

CENTRAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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Unbinding Your *heart*

DEVELOPING A CLOSER RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH PRAYER
AND SHARING OUR FAITH.

We can only have relationships that equal our own ability. So if we want the great things that relationships offer – like authenticity, trust, love, security and growth – then we have to be the first one to bring the important skills of love, kindness, forgiveness, faithfulness, honesty, acceptance, authenticity, and other such important traits. There will be no love if you do not bring love to the table yourself. Dr. Henry Cloud “The Secret Things of God.”

Why the Church?

I do not believe I have ever heard a criticism of the church, however accurate, that has impressed me. For every criticism leveled against the church by those who have no association with it, I can come up with a half dozen more they have never even considered. Finding fault with the Church is about as difficult as hitting the broad side of a barn. In other words, with a little time and research anyone can do it – and usually make a good case. The church, in the Apostle Paul’s words, is very much the “earthen vessel” he describes. It is imperfect, sometimes prone to unfaithfulness and selfishness, and often times slow to respond to the very things God is calling it to do and be. As you may have heard me say before when someone criticizes the church for being full of hypocrites, I always agree! Should someone say the same thing to you, I recommend you do the same. Say, simply, “Absolutely – the church is full of hypocrites -- but there is always room for one more. Why don’t you come and join us!”

If the church is as flawed as its critics claim, what purpose can it possibly serve? How can we defend its purpose? Why would want to be a part of it? Even more importantly, why would we ever want to invite someone else to be a part of such a community?

Well, first of all, let me make one thing clear: it isn’t, and has never been, ABOUT the Church. Evangelism is NOT about inviting people to love the Church – or even necessarily join the Church. Evangelism is about inviting people into a living relationship with a loving God who has revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ. I guarantee if you tell someone how important it is for them to belong to a church – they will either ignore you or find 101 reasons why you are wrong. If, however, you share with them how Jesus has made a difference in your life, people will pay attention. Jesus, who forgave sinners, healed the sick and took in the ones no one else wanted, is more interesting to people outside the Church than those of us “inside” the Church sometimes realize. To hear we follow a Savior who loved the outcasts,

touched the untouchables and went head to head with the self-righteous religious folks of his day is amazing news to many people. To hear a person does not have to “have it all together” before going to church – and the church is there to welcome them wherever they might be in their lives – is something a lot of people simply do not know. It is a message we cannot take for granted. Indeed, when we do, we no longer have any function other than institutional survival.

So, why is the church necessary? Why is it beloved of God despite its many and obvious flaws? In 2 Corinthians 4:7, Paul writes, “...we have this treasure in jars of clay to show this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” We are an imperfect messenger with a perfect message. We are the flawed, sometimes even unfaithful Church, yet we have been entrusted to witness about One who was faithful in every way. In other words, because we are a human institution (with all the baggage that comes with it),



Take a Minute

We value your insight and would like to hear from you about issues you feel led to share. Page 2 of this week’s edition has a survey we would like for you to complete and drop in the box located in the narthex or email to Moniqua Suits – signatureidea@yahoo.com. Remember names will not be shared only comments.

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Why the Church? cont

any good done, any transformation made, any miracles produced, are clearly not the result of our power or holiness – but rather the power and holiness of God at work in us.

So, once again, why is the Church important? Because God has chosen the church as his primary messenger to the world. It does not mean God cannot or will not communicate in other ways or through other means. For Christians to profess otherwise is to make claims for or about God we have no right to make. However, God's love for the Church is made clear both in scripture and in history. God uses the Church to bring a message of love that has impacted the world in ways hard to measure. And when the Church has gotten off track or forgotten its mission, it has been corrected (or simply gone out of business).

God has promised to be faithful to the Church – which is, by definition, the Body of Christ at work in the world carrying out God's mission and witnessing to the person and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Is the church imperfect? Does it sometimes get caught up in itself and forget its core purpose? Unfortunately, the answer is "yes." But I believe, like

the father in the story of the Prodigal Son, God is always looking for evidence the Church is turning back to him. God wants nothing more than to bless his church – this "earthen vessel" – because in doing so all the world can see that God is real. After all, if God can work through "those people," (meaning us!) then God can do anything!

Why do I love the church? Well, it's not because the church is always warm and fuzzy. Rather, I love the church because it gives me an opportunity to be a part of what God is doing in the world right now. And it gives me a chance to do it alongside other believers (imperfect as we might be), who likewise have taken up the message of God's love, have surrendered to God's power, and are seeking to be vessels of something that has the potential of saving the world. Who WOULDN'T want to be a part?

Even now, God is doing amazing things in and through Central Christian Church. Not only can you be a part of those things, but you can invite others to come along for the ride. Indeed, that's part of the deal – and something God will honor and bless in ways we can only begin to imagine. ✞

Prayer Labyrinths

In my last column, I promised to write more about one of the types of prayer discussed in William Tenny-Britton's Prayer for People Who Can't Sit Still. I was unsure of which type to write until I went to JT's first flag football game. To get to the field, we turned on Ariadne Trail, passed Theseus Ct., and caught sight of Minotaur Way. Although I am skeptical of "signs," I was willing to take this as inspiration for my column and decided to write about prayer labyrinths.

The history of labyrinths goes back as far as Greek mythology which explains King Minos' labyrinth was built as a prison for the Minotaur. It was deemed necessary to imprison the Minotaur because he was half man and half bull (through no fault of his own, by the way). The Minotaur was eventually killed by Theseus, with some technical assistance from Ariadne. She had the insight that if Theseus laid a piece of thread behind him as he went into the labyrinth, he would be able to find his way out again (and he couldn't think of that himself?).

A number of European cathedrals have prayer labyrinths embedded into their floors, most notably including Notre-Dame de Chartres Cathedral. They differ from the Minos' labyrinth as they have only one path, so it is impossible to get lost. The medieval church used these labyrinths as contemplative aids and as a substitute for a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for those who could not make the actual journey to the Holy Land.

Labyrinths fell out of use when the pilgrimage requirement was no longer emphasized, and much later, they also came to be associated with the occult. However, many Christian denominations are taking a fresh look at the practices of prayer walking in general and the prayer labyrinth in particular. The Wikipedia article on labyrinths includes the following quote, attributed to "a Catholic writer":

The labyrinth is a universal symbol for the world, with its complications and difficulties, which we experience on our journey through life. The entry to the labyrinth is birth; the center is death and eternal life. In Christian terms, the thread that leads us through life is divine grace. Like any pilgrimage, the labyrinth represents the inner pilgrimage we are called to make to take us to the center of our being. In some Christian circles today the labyrinth continues to be used as an instrument to facilitate meditation, prayer, personal reflection, etc.

Take a Minute.cont

1. What kind of church do we need to be to help existing and future Christians successfully navigate their spiritual journey?



2. Do you believe Central is that kind of church, why or why not? Please share specific comments.



3. What specific ministries, activities and events do you participate as part of your spiritual journey?



4. What ministries, activities, and events would you like Central to offer?



5. I need help with

