

LOSING OUR **BUTS**



I Love My Church DAY 1

**Matthew 16:18, Acts 20:28, Colossians 1:15-20, Ephesians 1:22-23,
Ephesians 3:6-11**

It's crazy to think that at one time in my life, I hated the church and swore I would never go back. But now, I cannot stop talking about it!!! That's why it bothers me when I hear someone say they don't think church is really that important.

I believe with all my heart that the church IS important. The reason I believe it's important is because the Bible says it's important to God. And anything that is important to Him, should be important to us, too. So if you (or someone you know) is struggling with how you feel about the church, ask yourself these four questions:

1. Matthew 16:18 says Jesus built the church. Would the Son of God actually spend time building something that was worthless?
2. Acts 20:28 says Jesus shed His blood for the church. Would the Son of God have been willing to endure the suffering He went through for a meaningless organization?
3. Ephesians 1:22 and Colossians 1:18 say Jesus is the head of the church. Would Jesus really be the head of something insignificant and trivial?
4. If church isn't necessary for a relationship with God, why does Ephesians 3:10 say that the wisdom of God should be made known through the church?

I know that every church is not perfect. It's filled with sinners saved by grace, and that includes me and you. Jesus died for us (the church), and He loves us all (even us crazy imperfect people).

So if you are NOT currently a part of a local church, go check one out this weekend! And whenever you find the one for you (or if you're a part of one already), get plugged in, serve and watch how the Lord will bless your life because you're serving his bride, the church.

I Love My Church DAY 2

2 Corinthians 5:15-19

In the 2010 Super Bowl, Peyton Manning and Drew Brees were locked in an epic battle that resulted in the Saints ultimately winning. They celebrated well into the night and marked their place in history as Super Bowl champions.

As I was thinking about this, my mind flashed back 2,000 years to the Roman Coliseum and the sporting events that took place there. I am sure the coliseum hosted epic battles that riveted the crowd. When these battles were over, men were raving about the results and talking about how the gladiators would never be forgotten. And yet they have been.

We know that gladiators existed, but we have no idea who they were. We know there were battles, but we barely know any details about them. Those once lifted up by society have drifted into obscurity, and what people considered to be of the utmost importance, we now see as insignificant. However, around the same time the gladiators were locked in the epic battles, a little known movement called Christianity was beginning to take shape. A guy named Jesus who was dead came back to life, and it really did turn the world upside down. People began hearing Jesus' message and lives began changing.

What was set in motion 2,000 years ago is still happening today. And while the gladiators that were once lifted up by society have been forgotten, Jesus has not been.

So let me encourage you with this: What you are doing at church matters and you are making a difference. Your grandchildren will probably not know who Peyton and Drew are, or even care about an event that took place decades before their time, but the Gospel will still be true and relevant to their lives. And the message of Jesus will continue to matter in the years to come.

I Love My Church DAY 3

Matthew 21:42, 1 Peter 2:4-10, Ephesians 2:17-22

Every college football team in the country gathers worshippers every Saturday. We've all seen it. People spend thousands of dollars on parking places and tailgating supplies. Some even have plasma TVs and satellite dishes IN their parking place.

I love college football and I'm sure I will continue to for a long time. But, at the end of the day, a college's win/loss record is a temporary thing that will pass away. It will no longer matter when compared to eternity and all it holds.

Only one investment will last from today until eternity, and that's the church. What schools, hospitals and other organizations are doing is not bad. However, the church is the only organization that Jesus founded and that has been around for 2,000 years. No system of government, business or parachurch organization has ever lasted as long as the church.

When the local church is working right, there is nothing more powerful and breathtaking in the world. It's the place where lost people are found, where found people grow to love Jesus more, where addicts are set free, where the excluded are included, where the hopeless find hope, where marriages are restored, where forgiveness is extended and where God gets the glory for it all!!!

I Love My Church DAY 4

Isaiah 43:18-19, Ephesians 3:20-21, Acts 4:23-31

For years, Christianity has been crippled by the myth that Jesus wants us to "play it safe." Jesus didn't play it safe. None of the apostles played it safe. The church in Acts did not pray for safety, they prayed for boldness!!!

