

Finding Church

Wayne Jacobsen

(*highlights by Rob Stewart, LPD*)

Eight tell-tale signs of the church that will rise out of Jesus' new creation:

- 1. Jesus himself is the overwhelming focus:** *"And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy." (Col 1:18).*
 - *following Jesus the only True Shepherd, not human shepherds*
- 2. Trusting Jesus work over human effort:** *"Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?" (Gal. 3:3).*
 - *"not made with human hands."*
 - *if we can't trust him with our own lives, how will we trust him to build his church and to bring us to a unity in a way that will threaten the worldly powers of this age.*
- 3. Community grows from the desire of a transformed heart:** *"Your people will volunteer freely on the day of your power." (Ps. 110: 3 NAS).*
 - *"devotion without obligation."*
- 4. The depth of relationship is valued over pre-planned meetings:** *"...not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Heb. 10:25).*
 - *"gatherings without meetings."*
- 5. Authority rises from the revelation of Jesus, not from well-crafted structures.** *"Sheep taking turns to pretend to be shepherds. (Psalm 55:3 the Message).*
 - *"authority without hierarchy."*
 - *theology without transformation only leads to arrogance.*
- 6. Order comes from mutual respect and affection, not from politics and rules.** *"Honour one another above yourselves." (Rom 12:10).*
 - *"order without control."*
- 7. Unity emerges from wholehearted agreement, not from conformity imposed from the outside.** *"...for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers." (Matt.23:8).*
 - *"unity without conformity"*
- 8. Everyone is equipped to follow Jesus.** *"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Eph. 2:10).*
 - *"equipping without subduing."*

A revisit of the themes developed over the previous eight chapters that were designed to help one get a fix on how Jesus works to shape his church.

First, who around you has their attention and affections on Jesus, not on a charismatic leader, author, or an innovative program? Ask people what they like about their congregation and see if "helping them learn to follow Jesus" comes up at the top of the list instead of fawning over the pastor, music team, or children's ministry.

Second, who is learning to live on a growing alliance on God instead of their own effort or achievement? Is the focus on outward conformity or the inner transformation of an affection-based relationship to Jesus? Are you being encouraged to grow in trusting God, or being trained to trust the congregational leadership or program?

Third, who genuinely cares about others and who is not living by obligation, commitment, or covenants? Accountability attempts to change people from the outside and if you are pressured with guilt and fear, you won't grow to know him. Genuine compassion for others spawned by grace working in us will invite us into the most productive relationships.

Fourth, who is open to building friendships and doesn't just invite you to a meeting? Some groups are too large or too busy to provide opportunity for real relationships to grow. Others may already have established friendships that are hard to break in to. Being invited out for a meal is far better than being handed a bulletin with all the meetings you can attend. You want people who are open-hearted and value close, honest friendships that grow in affection and mutual care. You'll see that as they take an interest in you.

Fifth, in whatever group you find, is everyone respected or is there a hierarchy of spirituality that elevates some over others? Do people talk down to you as experts or laterally with you as fellow travelers on a journey of faith?

Sixth, does it find freedom and order in mutual respect and love or by the demands of leadership? How are you treated if you see things differently than others? One of the earmarks of broken leadership is their demand for conformity and their appeals to personal loyalty if you express concerns or ask questions. If they get angry, belittle you ("If that were true don't you think God would tell me first?"), gossip about you, or marginalize you unless you silently submit, you're in a dangerous environment. Run! To grow you need to question what you need to question and struggle where you need to struggle in an environment of love. Of course that also means you will find respectful and appropriate ways to express your concerns so as not to be divisive or undermine other people's freedom as well.

Seventh, are you encouraged to respond wholeheartedly as God leads you and to have relationships with other believers beyond that group? Find the environment where you're free to make mistakes as you learn to listen to his Spirit, and spend time with those who encourage you to follow your heart more than meet their expectations.

Eighth, are people being equipped to have their own spiritual journey, or are they encouraged to be dependent on the leaders? If they forbid you to read books that make them uncomfortable or if you are told you will wither spiritually if you don't regularly fill your tank at the meetings, you're already being taught to be more secure under human leadership than from following Jesus.

It's here, when the Body of Christ becomes all about personal achievement, approval, and self-actualization, that so many lose heart. The good news is, when we finally learn that our place in the family of God is simply "in Christ," we begin a new journey—one that makes the Lord Jesus central so we can look to him for leadership, guidance, comfort, and love.