

*What Does It Mean
To Serve God
Faithfully?*



What Does It Mean To Serve God Faithfully

In the last issue of BC, we considered, "How Can You Know God," and our thoughts were derived from 1 Chronicles 28:9, where David says, "Know the God of your father." In order to know God, you must spend time with Him. If we don't take time to get to know God, we will never be able to serve him properly. It takes a relationship that involves much more than just hearing about Him. It takes wholehearted devotion!

Due to the Facebook society we live in, we sometimes mention we know someone or say, we're "friends," when we may not even remember who they are and have never actually spent time with them. That cannot and must never be the case as pertains to our relationship with God! In order to serve God faithfully, we must never allow our service to Him to become just another hobby. He must be above all else. God must be first every day and not just occasionally. There is absolutely no such

thing as a "part time servant of God!"

In Paul's letter to the Romans there is a lot of advice on how to live for God daily. In the 12th Chapter verses 1 and 2, he writes, "I beseech you therefore

**In order to know God,
you must spend time
with Him.**

brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Paul begins this chapter with a command, not a suggestion, that you become a "living sacrifice." He says this is pleasing to God. If you want to be acceptable to God, you can't live or think like the world.

Those seeking to please God must also be aware of this admonition: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

To rightly divide the truth suggests there is a wrong way to divide it. Peter spoke of this possibility when noting the writings of his fellow-apostle Paul, "... in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable People twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16). Some will be lost in spite of their reading habits, for they haven't been careful in their reading.

Should we therefore ditch our digital reading devices? Not necessarily. But we do need to be as careful as we can to read God's word deeply, devotedly.

Timothy D. Hall
Lightgrams July 16, 2015

Open A Book

Open a book
And you will find,
People and places of every kind;
Open a book
And you can be,
Anything you want to be;
Open a book
And you can share,
Wondrous words you find in there
Open a book
And I will too,
You read to me,
And I'll read to you!



Volume 36 - Number 6 - Nov/Dec 2017
BC is published every other month. Send all inquiries, address changes and subscriptions to the editor: L Scott Gage, PO Box 3425, Fayetteville, AR 72702-3425 Voice & Fax 479-521-6809 Email: Lsgage129@cs.com

www.basicchristianity.net

If you or someone you know would like to receive BC, send the name and mailing address to:

Basic Christianity

PO Box 3425

Fayetteville, AR 72702-3425

Or

Lsgage129@cs.com

Digital Natives

"Digital natives" is a phrase I've just encountered. I find that the term has been around since 2003, and refers to anyone born after 1980. What makes this group of people different is that screens have always been a part of their lives (generally speaking). They've cut their teeth, so to speak, on information and entertainment conveyed by computer monitors, smart phones, and digital readers.

What makes this group of people different is that screens have always been a part of their lives.

At first that might not sound too significant. My own generation was the first to grow up with telephones and televisions; was that so bad? Arguments pro and con could be suggested, but most of my generation feel we've developed in a normal manner.

An article recently published on Fastcodesign.com ("Everything Science Knows About Reading On Screens") points to a potential problem of reading via digital media versus reading words printed on paper. Citing a 2005 study by San Jose State University researcher Ziming Liu, a warning is given that "this style of reading may come at a cost.

... sustained attention seems to decline when people read on-screen rather than on paper, and that people also spend less time on in-depth reading."

Another study noted this: "Nonlinear reading might especially hurt what researchers call "deep-reading" - our in-depth reading of text that requires intense focus to fully understand it ..." We develop a tendency to skip through the reading, looking for key words instead of reading the material closely. In the process we lose much.

Reading is a key component of our faith. Paul declared, in Romans 10:17, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." That was written when few could read;

"Nonlinear reading might especially hurt what researchers call "deep-reading"

most gained information by hearing what others said. Implied in his statement is that reading is the gateway to the faith that will save us. We must work to gain the information God has revealed, or we can't please Him (see Hebrews 11:6).

Later in this same chapter and verse 11, he says, "Not lagging in diligence, fervent in Spirit, serving the Lord." Are we "diligent" in our faith? To serve God faithfully, we must be. Occasionally, we might mention how something must get done, and say, "I have got to give it due diligence," which involves time and energy on our part; being committed; working at it earnestly. Paul spends some time in Romans 12 speaking about God-given abilities. In

Serving God faithfully takes work...

verse 8, he says, "He who leads, with diligence." You study the life of the Apostle Paul, and what you find is that he was a servant in every sense of the word. He worked at it. He told the Galatian brethren, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). As the world looks at you and me, is it evident by our words, actions, and certainly by our worship, that we have truly committed our lives to God? Do we put forth enough effort, and show the amount of interest necessary for someone to look at us and say, "That person is a worker for the Lord."

We know, by the sure promises of God, that our life which is

"hidden in Christ" has great and eternal rewards. In Hebrews 4:9 Paul says, "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God." Later in verse 11, he says, "Be diligent to enter that rest." Paul is saying, "Whatever amount of dedication and commitment it takes, do not miss heaven!" In 2 Peter 3, Peter speaks of a day on which the Lord will return, and in verses 10 and 11, he says, "The earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness." Peter says, the life you live must be in view of what blessings await us. He says, "We according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless" (2 Peter 3:13-14). Serving God faithfully takes work, but for each of us it should be done so in view of heaven that awaits us.

