

What's so wrong with church hopping?

By: Carl Jones

Committing to a church can be difficult. You like the preaching at one, but you aren't so sure about the music. You love the people at another, but the preaching is not as solid. So you pick and choose, visiting different churches, but never really sticking to any of them.

And at least you're going to church, right? As Dwight Moody said "Church attendance is as vital to a disciple as a transfusion of rich, healthy blood to a sick man." That we "go" to church—that is, that we gather together consistently with other believers—has to be a moot point to Christians. We need to do it. The Bible tells us not to forsake the fellowship of believers (Hebrews 10:23-25).

It isn't the that that we need to talk about. We need to talk about the where.

I don't mean "where" as in a building that was built by a congregation, a mall, a bar, a school or any place like that. I mean "where" as in the consistently fellowshiping with a local Body of believers. We need to discuss consistent church hopping, and look at the pros and the cons of what many of us are doing today.

The "Pros" of church hopping.

1. Beauty in the Diversity

I asked a friend about church hopping, and in part of her response, she stated that it made her nervous when Christians never fellowship with other local Bodies. She said that there are many flavors within the Body of Christ, and Christians should experience other churches.

Society does not hold a patent on diversity. The Church is incredibly diverse. It has been from the start. Many that were saved during Pentecost were from all over the world (Acts 2:5-11). The Church consists of many people from all walks of life. Can you really see the beauty of the diversity of the Body of Christ by consistently meeting with the same people?

2. Different Strokes for Different Folks

The local Body that I grew up in was, for lack of a better word, old. There were some incredibly kind people that I had the privilege of knowing, but once I was too old to be in the youth group, there was nothing for me. Churches ask too much of young adults when the leadership asks teenagers to go from youth group to productive adult church member overnight.

Sometimes, your local Body has nothing organized for your demographic. This doesn't just mean young adults. Some churches do not have singles ministries, youth ministries, children's ministries or marriage ministries among other specialized ministries. Is it wrong to go to one church on Sunday and a young adult group on Monday when your church doesn't have that?

3. What's Good for Them is Good for Me

I have some simple questions for you. What church did Jesus attend? Ok, yes, that was a ridiculously loaded question. How about one that's a little less loaded. What church did Paul attend? Yes, that was also a loaded question.

Jesus and Paul pretty much spent their entire ministries traveling around. They stayed with multiple people, in multiple cities, in multiple countries around the world. Their calling may not be representative of the majority of us, but their precedents shouldn't be ignored.

The "Cons" of Church Hopping.

1. Commit Much?

On the other hand, through thick and thin, the 12 disciples were committed to following Jesus. I know that isn't "church" in the sense that it is today, but it does say something about a commitment to fellowship. Those men were committed to Jesus AND to each other. Is there a reason to expect anything different from ourselves?

There are very few people who want to put time and energy into people that they feel are not committed to building a relationship. Even fewer leaders are interested in handing responsibility to people that they feel they cannot trust to do something as simple as be around. If someone is consistently coming in and out of your local Body, you have to wonder if they will be a "safe place" for you.

2. Too Many Cooks in the Kitchen

We live in a day and age of information overload. This is no different in the Church. Pretty much every notable pastor—and many obscure ones, as well—has their teachings readily available online for us. We can listen to podcasts, view prayer rooms and "attend" conferences all by that wonderful little "click" sound. There is a church building on pretty much every corner. Many of those churches have wonderful, but different, flavors to them. All of that is amazing, but we can make a big mistake with it.

I have to be careful that I don't allow too many people to be speaking into my life. If I'm consistently hopping from church to church, how many people am I allowing to feed into me? Am I allowing none, because of a fear of commitment, or too many, because I won't stay in one place? Am I able to take advantage of all that a church has to offer if I'm not there half the time?

3. No ... YOU do it!

A few years ago, my wife, myself and a few others began a young adult small group at our church. There was nothing for young adults before that. We were not pastors yet, we were just a bunch of people who love this generation and wanted them to know that. Three years later, we have a growing young adult movement in our church. That happened because a gap was filled instead of us going elsewhere to fill our needs.

Some people are not in the place to lead, so they go elsewhere to fill the needs in their lives. I get that, but if you are in a place to be a

leader, lead where you are! How often do we miss opportunities to bring awareness to our local Bodies or make them more complete when we leave to fill our needs instead of leading to fill everyone's needs?

Church hopping has always been an issue in the Church, and today is no different. It's something we each should think through. There are good and bad aspects of consistent church hopping, and ultimately it's your decision whether to keep hopping or to commit to one church. But remember to keep in mind: there is no substitute for a commitment to the Body of Christ. Church hopping may have its season, but the best kind of hopping knows when it has settled down on something solid.