



# BANNER of *Love* MINISTRIES

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## 10 Signs You've Found a Good Church

### 1. The church model is backed by scripture, love, and the Spirit of God.

No church is perfect. Every church is different. This is because they are daily run by men and women who are different, unique and flawed. There are loads of different denominations, networks, streams, and structures. Navigating all these can be overwhelming. Some churches are going to do things differently, and maybe even practice things you do not like or believe. But who says you are right either?

This is why our filter for evaluating a church model, belief, or practice should be: is it scriptural, done in love, and from the Spirit of God? We can be wrong. God may want to challenge our belief or practice of something. We can not be so rigid in our thinking that we miss something that God is doing. Remember Peter and the vision of the sheet of unclean animals? Remember Paul and his revelation of Jesus whom he was persecuting? Let's not rebuke something God is doing. But let's not be so openminded that we lose the Truth of God. Remember the men of Berea, who,

*...received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men. Acts 17:11-12*

They were challenged by what they saw, but took the time to search the scriptures to see if it was true before they discarded it. Too many today are church shopping to find a place that suits their understanding of God, whether it is scriptural or not. Scripture is to be our plumb line for evaluating if something is from God, not our feelings or traditions.

*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17*

It is your job as a believer to evaluate what you partake of. No leader or ministry can do that for you. You will answer before God one day for what you did and did not do. So before you jump into a church because you like it (or dismiss a church because you didn't like what you heard) evaluate, "Is it scriptural, done in love, and from the Spirit of God?" If you find yourself in a church whose goal is having their practice backed up in the entirety of scripture — regardless of your opinion — you have found a good church.

### 2. They teach the Bible – A LOT.

In ministering in different countries we are constantly asked what kind of churches people should go to in their area. People tend to believe that if they find a church from a certain denomination, network, or leader that they will be safe. Our common answer is simply, "Find a church that has no problem publicly reading the entire Bible cover-to-cover." Denominations, networks, and leaders will vary from place to place, and their message can change — the word of God does not. The Apostle Paul encouraged Timothy,

*Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery. Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.* 1 Timothy 4:13-16

There are more signs of a good church than just this, but if you can't find a church with everything, at least find a church with a core value for solid Bible teaching. This is the criteria by which all the others are supported and appraised. As Paul said, this *ensures salvation* for leaders and those whom they teach. The Bible will convict of sin, correct false doctrine, lead us to the love of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit, and teach us the signs of Christ's second coming and how to be saved from the coming wrath. A church where the Bible is taught without timidity is a church where there is always hope and room for God to work.

### **3. The Holy Spirit is Lord of the church, and not just a teaching or a gift.**

We know that God the Father made Jesus as head over the church, but what about the Holy Spirit? Is He not one with God the Father and the Son? What, then, is His role in the church?

Jesus said it was for our benefit that He go to the Father, so that the Holy Spirit would come to convict us regarding sin, righteousness, and judgment, as well as disclose the things of God's heart (John 16:5-15). I cannot imagine the ministry of the church without the Holy Spirit's conviction and disclosing of these things.

Paul was concerned when he met disciples in Ephesus who hadn't received or even heard of the baptism of the Holy Spirit — much like believers today. He then made sure they were baptized into Jesus and the Holy Spirit, resulting in an outward manifestation of speaking in tongues and prophesying (Acts 19:1-6). In this story, it is emphasized that receiving the Holy Spirit is of equal importance to receiving Christ. This is because they are one and equal parts in the Godhead.

The Lordship, power, and presence of the Holy Spirit in the church is all over the scriptures. Not just as a doctrine, teaching, or gifts, but in His personage. He is the Spirit of unity, and we cannot be made one body without Him. The scriptures constantly challenge us, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all," (2 Corinthians 13:14) and, "The disciples were *continually filled* with joy and with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 13:52). Therefore the Holy Spirit should be an active, expected, and welcomed part of all our meetings and interactions as the church of Jesus. As Lord of the church, He should not be limited or held captive to a special meeting or teaching.

