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CHURCH INVOLVEMENT

Matthew 25:14-30

One Main Thing

Being involved in the church is like being married. How are you going to get to know your spouse if you are never around?

Introduction

Perhaps you have heard stories of the lady down the street who lost her son in a car accident; the man who lost his wife to cancer; or the student struggling with addiction. These are common stories that break our hearts. We may think otherwise, but there are people in our very own churches, sitting in the pew right beside us, who are struggling, battling against various influences. These hurting people often feel alone, but as the mixed martial artist Conor McGregor said, "If one of us goes to war, we all go to war!" We can look to our own selves as proof of this. When one body part develops cancer,

the whole body reacts. Similarly, this reasoning can be used within the church. Romans 12:4–5 states, “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and *individually members one of another.*” Because we are all members of the same body, and members of one another, we must support one another. When one of us hurts, we all hurt.

Sadly, when facing pain and suffering, a member will typically hide one’s self from others, isolate, and disassociate from their church family. We, as members of the body of Christ, need to be aware of the situations others may be going through, and must be understanding and encouraging because some of us are hurting greatly.



On March 11, 2011 there was a tsunami in northern Japan. The total damages amounted to \$300 billion. The death toll reached 15,891. Families were torn apart, homes were swept away, and the world that so many had once known was now gone. Imagine your hometown being swept away in a matter of minutes. It was a dark day for the nation of Japan.

One little town named Otsuchi, established 100 years prior, had grown into a thriving, bustling community. However, in 30 minutes it was gone—almost totally flattened by the tsunami. Out of the nearly 16,000 who

died in Japan, 2,500 are still missing. Of those missing persons, 421 lived in the town of Otsuchi. Scars from the devastation remain today.

The radio program, *This American Life*, aired an episode called "One Last Thing Before I Go." They discussed how the people of Otsuchi have coped with their loss of loved ones. It begins by talking about a man named Itaru Sasaki who was already dealing with the pain of losing his cousin when the tsunami hit. Sasaki had bought an old phone booth, similar to those you might find in London, and placed it in his backyard, complete with an old rotary-style telephone! He didn't connect the phone to the phone grid, because when he was using the booth, he wasn't talking to anyone on this earth: he was talking to his deceased cousin. Thus, he called the booth "The Wind Phone."

It was after the tsunami hit that the news spread of The Wind Phone. People began streaming in from all over Japan to use this booth to communicate with their deceased loved ones. The local TV station received permission to record some of the calls in the booth, and the audio recordings are heartbreaking. In one, an elderly lady walks into the booth, picks up the telephone, and dials the number to her house that used to be in Otsuchi. She never says anything, but you can tell she is waiting, hoping that her loved one might answer the call. When no one answers she hangs up the phone, breaks down, and cries.

In another recording there was a man whose wife went missing. He enters the phone booth on a cold winter morning, picks up the phone, begins sobbing, and then begs and pleads for her to return home. He promises her that he will build her a new house if she would just come home to him. "Where are you?" he asks. "Please come home," he says.

Application

Here we are several years after the 2011 tsunami, and it's plain to see that there are many people who are still hurting. The question we ask ourselves is: what are we to do about it?

As members of the body, we must remember that there are large numbers of hurting people and we must be encouraging them to remain involved in the church. Involvement is an excellent way to shift a focus away from sadness, grief, and loss. In order to encourage them, a commitment is required on our part. We must make an effort to include those who are hurting, to surround them with the love and support they are longing for.

I know of a man who lost his wife several years ago, and he made the comment that a few months after becoming a widower, people began to forget that he was still struggling with loss. People began to assume that he was okay, and that he just wanted to be alone. The married couples that he and his wife would go

out to dinner with no longer thought of him as part of the group. Members quit asking him to bring food for events, they quit asking him to lead in worship, and they left him out of activities he used to play a big part in. In fairness, he admits that he didn't feel like being around people after losing his wife, but even now he wishes that the members of the church would have included him instead of leaving him alone.

It is stories like this that should motivate us. Instead of assuming, we must put ourselves in the shoes of those who are hurting. We must look to Matt 7:12 and ask ourselves, "How would I want to be treated if I were in this situation? Would I want people to ignore me, forget about me, and leave me out? No, I would want to be surrounded by those who love me and support me."

Making a commitment to involve those who are hurting is a wonderful thing, but if we ourselves are not involved, how can we expect to help others be involved? A man once asked me, "Do I have to go to church? Can't I just worship from home?" I smiled, thought about his question for a moment, and said, "Being a part of the body of Christ is like being married. How are you going to get to know your spouse if you are never around?" While this may seem like a funny analogy, this helps to explain why being involved in the church is of great importance. Who will be there for you when you struggle, or when you are weak? Who will be there to pray for you and support you if you are never around?

How will you become acquainted with other members, how will you grow in the body of Christ if you feel that involvement is not necessary? If we want to help involve others in the body of Christ, we must first make sure we are involved! Involvement can be as simple as bringing food for a potluck, or volunteering to teach a class. The number of things we can do to be involved is limitless!

However, the church cannot grow or thrive if our members believe that involvement is not necessary as part of His body. How can we be evangelistic if we have no connection with the church? How can we grow if we deprive ourselves of the nourishment that comes from being involved in our congregations? Being a part of the congregation not only nourishes us, but it strengthens us. We should remember that the Lord knew Jeremiah before he was created (Jer 1:5). God had a positive plan for the Judeans, even though they were in exile (29:11). I point to these verses to remind us that God knows us better than we know ourselves-He knows our potential. He knows that we can do great things for His kingdom, but it starts with being involved in His church.

Matthew 25:14–30 is where we find the parable of the talents. The master gave each of his servants several talents and all but one invested his talent and received more in return. One servant decided it would be better to bury his talent in the dirt. Instead of using what he had been given, he squandered it to the benefit of no one, not even himself. Each and every one of us has a talent that we can use for the benefit of ourselves

and others. We can invest it in the church by being involved, and we can watch our investment bring great returns both spiritually and physically. But how can we ever hope to use our talents and encourage our hurting brothers and sisters to remain involved in the church if we aren't even involved?

I pray that those of us who are hurting will read this chapter and realize the importance of being involved in our local congregations. From the beginning, God saw that it was not good for man to be alone. Sometimes we face various trials and feel as though the best thing for us to do is to marginalize ourselves from our brothers and sisters. However, this leads to more pain and sorrow. Let's not forget that God has great plans for us, plans for our welfare, to give us a future and hope.

I also pray that we, as members of the church, will make a commitment to (1) be involved in our local congregation so that we might invest our talents and see great rewards. God knows our potential and believes that we can make a difference in this world. Why else would he give us so many opportunities to serve others? Also, let's not forget that being a part of the body of Christ is like being married. How are you going to get to know your spouse if you are never around? (2) Make a goal to generate a renewed effort to include those who might be marginalized and encourage those who are hurting to remain connected to the church. Without the support of its members, the

church will never blossom into a thriving community of interdependent members all striving to live and grow in Christ.

Discussion

1. Why do you think hurting people often feel marginalized within the church?
2. List some activities that you could include hurting members in.
3. Why do some members feel that it is not necessary to be involved in the church?
4. List some church-related activities that you could invest in.