



**SHOW UP!
(Sermon)**

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Introduction

It has been said that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. When it comes to retaining and reclaiming church members, this is particularly true. Today we'll examine one of the simplest, most effective preventative measures that every church member can do to not only remain connected to the body of Christ personally but to have a powerful influence on others to do the same. This radical preventative measure? Show up and participate in everything that happens in your local church!

Jesus and His Local Church

With His public ministry only recently begun, the Bible records how Jesus made a stop through His hometown. "So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read" (Luke 4:16).

Notice carefully that Luke doesn't refer to Nazareth merely as Christ's "hometown" or "where He was from," but more specifically as the place "where He had been brought up"—a nod to the deliberate development of good habits by Jesus' parents during His childhood and youth. And it is in the context of that upbringing that we are then told how Jesus "went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read" because it was "His custom." Clearly, Joseph and Mary had established in Jesus the habit of regular attendance and participation in the local church from the earliest age.

Similarly, we have been counseled how, "Fathers and mothers should make it a rule that their children attend public worship on the Sabbath, and should enforce the rule by their own example.... All who have taken the baptismal vow have solemnly consecrated themselves to the service of God; they are under covenant obligation to place themselves and their children where they may obtain all possible incentives and encouragement in the Christian life" (*Child Guidance*, 530).

As the story of Christ's hometown Sabbath continues, another vital lesson for us becomes clear: Jesus didn't go to church each Sabbath because the program was interesting or because everyone was nice to Him. "So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff" (Luke 4:28, 29).

Christ's consistent attendance and participation in the local synagogue puts to shame many of the objections to church attendance often heard today like "the service is boring" or "the church members aren't very loving." While every local congregation should be a warm, caring, and welcoming family and every worship service should be "intensely interesting" (see *Christian Service*, p. 211), even if it sometimes falls short of these ideals, you should still show up and take part! Whatever frustration you encounter at church, remember that they literally tried to kill Jesus and yet He kept going to church on Sabbath!

New Believers After Pentecost

Another helpful glimpse into the crucial role of attendance at church functions is seen in the example of the believers after the Day of Pentecost. When the church family swelled by several thousand in a single day, Scripture emphasizes how these converts viewed their experience not merely as a singular, powerful event, but as the beginning of a whole new life together.

Of the many lessons to draw from the experience of Pentecost, two stand out for our purposes today. First, these converts didn't just join Christ in a spiritual sense, they joined the body of Christ, the church, in a practical sense. We see this in Acts 2:41 when the newly-baptized believers "were added unto *them*" and again in Acts 2:47 as "the Lord added to *the church* daily those who were being saved."

The Bible goes on to explain how "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). Converted by the present-truth message proclaimed by the Apostle Peter in the power of the Holy Spirit, Scripture records how these new believers studied together, ate together, prayed together, and ministered to members' needs together.

Finally, we are told that, "continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:46-47). These devoted church members could be found in the temple and in each others' homes "daily," not just weekly, revealing that they viewed church life as involving far more than Sabbath worship services. And the result was a growing church.

What services, ministries, or activities of your local church would be better if more people attended? What things would be more appealing for both members and visitors alike if more people just showed up? Imagine a prayer meeting, Sabbath School mission program, or worship service that was packed with people. Even if they didn't have an up-front role or hold a designated office, their presence alone would automatically improve the program. Indeed, "those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary" (1 Corinthians 12:22).

True Involvement

The reason that attendance is so important in the life of the local church is because attendance demonstrates what you value. It reveals what is truly important to you, what you do just because you want to. When you're interested in someone romantically you purposefully look

for ways to be together more than you normally would with just anybody else. Your family and friends would start whispering, “Looks like they’re getting involved!” Without any public declaration on your part, people would recognize your romantic involvement simply by your consistent association.

The same principle applies to the church. For example, we are told how “A prayer meeting will always tell the true interest of the church members in spiritual and eternal things. The prayer meeting is as the pulse to the body; it denotes the true spiritual condition of the church. A lifeless, backslidden church has no relish for the prayer meetings” (*Pastoral Ministry*, p. 183).

We hear a great deal these days about “Total Member Involvement,” a wonderful General Conference initiative to encourage every Seventh-day Adventist to be active in the life and work of the church. Yet if asked whether they are involved with their local church, most would likely answer based primarily on whether they held a particular office or responsibility: “Yes, I’m a Sabbath School teacher” or “Yes, I’m a deacon.” And while a church office is one evidence of involvement, if you are only at church when you’re required to be as a fulfillment of a particular duty or scheduled service, you’re still not genuinely involved. Involvement is seen first and foremost in just being around whenever things are happening.

Stirring the Church

The Apostle Paul recognized the power of consistent attendance to move the church forward. In his letter to the Hebrews, we are instructed to “consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24, 25). In this quintessential attendance passage, we find a great deal of practical counsel for the church today.

First, note that when it comes to church attendance, our primary consideration should be for “one another.” While we should always expect to receive a blessing from the services and functions of the local church, our highest priority is to *be* a blessing to others!

“Before leaving home, go to God in secret prayer.... With your heart softened by the love of Jesus, go to the meeting, feeling that you are personally responsible for its success. If but few attend, you should feel under double responsibility. You are in the service of God, and should do what you can with your talent, tact, and skill to make His worship interesting” (*Pastoral Ministry*, p. 184).

Second, Paul understood that “love and good works” require effort to “stir up.” A good illustration of this principle is peanut butter. Though there may be countless brands, there are really only two types of peanut butter: healthy and unhealthy—and you can tell the difference easily. If every label on the peanut butter jars in the supermarket were removed, you could still spot the healthy peanut butter because it separates into a block of concentrated paste at the bottom and a layer of oil on top. Both of those are unappetizing on their own, but when you stir them together, it’s delicious! Like healthy peanut butter, a church’s “love and good works” need to be stirred up by “not forsaking the assembling” of ourselves together. Put simply, one of the

primary ways the Bible gives us to keep our church families healthy and active is to show up to everything that happens!

Finally, Paul's instruction applies particularly to those of us living in the last days, when we "see the Day approaching," nearer than ever before. If any denomination of Christians steadfastly adheres to this biblical truth by faithfully practicing the ministry of attendance, it should be Seventh-day Adventists!

Where Your Treasure Is

There are, of course, some legitimate reasons not to attend the functions of the local church. You may have a communicable illness or some other infirmity that leaves you homebound. You may be so geographically isolated that it is not just inconvenient, but actually impossible for you to enjoy church life with fellow believers. But circumstances such as these should be regarded as exceptions and not the rule. Yet too many Adventists excuse not coming to church by saying things like, "I get as much blessing from being alone in the woods or at the lake as I do from being in church" or "I get my church through my favorite media ministry." And while there's nothing wrong with spending time in nature, and we praise the Lord for the technological advances that allow the Third Angel's Message to be spread around the world, none of these things can replace the special bond developed by personally joining your church family in worship and service.

Jesus explained that "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). By this He meant that what you choose to devote yourself to—your time, energy, and your resources—you will come to love. Let us each commit to investing ourselves in the services, activities, and ministries of the local church that we may "stir up love and good works." By God's grace, let us retain not only our own love for the Lord and His cause, but let us influence others to stay faithful and active until Jesus returns.