

Returning to church

Testimony by Sister Hannah



I first heard the Gospel, and was baptized at the age of 17. Throughout most of my teenage years, I struggled with depression and anxiety, something that impacted every possible area of my life, preventing me from partaking in the most basic of life's tasks, let alone experiencing any sense of joy or happiness.

Giving my life to the Lord was and continues to be a great victory. I grew to love the word of God and find great comfort and encouragement in it. However, I struggled with attending church regularly and remaining consistent in the House of God.

Out of church

I became overwhelmed by my issues, anxieties, thoughts, feelings and insecurities. Being in this state had many negative impacts on my life, the most detrimental being ending up out of church.

Although I continued to spend time in the presence of God, praying and finding comfort in His word, without the safety of continually dwelling in God's house, I began to drift and to lean on my own thoughts and ideas about life.

Church attendance is not always a black and white issue. Sadly, there may be individuals who have been in church week in week out for many years but are actually far from God. It is important for us to do all things in wisdom, marrying together all aspects of Christian life in order to be in right standing with God.

The enemy is a deceiver and will use any opportunity to blind us to the truth of the situations we find ourselves in. I was essentially in denial, refusing to acknowledge the severity and consequences of being away from God's house, but by His grace, in time, and after experiencing many difficulties, I would see my situation for what it truly was...a lack of covering and safety.

A lack of strengthening

Failing to hear the word of God regularly meant it became harder for me to lean on the promises of God.

["...faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."](#) [Romans 10:17](#) This verse suggests that a lack of hearing of the word will inevitably lead to a decrease in faith, and this is certainly what I

experienced. Without being continually encouraged and strengthened in the house of God, the difficulties I faced became all-encompassing and completely unmanageable.

A Spiritual imbalance

Having a knowledge of the word of God, but not being in the place to have it work powerfully in my life was a miserable state to be in. I felt spiritually unbalanced and uncomfortable. I knew what the word said about each situation I faced, however I felt I was unworthy to cling to it. I knew for the word to have power in my life I needed to be close to the Lord, and I simply felt so far.

“Achievements”

I made progress in some areas of my life, finishing college, working in a field I enjoyed and attending university. While there is nothing essentially wrong with progressing in the areas of work or education, exalting these things as our primary focus or source of happiness will only lead to disappointment. [But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Matthew 6:33](#) Despite my progress in these areas, there was always a struggle attached to them that led to feelings of discontentment. God was teaching me that to begin my journey of true contentment, I needed to return to His presence.

My journey back to church

The months leading up to my return to church were some of the most painful I have ever experienced. I experienced feelings of deep sadness, felt insignificant and without purpose, held on to strongholds that I knew deep down were only harming me, and at my lowest moments battled with suicidal thoughts. I felt unworthy and so far from God and even got to the place where I felt He did not love me anymore. I now know that this was a lie from the enemy, a fiery dart aimed at me with the intention of robbing me of God’s restoration. [If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9](#) God in His mercy, used my lowest moments to make me realise that the only option was to begin to cling to Him once more.

God took me on a journey. Teaching me the reasons for his commandments and warnings, showing me the dangers of leaning on my own understanding (**Proverbs 3:5-6**) and by His grace, forgiving and healing me.

Making the step to return to church was not easy. I was filled with so many worries and anxieties. I worried that I would feel out of place, that others may think badly of me, that I had been away far too long, that I would forever be playing “catch up” while everyone else was established in church and I was beginning my journey from scratch. God began to do a work, allowing me to view my decision to return to church as more important than anything I was feeling. On Sunday 1st September 2019, by the grace of God, I returned to the house of the Lord after many years away.

I am not ignorant of satan’s devices (**2 Corinthians 2:11**) I know that the enemy still seeks to attack me in the area of church attendance. Feelings of lowness and discouraging thoughts still try to creep in at times, and although it’s a process, I am determined, by the grace of God, to overcome anything that may try to hinder the work God is doing in my life.

Ultimately all it took was one step, and God did the rest for me. I used to feel very discouraged that church attendance was such a struggle for me. I couldn’t understand why it brought me such difficulty. I now see clearly the understanding the Lord has given me and the journey He has used to teach me the importance of clinging to Him as my only help and source of strength.

I would like to thank my mum for encouraging me and showing patience and understanding throughout my journey. I would also like to thank the saints for always reaching out to me, encouraging me, and most importantly keeping me in prayer. God bless you.

