

The Value of Arriving Early to Church Meetings

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“If we had left just *five minutes earlier*, we wouldn’t be in this predicament,” you mutter to yourself, confident that you are going to arrive after the church meeting has started. You feel your heart racing. You dread the attention you are about to bring upon yourself. You think about how you might sneak in the back, but then you remember that the church building’s squeaky door will announce your arrival. Finally, you are in your pew, your heart rate is back to normal, nobody is staring at you anymore, and all is well. Or is it?



Whether we are considering the main weekly meeting of the church, a prayer meeting, a leadership breakfast, a weekday lunch and Bible study for seniors, or any other church meeting, arriving late is always an option. All of us have been late at some time, often without sin (You didn’t put the nail in the road that caused your flat tire!). However, some in the church have made it a bad (and sinful) habit. In fact, they are known for incessant tardiness.

Does it really matter when we show up? Yes! Granted, this issue is not as important as other aspects of church life (like sound doctrine), but good things happen when we show up not only on time, but *early*, to church meetings. Consider, then, the value of arriving early to church meetings:

- *Arriving early provides opportunities for fellowship.* Followers of Christ need one another. Hebrews 10:24 exhorts us to “stimulate one another to love and good deeds.” Some of the most motivating conversations you may ever have could take place in the fifteen or twenty minutes before the church meeting begins. Those who come early are some of the most encouraged Christians in the church.
- *Arriving early prevents you from distracting others.* A person who arrives late, especially to the church’s main meeting, usually distracts people away from the truth. What happens when somebody walks in late? Most, if not all, look to see who it is. If the door to the meeting place is in the back, heads, and sometimes whole bodies, turn to get a good look! And, for a moment, the Christ-exalting song being sung, or the truth-filled prayer being prayed, or

the Scripture being read, is forgotten. You don’t want it to be said of you that your regular lateness was a distraction to others hearing the truth, do you?

- *Arriving early reveals a loving, Christ-like attitude.* Those who arrive early communicate that they love the church. They are saying, “I want to be here. This is my family. My life revolves around this church. It is worth any sacrifice to be here.” Those who consistently show up late, however, pronounce by their actions that coming to church meetings is a chore and perhaps even a burden. Paul’s words should be heeded:

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:3-5)

- *Arriving early is a simple way to respect your leaders.* I was once teaching a two hour seminar which included a break for coffee at the halfway point. When it was time to start the second session, one of the pastors announced to the people that it was time to be seated. Nobody moved. Five minutes later he again exhorted the people to reconvene. They didn’t listen. Finally, fifteen minutes later, they trickled back to their seats. I thought to myself, “How disrespectful!” Oftentimes, a pastor or ministry leader will set the time for a meeting. A simple way to respect them, and make their leadership a joy (which is for your good, Hebrews 13:17), is to show up even a little bit early.
- *Arriving early sets a good example for your children.* You get to work on time, and your kids know it. You wouldn’t miss the opening play of the ballgame, either, and they are right there by your side. Have you considered the possibility that your consistent lateness to various meetings of the church communicates to your children that work and sports are priorities over the church? Will your legacy to your children be, “Dad loved the Boston Red Sox,” or “Dad loved the bride of Christ?”