

# Are You a Part-Time Churchgoer? You May Be Surprised

Note from Pastor Kevin Lea follows this article.



Geoff and Christine are thirty-something churchgoers who love Jesus and love their three kids. They consider themselves faithful members of New Life Community Church. Their oldest is about to be in the youth group, and their youngest is finally out of diapers. Christine has been involved in the kids' ministry through the years. Geoff is a deacon.

But they are part-timers when it comes to church attendance, and they never set out to be. They are not alone. [Recent statistics](#) show that an increasing number of evangelicals who are firm in their faith are flabby in their practice of actually gathering with their brothers and sisters in worship. It's the part-time syndrome, and it can sneak up on any of us.

Let's go back to Geoff and Christine. There are 52 Sundays a year, and last year, they attended a worship gathering on 28 of those Sundays. (That's an average of about twice a month.) What happened?

- **Vacation:** To maximize his allotted days, Geoff took the family to the mountains during the kids' spring break, stretching over two weekends (one of which happened to be Easter!). There was the summer beach vacation, another stretch of a week and two weekends, and then a fall getaway. Total = 5 Sundays.
- **Sports:** Their oldest son is on a travel soccer team. Many of the games are on weekends, and they believe it would be a better testimony to be among unbelievers on Sunday mornings rather than let down the team. Total = 9 Sundays.
- **Sickness:** With their youngest child going to preschool, the family seems more susceptible to illnesses than before, and sickness always seems to hit on the weekends. Total = 3 Sundays.
- **Guest Preacher:** When Pastor Jon is out of town, Geoff and Christine usually take the weekend off. They never like the guest speaker as much as Pastor Jon. Total = 3 Sundays.
- **Visiting In-Laws:** Christine's parents come twice a year to spend the weekend with the family. To maximize their time, they usually spend the weekends catching up and doing some shopping. Total = 2 Sundays.
- **Holiday:** Thanksgiving weekend, and the week in between Christmas and New Year's, the family is traveling. Total = 2 Sundays.

Geoff and Christine may be a fictional couple, but their situation is true for many of us. Recently, a church leader told me their most faithful attendees are only in church 2-3 times a month. They basically *expect* churchgoers to be "hit or miss" every week.

## Danger #1 – Guilt You Into Going

Now, there are two wrong ways church leaders might address this issue. The first is to go all Hebrews 10 on everyone and emphasize the importance of the worship gathering, so as to whip people into shape and guilt them into church attendance. Sorry, but this isn't a gospel-centered approach.

We should never take the command of Hebrews 10 about neglecting the church and isolate it from the preceding verses (about the privilege of coming before God in a community of faith that holds to a confession of hope). That's giving the imperative ("Go to church!") without the indicative ("You are welcomed into the throne room of grace with your family in Christ."). This approach also stresses church as a *place* we go, rather than church as *the people* with whom we gather. It reinforces the idea that the church is a building and leads people to think holiness happens by being present every week.

Lastly, this method could cause people to have a checklist mentality, where we pat ourselves on the back for being in church 48 weeks a year, while neglecting other important matters – like justice and love.

Churchgoing isn't necessarily a sign of spiritual health. How many times do you think the Pharisees were absent from the temple?

## **Danger #2 – Avoid the Issue**

The second danger is to be so concerned with the first that we fail to address the imperative in Hebrews 10 at all. In doing so, we ignore the importance of the church as the family of Christ, the people with whom we are to gather and hear the gospel.

Because of our strong distaste for legalistic checklists, we might minimize the counterfeit gods that creep into our lives and vie for our free time. In the desire to avoid legalism, we never mention that a ball can become a Ba'al for some, or that leisure and comfort can become idols that keep us from worshipping the true God with other believers.

In an effort to not guilt people into church attendance, we never make people aware of ...

*To read this article in its entirety, go to:*

<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevinwax/2013/08/06/are-you-a-part-time-churchgoer-you-may-be-surprised/>

*Note from Pastor Kevin: I love the fact that I **GET** to go to church. It is a great privilege to gather with people that are also in love with my Lord and Savior, Jesus. When we gather, the Lord often uses someone there to minister to me in some way and He uses me to minister to others. Each time, I am convicted by the Holy Spirit in a way that causes spiritual growth and better prepares me for carrying out the Great Commission. Often these events would not have happened had I not "gone to church" with a heart yielded to the Spirit about what Jesus wanted to do in my life that week.*

*Unfortunately, there are many who wake up on Sunday morning and first mentally run through the list of their priorities. If nothing else is more important, then they will "go to church." When they go, they go expecting to receive something that will meet **their** needs that day, and they go away disappointed if their expectations are not met. How tragic that they miss out on the spiritual fruit of being blessed and used by God flowing through His people in ministry to one another. God reserves this kind of blessing for those who have the right attitude about gathering with the other believers.*

*In my 39 years as a Christian, I have very rarely missed the weekly gathering of God's people. The Lord has given me much joy in doing so, even when it meant attending with people that brought discouragement and personal trials because those trials resulted in patience, peace, and joy, just as James said they would (James 1).*

*Each week, I eagerly anticipate what Jesus will do as the Saints gather, and I pray that our (and your) church will grow in this attitude until our blessed Savior returns.*