As God's child, we should not only be a worker for him, but we should also be as Paul said in Romans 12, "Be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." Are we enthusiastic and excited when we think about our service? Is our attitude one that leaves no doubt to the world around us that following God is the greatest part of our lives? The Greek word

for “fervent” means to “bubble” or “boil.” As parents, if our children accomplish something we are especially proud of we may say, “I am just so proud, I could boil over!” Are we so happy about serving God that the same could be said of our spiritual walk? Is real rejoicing evident on our part?

In reading 1 Peter 1:3-9, you can almost feel the excitement from Peter as he delivers a wonderful message to us. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love though now you do not see him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” Peter tells these early Christians that they may go through

“various trials,” but these difficulties will help shape them for the most important journey ahead. He says, no matter the difficulty, rejoice because heaven is waiting for His children. He describes it as: incorruptible, undefiled, does not fade away. When you and I think of the picture described by Peter, does that not make us excited about our service for God?

David tells Solomon, “Know the God of your father, and serve Him with a willing mind.” When we follow the life of Solomon in God’s word, we find that he recognized if you serve God, He is there for you. The book of Ecclesiastes speaks of all the ways he experiments with life. What does Solomon determine is most important? “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all.” God must get first place in our lives!

When you and I serve God faithfully, and make him top priority, He is there for us, just like He was with David, Solomon. Paul, Peter, and all before who have been faithful servants. Jesus tells us, “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.” My prayer is that each of us has done as the Apostle Paul commands, and have become a “living sacrifice.”

Tom Bennett
Spearsville, LA

demand proximity. Proximity isn’t required for community.” I do not completely agree with that assertion. There are some things that can only be gained by assembling with the saints. When we choose to stay away for our own convenience or desires, this defeats some of the very fundamental purposes of the assembly in the first place. If I am sick and must stay home, this is not the same as if I just want to stay home so I can sleep longer, or so that I can watch football or some other personal pursuit.

While this article touts many of the advantages of new technology, there are other studies that have been done that detail some of the adverse effects of smart phones and the techno world. I read one recently that talked about some of the adverse effects of Facebook and other social media on the younger generation. While the claim may be made that social media promotes community, there are others who believe that it is causing a disconnection among young people. It is as if they are living in a fantasy world instead of the real world.

The Hebrew writer admonishes us to hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering. There are many areas in which we may need to hold fast, and we must not allow any modern technology or anything else to lure us away from steadfastness

to God’s word. We are to learn how to stir one another up to love and good works. There is no better place to accomplish that than in the assembly of the saints. A phone, a computer or a television is not near so warm and encouraging as another live individual interacting with you in the assembly of the church.

One final thought on being faithful to assemble. The Lord appointed his table in his church. We are taught to remember the Lord in the communion service. When the saints come together to break bread in memory of our Lord, we should desire to be there. We cannot accomplish the full intent of this command when we are at home on our phone. Paul’s admonition to the Corinthians was, “Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another” (1 Cor. 11:33).

We should not forsake the assemblies of the church. God means for them to be encouraging and strengthening to our faith. The absence of bodies in the assemblies of the church is an unhealthy sign. May God help us to find our way back to the assembly and back to his word.

L. Scott Gage
Fayetteville, AR

working solo (or with a small staff), and popular camera and encoder options that will fit every budget. (<https://stretchinternet.com/church-attendance-statistics-trends-what-they-mean-for-modern-church/> accessed 11/29/17)

Most of the suggestions in this article are reasonable. It is obvious that churches do adapt to different surroundings and cultural requirements. If we go back fifty years many of our churches didn't have air conditioning. This was one reason in past years that a lot of churches made brush arbors in which to conduct gospel meetings in the summertime. It was cooler under the arbor than in the building.

I remember my dad telling stories about riding in a wagon to church on Sundays. Many of the members lived miles away and it was a long ride to church. For that reason, they usually only met on Sunday mornings. However, they would often have dinner on the ground and stay around for an early afternoon service before loading the wagon and heading back home. There was a strong family altar in those days, much stronger than we normally see today. My grandmother had my dad memorize passages of scripture every week. They read the Bible in the home and sang together at home.

By the time I was growing up in the 1950's and 1960's, our nor-

mal church schedule was Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night. People were driving automobiles and most of us lived within minutes of the church building.

Church schedules and meeting times change from time to time for various reasons. When gas prices began to rise several years ago, some churches began having early afternoon services so that members were only having to pay for one round trip to church on Sunday. The church would either have a lunch together or take a little time for members to go eat lunch somewhere nearby and return for the early afternoon service.

These are just a few examples of how churches have adapted to changing times. With the new technology that has arrived on the scene, we can expect to see some adaptations. Some people use their phones for Bible reading now. We can pack a whole library on a smart phone!

