



**RECLAIMING LOST MEMBERS:  
HOW TO BECOME A "VELCRO® CHURCH"  
(Sermon)**

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**Text:** *John 13:35* – “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another” (NIV).

The story is told of an older couple who late one stormy night walked into the lobby of a hotel and requested a room for the night. “I’m sorry,” said the clerk, “but all the rooms are taken.”

The couple looked crestfallen. “My wife is sick, and we’ve tried the other hotels in town but they’re all full,” the man said as he and his wife turned to go.

“Wait!” said the young clerk, “I can’t send you back out on a night like this! We don’t have any rooms left, but you can have my room. I can sleep in one of the chairs out here.” He led the tired couple to his private room and settled them there for the night.

The next morning, as the couple was checking out, the man said to the clerk, “You have been so kind to us; it’s rare to find people like you. One day I’ll build the best hotel in America for you to manage.”

They all had a good laugh, and the couple left. Two years passed, and one day the clerk received a letter from this man. It held a round-trip ticket to New York City, and the man was inviting him to be the manager of his new hotel. The man’s name was John Astor, and he had just built the Waldorf-Astoria, the grandest hotel in America.

The clerk, whose name was George Boldt, not only managed this grand hotel for 40 years, but became a famous hotel owner himself. All as a result of the kindness shown to strangers.

The example of George Bolt can be repeated many times in the life of the Christian. Kindness is the result of something that God works in each heart through His Holy Spirit. When we practice courtesy, kindness, and love in a world where people often struggle in quiet despair, we become an oasis to those around us.

It is God’s purpose that His church be a center of kindness and love, where people can feel welcome and learn to understand God’s love for them and His plan for their lives.

We often hear people say, “My church is cold and unfriendly.” But who is our

church? Our church is us. My church is me. You and I determine what our church will be. If we want our church to be friendly and loving, then we must be friendly and loving.

Most of us are familiar with something called Velcro®. Even if you don't know it by name, you have probably used it at some point. It's the sticky stuff that is used to hold things together. Velcro® is used because it sticks. Wouldn't it be wonderful if our church was a "Velcro® church," where all who came were drawn to stick around?

What makes some churches so successful at reclaiming and retaining members, while others languish and slowly die?

Studies have shown that for a person to remain in a church, they need to know and have a friendship with at least five to seven people. Less than that, and people aren't likely to stay. Studies show that people may come to a particular church for reasons that may surprise you:

1. The church is near their home.
2. The church has a church school.
3. The church may boast a great music program or choir.
4. There may be food and sociability every week.
5. The church has great sermon presentations (this is not the top priority!).

Whatever the reason may be, once people come to our church, if they don't feel they belong, or if they don't feel they make a difference, they won't stay for long.

There are also reasons why people leave the church, and they're not what you might think, either:

1. They had a disagreement with someone.
2. They missed a few Sabbaths and no one noticed.
3. They felt pressured to take on a responsibility they did not want to take.

Interestingly enough, seldom does someone leave the church for doctrinal reasons. That would seem to be the logical conclusion, but it seldom ever is. It is usually a much more banal reason.

What can we do to make our church a "Velcro® church?"

- 1. Warmly welcome visitors and returning members, and make them feel that we want them to stay.**

There may be visitors or church members facing struggles with health concerns, family problems, job pressures, and personal issues. How wonderful if they could receive a word of encouragement!

**Quote:** "Many, many, have fainted and become discouraged in the great struggle of life, when one word of kindly cheer would have strengthened them to overcome. Never should we pass by one suffering soul without seeking to impart

to him of the comfort wherewith we are comforted of God” (*Desire of Ages*, p. 504).

## **2. Don’t judge or frown on returning members for having been away.**

Jesus is our example in this. People felt attracted to him. Multitudes followed him, because his life contrasted with the cold censure of the Pharisees.

**Quote:** “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me’” (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 143).

One day Jesus will come again, this time as a Judge. But on his first coming, He came to save the world, and we are to do the same—lead people to the Savior. It is not our job to judge them.

**John 3:17** – “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

**Quote:** “All who are to be saints in heaven will first be saints upon the earth. They will not...put forth their finger in condemnation and oppression; but they will follow the Light of life, diffuse light, comfort, hope, and courage to the very ones who need help, and not censure and reproach” (*Review and Herald*, Aug. 4, 1891).

