

CHAPTER

2

church



Christian Foundation Series
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Isn't it interesting, that step two really shows if you're serious about step one. . .

If step one is deciding to become a soldier, step two is enrolling in the army.

If step one is deciding to sky dive, step two is putting on the parachute and getting on the plane.

If step one is deciding to lose weight, step two is joining the gym and choosing the carrot instead of the

carrot cake . . . (gasp).

If step one is saying 'Yes' to marrying your man, step two is saying 'I do' on the wedding day.

(I know all the wedding planners are now muttering about all the steps in between on that example, but at the risk of upsetting Mrs. Marriage inc. you get the point)

If step one is intention, step 2 is follow through . . . and as I'm sure you'd agree there's too often a fall out that happens between those two steps in our lives.

If step one is the decision, step two is doing something about it.

So what's step two for our Christian faith? After making our decision to believe in Jesus . . . what's the proverbial army, plane, gym and place to say 'I do' ?

Glad you asked . . .

Step 2 is church.

Church . . . ?

Yep . . . Church.

The word immediately brings to mind images of steeples, stained glass windows, big wooden crosses and pipe organs, doesn't it? Or, if you've experienced a more modern church, perhaps the word brings to mind a blaring rock band (also known as 'Weapons of Mass Destruction' to the elderly), impressive multimedia projectors, good coffee at the after service café, and those friendly door greeters who are always trying to hug you (hello . . . personal space please!).

Whatever your image, if it mainly consists of things or a building, or stuff . . . you've got a different picture

than God. You see, when God thinks of church, he doesn't think of the place that you go, he thinks of the people that go there. He doesn't think of the things that you do, he thinks of the ones that do it. When God says, 'church,' he's not talking about a building . . . he's talking about people.

Now that you're a believer, a Christ-follower, a person who's made a decision; the next step for you is to join the ever growing number of people who have made that same decision as you. To join a church. We all know there's strength in numbers, there's synergy when our gifts and talents are combined; and we all need somebody to do life with, to learn from, to lean on and to give to. We join church so that it can be an answer to us, but also so that we can become an answer to it.

Here's some of the things that the bible says about church:

The Church is very important to Jesus, he paid the ultimate price for it.

decision

Keep watch [in the] . . . church of God, which he (Jesus) bought with his own blood.

Acts 20:28

As a member of the Church, you are a part of something that Jesus will personally build and protect.

I will build my church, and the gates of Hades (Hell) will not overcome it.

Matthew 16:18b

Jesus loves the church and is constantly working on making it more righteous and beautiful.

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her . . . to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Ephesians 5:25

As a member of the church, you are a part of a group that can help to change to world around it

On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the (people in their community).

Acts 14:27

There are 'good things' to be found in church:

Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts! We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple.

Psalms 65:4

Church is wonderful. Church is a necessity for our spiritual development. Church is a group of believers with whom we can link arms and make a positive difference. Church is God's plan advancing in the earth.

But, a warning . . .

Church is NOT perfect. God is perfect, Jesus is perfect, but not church. Why?

Because church is people. We are all God's 'work in progress', we are all half-painted canvases, we are all seven chapters into a twenty-three chapter story. Our hearts and attitudes swing from triumph to tragedy depending on the day; we're hopeful, but also hurt; we're faith-filled, but also foolish; we're joyful about the present, but a little jumpy about our past. The church consists of puzzling, broken, beautiful, redeemed humans . . . just like you. So PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE, don't make the mistake of going into church expecting to never get hurt or disappointed. People will be your greatest pleasure in life, but also your greatest pain, and it's no different in church. So now you know. Fore-warned, is fore-armed. Does that mean that we don't take this step? Not at all. On the contrary, it means that we take the step even more deliberately. Step 2 should not be taken cautiously or gingerly. This step needs to be made with purpose and determination. In fact, the bible describes the way that we should approach step 2. Rather than 'attending,' 'visiting,' or 'checking out' church, we should approach it like a tree looking for a place to put down its roots:

The righteous will flourish like a tree, planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God.

Psalm 92:12-13

Being planted . . . that sounds a lot more permanent doesn't it? That sounds like, 'I'm in for keeps, I'm going to make this work, no matter what comes my way I'm staying here.' And that's PRECISELY the kind of attitude we should approach church with. Once we've found the right church, the right group of believers, we should make like a tree . . . and get planted. Because, being planted in church is step 2, the best long term decision that you can make for your Christian walk. None of the other steps after this will last if this step isn't taken first, and even the step before this will be shaky at best until this step is taken. Like we said at the beginning, step 2 really shows if you're serious about step 1 . . .

So, take the step, your future depends on it. Join a church. If you haven't found one yet, look for a church that feels like home, pray about it and wait for the sense of 'Yes' on the inside.

decision

Then, go out of your way to make five friends in your first five months, attend consistently and frequently, don't let ANYTHING get in the way of your being planted. Love, forgive, encourage, be-friend, belong. You can do it, heaven's cheering you on, and so are we.

Make like a tree . . . and get planted.

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

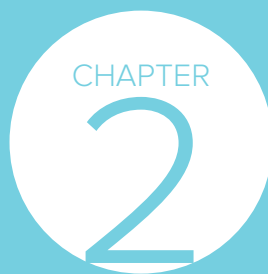
Hebrews 10:25



TO UNMISTAKABLY
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WORLD FOR GOOD
AND FOR **GOD**



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what's next

