



Tower of Strength

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”

—Proverbs 18:10

Lest Our Dimness and Neglect

Listen to these heart-breaking statements, given in
Flavil Yeakley’s 2012 book, *Why They Left*.

The first few times we visited, no one spoke to us, unless we first spoke to them. The members seemed to be very friendly with one another, but they appeared to have little interest in visitors. We placed membership anyway, but soon learned that most of the members already had their quota of friends, and they had little interest in newcomers. We tried for three years to make friends in this congregation without any success. We left and went to a ___ church where we were quickly welcomed. We now have many friends in the church where we attend.

My father was an elder in the church of Christ for many years. He had to resign because of his health. In the last few years of his life, my mother had to stay with him 24/7. She needed the kind of help that she and my father had given to many others throughout the years. But no one offered to help. When Dad died, only a handful of people from the church came to the funeral. Soon after Dad died, Mother went to a nursing home. Very

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few church members visited her. When she died, only two church members came to her funeral. That neglect gave me a very bad impression. My family and I are now ___s, and our church would never treat former leaders the way those people treated my parents.

My husband and I used to be members of the church of Christ. Because of various health problems, we were not able to attend church services very often. When we did, few people even spoke to us. After my husband had a stroke, he was in the hospital for more than a month. The preacher visited twice. None of the elders ever came. No other members came. After my husband came home from the hospital, we went for more than a year without going to church. Then one day we got a letter from the church signed by the new preacher for the elders. They withdrew fellowship from us because we had forsaken the assembly. No one asked why we were no longer going to church. They just took our names out. So we really did not leave the church of Christ, we were kicked out.

Oh, to think that such things really happen among people who claim to be concerned for the spiritual welfare of others. Let it be our goal that no such thing could ever happen in this congregation!

- We have a responsibility to visitors (James 2:2–4).
- We have a responsibility to new members (Acts 9:26–28).
- We have a responsibility to all members (Romans 12:10).
- We have a responsibility to the poor (Romans 12:13).
- We have a responsibility to the lowly (Romans 12:16).
- We have a responsibility to the weak (Romans 15:1–2).
- We have a responsibility to the sick and shut-in (Matthew 25:36).
- We have a responsibility to the widows (1 Timothy 5:16).
- We have a responsibility to the struggling, doubting (Jude 22–23).
- We have a responsibility to the wayward sheep (Ezekiel 34:4).

It would be nice if people didn't allow such sappy and subjective things as emotion and the love of a church family to hinder them from serving God. But, in reality, approximately zero percent of us have the iron will to follow the principles of sound doctrine if we feel left out in the cold. "No one cared about me" is a valid complaint.

And honestly, God understands this, which is why He speaks so often in His word about the importance of a supportive church family. This is why the phrase "one another" appears 59 times in the New Testament. And why the concept appears far more often than that. One author, Brian Hathaway, estimated that around 44% of the verses in Paul's letters focus on our responsibilities toward one another in the Christian congregation. Teaching is vital, but time and time again, studies have shown that the two biggest factors in whether or not a new member stays or drops out is how many close relationships they form, and how quickly they are asked to be involved in some area of ministry.

Bro. Yeakley includes another story in his book (p. 83). The leaders in a certain congregation gathered a list of 50 members who had not attended in the past three years. They decided to publicly withdraw from these 50 the following Sunday. But then one man had a change of heart and expressed concern with the plan. How could they feel right in saying "we're cutting you off" when they had never said, "we love you and we miss you"? So, they all agreed that before announcing anything about disfellowship, they would start an effort to *intensely fellowship* these 50 members. They visited them. They invited them over to their homes for dinner. They encouraged them to come to worship. They sent cards and made phone calls and reached out. In the end, not one single family needed to be disfellowshipped. Three had died (sadly), four had moved, but the other 43 returned and were restored to active membership!

It's easy to purge the rolls. Out of sight, out of mind! It's hard, but worthwhile—and commanded of God—to take a deep interest in the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and to take a bold position on whether or not they go to heaven. Sometimes I wonder who is more deserving of discipline: the wayward members for the sin of drifting

drifting away, or the congregation for the sin of allowing people to drift away without comment or concern! Which party “has the greater sin” (John 19:11)?

There’s a song we sing, #636 in our hymnbooks, that says in the fourth stanza,

*While his love burns true and bright, we are walking in the light,
He has shown us the road.
We his glory must reflect, lest our dimness and neglect,
Keep some soul from its God.
The love of God within the heart, will kindness and warmth impart
The soul will glow like Jesus in His tender mercy,
If the heart is made His dwelling place.
The love of God glows like a flame, thru endless years it is the same,
The love of God will never fail nor lose its glory,
Til we see Him face to face.*

That’s a wonderful sentiment. But it doesn’t come to pass by accident or by singing about it. Closing the back door of the church requires careful planning, it requires organized activity outside the worship times, it requires constantly monitoring attendance figures (especially as the congregation gets larger), it requires broad cooperation, it requires conscientious leadership. But it is most definitely worth doing it. Will it be done?

Let each and every person in the congregation reach out to his beloved brothers and sisters, to pull them in from the fringes toward the center, and to tighten the bonds of family. Let each person understand his duty to lead, feed, and protect. “If any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:19–20)

—John Guzzetta

Quote of the Week:

“Do not let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do.”

—John Wooden