## **3. Involve new and returning members as soon as possible.**

What does this mean? Returning members should not be regarded as visitors week after week. Find out if there is something they enjoy doing, and ask them to do it. Undue pressure may drive them away, which is why it’s important to get to know them first and find out what they like to do. It may be they secretly wish they could participate in some activity.

Too often, the same people participate over and over again, and there is no chance for new leadership or inclusion. We should make sure this is not happening in our churches.

## **4. A working church is a vibrant church.**

A working church is an attractive church, and activity attracts others to join in.

**Quote:** “If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice. Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of

prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit” (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 144).

**Quote:** “Christ has identified His interest with that of suffering humanity; and while He is neglected in the person of His afflicted ones, all our assemblies, all our appointed meetings, all the machinery that is set in operation to advance the cause of God, will be of little avail. ‘These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone’ (Luke 11:42)” (*Review and Herald*, Aug. 4, 1891).

## **5. Be a praying church.**

Just before Jesus left His disciples and rose in a cloud back to Heaven, He encouraged them with the promise of the Holy Spirit. This promise belongs to us, but is rarely presented or spoken about, often mentioned as something that will be given to us at the end of time. We must pray for the Holy Spirit like the most coveted of all gifts.

**Quote:** “The promise of the Holy Spirit is casually brought into our discourses, is incidentally touched upon, and that is all. Prophecies have been dwelt upon, doctrines have been expounded; but that which is essential to the church in order that they may grow in spiritual strength and efficiency, in order that the preaching may carry conviction with it, and the souls be converted to God, has been largely left out of ministerial effort” (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 174).

A praying church will be a spirit-filled church. And who can resist a church like that?

**2 Corinthians 2:15** – “*For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.*”

There are things that produce an unpleasant aroma in the church and drive people away: criticism, harshness, pride, etc. But how wonderful when there is a pleasing aroma in our church: kindness, graciousness, praise, sharing, and love.

## **6. Love one another.**

**Quote:** “If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 189).

We can’t of ourselves, love those around us, but we can ask God to grant us His Spirit so that we can bear the fruits.

**Galatians 5:22** – “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*”

**ILLUSTRATION:** Many years ago, a missionary was sent to work with a

primitive tribe in one of the Pacific islands. He worked tirelessly on their behalf and the people learned to love him. But sadly, after a time, he died of a tropical disease. Some years passed, and another missionary was sent. He began talking to the people about Jesus and what Jesus did. The natives said, “Yes, we knew him, he was here with us. Come, we’ll show you his tomb.” And they took him to the missionary’s grave.

Do others see Jesus in us? Do we reflect Jesus in our church, in our work, at school, or at home? When we spend time with Him, we begin to reflect Him. A change begins to occur in us, and it will change our church.

When Moses came down from the mountain, his face shone because He had been with God. We are promised that this will happen again:

**Daniel 12:3** – *“Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.”*

Just before Jesus returns, there will be a great awakening in our church. I long for that day, when God’s Spirit will be poured out in full measure, and God’s church will be a triumphant church:

**Quote:** “Servants of God, with their faces lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from heaven. By thousands of voices, all over the earth, the warning will be given. Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers. Satan also works, with lying wonders, even bringing down fire from heaven in the sight of men. Revelation 13:13. Thus the inhabitants of the earth will be brought to take their stand” (*Great Controversy*, p. 612).

What a time that will be, when we as a church can light up the world with the knowledge of truth and with the character of Jesus! We won’t be struggling to grow and retain our membership. People will be coming in droves! We will truly be a “Velcro® church!”

The power that the Holy Spirit will provide to God’s church will be so great that the whole world will be illuminated by its splendor.

**Revelation 18:1** – *“After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor.”*

**Quote:** “Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of the Savior shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim His own. It is the privilege of every Christian, not only to look for, but to hasten, the coming of our Lord. Were all who profess His name bearing fruit to His glory, how quickly the whole world would be sown with the seed of the gospel! Quickly the last great harvest would be ripened, and Christ would come” (*Maranatha*, p. 113).

Let us pray for that day. And let that day start today, with you and with me.

Our acts of kindness may not grant us a position at the Waldorf-Astoria, as it did for George Boldt, but it will give us something much, much greater—lives changed for eternity, and an eternal home with Jesus.

***John 13:35*** – “*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.*”

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