As a result of Him being central and active in the church we will see signs, manifestations, and demonstrations of His power and Lordship. As we see in the book of Acts, "Having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both *see and hear.*" (Acts 2:33). The words see and hear imply that you will recognize visibly and audibly that the Holy Spirit is active in the church. If this describes your meetings and the lifestyle of the leadership and believers around you, you have found a good church.

### **4. The teaching stings a bit. You're constantly challenged and convicted in love.**

A good pastor friend of ours says, "I'm not doing my job if it doesn't sting a little bit." The reality is that the "good news" of Jesus Christ is incredibly controversial and convicting. How many times does it say in the gospels that upon hearing the words of Jesus they sought to kill him, gnashed their teeth at him, or went away with heavy hearts? It's the deeply stirring messages that make you a little angry that are really needed. If you're always made to feel good — somebody is selling something. That's why we'd encourage you to find a church that weekly challenges and convicts you. Why? Because it means they actually care more about helping you than pleasing you. That's real love. In the words of the Apostle Paul,

*For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it—for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while— I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. 2 Corinthians 7:8-10*

Find a church with leadership that loves you enough to say the hard stuff. Believe me, you want a pastor who is more concerned with the thought of you losing your eternal soul than the thought of losing you as a church member along with your tithe check.

## **5. The leaders walk in loving authority.**

A sign of a great church is strong, loving authority. Yet many people avoid these churches as they struggle with the idea of someone walking in authority over them. (In our [past article](#) we discussed how to identify and flee from abusive authority. If you have not yet [read that, please do so now before continuing.](#)) It would be very unfortunate to miss out on an amazing church because of a personal issue and need for healing. In response to abuses of authority, many churches now overreact and model more of a buddy, peer-style leadership. Please, do not settle for this. In our experience, this style of leadership breeds hurt, prideful, and uncorrectable believers. Find a church that will go out of its way to see that you heal, instead of appeasing your hurt. One of the best ways we know to heal the pain of authority issues is to see the right ones modeled in your life.

The model of church leadership in the scriptures is one of loving authority. The writer of Hebrews tells us,

*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. Hebrews 13:17*

It is shown here that godly leadership can be obeyed and submitted to out of trust and submission to God, knowing that the leaders are watching out for you. It's a part of their job. Authority is the means by which they watch out for you. Leaders cannot actually take care of you if they are not given a place of authority in your life. So, as the flock in need of care, believers are told to submit to them so the proper protection and help can be given.

Paul tells Timothy, and leaders like him, to, "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." (2 Timothy 4:2) In the book of Acts, Paul mentions that, "Night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears." (Acts 20:31) These verses, and many more like them, give us the example of godly, loving authority. If you've found a church where the leaders are not afraid to correct you, tell you when you're wrong, warn you of error, and encourage you to do the right thing over and over again with love, patience, and tears... you've found a great church!

## **6. The church has a great model of pastoral care.**

One of the most crucial, yet often neglected, parts of a healthy church is quality pastoral care. The word pastor simply means shepherd. As an elder, Peter charges fellow elders,

*Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 1 Peter 5:2-3*

By definition, pastors must watch over and care for the body of Christ. Not only that but, they are to serve the body and walk in an exemplary life before their congregation. This process is time consuming and cannot be simply performed from behind a pulpit. It requires a closeness with individuals within the congregation. Pastors need to be accessible and open. They should know

your name and have your phone number. It should not be uncommon to share meals with them and be invited into their home and family. It's in this closeness that they can show themselves as examples to the flock in regards to walking with God, family life, and marriage. It's one thing to hear these areas taught, it's another to see it modeled in a pastor's life. In this closeness pastors will be able to know you in a more personal way and identify your hurts, struggles, and areas for needed accountability. In this way, you will have the support and personal care to overcome and grow spiritually — not just in knowledge, but in action. If you've found a church with this kind of pastoral example, you've found a place to call home. If you're not used to being known by people in authority, this may feel uncomfortable and it will take you time to adjust. But, we'd encourage you to stick in there as these close and personal bonds will be for your healing. Soon you will come to find great comfort in being known and cared for by the family of God.

