

Church Life – 1

By Pastor Alan Utting



'The church is not a museum for saints, but a hospital for sinners.' Tim Keller

The early church was filled with irrepressible joy! During the years of pastoral ministry, I also spent time as a church advisor. In that role, I witnessed both the best and worst aspects of church life. Of course, no church is perfect. But despite its flaws, I confess — I am still in love with the church just like Jesus is. Ephesians 5:25. 'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.'

Biblical Perspective

The general activities of the church are shown in Acts 2:42-47.

'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.'

This can be summarised in this way:

1. Bible study (the Apostle's teaching).
2. Fellowship in homes and temple.
3. Breaking of bread (Communion).
4. Prayer.
5. Signs and wonders (miracles) displayed.
6. Possessions were shared.
7. Regular gatherings (daily).
8. Evangelism (the Lord added to their numbers daily).

Observations

1. Despite the joy of church life even leaders can drop out of church involvement. I imagine the Apostle Paul felt a real sadness when Demas abandoned him, having become captivated by the things of the world (2 Timothy 4:10). Let's support leaders to help them stay the course.
2. There are many reasons why people drop out of church, but often it comes down to taking offence, a common trap of the enemy. Let's be honest, at some point, we'll all disagree with something in church life. But reconciliation is a cornerstone of Christian living. Sometimes people also leave because it is boring or irrelevant. If your current church isn't a good fit, whether because of worship style or something else, don't drop out. Find another one. Stay connected to the body of Christ.
3. In Western culture, we often lean towards individualism — doing things our own way. However, in many other cultures, there is a greater importance placed upon community, and such was the world Jesus lived in. Jesus died for each of us as

individuals and Scripture also makes it clear that He died for the wider church community as in Acts 2:42-47. Are you part of his visible church?

4. We live in a time when leaders are under immense pressure. Expectations from all directions, differing opinions, and constant demands often weigh heavily on pastors and leaders. For many, the stress becomes unbearable, and stepping away from ministry can seem like the only option. We must remember that we live in a fallen world, and the forces of Satan and his followers actively seek to dissuade those who are Christ followers.

When I trained for ministry, the understanding was that this form of ministry was for life. While I still value that sense of lifelong dedication, I also believe the Spirit can lead us in new directions as He wills. Ministry may shift in shape or season, but our commitment to Christ remains constant. If you're a wounded warrior, take comfort in God's abundant grace and mercy. Embrace the journey of restoration whatever that may involve. However, when it comes to following Jesus, the commitment is always for life. As Jesus said, 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me' (John 10:27).

5. Paul's ministry largely focused on planting churches and establishing leadership structures to support believers both inside and outside those communities. Over time, I've come to see that Holy Spirit-inspired structures are both biblical and essential for the health and growth of the church. Think of it like our physical bodies — we need both bones and flesh. Bones provide structure and stability, while flesh gives life and movement. Without bones, we'd collapse. Similarly, a church without structure lacks stability. But structure without the Spirit leads to lifeless routine. Leaders must walk humbly and live Spirit-filled lives. It's also vital to recognise that churches can look very different from one another. Some are large, others small. Some prefer lively, expressive worship, like the heavenly praise described in Revelation 19:5, while others embrace quieter, more reflective gatherings. Let's resist the temptation to judge. One style is not godlier than another.
6. Healthy relationships are key to meaningful commitment. In the New Testament, as mentioned Believers met daily in the temple and shared meals regularly. That kind of closeness is only possible when people learn to get along. Unfortunately, some personalities haven't yet learnt how to get on with people and will fight over anything. Churches like communities and countries, can become polarised over certain issues. Satan often uses division to destroy what God is building. As we mature in Christ, we learn to respect and love each other (John 17:20,21).
7. Finally, I love the motto we had at our earlier church we attended before moving to another city: 'Jesus, front and centre'. What a powerful reminder of where our focus should always be. Get involved and pray regularly for your church leaders and fellow Believers. Ask God to grant them grace, wisdom, and peace. Remember as leaders we must not be 'a know all.' We are servants and called to walk in humble spirituality.

Resources

Tim Keller, *Centre Church*

A. M. Renwick, *The Story of the Church*

N. T. Anderson and C. Mylander, *Extreme Church Makeover*