Safety cannot be our goal. What is that one thing you know the Lord is calling you to do? You know it's a risk. You know that for this thing to happen you are going to need divine intervention. What is it? Why are you not doing it?

People have asked me, "How do I know that it's God telling me to do it and not just an idea I had?" Here are three identifying marks I have experienced:

1. The thing God has called you to do will not contradict His Word.

I believe in the power of the Holy Spirit and He speaks as loud today as He did in Acts. However, the Holy Spirit will not contradict the Bible. If "that thing" that you feel called to do directly conflicts with God's Word, it's not God telling you to do it.

2. You can't get away from this thought.

It dominates your thinking and the more you marinade on it the more you feel like you might explode. For example, in 1996 Jesus was telling me to start a church. Instead of running out and doing it immediately, I began reading books on starting churches and dove into the Bible to see what it taught about the subject. The more I prayed, studied and read, the hotter the fire inside of me became.

3. Godly people in your life affirm it.

If I share an idea, and the people God has placed in my life to love and challenge me push back, I take a step back to pray and think through the idea until the Lord gives me greater clarity or shows me that my friends' wise counsel is exactly what I needed to hear.

Life is short, hell is hot, and eternity is forever!!! The world has never been impacted by Christians who spent their lives begging God not to let anything bad happen to them. Jesus is good, but He is not safe.

I love My Church DAY 5

Hebrews 10:19-25, 1 Corinthians 12:14-30

Who or what has the most influence in your life? It's an important question to ask because who or what you listen to will ultimately determine what you do.

Some argue that church is not that big of a deal, but only people who are connected with Jesus and His church will experience the abundant life He promised us. Read Hebrews 10:19-25 and answer the following:

- How many times are the words "us" and "we" used? With that in mind, do you think God intended Christianity to be a solo or a team sport?
- Does God want His people meeting together on a consistent basis?

Life is too short for us to make bad decision after bad decision. We need to seek the advice of people who love Jesus and will tell us what we need to hear rather than what we want to hear. We can always find a group of people to affirm our sin and dysfunction because doing so will allow them to justify their lifestyle. But that would be the wrong approach.

When you attend a church weekly and walk in with a prepared heart, you will often find that God will speak to you in a very direct way. God is always speaking. The question is, are we always listening?

So think about it, who or what has the most influence in your life?

Answering this question is dangerous because in doing so, you may need to make some adjustments!!!

I Love My Church DAY 6

Acts 1:8, Matthew 24:3-14

I watched in amazement when the first iPhone was released. People sat in line for days for a product that would be obsolete in a year when a new version would come out. Why is it that Apple can get people to line up for their product but the church can't? I can think of four reasons:

1. We refuse to keep it simple.

The larger the church gets, the more ministries people expect the church to do. If a church wants to continue to be effective it needs to do less, not more.

The church is most effective when we say, "Give us an hour or two a week, and we promise to make that hour worth your time because of what we put into it."

2. We're scared to generate excitement.

The tomb is empty!!! Jesus and His Church are the most exciting things to ever happen, and in just 2,000 years Christians have made them boring and irrelevant.

The best way to generate excitement is to make a Sunday service the most exciting thing a person experiences during that week. This takes both prayer and planning. And if you're GOING to church on Sunday, get excited about it!! Did I mention the tomb is EMPTY?!?!

3. We don't maximize technology.

Some people say the church should not depend on technology. But let the air conditioner go out on a hot Sunday and see how much they miss technological advances!!! Every church embraces technology – from heat and air, to lights, to indoor plumbing, to HD video screens. Technology is not the devil. It is a tool that, when used properly, can radically impact the world for Jesus.

4. We forget to make the message available everywhere.

When many Christians leave church and head for a restaurant, the last thing on their mind is sharing Christ with their server. When I worked in the restaurant industry, Christians were the loudest, most obnoxious people in the place.

We should make Jesus available everywhere because HE IS! He's there in the restaurant, at our workplace and the grocery store. Everywhere you go you have an opportunity to minister to the people around you.

