

## WHY INVITE PEOPLE TO CHURCH

***“In Christ, we who are many from one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” (Romans 12:5, NIV)***

***“...Let us do good to all people, especially those who belong to the family of believers.” (Galatians 6:10, NIV)***

As we said a couple of weeks ago, the church represents God’s family. As a believer we are His disciples in the community of faith and ambassadors to the world. But what is the object of these callings? I believe it is to tell the good news so people will come to Christ and then help them grow in that relationship so we want them to come to church.

Being a Christian is far more than believing; it is belonging. We are to belong in the family of God “the church” and in belonging, we become all God wants us to be. At spiritual birth I have a Heavenly Father and I have a family. I’m part of the universal church. But my sense of belonging comes from being a part of a local congregation.

When I was born physically I was part of the human race; one of 6 billion, but what made the difference in my growth and in my sense of belonging, my identity was I was part of a family; one of six children. In that same way the local church is essential to every Christian’s growth, identity in Christ and sense of belonging. In God’s family I belong to God and we belong to one another.

The church is referred to as God’s family and as the body of Christ where each member is a necessary part. In both cases membership means something. Membership means we are virtually connected to the body. A disconnected ear is worthless. As a family member I have responsibilities to others in God’s family.

When we say the word church most people have a mental image of a building or campus or an event that happens weekly. The church is neither an event or a building; the church is a family relationship with God and with other saints.

I don't believe you can be a disciple of Christ without being a part of God's family "the church." You can't say I love Jesus but could care less for His Bride! No, it's a package deal. That's like saying, "I want to play pro ball but I don't want to be part of a particular team." You can have all the talent in the world but you're not going to play. "I want to join the U.S. Army, but I don't want to be assigned to a particular unit." Ain't going to happen! It's impossible! Every team has a roster and every military unit has a roll.

Like a tuba player needs an orchestra, you need a church. The Christian without a local church is a spiritual orphan.

## **I. The growth of the New Testament Church.**

- Acts 1:15     120
- Acts 2:41     3000 in one day, so 3120.
- Acts 2:47     The Lord added daily to that number
- Acts 5:14     A multitude (5000 men, so 15-20 thousand)
- Acts 5:28     The church filled Jerusalem.
- Acts 6:1      Rapidly multiplied.
- Acts 6:7      Increased rapidly.
- Acts 21:20    Tens of thousands (too many to count)

In 300 years it had impacted the known world. By 25 years historians say that of the population in Jerusalem of 200,000, over 1/2, or 100,000 were a part of the church. That's 20-25 times larger than our local congregation. Obviously we are not large in comparison. Now our local congregation is not in competition with any other local congregation, but we are about growing here like the congregation of the first church of Jerusalem.

## **II. The emphasis of our local church.**

### **A. Large-group worship.**

- **Celebrate baptism. We pray, praise & preach.**
- **Celebrate Lord's Supper.**

### **B. Small-group fellowship.**

Both of these things are important. The church at Jerusalem met together to celebrate the Lord's Day (Sunday), the resurrection of Jesus, and in small groups for instruction and connecting.

Now they did not have a huge campus. They celebrated in the Temple courts and they had fellowship in their homes. We are blessed with a campus. We celebrate in this Worship Center and have small rooms to instruct and connect within.

### **Importance of Sunday School:**

1. Small groups are relational. Small groups bring intimacy. The larger the class, the less connection takes place. Jesus intentionally kept His small group small. He had 12 men because of the dynamics. You can be in relationship with too many at once. We are like Lego blocks; we can only connect to so many at one time.

**\*NOTE** We are not very good at relationships in our culture. We don't know our own families, let alone our neighbors. At a time in our country, families for the most part are in the same area. Neighbors actually come out of their homes. We don't even know our neighbors. This is one reason for the high divorce rate; we don't know how to be in relationships with each other; can't solve conflict in love.

Jesus was teaching them to love God and each other. That is the Great Commandment. You can't learn that in a crowd.

You don't have to know everyone in this church to connect, but you have to know someone. The church that only focuses on public worship will not see spiritual maturity take place in the members' lives.

2. Small groups are flexible. You can do so many things at different times and places.
3. Small groups are easily expandable. We can continue to start them. You can have a storage room cleared out and start a group.
4. Small groups give opportunities.

Reaching East Dallas County requires us to do more than simply get a crowd in this room. We must build people. Our body is made up of cells. That's what makes our body healthy.

### **III. The goal of Sunday School.**

Seven marks of a healthy small group. (Based on Acts 2:41-47)

1. They study the Bible together. ***“They devoted themselves to the Apostles teaching...”*** Apparently they took the teaching from the Lord’s Day by the Apostles and reviewed it in their small group. I can only imagine how they discussed its application to life.
2. They had fellowship with one another. ***“They devoted themselves ... to fellowship.”*** For fellowship to be real it must be often and done consistently. They become intimate in friendship. They not only knew one another, they knew about one another and ministry to each other was the result. ***“They ate together with glad and sincere hearts.”*** Notice they ate together. That means the groups were not too large. You don’t have to know everyone to feel a part but you have to know someone.
3. They took the Lord’s Supper together. ***“They devoted themselves...to the breaking of bread.”*** Apparently the Lord’s Supper was not limited or maybe not even done in the cooperative celebration service on the Lord’s Day. I can only imagine the dynamics and intimacy of this being done in a small group setting. The ability to pray and evaluate one’s life in the context of friends who you shared life with.
4. They prayed together. ***“They devoted themselves...to prayer.”*** Jesus said where two or three are gathered together, He would be in their midst and what we agreed upon would be done. There is power in agreeing together in prayer.
5. They helped one another in practical ways, ***“They gave to anyone as he had a need...”*** We know the story of their generosity that enabled them to meet one another’s needs. In the community of a small group we can

know the needs exist and respond in compassion without even being asked. They took the initiative in meeting needs.

6. They were on mission together. ***“They praised God and enjoyed the favor of all people.”*** How did they have favor with unbelievers? I believe it’s because they took their ministry out into the world. They served the Lord by serving people.

7. They invited people to church. ***“Everyday, the number in their group continued to grow as the Lord added those who were being saved.”***  
The Great Commission is to go to the people and the desire is to bring people who come to Christ to church. Who would leave a newborn baby to fend for itself? The church is a place to lift the name of Jesus and when He is lifted up He draws all men to Him. The tangible representation of Christ on this earth is His Body; the Church.

**\*NOTE** When a small group grows beyond 10 or max 20 people, those participants no longer are able to connect intimately. They can’t really have intimacy in fellowship. Like Lego blocks we only have so many places to connect with another block. Most of our classes are pregnant and need to give birth to new classes.

#### **IV. Marks of small groups that bring healing. (Mark 2:1-12)**

1. Compassion: They became concerned for a hurting friend.
2. Faith: They believed Jesus would heal their friend.
3. Action: They didn’t just pray. They took action. ***“They brought to Jesus the man who was paralyzed...”***
4. Persistence: They didn’t let difficulties discourage them.
5. Innovation: They dared to do something different.
6. Cooperation: They worked together on their friends behalf.

7. Sacrifice: They were willing to pay for the roof!