

What's Your Excuse?

By: David Burruss

A few years ago, I delivered a sermon titled "Do Excuses Work?" to address the issue of church attendance among believers, exploring common excuses people use to justify their absence from worship services. It acknowledged some reasons, such as illness, work, family crises, and vacations, are valid. However, it emphasized that many who profess strong faith often struggle with consistent attendance. The discussion centered around seven prevalent excuses:

- 1. I Don't Feel Like It:** The conflict between flesh and spirit means that waiting to "feel like" attending church often results in perpetual absence. Galatians 5:17 highlights this struggle, urging believers to overcome their natural inclinations in favor of spiritual commitment. The Bible teaches that the flesh and the spirit are in constant conflict, preventing us from always doing what we "feel" like doing. This natural resistance to worship is something that needs to be consciously overcome. If attendance at church is based solely on feelings, many might never attend.
- 2. I'm Too Tired:** While fatigue is understandable in a stressful world, people often find energy for other activities, such as their children's sports, watching TV, or engaging in hobbies. This suggests a need to prioritize spiritual life over leisure and entertainment. Proper rest should be scheduled to ensure readiness for worship. The hope is that this message encourages believers to recognize that spiritual life should take precedence over entertainment or hobbies. By making time to rest appropriately, one can be fresh and ready for worship, acknowledging its higher priority.
- 3. I'm Changing:** Life changes such as moving, college, marriage, new jobs, and retirement disrupt routines, including church attendance. I want to warn against delaying the search for a new congregation and encourage maintaining worship habits despite life transitions. These periods of change can lead to the neglect of church attendance, often putting it off until "things settle down." However, this habit often remains "packed away" and believers need to integrate worship into their new routines promptly.
- 4. I'm Busy:** The message differentiates between necessary work and optional busyness. The busy person is not necessarily a bad person but might have a priority problem. Mark 4:18-19 speaks of the dangers of allowing worldly cares and desires to overshadow spiritual priorities. It is important to prioritize "kingdom matters" to ensure God's provision for other needs. Busy people may forget or not realize the fundamental Christian principle that if kingdom matters are put first, God will provide for all other needs. This principle calls for trust in God's provision over our own efforts.
- 5. I'm Hurt:** Personal offenses within the church, whether real or perceived, often lead to absenteeism. Many stop attending because they feel hurt by another member's comments, attitudes, or perceived lack of attention from church leaders. Such grievances do not justify abandoning the church. Matthew 18:15 and James 5:13 are guides for resolving conflicts and seeking support during suffering.

Two key points are made:

- Leaving does not justify the behavior before God: Jesus warned his disciples that they would face persecutions, false teachers, and various sufferings. He emphasized endurance for salvation (Mark 13:9-23). Regardless of offense, abandoning the church is not justified before God.
 - Leaving does not solve problems: Leaving the church because of offense or tragedy does not aid in recovery or improvement. Ignoring God and separating from the church community only increases vulnerability to sin. Jesus instructs in Matthew 18:15 to address offenses directly with the individual involved.
 - James 5:13 advises seeking prayer and support from the church when suffering or sad. It is extremely important to resolve conflicts and seek help within the church rather than turning away from it.
6. **I'm Not Into Church:** For those who claim not to be interested in church, this attitude may extend to heaven itself. Revelation 21:9 describes the church as the "bride of the lamb," integral to Christ's eternal reward. Rejecting the church equates to rejecting Christ. Being disinterested in church might indicate a deeper spiritual issue. Since the church is central to the eternal relationship with Christ, dismissing it now could imply a lack of desire for the eternal fellowship it represents.
7. **I'm [Insert Excuse]:** The number one excuse is a personalized one, unique to each individual. It might stem from misconceptions about the necessity of church attendance or a lack of perceived benefit. I want to encourage self-reflection to identify and evaluate the validity of one's reasons for absence. This could include believing attendance is not necessary, thinking God or the preacher doesn't require it, or feeling that one doesn't gain anything from it.

Consistent church attendance is crucial for spiritual health and growth. While life presents legitimate challenges, believers are to prioritize their spiritual commitments and address any excuses that hinder their worship practices. By overcoming natural inclinations, fatigue, life changes, busyness, personal hurts, disinterest, and personal excuses, believers can strengthen their faith, grow in their spiritual journey, and build a supportive church community. The message is a call to self-reflection and commitment, urging believers to make church attendance a fundamental part of their lives, recognizing its irreplaceable value in their spiritual walk.