The church is on the threshold of seeing the kingdom preached in the whole world, just like Jesus predicted in Matthew 24:14. With the technology and ability God has put in the Church's hands, there is no reason we can't share the Gospel with the entire world!!!

I Love My Church DAY 7

Numbers 22:21-24, Matthew 17:24-27

We live in a culture dominated by entertainment. If a movie is good, people will go. If it isn't, people will stay away. If a television show is good, people will watch. If it isn't, it will be canceled. And if church is good, people will go. If not, people will stay away.

God communicates creatively and His church should as well:

- When God wanted to communicate to Balaam, He spoke to Balaam through a donkey.
- When God wanted to communicate to Jonah, He used a big fish.
- When God wanted Peter to learn not to worry about money, He sent Peter fishing and told him there would be money in the mouth of the fish.

Given God's example, why shouldn't we do our best to make our church services the most creative, entertaining environment of the week?

The population is increasing while church attendance is decreasing. I've read the statistics that over 90 percent of churches in America are either stagnant or declining. Maybe it's because people find no value in going to church. Maybe nothing in the church seems to hold their attention. You can scream at people for embracing this mindset, but the people who are embracing it are lost. And if we are not willing to do what it takes to reach them, they are going to go to hell.

When people walk into church, something has to catch their attention if we want them to come back. We should talk about sin and repentance, but we should do it in a way people can understand and apply that information. And I'm not saying this to just church leaders, I'm saying this to everyone who knows Jesus and goes to church! You, as the greeter or children's ministry volunteer or usher, have the opportunity to make people feel loved and welcomed. People will come to church to experience it. People will come BACK to church because of a relationship.

If the church was as serious as Hollywood is, about reaching people, we would be reaching more people. Hollywood has discovered something the church runs from: It takes work to create an experience people will remember.

The people walking through our doors are worth our time and effort. People should look forward to church more than they look forward to watching a new sitcom or blockbuster hit.

Yes, God is in charge. He is ultimately responsible for everything. But we have to understand that God works through people who work. He is honored when people plan, pray and work, rather than sit back and watch Him make up the difference.

I Love My Church DAY 8

Ephesians 4:25-32, Matthew 5:23-24, John 16:33

There are no perfect people and no perfect church. Relationships are messy, and hurt is inevitable. I am not being pessimistic. I've just been alive long enough to know that pain is bound to come our way.

If we want to experience the fullness of life in the church, we must learn to address conflict and forgive each other.

1. Don't email, text or use social media.

In the past, when I had a conflict with someone, I would log on to my computer and fire off an abusive email. There are several problems with this:

- Avoiding confrontation is the act of a coward.
- Typing allows me to say things I would never say in person.
- Email can easily be misinterpreted, thus causing new conflicts.

2. Handle conflict quickly.

Ephesians 4:25-26 tells us not to let the sun to go down while we are angry. If we allow anger to fester, what comes out is never pretty.

3. Always assume the best about the people you serve with.

Love always assumes the best about someone. If you can't stand the people you serve with, the best thing to do is to ask the Lord, "What is wrong with my own heart?"

4. Stop expecting people to read your mind.

In the past, when people unknowingly said something hurtful to me, I would become angry and say to myself, "Well, they should know that just hurt me!" News flash: They don't know. And they won't know unless I look them in the eye, assume they didn't mean to hurt me, and calmly explain why what they said wounded me.

5. Stop waiting for them to approach you.

If you know there is a problem to be solved, stop waiting on "the right time" or for them to come to you. Read what Jesus said in Matthew 5:23-24. Maturity is when a person is willing to seize responsibility instead of just waiting on something to happen.

6 . Never, ever go public when you have not even attempted to talk in private.

Too often people take their conflicts online when they have never even attempted to handle them privately.

Pain should never stop us from connecting with others in the church. When conflict comes, we have a decision to make: Do we sit around and talk about it? Or, do we address the conflict, forgive one another and get on with life?

I Love My Church DAY 9

Galatians 6:1-10, James 5:13-16

Going to church should be way more than merely making an appearance and pretending to be perfect. I've worked in the church for over 20 years and the reality is that life is messy on either side of the cross. What finally changed my perspective was when I stopped trying to change everything around me and began asking God to change what was broken inside of me. He humbled me, broke me and restored me.