## **7. The goal of church leadership is to make and equip mature disciples of Christ.**

*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Ephesians 4:11-16*

Let's admit it. There are a lot of apostles out there, and not a lot of mature, equipped saints. According to this passage of scripture, it shouldn't be this way. The purpose of leadership and the church (which was instituted by Christ who is the head) is to equip believers and foster them into maturity and unity of *the faith* until Jesus comes. This is more involved than growing church numbers or busying one's self with building projects, dinners, and outreach programs. This means actually teaching, discipling, equipping, and warning believers to the point that they grow into one unified body that looks like Christ and are mature enough to recognize and avoid pitfalls. A leader's job is not serving you and equipping you to grow into your purpose and destiny. A godly leader's number one priority should be seeing you grow into a mature believer who knows the scriptures and knows what wolves look and sound like. This means they will pursue, challenge, and correct you in love to make sure you are walking in these things. As well as all this, they will make sure you are integrated and serving in maturity within the local body. If you've found a church where the leaders will do whatever it takes to see you corporately come into the fullness of Christ and *the faith*, you've found a good church.

## **8. There are many members doing their part.**

In the traditional church days we saw the model that *pastors do church, while the congregation receives and then goes home*. Unfortunately, that imprinting is just not scriptural. Pastors cannot, and should not, do it all.

*For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:12*

*Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. 1 Corinthians 12:27*

Paul goes on in these passages to explain the vast number of abilities and roles of each member of the body, and that we all come together to form the church, of which Christ is the head. Pastors are called as shepherds who keep watch and care over the spiritual health of the body. They, as leaders, are part of a greater whole. A sign of scriptural and thoughtful leadership is a vibrant church where each of the many members are encouraged to serve through their spiritual gifting out of love for Christ. If you've found a church like that — don't sit back — you're in a great place to engage and grow. Talk with your pastors about their model, rules, and requirements for

service in the church. Submit to them in love and reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21-33) and find a way to serve the body.

### **9. Of the many members, someone is in charge.**

As we've already written, a healthy vibrant church has many members all serving together in the body. All the daily responsibility and work should not be placed on one person. That being said, of all the many members and parts of the body, one person needs to be the boss. As we were commissioned in leadership by our pastors, "Run your church like you run your family," there are many members in the family, but "there can only be one Dad and Mom."

*I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 1 Corinthians 4:14-15*

Today, fatherlessness is the norm — and we're not just talking *in the world*. Members of churches are operating in an orphan spirit within the family of God, because few have stepped into that spiritual father role in the church. Boards of elders and team leadership models, mega-pastors and "apostles" — all have replaced *Dad*, and as a result, inconsistency abounds and people fall through the cracks. Issues and disagreements will come about in the body, and even between leaders. Having a central leader who has the final say will ensure consistency and stability in the body. In keeping this model of leadership we honor God who modeled it for us by placing Christ as head of the church (Ephesians 5:23).

### **10. The church is the center of people's social & family lives.**

A great signpost of a church's health is the congregation itself. A lot of things in a church can be faked and manufactured, but one thing you cannot imitate is genuine relationship. One of the hallmark signs of this is when the center of congregant life is the church.

*They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47*

In Acts we see that church life was the center of the believer's daily life. They ate, slept, and breathed assembling together. Now, we're not talking playing golf with buddies from church, joining a book club with your girlfriends from church, or attending a playgroup with other young families from church. We're talking about them daily getting together and talking about the Lord, praying together, reading the scriptures, and discussing the sermons and teachings with one another — children and families included. It wasn't just for the "holy Joe's." Church life is what the congregation wanted to be a part of all the time.

If you've found a church where the people can't get enough, and in their loving, genuine excitement they can't help but draw you into that place of relationship... you've found a great church!