by 1) having married couples or children of church leaders in positions of leadership, which might give the perception that the church is a "family-business" or 2) dissension within the church when disciplinary actions or employment termination occurs. These situations, as well as others relating to favoritism, are likely to negatively affect the congregation to some degree.

Question #7-Financial Transparency

Before, finalizing your decision to be a part of a church, find out for yourself some key financial information that will help you decide whether to join that church. Again, by attending a new member orientation class, you may be able to get answers related to financial disclosure and the debt status of the church. Churches, as with buying a car, may look good on the outside but under the hood there may be a lot of reasons not to buy. Here are a couple of items that you need to know more about in order to satisfy yourself that the church is being operated in a financially sound manner.

- 1) **Disclosure** - Does the church have periodic business meetings that are open to the church membership where financial reports are discussed? If not, why? The church membership has a right to know how the tithes and offerings of the church are being spent. Who wants to blindly give money to an organization which does not exhibit accountability and transparency in their day-to-day operations?

If the church does not have a business meeting that is open to the public, then request from the church office a financial report showing an annual budget as well as a detail of the church expenses. If the church refuses to provide you with information such as this, do you really want your tithe and offerings going to an organization who will not tell you where the money is going? Why would that be? Although it is not required that a church disclose staff salaries, a church that is committed to financial transparency should have no problem offering at least salary ranges for each position and their methodology used in establishing staff salaries to their members or prospective members. Remember, the pastor and staff are servants to the flock.

- 2) **Debt** - Many churches today, like families, are over-extended, meaning that they have more debt than they are capable of paying off. Be wary of churches who have a large amount of debt or who are considering taking on more debt. Without business meetings where the members can ask questions, without financial transparency or disclosure and without accountability, the focus of the church can easily become 1) tending to the facility and the banker and 2) maintaining the salary levels of the pastor and staff, instead of tending to the many ministries available to a local church. So, ask what the church's debt amount is.

Summary

There are other areas within churches where questions need to be asked by its members and prospective members, but these seven questions are fundamental questions that deserve passing grades. When looking for a church home, it is wise for a prudent prospective member, as well as existing members to investigate and get satisfactory answers to these questions if they want to be part of a healthy, properly structured and managed church that is operated at all levels based upon the early church template established in chapter 2 of the Book of Acts. Remember, service to others is a work of the Holy Spirit and is shown by example. In church organizations, service starts at the top. In Matthew 20:28, Jesus said that "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

In summary, hopefully these seven questions will help you discern if the church is operating in a sound manner and where Jesus is the focus in the message, in the worship, in bible studies and in the ministries of the church and equally important, where everything is being operated with accountability.