



So, you want to go to church?

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So you want to go to church?

This booklet is written for humorous purposes. Extensive use is made of sarcasm and quite often things people cherish are made to look silly. However, in a world where people have created things like a debutante ball, the Gong show, women's studies, and roller derby it should not be surprising that many religious practices have come into existence which do not reflect God as much as poor decision making on the part of people.

This will not be as consistently hilarious as the booklet "So Your Want to go to College". The reason is that college is a sort of an easy target. With churches, there can be things of value so the reader will be guided to try to find these while being hopefully entertained regarding those other church characteristics that are not so helpful.

The target audience are those who are completely disinterested in God and religion and are looking for a good laugh, those who have had bad church experiences and are wondering why, those who have never been to a church and are hesitant and skeptical, those who want to learn more but find what they know already seems to make church inquiries a dubious proposition.

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If you are easily offended, it would be wise to stop reading now. Humor can be deceptive, what we often find humorous in others we seldom see as humorous in ourselves. Humor and pride do not often work well together. As a further warning about how offensive this can get it might be helpful to see an example drawn from the over-valued field of psychology.

According to the Briggs and Stratton personality index every person can be classified using a system of four characteristics.

P-Popular	W-Wealthy	C-Clever	A-Attractive
L-Lazy	O-Obtuse	S-Smelly	U-Ugly

Here we can see that most people self-identify as PWCA while they often identify others as LOSU. This index is not as widely used as the Meyers Briggs index by the overly self-reflective and narcissistic as it does not give much in the way effusive, excessive, and continual self-affirmation.

For those who were unable to discern the sarcasm above or may self-identify as a LOSU, they should be warned that its going to only get worse.

If you want to inflict this on someone you know, you can obtain a free pdf copy here:

The desire to go to church can originate from a variety of motives so it is best to identify which one is foremost so that a good selection can be made;

1. To make business and social connections to help advance one's career or standing in the community.
2. To keep one's family content that tradition is being observed.
3. To seek a solution to a family problem.
4. To meet dating prospects with less chance of disease than at bars.
5. A last chance after being rejected by real softball teams.
6. To avoid mowing the lawn on Sunday mornings.
7. To find the true answer to life, the universe, and everything.
8. To show off or otherwise contend for the adulation of others.
9. To become a big fish in a small pond.
10. To enforce compliance or otherwise seek to manipulate others (small fish).
11. To get approval from the pastor like Summer in "School of Rock".
12. To appease an employer or probation officer.
13. To fulfill a perceived requirement to secure entrance to heaven upon death.
14. Generational inertia.
15. To have a chance to mess with people for your own amusement.
16. Finding the right combination of child care programs and caramel latte.

Searching for help to family problems is laudable, but without a foundation of truth one is really vulnerable to bad advice. The more noble motive is the search for truth. The difficulty is that visiting a church is often like searching on the Internet. You can turn up tons of information some of which may even be true.

What is truth?

Philosophers have pondered this question for millennia. However, that is not as profound as it first sounds as many philosophers are unable to prove they even exist and then are never heard from again.

Something can be declared as true because it can be compared to something else. Truth is that which stands alone and needs no comparison to support it. The bible declares God, Jesus, and the Bible itself are truth. Truth has fallen in popularity as relativism has become all the rage. This is partially a result of Einstein who invented a complex view of physics that he called relativity to tell his brother in law that his interest in loaning him more money was rapidly approaching a negative infinity.



People like relativity because it excuses so much, like when Obi-Wan Kenobi told Luke that he said Darth Vader had killed his father because it was true from a certain point of view, a married man saying I am going to leave my wife when the time is right, and a politician who says he is going to make things better.

Because declaring truth is declaring an absolute, there can be conflict with others who declare a different truth. This is the sort of thing that reduced the population of Germany 77% in the 1600s. A person can plant a sort of emotional flag in a doctrine or teaching that can inspire him to an intensity of zeal that can reach lethal proportions. Consider Islam.

Many people confuse truth with the ability to make people compliant. Joseph Stalin once said, "The only real power comes out of a long rifle." Some churches use a variety of coercive methods to achieve compliance as opposed to persuasion to illuminate truth. Some churches have and continue to use intellectual bullying, academic credentials, guilt, social pressure, and even a fear of hell to get the inquirer to acknowledge defeat which is not exactly the same as coming to a knowledge of the truth. While still not as severe as Islam, such bullying is not a path to God and truth.

It can come as a shock to consumers who are used to opening the yellow pages and selecting a dentist, dog groomer, or ordering a pizza that finding truth is more difficult than selecting the right franchise brand.

Why truth is elusive?

Truth is essentially that which is absolute in the universe and that pretty much limits it to God. The Bible tells us that God is revealed in his creation so we all have a chance to recognize him. For example, there are a variety of reactions one can have upon seeing the stars on a cloudless night.

1. Wow, it is really amazing that nothing existed and then it blew up and became all this.
2. I would prefer a different color.
3. I thought it would be bigger.
4. What other channels are there.
5. The hand that created this is worthy of praise and worship.

There is that in us which could respond to the creator (truth) however most people find truth repugnant. This is explained in the Bible;

John 3:19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.



The universal symbol for those who value comfort over truth.

(Ostrich with head in sand not a three legged mutant panda).

If one searches for truth, one might at first try the various cable TV programs that specialize in religion. One of the most well known is the Trinity Broadcasting Network. The golden thrones that Paul and Jan Crouch sit on give a first impression of the tackiest country and western show one could imagine.



3ABN network is less gaudy than TBN and is run by Seventh Day Adventists. After a while you see that most of the people on the network are really skinny and you begin to think they have to have AIDS or are real health enthusiasts.



The first thing one learns about Churches from cable TV shows is that there are some practices that are very theatric and even creepy



No, this is not yet another Muslim terror attack. This is the result of being “slain in the spirit”. Those that look like casualties have supposedly been healed from whatever malady they had suffered. Medical proof of such “cures” is somewhat thin.



Speaking in tongues is another phenomena that can strike the uninitiated as similar to the girl alien in Galaxy Quest with the broken translator.

Charismatic - Pentecostal - Full Gospel

If you have already come across those who speak in tongues or are slain in the spirit on TV, you may be interested in why these people do these things.

The term “charismatic” refers to the Greek word *charis* which means the gifts God gave the early church. These were supernatural abilities such as healing (including raising the dead) the ability to speak other languages, and prophecy (the direct communication of God’s word as opposed to predicting the future). This is also called Pentecostal because it is considered that these abilities were given to the early church on the day of Pentecost (about 50 days after Easter).

While what is occasionally shown on TV can be quite puzzling, it can get even stranger. Like the Toronto “blessing” where people roll around on the floor laughing and barking like dogs. This is similar to what used to be called “Holly Rollers”. There are more conservative flavors of these churches where such practices are more subdued and less demonstrated in the main service.

Such extreme practices can easily be ridiculed. However, it is important to consider that most of these people have been told that this is what is expected of Christians as they attempt to duplicate what they read in the Bible. What they do not often appreciate is that even when these gifts actually were functioning, people often showed some of the same abuses they do now.

Contemporary charismatic practices can be traced back to 1906 to the Azusa Street church in Los Angeles. Here starting in a black church a revival began where people were being “baptized in the Spirit” as evidenced by their spouting what has been called tongues. Since no recording of this has proven to be any known language, it might kindly be called “ecstatic speech”, or less kindly, gibberish.

People so desperate to experience the supernatural and miraculous that they enter into a sort of trance state where they are open to all sorts of influences. Ironically, it is at this point where people can become vulnerable to demonic deception, influence and even possession and end up further away from the truth they first wanted to come closer to.

For the casual observer whose only exposure to Christianity and churches are the various circus acts on TV, it may be unlikely that he would ever consider actually visiting a church.

This raises the natural question as to which is the “right” church. We can see that God is truth. However, churches are run by people who are at various distances and in different directions from truth.

The prospective church attendee has the burden of sifting through all the problems of doctrine, denominations, and practices to find what is true (or just close to true). He can be aided in this by God who wants everyone to come to the truth and grants discernment and wisdom to help identify truth.

Denominations

Before going too far it would be best to consider that churches almost always are associated with a denomination. This is sort of a franchise brand that tells potential shoppers what to expect. The apostle Paul wrote a letter to the church in Corinth in the first century addressing a whole list of problems they were having. Right off the bat he tells them he is disappointed to hear that they have divisions each following a particular person. This is the first example we have of denominations.

Denominations usually start when someone gets really ticked-off about something they don't like or enthusiastic over something they have "discovered". Martin Luther nailed a list of 95 things he didn't like to a church door. Pentecostalism took off when people discovered that they were able to experience the sensations of ecstatic speech. Denominations focus attention on how they are different often at the expense of helping people understand truth and follow Christ.

What makes picking a denomination different from selecting Chinese over Italian when looking for a restaurant in the yellow pages is that with a church you don't get merchandise or a service. Churches are more like clubs in that you apply for membership and are evaluated to see if you qualify.

Denominations can function a little like a street gang. Once you become a member, you get to know what tattoos are approved, what colors to wear, what signs are used, what your turf is, where you are in the pecking order, who the bad guys are, and what is expected of you. Most of the emphasis is on what you have to do to measure up as opposed to how you can be built up (edified).

There are characteristics of churches that make them distinctive from other churches such as their denominational affiliation. There are also characteristics that can be ethnic, social, cultural, and political. We will first consider various denominations. We have already mentioned Charismatic churches which is more a grouping than a single denomination.

Once I saw this guy on a bridge. I said, "Do you believe in God?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Are you a Christian or a Jew?" He said, "A Christian." I said, "Me, too! Protestant or Catholic?" He said, "Protestant." I said, "Me, too! What franchise?" He said, "Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?" He said, "Northern Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?" He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region, or Northern Conservative Baptist Eastern Region?" He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region." I said, "Me, too!" Northern Conservative†Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1879, or Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912?" He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912." I said, "Die, heretic!" And I pushed him over.—Emo Philips

Roman Catholics

The biggest and oldest denomination is the Roman Catholic Church. In the early church each town would elevate one of the teachers to be the big shot religious guy so that they wouldn't be too burdened with religious stuff. There was a contest held (sort of like Jeopardy) and the guy in Rome won so he became pope.



The RCC split in two over 1500 years ago with the eastern franchise keeping Greece and Russia and a designated hitter to be named at a later date. By exterminating Christians, Islam was able to limit the expansion of the Eastern church.

The history of Western Europe and the RCC church are intertwined in a complex story of corruption, scandal, and lasciviousness that could put any soap opera to shame. Today the RCC is more of a lumbering behemoth saddled with strange doctrines, rituals, and teachings while still attempting to jump out in front of the latest social trends.

A visit to a Catholic church can be a little intimidating. The more ritualistic something is the more likely you can be observed making a mistake. For this reason it can be helpful to go with a friend who can tip you off as to when in is appropriate to bow, kneel, or cartwheel.

Central to the Catholic church service is the Mass. This is a ritual that repeatedly offers Christ's physical body as a sacrifice each time. This can be puzzling when you consider:

Hebrews 10:10 By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

The Catholic church is supported by the Bible, church tradition, and the teachings of the church. In case of a tie it is not often that the Bible wins.

Catholics got themselves in a pickle when they elevated one guy to be priest and in effect told the average Joe that he was too dumb to understand Christianity so he should just do what he was told.

Those who broke with Catholicism in the 16th century (Protestants) unfortunately kept the same church structure replacing priests with pastors.

All too often instead of teaching their members to grow in the knowledge of truth and Christ-likeness, priests (and pastors) enforce compliance and dole out assurance of a heavenly destination.

Lutherans

Lutherans are much more light on ritual but heavier on pot-luck dinners than Catholics. Their history starts with a rebellious priest named Martin Luther who happened to be favored by a German ruler who had a bigger army than the pope could field at the time. 100 years later a pope came along who had a big army and tried to show Lutherans the error of their ways by killing most of them.

Lutherans are organized into synods. The Wisconsin, Missouri, and Brethren synods still believe the Bible is true while most of the others have made greater progress achieving social relevance (called worldliness)

Most Lutheran services follow the standard and almost universal three hymns, collection, and half hour sermon lecture format. Most churches offer an earlier Sunday school option that lets parents dump their kids in a class with three bullet points and a lot of bad coloring. If the kids are older they will use their meditative ability to zone out (a skill fully developed in the public school classroom) like their parents do in their class and the church service.

Since the parents are so relationally starved, they often allow their children to run wild at church events so that they can visit with others. The elderly in particular should be cautious of roving packs of feral children.

Methodists

Susanna Wesley founded Methodism when she used an excessively rigid child rearing program for her sons Charles and John. Both grew up with a sort of “by the numbers” approach to Christian living and felt Christian maturity was to be obtained through meticulous diligence.

The Wesley's diverged from the Anglican Church (in which they were both priests) during the Revolutionary war. As a result much of Anglican doctrine and practice can be found in Methodist church services.

There is a “social holiness” component of Methodism that basically justifies telling other people what to do. While not completely responsible for the civil war and racial disharmony, Methodists have often engaged in social manipulation that is more a natural extension of the Arminian belief that salvation is solely a matter of choice. (We make it happen)

Methodist churches can vary from being very ritualistic (liturgical) to more free wheeling.

A survey was mailed to almost 1400 Methodist ministers in England. The survey showed the men were more feminine and the women were more masculine. No one asked why they were so bored they answered such a survey in the first place. Like many other denominations they seem to be advancing on a feeling based theology.

Episcopal / Anglican

The king of England (Henry the eighth) in 1527 wanted a divorce. The pope who had granted such favors previously was unable to as he was under the political pressure of Charles the fifth. In the next few years Henry seized all the church property and declared himself the head of the new Church of England. Having an army and an ocean, there was no one to tell him no.



Catholic procession



Episcopal procession

Even today there is not much difference between the Catholic church and the Anglican / Episcopal / Church of England. However, in the race to abandon the Bible, accept worldliness and perversion, and champion the communist agenda the Catholic church lags behind.

It used to be that being an Episcopal or Anglican was a key factor into the corridors of establishment power. However, today being any flavor of Christian is more of a liability.

Baptist

One would think that with the name “Baptist” that baptism looms large over the members of this denomination. While they do not believe that baptizing makes anyone a Christian, they do require a public baptism as a demonstration of faith for membership.



One feature of many Baptist church services is the altar call. Here an invitation is given for anyone who would like to become a Christian, get baptized, join the church, or “make a decision for Christ” to come forward.

Many Baptist denominations have lists of prohibited acts such as drinking, smoking, dancing, or going to movies. These prohibitions can give a deceptive appearance of spiritual maturity such as hypocrisy.

Baptists have been called “kill-joys” but if your idea of joy is lying drunk facedown in cigarette butts on a dance floor, you might see the value of such a list.

The Liberal / Conservative Spectrum

Most denominations have factions within them that span the spectrum of liberal (frequently contemporary or modern) to traditional (frequently conservative or fundamental).

Those at the liberal end frequently have a mixture of traditional church practice with various degrees of secular doctrine. They will deny that they think the Bible is untrue. However, they often explain that the Bible needs to take a back seat to man's growing wisdom and understanding.

Those at the conservative end of the spectrum are frequently either defensive in response to the threat they see of secular liberalism or smug in their ability to penetrate the arcane mysteries of "true" Christianity.

Those who are either liberal or conservative should be able to find a church where they can feel comfortable. Those who are both or neither may have more difficulty.

Liberal



Conservative



The Living / Dead Spectrum

Churches can have differing levels enthusiasm and activity. It can be a little misleading in that superficial business can sometimes be mistaken for hearts offered for use by the Holy Spirit. Younger people tend to be more attracted to churches that have more activity.



Church zombies



Church zealots

Vitality can be attractive, but before jumping on the train, it can be useful to know where it is going.

Some churches lumber along on inertia from generations earlier. Like the living dead, these churches grind through repetitive activities and events without much thought or engagement. It may take decades for these churches to finally die. Even young people raised in these churches move out. It can be pretty easy to identify this type of church because the Sunday service may have 10 people with an average age of 83.

The Big / Small Spectrum

A mega church is like a Wall Mart Super Center for your one stop spiritual shopping needs. A small church offers the opportunity for closer personal relationships. However, this can also be a reason to avoid them.



Christianity like a
conveyor belt



Nowhere to hide
Christianity

Both big and small churches can be dead or alive. Both can be in gross error or coming closer to the truth. Big churches tend to be more liberal and contemporary with a big screen projector for hymns with the words to help you follow along. They sometimes have “7-11” hymns (where you say the same seven words eleven times).

A small church may only have a part time pastor but usually has the building paid for. There are worse things than a pastor familiar with the real world.

The Rich / Poor Spectrum

This is somewhat related to the big / small spectrum. A lack of money can be helpful if it inhibits people from doing something foolish. However poverty is no guarantee of spiritual maturity.

Rich churches tend to use their money to make themselves comfortable and poor ones can obsess about getting money.



Gold in the “temple”

Mosquitoes in the church

It has been said that 80% of Christians can survive poverty but only 20% can survive prosperity. This may reflect the human tendency to see in wealth the proof that we are masters of our own destiny and in poverty that we need to trust the God will care for us.

1 Timothy 6:10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

The Rural / Urban Spectrum

Similar to the wealthy / poor spectrum, the rural / urban spectrum also reflects a variety of church environments the church “shopper” may wish to consider.



Urban

Suburban

Rural

In the urban church one might hear conversation such as, “What is the best way to avoid the guys in the 17th street gang?”, or “Who got arrested at school this week?”

The Suburban church might find people asking, “How can I find a gluten free bread?”, or “Where is a really good antique store?”

A rural church might present such questions as, “What is the best pre-emergent herbicide?”, or “Where can I get the best price on diesel?”

Those ones that talk more about God may be more spiritually helpful.

Amish / Mennonite

Also called “Anabaptists” for their rejection of infant baptism during the reformation, these people seem very dedicated to their faith. However, you find just as many ignorant, disinterested, and unspiritual people as you might in other denominations.



These guys are not very open to the casual visitor and membership in their church is a high hurdle to jump.

These people are often made the butt of jokes for their folksy ways and rejection of modern life. However, when the cities are burning down with race hatred, and liberal socialism has brought the prosperity of Zimbabwe, we all might come knocking on their door to let us in.

Speaking German helps but the real difficulty is following all the Ordnung (rules).

Church of Christ

These guys often claim not to be a denomination and there can be a lot of variation between churches. However, they all seem pretty serious about baptism.



Here a woman is about to be slapped for getting baptism wrong.

The visitor to a Church of Christ church should be aware that there can be pretty intense feelings about whether or not musical instruments should be allowed in a church service.

If you inadvertently visit a church that frowns on musical instruments and suddenly whip out your harmonica to accompany a song, you may find yourself carried bodily out of the church.

They desire to restore or pattern themselves after the New Testament church but not so much that they reject dentistry, automobiles, or popcorn.

They often do not believe in original sin, so do not mention it if you are from New York.

Latter Day Saints

At first glance you might ask how can any denomination that advocates traditional conservative values like family and good citizenship be critiqued.

Beyond the strange machinations of Joseph Smith the treasure hunting founder of the religion, there are a lot of other reasons for considering Mormonism more of a cult than just another denomination.

- Requires you to give 10% of your money
- Requires you to keep a years worth of food
- Requires wearing special underwear
- Requires conservative clothes
- Requires obedience
- Requires missionary work
- Requires baptism for ancestors

Most people are attracted to Mormonism by the decency of its members and just put up with mystifying doctrines.



Jesus visiting the Indians. Unfortunately, the Africans didn't come out so well.

Calvinist / Reformed / Covenant

Many Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches are also considered part of this grouping. Calvin was one of the early reformers and lived in Geneva. His writings had a wide influence and had at the core the idea that only some people are “elect” and can become Christian. This doesn’t sound like a big deal until someone thinks it makes them special and others contemptible slime that should be exterminated.



Calvin overseeing the disposal of the un-elect Michael Servetus.

The church services in this group are fairly conventional however you can encounter people who approach you like a crusader with a broadsword. They revel in erudite doctrinal details with which they attack some and bore most.

Frequently the question is asked if you have “really” repented. Like in Ghost Busters, the expected answer to this is “Yes”.

Presbyterian

The word “Presbyterian” comes from the Greek for elder. This refers to the administration of the church by elders as opposed to priests and bishops found in Episcopal (from the Greek for overseer) churches.

There was an early emphasis on college education for church leaders which may account for the speed with which many of the Presbyterian churches rejected the literal interpretation of the Bible, accepted women pastors, and is advancing the cause of homosexuality as well as other social justice issues.

There have been splits in the Presbyterian church over the speed with which to accept these various departures from traditional church doctrine. If you want to visit a church you should be warned that not all are at the forefront in embracing secularism, socialism, and sexual perversion.

Like most churches the church service is built around the sermon / lecture.



John Knox the founder of Presbyterianism and follower of John Calvin. Knox well known for his pride in his alma mater St, Andrews leads a congregation in their fight song.

Congregational

Trying to characterize this denomination is a little like trying to hit a moving target. Originating in the independent movement in England which culminated in the English civil war, Congregationalism came to America with the Pilgrims where it broke with Presbyterianism.

Congregational rule is more like democracy than elder rule or Episcopal rule. Here truth and practice are decided by majority rule and whatever is popular wins the day. It was a little chaotic when hula hoops were all the rage.

Since Congregationalism emphasizes local church autonomy, there was little to restrain the drift of some churches into the uncharted waters of Arminianism, Unitarianism, Deism, Transcendentalism, skepticism, atheism, and disinterestism.

Using the Fleetwood Mack song, “Go your own way” as its anthem, this model of church administration has been adopted by many denominations so the word “congregational” may have less of a specific meaning than it did even a few decades ago.



Congregation
voting on
what hymn to
sing

Quakers

Calling themselves “friends” as if it would win them more, the Quakers got their name from the words of George Fox telling them to “tremble” at the word of God. This then was used as a pejorative term by outsiders, then a term to describe the demonstration of what looked like min-seizures while they were waiting to be stirred by the Holy Ghost.

The Quakers got their start during the English civil war. With the inclusion of visions and an emphasis on experience, they were often seen as the 17th century equivalent of Charismatics and just as welcome.

Church services can be programmed (more similar to other church services) or unprogrammed, (more similar to older Quaker practice).

The Quaker view on non-violence has led them to be ridiculed as cowards for not wanting to fight in wars. It is difficult to see how not wanting to fight in a war (especially other people’s wars) is cowardice as opposed to prudence.

One can see a progression from Episcopal rule, to elder rule, to congregational rule, to individual rule. One might expect that following this progression individuals might end up wandering into all sorts of strange ideas and practices. It should not be surprising to find many Quaker churches following after the pull of the world into increasing secular concerns.

Christian Science

Not to be confused with Scientology (the for profit invention of Ron Hubbard to make money combining UFOs and gullibility)

Christian Science was invented by Mary Baker Eddy, who declared that sickness is an illusion that can be corrected by prayer alone. She died in 1910.

Eddy thought the physical world was only a projection of the mind and other people could put the “whammy” on you with their bad thoughts. This was even more objectionable than second hand smoke.

Eddy had a Congregational background and wanted to restore the church to its primitive origins with an emphasis on healing.

Christian Scientists have no clergy, sermons or rituals, and perform no baptisms, marriages or burials. Its main religious texts are the Bible and Science and Health. Each church has two Readers, who read aloud from those texts during services, and select hymns from the Christian Science Hymnal.

It would probably be best not to come if you are sick. However, you can pay a Christian Science practitioner \$50 and get an email prayer.

This church might be a good half way step for those reluctant to consider a full plunge into metaphysics.

Jehovah Witness

It is difficult to think of anyone who has made more false predictions about the future except perhaps the Psychic hotline people.

You have to have a degree of admiration for the sheer drive these people have. Getting doors slammed in your face every Saturday for years and still in there pitching.

You should take their literature (which they have to pay for themselves) even though you risk being identified as a target for their higher level sales team because these guys are trying to earn their way into heaven and they get points for all the literature they are able to distribute (sort of like selling band candy).

You don't have to worry about visiting a Kingdom hall (their church) they will bring it to you. However, this passage from the Bible might have bearing;

Matthew 23:15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.



Using the famous threat to “huff” and “puff” to gain access to a potential recruit.

The “These aren't the droids you are looking for” defense seldom works.

Seventh Day Adventist

The Bible specifically states that no one knows the date of the return of Jesus. The bungling of the JW in this regard is an embarrassing fact of history, but not the only one. In 1844 another missed prediction occurred resulting in what has been called, “The Great Disappointment”.

Those left clinging to a fuzzily redefined “return” added Sabbath observance and the visions of Ellen White with a mixture of health and vegetarianism and got Adventism.

Adventists have a strong view of the application of Old Testament law (you should not admit to coveting your neighbor’s cattle). There is also a foot washing ritual associated with communion. While this practice may have been more useful when everyone was walking in donkey manure all day with sandals, the modern equivalent would be farm kids who insist on going barefoot.

Don’t be too distressed if you show up for a church service Sunday morning and no one shows up.



Foot washing may not always be the most pleasant aspect of fellowship.

Unitarianism

The rejection of Jesus as God was key to the establishment of Unitarianism. In a process called “damning with faith praise”, Jesus is still held as an important teacher.

This movement grew in England and America where wealthy people saw an opportunity to still be called religious without having to bother with religious requirements or even having to believe in God at all.

Just like a homosexual may need to maintain a “marriage” as a cover, Many Unitarians use their “church” membership as a plausible cover should anyone ask them what church they go to.

Unitarians accept those who do not believe in God into their membership. If you have been rejected by other churches, this may be your best bet.

While ironically peripherally considering themselves “Christian”, they might better be seen as churches for the religion of secularism (the worship of man in general and self in particular).



Narcissus is the patron saint of secularism.

Swedenborgarian

Emanuel Swedenborg started in life as the son of a wealthy Swedish theologian who embraced the experiential aspect of religion (like the Charismatics today).

He began life with an interest in the material sciences but took a turn of interest when he tried to expound on the relationship between philosophy and mineralogy. This was similar to Spinoza's attempt to explain God using Geometry.

Increasing dreams and visions led to his thinking that Jesus was giving him personal instruction (it is eerie how similar this is to the experiences of Mohammad).

Swedenborg doctrine is a sort of fuzzy and warm, "All dogs go to heaven" new agey milieu that defies analysis as its primary purpose is to create positive feelings.

Church attendance can help support those who feel their illusions occasionally slipping away.



While not as physically risky as LSD, the use of religion to sustain pleasant feelings still leads away from truth.

Messianic

The term “Messianic” can be used to refer to Jews who have become Christian or Christians who wish they were Jewish.

There is usually an elevation of Old Testament law, feasts, observances, and rituals as well as attempting to make use of an expanding Hebrew vocabulary.

For many, these Churches seem to be missing the book of Galatians from their Bibles.

If you want to attend one of these churches, it would help to prepare yourself by watching movies rich in Hebrew tradition such as “The Ten Commandments” “Fiddler on the Roof”, or anything by Woody Allen.



It is not uncommon in religious circles for people to be attracted to that which seems to promise a culture of acceptance and defined roles. Some may condemn this as hypocrisy, but there are many people who welcome a place of security, stability, and definition.

Metropolitan Community Church

These and similar churches are mostly LGBT (not the more common Lettuce, Garlic, Bacon, and Tomato sandwich with which we are all familiar). Homosexual founder Troy Perry wondered if regular Christians can throw out creationism, why can't I throw out the anti-homosexual parts as well.

Many homosexuals still have lingering doubts that their life style may be aberrant, or even "wrong". The purpose of the MCC is to provide assurance that God approves of everything they do. This is a more specific assurance than Swedenborgianism provides, but the attendees come for this specific assurance.

Considering the rampant disease to be found in most homosexual meeting places, the church also serves as an opportunity to meet others who are slightly less likely to reduce your lifespan by decades.

One ancillary benefit is that many homosexuals become members of dead and dying inner city churches and vote to become an MCC church thus gaining access to millions of dollars in assets that had been given to the church when it was more vital a hundred years earlier.

As homosexuality becomes more accepted, MCC membership may begin to decline. This could be halted by offering new services similar to the temples of the ancient world when the word for male temple prostitute meant "devoted one".

Salvation Army

Started in England in 1865 by William Booth, this is not a armored tank battalion posed for another crusade as feared by the Muslims, but over a million member organization desiring the salvation of lost souls (possibly also feared by the Muslims).

Known for their role in perpetuating the belief in Santa Claus, they also reach out to the outcasts of society such as drunks, prostitutes, and lawyers.



While getting less publicity than the Red Cross organization, they may actually do more good. Even with the military motif, brass bands, and bell ringing, they represent a last chance for those that have given up on themselves.

If one is hesitant to enlist in this organization or even visit a service, there are volunteer opportunities that provide a chance to become more familiar with their ministry and beliefs.

These people are understanding of past problems more than most and have a sincere desire to help you keep them in the past.

Legalism / Anarchy Spectrum

This spectrum sort of parallels the liberal / conservative spectrum. Legalism is an emphasis on rules, lists, procedures, and behavior often developed in a sincere desire to get and keep things right. Anarchy is more than just the absence of rules, it is the lack of discipline internal or external that often accompanies destructive self-indulgence.

Those who might be called anarchist see any restriction as oppressive and in error. However, they often fail to consider that we are called to self-discipline.

1 Corinthians 11:31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.

One sign that the Holy Spirit is working in a person is a demonstration of self-control.

Legalism can give a false appearance of this sign of spiritual maturity and even block it from developing.

The rejection of discipline altogether often leads to the adoption of the religion of secularism under the guise of unrestrictive “Christianity” to excuse any excess or indulgence.

The person seeking truth may wish to avoid either end of this spectrum (ironically both ends are manifestations of the flesh as opposed to the Spirit) and seek out those individuals who walk in truth and by the Spirit.

Church Attendance Strategies

1. Sit near an exit in case you need to bolt.
2. Avoid elderly women with too much perfume.
3. Go with a friend to clue you in.
4. Avoid children who might annoy you.
5. Sit behind a large person so you can sleep.
6. Don't put Monopoly money in the collection.
7. Avoid entangling conversation by speaking Urdu.
8. Don't sing loud (especially during the sermon).
9. Don't look, smell, or be odd.
10. Don't watch the ball game on your cell phone.

The specific strategies will vary depending on the specific objective. If you want a quick “in and out” don't make any eye contact, mumble, and snap your fingers as if you just remembered you left the water running at home.

If you are looking for someone to tell you more about the church, come prepared with a doctrinal question that is a little arcane so that you will be passed along to someone who might have useful answers.

If you are looking to find someone to whom you can minister find the neglected elderly people left alone in the corner of the church basement.

If you are looking for someone from whom you can learn, look to see who is ministering to the neglected elderly person in the corner of the church basement.

The relational angle

The Bible instructs us to “love one another” thirteen times. This may be because we are by nature so unlovable. Most churches are structured with organizational efficiency to minimize relational contact with other Christians so that it often seems that tremendous harmony has been achieved, when in reality most people do not even know each other well enough to even know what problems they have.

Sometimes churches make an effort using small groups, cells, or discipleship classes to work towards building relationships between their members. This can fail usually because the closer we get to each other the less we like it.

It is difficult enough to have love for members of your own family. To be able to show familial love and tolerance of others requires the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit within us to achieve. Most church “programs” do not aid in helping people learn how to develop this and as a result arguments and hostility can break out leading well meaning church leaders to return to the impersonal church “machine” to prevent further problems.



KJV Only

Many conservative churches follow a “King James Version Only” view. There are two general groups that follow this. The first considers that most newer translations are based on a Greek text that has errors (like leaving out the end of Mark 16). They feel that the KJV (which is not based on the more recent Greek) is more reliable.

The second group is rather more militant and insist that the KJV has been inspired by God and preserved and that any other translation is evil.

When it comes to translations the greatest “error” comes from just converting from one language to another. From Greek to English what is often missed are the verb tenses that do not easily fit into a “word for word” translation. It can be useful if one wants to study the Bible to use a tool like the free e-sword and compare different translations as well as the Greek and Hebrew. These tools can greatly aid in better understanding some verses.

Hebrews 13:17a Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: - KJV

Alternative translation: Stop resisting and allow yourselves to be persuaded by those you have chosen to follow:

House Church

A phenomena sprang up in the 1990s where people would meet in their homes for “church”. There were writers like Frank Viola who wrote books exposing some of the problems with traditional churches.

The bloom is now off the rose and looking back one can see why this return to real and relational Christianity never took off.

1. People are already comfortable where they are.
2. A house church can be as quirky as a family.
3. A house church can have strange doctrines.
4. A house church can have an abusive leader.
5. A HC may expose that which we wish hidden.

Some house churches are a refuge for those with bad church experiences and they may reflexively reject anything sounding like teaching.

If you are looking for a church to plant yourself in and coast along for years, you might want to avoid a house church.

If you have an adventurous inclination and are curious to get to know other Christians, then this might be something to explore.

You should be aware that there can be widely differing ideas regarding the difference between clutter and garbage.

New / Old Spectrum

A new church can start as a result of an existing church having grown so large that members from a more distant geographical location desire to break off and have a church physically closer to where they live.

A church can also be started by a church planter from another church or a denomination targeting an area (usually an increasing population suburb) where their marketing research tells them they should be able to find enough people. This is a little like Wal Mart searching for a location for a new store.

A new and growing church can impart a feeling of vibrancy and enthusiasm. This can be in stark contrast to a church that is old and that seems to be just “going through the motions”.

A new church always seems to be asking for money. An old church may have everything paid for and even have bequests and endowments so that it needs little financial support.

Older churches in an urban environment may also have to contend with neighborhoods that have become demilitarized zones.

Doctrine

Doctrine simply means teaching. In a denomination it is usually a list of declarative statements that members are required to affirm and support.

The assumption that the denomination doctrine is “right” can often produce a smugness and sense of self-righteousness that completely shuts down any interest in Christian maturity, growth in Christ-likeness, or the humility that is necessary to receive God’s grace.

This is what happened to the Pharisees and the path the Galatians were beginning to follow.

The Bible tells us of people who lived in the town of Bera. They were known to hear teaching (doctrine) and compare it to the Bible to see if it was true. Since there is so much that is false, erroneous, and contradictory it would seem wise to have a standard by which things can be judged.

One problem is that we often rely on others to tell us what the Bible says such that we rely on their understanding rather than our own. It can be beneficial to be continually reading the Bible so that we develop a greater resonance with truth and develop the discernment of the Bereans.

The Real Christian Life

Christianity is supposed to be about Christ living in you, being led by the Holy Spirit, walking in and growing in truth and love and becoming more like Jesus. Churches in general fail to greater or lesser extents to help you do this. This is because Christianity was never intended to be an organizational system.

Unfortunately most churches operate like mechanical systems and often quench what the heart desires most. We are supposed to minister to and receive ministry from each other. This is often actively suppressed by church practice and insistence is often made that members only have a “relationship” with the organization through its established events, activities, procedures, committees, and personnel.

Sadly there is often little to distinguish a church from school, work, government, or other collective enterprise. Even church members can be leery of a solicitation of fellowship outside prescribed activities.

In order to pursue real Christian growth, you may have to use churches as a starting point to identify those whose love and knowledge of Christ so illuminate their life as to identify them to you as candidates to ask if they might be willing to teach you to know Jesus as well as they do.

Along the way the Lord may also bring people across your path to whom you might be able to minister.

Hopefully this overview of churches has provided a few laughs and some insights that might make your search more effective or at least introduce some aspects to consider.

When Christianity was run under the tight fisted control of either a government or church leader it became a confusing mixture of ritual and doctrine.

When Christianity was liberated to the marketplace it became an even stranger array franchise brands and competing claims for truth.

It should be understandable that the person observing all of this might be confused, bemused, or even amused.

The reader should be sympathetic and understanding of all the human foibles that have produced such a confusing milieu and if not compassionate, at least keep a sense of humor.

There is truth. It is God. Sadly churches are often hurdles in the way of drawing closer to God, walking in truth by the Holy Spirit, and becoming increasingly more like Jesus.