

Hello Orange Cove Church Family & Friends of Orange Cove,

**Pastor's Weekly Letter: January 14, 2016 – "Maximizing Church"**

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Happy , Thursday, January 12, 2016. It was good to see our church family together this past Sabbath. I praise God for showing up amongst us once again. Please pray for God to speak to each of us through this new sermon series, "Follow Me."

**This Week's Devotional – "Maximizing Church"**

This past Sabbath, during the morning message, I told the church how I used to slip into the back pew of the church I used to attend, Sabbath after Sabbath. Even though I wasn't living according to God's will during the week, I somehow felt that I needed to go to church on Sabbath. Something compelled me to show up at church in time for the intercessory prayer. I'd kneel down and feel a sense of relief that I had attended church on that day. In later years, I contemplated as to what showing up for church was all about. Was I showing up to soothe my conscience, to ease some of the guilt I was feeling, or to sincerely learn more about God and seek to hear from Him?

How can you and I gain the maximum benefit from church attendance? Is church attendance important to our spiritual growth and maturation? Hebrews 10:25 teaches . . . *"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."* There is no doubt about whether attending church and being exhorted by other believers is an essential part of being a believer in Jesus Christ. To gain the most benefit from church attendance, the exhortation we receive comes to us in 2 forms:

1. **In a Small Group Setting** - During the lesson study or bible study time, small groups meet where individuals share their insights on a given topic within the bible. Those who are part of the small group are exhorted by the Word of God spoken amongst the group and by the personal testimonies shared. It's a time when questions can be asked, difficult aspects discussed and individuals can find the answers they need.
2. **In a Personal Setting** – During the worship service, all distractions are put aside and individuals are invited to focus on what God is saying to them personally. There is no discussion or questions raised within a group setting. This is the time when each of us is invited to "be still and know that I am God," Psalms 46:10. If every person in the worship service will open themselves up to listening to God speak, they will hear God speak to them, whether it's during the singing, the quiet prayer time or when the Word of God is preached.

The book of Acts chapter 2 verses 46, 47 gives beautiful accounts of how both of these settings blessed the believers. *"So 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, <sup>47</sup>praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.* Believers participating in both of these settings, the small groups and the personal settings, experienced gladness, simplicity of heart, praise for God and favor with all the people. Due to this culture of spiritual growth and maturation, God was able to send many new converts who would be safe and cared for by those who were more mature spiritually.

Are you and I gaining maximum benefit from our church attendance? Or, like I used to do, are most of us slipping in and out of church to soothe our consciences and ease our guilt? God always fulfills the promise He made in Matthew 5:5 that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will be filled. When the gentiles in Cornelius' household listened intently to Peter preaching the gospel to them, the Holy Spirit fell on them all. Acts 10:44. It is truly a mystery why God speaks through a sinful human being, but He does. It is amazing how a Pastor, elder, or anointed church member can preach the Word of God to a congregation and many people in the congregation will hear something completely different—something God needed them to hear which specifically applies to their lives.

So, once again, we ask the question: Are you and I gaining the maximum benefit from our church attendance? We know that the major portion of our spiritual growth and maturation comes from the time we spend alone with God before our day starts. When we spend time alone with God before our day starts, we have a greater receptivity to receiving additional exhortations from God's Word being discussed in a group and preached during the worship service. Nevertheless, God didn't ordain for either of these, our personal time alone with Him before our day starts or the assembling of ourselves with fellow believers, to be disconnected from each other. They work together to feed and strengthen us in our walk with God.

May you and I never view church attendance as a chore or a duty we perform to soothe our conscience or ease our guilt. May we prayerfully and expectantly wait on God to speak to us in both of the settings He ordained for us. May we make ourselves available for God to exhort others through us and may we be open to receive exhortations from others and through His spoken Word. May church attendance be synonymous with encountering God, in a group and personally.

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