When we meet Christ the penalty of our sin is paid for, but the presence of sin and what we've done in our lives is still there. It takes time to get the bad seed out and the good seed planted and producing a good crop (Galatians 6:7-9).

The church should be a place where we find hope during this process. Should you feel good at church? Yes. And should you feel convicted at church? Yes!

The truth hurts sometimes. It stings. It convicts. However, the truth also provides freedom and hope, inspiration and encouragement, and it does feel good.

The church is a place where it's OK to not be OK, but it's not OK to stay that way. The church should speak the truth from the Bible. It's not the pastor's job to make people feel good or bad about where they are in their spiritual journey. It is the pastor's job to teach the truth. The Holy Spirit will then do what He needs to do.

So if you're struggling with something, know the church is the perfect place to ask for someone to pray with you or for you. And when the Holy Spirit is speaking to you next time you're in church, listen and do what He says. If you apply that information you've heard or learned, it WILL bring about transformation in your life.

I Love My Church DAY 10

ROMANS 13:1-7, Matthew 22:17-22

In America, some people equate voting for a particular party with godliness. One side thinks Jesus was a conservative Republican, watched FOX News, organized pro-life rallies and had a Sean Hannity T-shirt. The other side thinks Jesus was a social liberal who supported homosexuality and thought everyone should be equal.

All too often churches become obsessed with passing legislation regarding abortion, homosexual marriage and other hot button topics, believing that passing a particular law will somehow stop immorality in America. The problem with this is that we are becoming political and neglecting the prophetic.

The more I read the Bible the more it is obvious that when God's people depend on a political savior rather than a heavenly one the result is always disappointment. We've got to remember that while politics will try to control the world, the Gospel is the only thing that can change it.

As a person meets Jesus and walks closer with Him, they are way less likely to plunge into destructive behavior, which is why we must be obsessed with pointing people to Jesus rather than our political preferences. Politics can change laws, but they cannot change the human heart.

Christians can and should have political opinions. Can you imagine how awesome our country would be if our leaders were more in love with Jesus than they were with the press and public opinion?

We should vote. We should ask God, "Who do you want me to vote for?" And we should pray for our leaders as the Bible clearly teaches.

As Christians, we have a responsibility to be involved in politics, but we should not use the church to advance a person or a political party. We should never use the platform God has given us for an agenda other than His.

Jesus matters. He's first. He reigns. And He is the only One who can change our lives forever.

I Love My Church DAY 11

Luke 15:1-7, Acts 2:41-47

In Acts 2:41, Luke records that the church grew by 3,000 people. In Acts 4:47, he stopped trying to count because the numbers got too high. Luke records even more numbers in Acts 5:14, Acts 6:1, Acts 6:7, Acts 9:31, Acts 11:21, Acts 14:1, Acts 14:21, Acts 16:5, Acts 17:12 and Acts 28:23. Luke was either obsessed with the wrong thing or he is making the point that it is OK for the church to celebrate with numbers.

When your church has been averaging 75 people and you finally break 100, throw a party, celebrate, get pumped!!! If your church was averaging 100 people this time last year and this year you have 150, tell somebody about it. Don't hold back what the Lord is doing in your church! Boast in Him and His work!! If one person comes to Christ, we should celebrate!!! Heaven does, why don't we?

We've got to stop allowing the world to out celebrate us. One person in your church coming to Christ is way more important than any awards show on television or any touchdown scored in any football game ever played. And yet, we allow the world to outshine us in the way they celebrate the temporary while we sit around and worry about how others may perceive the celebration.

Don't compare what God is doing in various places or feel bad because more people received Christ somewhere else than in your church. We are ALL on the same team!

Tell the world about Jesus and what He is doing in the church you serve. We can't blame God for the world not knowing how "at work" Jesus is. We have to blame ourselves for refusing to talk about it, for being way more obsessed with what someone is going to say than the fact that the risen Christ literally brought someone from death to life!

