

## How to Leave a Church

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When I mentioned to a couple of pastor friends of mine that I wanted to write a book entitled How To Leave A Church, they gave me a look that insisted I had lost it. Everyone knows that pastors are supposed to be about the business of bringing people in not sending them away. But I want to explain. Our calling is to bring people to God and build them up in His love but not necessarily to build up our own individual churches. If we believe that God directs His people, we must also recognize that there are times when He removes someone from a particular church family to be part of another one. The question is "when this happens, how do you do it?" You see, I have experienced people leaving church enough times to realize that most people do not know how to leave a church. Even the ones that seem to otherwise be so mature in many ways, until they decide to change churches, then watch out. Some of you know exactly what I am talking about. I will save all of my painfully humorous stories for the book version. For now, I want to submit to you nine rules for leaving a church.

1) **Be Loving:** Since God's love is what we all should have within us, there is no reason why we should be unloving as we say goodbye. Jesus taught "By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another". John 13:35

2) **Be Joyful:** When you first arrived at that church, you believed God brought you there. Now that you are leaving, don't forget to thank God for directing you there in the first place and for the valuable time spent with His people. Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full." (John 15:11). God does not want your joy exhausted because of your circumstance but He wants your joy to be "full".

3) **Be Peaceable:** No matter what is said or how your feelings may be hurt, you can handle this peaceably if you are willing to obey God in this. "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men." (Romans 12:18)

4) **Be Longsuffering:** I know that to be patient with some people it can feel like everlasting suffering but be encouraged, God has already given you what you need to endure the scruples of even the most difficult among us (Ephesians 1:6). And 1 Thessalonians 5:14 reminds us "... be patient with all".

5) **Be Kind:** It is so easy to say something that you will regret. Be careful to be kind. The Bible teaches that kind words can be a medicine to the soul but harsh words damage lives. Many times, because one is unsure of his decision to leave a particular church, he will look for problems in others to justify his actions; and in doing so, unkind things are said. James 3:10 warns of the duplicity of our tongue, that blessings and unkind words should not come from the same mouth.

6) **Be Good:** Sounds silly at first. Be good! But remember that goodness is a descriptor of divinity. Jesus said only God is truly good (Matthew 19:17). But we are told to imitate Him. Too many people are worse than simply "not good" when they finally depart from their former church; they are downright bad. Often times, their hearts have been gone for a long time before they actually take action. Then when they finally leave, the phone calls, the gossip, the rumors, the broken hearts; it is all so tragic. Maybe you have been truly mistreated, well Romans 12:21 says to "overcome evil with good". Or maybe you are offended at something; they won't hear your ideas, they don't recognize your inherent gifts, you weren't asked to lead another important ministry. What should you do? I would encourage you to consider, pray and ask: What is the "Good" or helpful response? and when you know what that is, do it. It is written "be holy for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16). If you say God is

leading you to change churches and therefore stating you can hear God when He speaks to you, well listen closely, this is what He is saying to you "Be Good".

7) **Be Faithful:** Throughout His ministry, Jesus is constantly observing how faithless His followers are. (Matthew 6:30) Changing churches is a major life transition, or at least it should be. Assuming that you don't change churches every few months as a lifestyle choice, chances are that you have been in your current church for quite some time. Leaving the people with whom you spend so much precious time worshipping alongside and serving in important ministry activities together is never easy. It can be quite difficult on many levels. You must remain spiritually strong. Your prayer, worship and devotion to God needs to continue unwavering as He guides you through this time. You must rely on Him to provide all that you need, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. He is faithful and we are called to remain faithful. This faithfulness in our lives is a demonstration of His Spirit in us. (Galatians 5:23)

8) **Be Gentle:** Once in a while, tough topics will need to be addressed head on. Maybe God has not instructed you specifically to leave but something has happened that has crippled your ability to fully participate in worship or ministry. In an effort to make peace as God instructs, you determine to look the problem straight in the eye. Be gentle! If you absolutely must say the difficult words, and you have already determined that these words are loving, patient & kind, say them but say them gently. Philippians 4:5 says, "Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand."

9) **Have Self-Control:** All right, here's the catchall. By now, you know you should handle this with love, a joy-filled heart, making peace from any conflicts, being patient with what others have said or done, using kind words, choosing what is beneficial and good, remaining full of faith and reliance upon God, and interacting gently with the others involved. And now I exhort you to control yourself: your actions, mannerisms, and tongue. It is a choice! We have all made foolish mistakes here; instead of exhibiting self-control, we have shown self – out – of – control. My friend, I have learned this to be true. If we want to know the mind of God in our difficult situations, here it is: He wants us to have self-control. (2 Peter 1:6)

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Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



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### Sunday Worship:

9:00 & 10:30am  
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley  
195 Mahoney Ave, Oak View

### Mid-Week Study:

7:00pm Thursday  
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley  
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View