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STARTING YOUR SEARCH FOR A CHURCH

The best searches for a church are a search for God, and the churches which are worthiest of discovery are those which us point to him.

God intends the search for him and the search for a church community to join, to go hand-in-hand. The words of the wedding ceremony are *apropos*: “What God has joined together, let no man put asunder.” The search for God without openness to search for a church is insincere, for God makes himself known through his Word (the Bible) amid the company of his people. The search for a church without the search for God, mistakes the chief purpose of church: the worship and service of God.

Given this, we should not be surprised that a search for a church teaches us some important truths about the God whom we seek:

First truth: Both existed before your search began.

Even the newest church you encounter will have predated your first contact with her. Likewise, the God you reach out to has long predated your search, your life even. Since he is eternal he’s been around through all the days and years of your disinterest in him (ours too), as well as through the fledgling moments of your curiosity and of your pondering of his existence and of his interest in you. He welcomes and encourages your search!

Second truth: Both reached out to you before your search began.

The church, it is said, is the only institution which exists for the sake of her non-members. In her reaching out she reflects the lead God has taken and the example he has shown in making his overtures toward us.



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God has reached out to the human race ever since we first turned from him in the days of Adam and Eve. In the face of our offense, he raised up patriarchs to whom he taught the gospel and sent us his prophets to proclaim it. They spoke of a Messiah who would mediate between God and man. Then he sent us his Son to be that Mediator. In him and his self-sacrifice were summed up all God's desires for our return to him. Finally, he sent to us his Spirit to apply to us what God the Son accomplished for us on the cross.

Third truth: Both offer free admission.

In any church worthy of her name, there are no snags in the invitation to attend church, no scams, unavoidable costs, no small print, or mandatory dress code (other than appropriateness). The cost of your admission is covered entirely by the church. How could it be otherwise? For we have learned that the profound cost of our admission into a relationship with God has been fully paid by the Lord Jesus.

His voluntary submission paid the penalty of God's broken law. His shed blood covers our sins and turns away God's just anger against us. By His bodily resurrection we are assured that God the Father has accepted Jesus' sacrifice on behalf of sinners. In short, the transaction for sin is done!

Fourth truth: Both encourage us to come as we are.

Don't try and get your life right before coming either to God or to church. You cannot do it anymore than we could. Do not wait to save up for better clothes, should you feel you need them. God is interested in your heart, not our dress code. All you need do is step through the doorway, trusting God to bless your search for him.

We come to God the same way as we come to church. He has already provided the door of entrance to a relationship with him. "I am the door," Jesus said, "if anyone enter in he will be saved" (John 10:9).



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The relationship is entered through faith. Faith is a resting in Jesus for personal forgiveness and acceptance by God.

Fifth truth: Both open up all sorts of new experiences.

God offers you the opportunity to learn about him, to understand that worship is the fulfillment of your existence, to get acquainted with a new circle of friends, and to serve God with them in meaningful ways.

That is what coming to Christ is like. Upon turning to God through Jesus, you will enter a new life and possess a new standing before God. The Bible describes those who come to Christ as God's sons, daughters, or children. In God's family we learn the length, breadth, and height of his love for us, and in the process mature in our response of worship, love, and gratitude. What we learn in this life is a prelude to the fulfillment of our fellowship with God in the next.

A relationship to the church is a wonderful blessing in life, but best of all is a relationship to God. We can tell you the way to churches worth visiting, the truth to be taught, and the life we seek to live, but only Jesus can lead you to fellowship with God and to heaven. Jesus taught us that he is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), and the chorus that,

*Without the Way there is no going;
Without the truth there is no knowing;
Without the Life, there is no living;
I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life;
that's what Jesus said.*

Look solely for a church, then, and that is all you may get; but look for a relationship with God and he'll lead you to so much more beside. Let your search begin!