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Finding a Church

How to Avoid Church-Shopping but Still Decide on a Church

“What’s the most I can get for my money?” Whether it’s a return on an investment or looking for the best deal on a product, this question is central to a consumer mindset. Not a bad question to avoid wasting resources, but it’s a terrible question to ask when searching for a church!

So what’s wrong with shopping for a church? Why not simply attend the church we like best?

Picking a church based on simple preference creates a decision-making process centered on us instead of on God. One very basic assumption about the church is that while we are part of the church, church is not primarily about us. When we gather as Christians, it is God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who is our focus.

The shopping metaphor also sets us up to view a church as an object or a product. But a church is not a thing—it is the particular Christian people, the community of believers with whom we are in relationship. Thus a better, though surprising, metaphor for figuring out which church to commit to would be dating!

At its best, dating is a process of discernment whereby two people, often with input from family and friends, try and figure out how committed they want to be to each other. While some people certainly approach relationships with self-centered wish-lists for the perfect match, we don’t often talk about “shopping for a boyfriend” or “choosing a wife.” The language of consumers thankfully hasn’t crossed over too much into how speak about committed relationships.

So if we don’t shop for a church, what do we do? What is a way to approach the decision-making process without being self-focused and acting like consumers? Discernment. What if we said to each other, when we’re in a transition time and without a church family, “I’m trying to discern a church” or “we’re still in the church discernment process.” Discernment has two important connotations. First, it is a

wisdom word. It suggests more than the simplistic “I like this” / “I don’t like that” responses. Rather, it suggests intentionally seeking depth of understanding before coming to a decision.

Discerning a church also suggests that listening is a part of the decision-making. We listen to what is being said and what isn’t being said when we worship at different churches. We listen to others who know us well. We listen to our own thoughts, responses, and reactions and, if applicable, to those of our families. Primarily, however, discerning a church involves listening to God. [[Read Discernment in Finding a Church](#)]

If we cut off a relationship every time our needs aren’t being met, or there is conflict, or something isn’t comfortable then it’s a good bet that we also won’t experience intimacy or grow in our emotional maturity.

God uses the hard work of perseverance, self-sacrifice, and daily dependence on His provision as the means by which we grow. Staying in an imperfect church (i.e. every church!) is about our growth in becoming more like Jesus.[1] When aspects of our community become uncomfortable and frustrating, God begins to form our motivations and desires to reflect his and away from focusing only on ours. We are also more willing to work toward a peaceful, effective, and healthy church if we’re committed to that particular Christian family for more than our individual benefit.

But not every relationship is a good one to really commit to, and neither should we commit to a church on a whim. We need discernment to understand the culture, beliefs, and priorities of a particular church. We need discernment to value compatibility without making it all about us. We need discernment when we listen for God’s direction so we don’t simply hear our own preferences.

If we begin at a church because we sense God drawing us there, we’ll be more likely to stick around to see why He has us there! Let’s get the most for our wisdom and the biggest bang for our discernment. Let’s drop the shopping and go worship with fellow Christians until God draws us to a particular church family.