My grandparents used to ride to services in a buckboard wagon with my parents in tow. My parents took me to the church assemblies in a car and I still drive to church today. However, there is a difference in using a different mode of transportation to attend the church assembly and not attending the assembly at all. The article cited above claims, "Technology allows a greater sense of community that doesn't

Absence of Bodies

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:24-25

I have been a fan of *Rumpole of the Bailey*, a series starring Leo McKern that ran on PBS stations some years ago. Rumpole is a crusty old barrister (lawyer) who defends various villains and ne'er-do-wells down at the Old Bailey in London. In one episode his wife Hilda has persuaded, or coerced, him into taking a cruise. There is a murder mystery writer on the ship who is working on a new novel which he is entitling *Absence of Body*. The novelist offers lectures for those interested to attend. Meanwhile, on the ship there is actually a lady who seems to be missing. The novelist, Rumpole and a judge on board put their minds to solving the mysterious absence of this lady, who her new husband claims is just feeling ill and staying in her cabin. In his humorous, and sometimes

abrasive manner, Rumpole solves the mystery and presents the woman alive and well, despite the nefarious claims by the judge and the novelist that her husband had killed her and thrown the body overboard.

In recent years there has been an absence of bodies in church assemblies. All the polls show that church attendance has been on the decline, some say the decline is worse than what had previously been reported. There are various theories and remedies that

In recent years there has been an absence of bodies in church assemblies. All the polls show that church attendance has been on the decline...

have been advanced by different people and organizations. There is another 'absence' that is glaringly evident in many of the articles and polls that deal with this subject of church attendance. That is an absence of any reference to God's word and what it says on the subject. While many of the authors discuss the impact of new technology and other factors that contribute to this decline, they seem content that the reasons and excuses given for spurning church are legitimate and the church needs to

change in order to meet the requirements of modern man.

An article posted on September 19, 2016 by Jordan Duvall states:

1. More than 40% of people claim to attend weekly church services—but research has indicated that less than 20% actually do attend weekly church services. (Hartford Institute of Religion Research)

2. Only 27% of millennials say they attend religious services on a weekly basis. (Pew Research Center)

3. Between 2007 and 2014, there was a 3.7% decline in weekly church attendance (based on poll respondents). Meanwhile, the U.S. population increased by over 16 million during that same time frame. (Pew Research Center)

As Mark Twain once famously stated, “Facts are stubborn, but statistics are more pliable.” Here at Stretch, our expertise is live streaming—not data analysis. So it’s hard to say with certainty what these church attendance statistics indicate. There are countless reasons why church attendance might be declining in the U.S. today. (And there are certainly some encouraging church attendance statistics out there, so all is not lost!)

That being said, it’s important to

understand what these church attendance statistics could mean for the growing number of modern, progressive churches out there. There are several big-picture takeaways we can discuss that may be contributing to these church attendance trends. Let’s dig a little deeper....

A Couple Takeaways From These Church Attendance Statistics

1. Church services are evolving—and technology should be a part of that.

According to a 2011 LifeWay Research study, 75% of protestant churches have a website—but less than half of those “use their sites for interactive purposes.” Additionally, Tyndale University conducted a study on technology in churches and found that 46% of church leaders discourage the use of technology at their church. And no, the study did not take place exclusively in the town from Footloose (all due respect to John Lithgow).

If only 27% of millennials are attending regular church services—and church attendance has slowly been declining in recent years—isn’t it entirely possible that the hesitancy to embrace technology could be a contributing factor?

That’s not to say that all churches fall into the same bucket. Many modern churches are see-

ing the upside to incorporating technology in their services and are making an effort to integrate new technologies. According to this *Christianity Today* article, technology can and should be used to further the mission of the church, because it enables:

A. Better communication:

“Technology enables the congregation easily to have direct communication with me, and I can have communication with them on a broader and a clearer scale.”

B. A greater sense of community: “Technology allows a greater sense of community that doesn’t demand proximity. Proximity isn’t required for community.”

Looking for a progressive way to reach more people with your message?

2. There are folks who genuinely would like to or intend to attend church service, but are not currently doing so.

There are a million things that could get in the way of someone attending regular church services—sickness, work circumstances, vacation, or those pesky football games every Sunday morning...the list goes on and on. But as a church in the modern age, you need to think outside of the church walls.

Consider the following ways to reach out to congregants and community members who are

not currently attending church for any of the reasons listed above:

- Use social media to keep the community up to speed on all church-sponsored activities. This may encourage those who can’t attend a weekend service to attend another event and become part of the church community.
- Have a church member tweet key messages, passages, or notes from your church service each week.
- Allow people to submit prayer requests on your website.
- Post your sermon notes online along with audio or video archives of your weekly service. This will allow people to participate in service at their convenience if they can’t attend in person.
- Live stream your church services online. For a church who faces budget or staff constraints, this can sound daunting—but with a few tools and a basic understanding of live streaming, you can get started in no time.

These ideas can be a bit intimidating at first, especially if you’ve never tried them before. If live streaming interests you, be sure to check out this free guide (<https://info.stretchinternet.com/download-guide-live-streaming-church-services>). In it, you’ll find detailed, easy-to-follow steps for live streaming, tips on how to live stream if you’re