He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. Psalm 40:2

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:13-14

I would like to encourage you with some truths that the Lord has solidified in my heart, by His grace. Truths that now hold more weight due to my personal journey.

The purpose of being in God's house

Our God is a mighty and all-powerful God, a God who dwells in every one of His children. The purpose of Christian life is to develop an enriching personal relationship with Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Strengthening this relationship through time spent alone in the presence of God is vital, and something that must remain an invaluable and precious part of our lives as children of God.

2 Timothy 2:15 encourages us to rightly divide the word of truth. This means we must weigh up the word of God using wisdom and adhering to all things the Lord has deemed necessary for our lives as Christians. One of these things is "the assembling of ourselves together" or church attendance, which **Hebrews 10:25** encourages us not to forsake.

The reasons for God's instructions

It is important for us to understand the reasons behind the instructions God gives us. We may not always understand the fullness of every instruction, however, through faith we must believe that God in His infinite wisdom, has a great knowledge of that which is beneficial for us. As our loving Heavenly Father, the instructions He gives are not to burden us, but to ensure we remain on the narrow way which leads to life. **(Matthew 7:14)** His instruction to assemble together in His house is one of many instructions that God has given in order to keep us.

The benefits of being in God's house:

Hearing God's word

As Christians, the word of God is what we live by. Encouragement, strengthening, teaching, correction, instruction...all of these benefits and more are found within the word of God. Being in the place where the word dwells, allows us to saturate our hearts with these benefits.

Luke 4:4 And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.

2 Timothy 3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

Assembling together to praise God

God is greatly glorified when His children gather together to praise Him, and it is important for us to uphold this practice.

Psalm 34:3 O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together.

Psalm 22:22 I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee

Psalm 149:1 Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints.

Receiving of counsel

Receiving counsel from those who God has given to watch over our souls. (**Hebrews 13:17**) helps us to navigate our lives with wisdom.

Proverbs 15:22 Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.

Proverbs 1:5 A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels:

Encouraging one another

Although our personal issues may differ, we are essentially on the same journey. There is a sense of comfort and safety to be found in regularly gathering with and encouraging one another as likeminded believers.

Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

Hebrews 3:13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Proverbs 27:17 Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

The dangers of being away from the house of God

It is no surprise that an absence of the benefits of being in church would be detrimental to one's life in several ways.

Without the strength we receive from hearing the word, praising together and encouraging one another, the ability to stand upon the promises of God in the face of life's difficulties is compromised. We are more likely to diminish the truths of God in our lives, exalting what we are going through and becoming greatly discouraged.

The regular instruction or counsel we hear and take heed to has a direct influence on the decisions we make, whether good or bad. When we are away from the place where we receive the sound instruction contained in the word of God, we begin to take on other instruction and counsel.

Whether from the world, by leaning to our own understanding, or being influenced by the evil whisperings of the enemy, taking on of unsound counsel can allow harm to enter our lives.

Proverbs 11:14 tells us that there is safety in the multitude of counsellors. This suggests that being away from the multitude leaves us exposed to danger. If there is safety in the multitude...there is surely danger if we remove ourselves from it.

Remember

I would encourage anyone who is struggling with church attendance to firstly *remember* the purpose of attending church and being firmly rooted in the body of Christ. In obeying God's instruction to assemble together, we reap benefits that are crucial for our lives and spiritual growth: consistently hearing the word of God, being encouraged by, and encouraging others, and receiving the Godly counsel needed to navigate any personal challenges or trials you may be facing.

Put aside

With God's help, *put aside* any feelings, thoughts, emotions, worries, insecurities, anxieties, excuses...whatever may be hindering you. I say this, not to belittle any struggles you may be facing, but to encourage you to magnify God above anything that seeks to keep you away from His house. This is a process, and I know firsthand the challenges of returning to and remaining in church, but I also know that God is your helper, and able to help you overcome this struggle too.

Purpose in your heart

Purpose in your heart that as a child of God, dwelling in the place where you can fully and regularly receive what He has for you is a must.

Move forward in boldness

No matter how far from the Lord you may feel, no matter what you may have done, He loves you, and is ready to forgive you if you seek Him with sincerity. *Move forward in boldness*, by the grace of God. ...**forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before**, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:13-14

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

1 Corinthians 9:24

Continue your race!

Jeremiah 24:7 And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.

Psalms 27:34 Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand.

Colossians 1:23 ...continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard...