

Online Church, What's Missing?

4 August 2021



In the midst of a global pandemic, it has been amazing to see how local churches, both large and small, have risen to the challenge of being unable to gather in person and have endeavoured to provide online services and content. Positively, churches are now keeping better connected to various groups that were perhaps previously overlooked, such as the elderly, carers, those with mobility issues and the sick, and providing a 'window' into the life of the church for those not yet following Jesus.

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Online Church is a Temporary Measure

Obviously there will be times when the message 'stay at home and join us online' is 100% the right thing to do. And well done to every local church and follower of Jesus who has played their part in the fight against the Coronavirus. However, research and anecdotal evidence in various nations is now emerging that 10-30% do not ever intend to return to in-person gatherings. The reasons for this are numerous, but may include consumerism, backsliding, fear and the reality of what had merely been a good cultural habit rather than a living faith in Jesus.

As society and the church globally are now slowly learning to co-exist with the Coronavirus, there is a danger of developing new habits that will replace life-giving, godly ones, particularly those replacing gathering with the local church in person.

"And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near." (Hebrews 10:25)

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Five Things You Can't Do as an Only Online Church

1. Fully Play Your Part

We can order groceries, take away food and do all our shopping from the couch. However, there are some things we need to do in person to fully engage. It's one thing to watch, but we all have something to bring to the table, as we have at least one spiritual gift (a grace) to be used to build others up.

2. Maximise the Impact of the Body

The church isn't about the people on the screen any more than it is about the few on the platform. "When each part does its part, the body builds itself up in love". When parts of the church body aren't fully connected, the entire body is inexorably weakened.

3. Encounter Jesus 'In the Moment'

Not everything God does is 'downloadable'. We are a people led by the Spirit, not only in our daily lives but in our gatherings. Like Thomas, who missed out on the in-person resurrection appearance of Jesus, we too can miss out as the Lord manifests His presence among His gathered people.

4. Model Spiritual Family to the World

The Lord has not called us to the couch but to spiritual family. In a world so divided along the lines of class, colour, ethnicity etc., we get to model what the Holy Spirit can miraculously do. We're the most diverse group of people gathering in our nations. This doesn't happen anywhere else like this. The glue of the Holy Spirit is working among us. Let the world see the family of God in action.

5. Minister to the Needs of Others

The church and the Christian life is all about 'we/us', not 'I/my'. 'One another' appears 58 times in the New Testament, including encouraging, praying, serving, loving, etc. However, most of these cannot be meaningfully done 'from the stands', but rather each person needs to be on the field of play! We are the hands and feet of Jesus on earth. Whilst it is a challenging season and hybrid church (in person and online) is here to stay, if we're not working towards getting off the couch and into the race, it will inevitably impact our walk with Jesus and the effectiveness of the church in its Great Commission.

We have a few other excellent articles on this topic to read - [Lord of Our Living Spaces](#), [The Non-Existent Online Church](#), [The Almost-Joys of Online Church](#).