

It happens to be one of the more popular traps along the journey of faith—the idea that somewhere along the path of righteousness we somehow outgrow our need for the church. Perhaps you’ve met someone who was too busy for the church. Maybe you’ve encouraged someone who thought they were too important for the church. What was once the central aspect of their life has now turned into an occasional hobby. We all need a healthy reminder from time to time that we need church in all seasons and successes of life.

### **We Need Church for Worship—Not Entertainment or Performance**

When the early church is pictured in the early pages of Acts (Acts 2:42-47), we see the picture of a worshipping church. Centered around the Word of God, the people responded to God in a life that reverberated with the rhythm of worship. You don’t see people searching for their type of music. You don’t see people using the church for a performance outlet to satisfy their narcissistic appetite to be seen, heard and to perform. You see a people who are gathered to worship the sovereign God who spoke the universe into existence from nothing and rescued them through the blood of Christ. Oftentimes in my experience of church life and ministry I’ve found that less is more. More focus on God and less pragmatism is always a much healthier diet for a church.

### **We Need the Church for Spiritual Development**

In the first letter to the church at Thessalonica, Paul explains the calling of the church to live holy and God-exalting lives (1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:12) and to hold one another accountable. Certainly it must be said that spiritual development in the church also requires a people who are committed to church discipline (see Matthew 18). The Word of God points out that God’s will is never for the Christian to develop spiritually in a vacuum or on a lonely island. Through the community of a local church, God’s people exercise their spiritual giftedness together and it results in spiritual development. Everyone in the church matters! The church is not a building, it’s a people who are called out for God’s glory. It’s impossible to be a part of God’s church without immersing yourself into a local body of Christ followers.

### **We Need the Church for Christ-Centered Friendship**

As we read through Pilgrim’s Progress by John Bunyan, we see the need for companionship along the journey of faith. We are not intended to hike our way to the Celestial City alone. Christ has graciously given us fellow pilgrims, and it would be a soul damaging decision to attempt life without Christ-centered friendship. This is true for all members of the church—including the pastors who lead the church. Christian friendship enables us to seek advice, receive accountability, stay grounded in the faith, and spur one another onward to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24-25). If the people in your church don’t know you, you’re not really a member of the church.

## **We Need the Church for Biblical Leadership**

The self-guided tour of Christianity doesn't exist. It's not an option for the true believer. God has sovereignly designed His church with leaders who are called to faithfully shepherd the church (see 1 Peter 5:1-11). Just as it would be utterly foolish for the inexperienced data analyst to leave his cubicle in New York and set out on a self-guided summit of Mount Everest, so it is with those who think they can navigate through this harsh and fallen world without submitting to their pastors. In a day where YouTube and Google serve up whatever recipe or how-to video we can imagine, we must be reminded that God has not called Google or YouTube to serve as our pastors.

## **We Need the Church for Missions**

As Christ was leaving the sod of this earth, He provided some extremely important words to His followers. He said:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matthew 28:18-20).

The Great Commission is not a great suggestion. It's a command given to us by Christ, but we must likewise remember that it cannot be accomplished alone. Even a lone ranger Christian (which is an oxymoron) cannot accomplish the Great Commission by merely utilizing para-church organizations. If a single Christian is to engage properly in the Great Commission, it must be through the context of a local, tangible, New Testament church.

The church is not an option for some Christians, it's a mandate for all Christians. To be a Christian involves participation in the local church. Charles Spurgeon once remarked, "Nobody can do as much damage to the church of God as the man who is within its walls, but not within its life." As we pass through various seasons of life, we must avoid the arrogant and self-dependent ideology of spiritual autonomy. It doesn't end well.

**Dr. Josh Buice;** <http://www.deliveredbygrace.com>

Dr. Josh Buice serves as the pastor of Pray's Mill Baptist Church in Douglasville, Georgia — just west of Atlanta. He is the founding director of the G3 Conference, the author of a theology blog (DeliveredByGrace.com) and is passionate about expository preaching, biblical theology, and the local church. Josh studied at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary where he earned his M.Div. and D.Min. in expository preaching. With a passion for sound biblical theology and ecclesiology, Pastor Buice spends much of his time preaching, writing, and talking about these important issues. He is married to his wife Kari and together they have four children (Karis, John Mark, Kalli, and Judson). When away from the office, Josh enjoys spending his time with his family, hunting, running, and a good cup of coffee.