Celebrate! It's OK! Jesus celebrated, the church in Acts celebrated (and counted) and we should, too.

I Love My Church DAY 12

Matthew 28:16-20, Acts 20:28, John 13:34-35

One of the last things Jesus said before He went back to heaven was for us to go and make disciples. But what does making a disciple look like?

I used to think making a disciple was taking someone under my wing and teaching them how to think and act like me. Then I had a rude awakening. Jesus showed me that the world didn't need more people to be like me. It needs more people to be like Him.

Making a disciple is not teaching someone how to be like us, but rather teaching them who Jesus is and challenging them to fall radically in love with Him. I ask people all time, "What causes you to fall in love with Jesus? Is it reading your Bible, singing, prayer, dancing before the Lord? Whatever it is, do it a lot!"

That statement has gotten some weird looks from some people who feel like making a disciple is teaching people to follow all the rules. Discipleship in that environment means giving people a spiritual to-do list: read this, memorize this, go here. Or, maybe you heard this one: "Don't drink, don't smoke, don't chew, and don't go with girls that do!"

If those are the rules of being a disciple, not many of the original disciples would have qualified. Peter was usually saying the wrong things at the wrong times and was sometimes violent. Matthew was a tax collector—the scum of the earth in those days. James and John were self-centered. Thomas doubted the resurrection. Yet all these men had one thing in common: a passionate love for Jesus.

Our efforts would be a lot more effective if we quit trying to teach people how to do what we do, and instead taught them who Jesus is and challenged them to fall madly and passionately in love with Him. That is how we make a disciple.

I Love My Church DAY 13

Colossians 3:23-24, 1 Peter 4:10-11, Luke 16:1-12

Part of being faithful to God is being faithful with all that He has given us stewardship over. In other words, it is impossible to say we are being faithful to the Lord and not be faithful to our spouse.

It is impossible to say we are being faithful to the Lord if we are neglecting to spend quality time with our kids.

It is impossible to say we are being faithful to the Lord yet refuse to honor Him with the money He has blessed us with.

It is impossible to say we are being faithful to the Lord and yet continually turn our back on and discriminate the church, the one thing that is going to be left standing when He destroys the world.

It is impossible to say we are faithful to the Lord when we are always attacking, tearing down and maligning others who do not believe exactly like we do.

It is impossible to say we are faithful to the Lord when we condemn people who are "sinful and wicked," not realizing that is who we were before we met Christ.

It is impossible to say we are faithful to the Lord when our biggest desire in life is to play it safe instead of trusting Him and taking the steps of faith that He leads us to.

All of us fall short of these things at times; however, the Bible says even when we are faithless that God is faithful (2 Timothy 2:13) and that His mercy is new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-24).

We have hope because of God's faithfulness, and if we are falling short in one of the above areas, the Lord is revealing this to us not to condemn us but rather to correct us. May we accept God's correction and take our next step by dealing with it so we can experience the big things He has for us in the future!!!

I Love My Church DAY 14

Mark 2:1-12, John 1:35-51

One night after church, my friend Clayton and I went to grab some pizza and catch up. That night, in a conversation with our server, I was reminded of an important principle.

We asked our server if she went to church anywhere, and she said no. We then told her we would love for her to come to NewSpring, and she lit up and said, "Oh wow, someone else invited me there too!"

Clayton then pointed to me and said, "That's the pastor."

She replied, "Oh yeah, I remember you. I came one time about six years ago and you were wearing a T-shirt that said, 'God is watching you download that porn!'"

I laughed and told her I remembered wearing that shirt. I asked her if did she not come back because the shirt offended her. She replied, "Oh no, the shirt didn't bother me at all. In fact, I thought it was funny. The reason I did not come back is that I didn't have anyone who would come with me."

So many people in this world feel all alone, and they would come to church if we made the effort to not just invite them but to bring them—just like Andrew did for Peter and Philip did for Nathaniel.

It is impossible to be connected to Christ and not care about the people He cared about. Jesus will honor our faith when we go all out and do whatever it takes to bring people to a place where they can meet Him. Who will you bring to church this week?

