

## “SHOULD I CHANGE CHURCHES?”

### How should I encourage and help someone looking for a church?

1. *If they're moving from another location*, celebrate how God has used Emmaus in your life for UP (worship), IN (spiritual and relational growth), and OUT (reaching people with the Gospel).
2. *If they're moving from another church in the area*, pray with them and help them move ahead in wisdom and humility. You can use some of the talking points in this document. Above all, focus on building up the Church and advancing the Gospel.
3. *In all situations...*
  - Celebrate partnerships among local churches
  - Share openly about why you love and are excited about your own church
  - Help people make connections and take next steps (Discover Emmaus; Membership)

### When should I leave a church?

#### Green Light

1. **Geography** - You move too far away to gather regularly and serve.
2. **Proclaim Heresy** - False teaching about core beliefs (Bible, Gospel, Christ) with no reversal and no way to remove leaders.
3. **Display Heresy** - God's Character and the message of the Gospel are being distorted through unholy living with no repentance or church discipline.

#### Yellow Light

1. **Travel Time** - You move, but still live within moderate driving distance. Your decision will be based on multiple factors and there is no right-or-wrong distance.
2. **Theological Disagreement, but not about Core Issues (versus #2 above)** - If the beliefs of your current church don't match up with what you understand from Scripture and this will impact your long-term ability to serve, teach, and support, you may need to consider another church.
3. **Kingdom Impact / Direction of God's Spirit / Seasons of Life** - You have a deep sense that your personal gifts or your family's situation would result in greater growth for the Kingdom at another church. Joining another church might be wise in these cases, especially if you've sought change or progress at your church through healthy conversations and attempts to serve. Sometimes, seasons of life simply change, and this opens doors for a transition.
4. **Strained relationships about issues not related to outright sin** - Make every effort to reconcile before moving because of a strained relationship. If you leave one place because of a strained relationship, it's almost certain you'll face strained relationships at the next place. Plus, as the people of God, we are called to reconciliation. (\*This one is practically red, but sometimes a change is still appropriate because of relationships.)

#### Red Light (almost every time):

1. **Personal Preferences are Changed** - Be extremely cautious about choosing (or leaving) a church based on personal preferences for style, programs, or personnel.

## **10 Commandments Suggestions for Leaving a Church**

1. Fervent prayer and careful evaluation of motives
2. Have open conversation and dialogue with your family/kids if they're old enough to understand and participate.
3. If possible, have personal and substantive conversations with your current pastor and other church leaders. Be willing to speak the truth in love. These conversations might end up strengthening your current church even if you leave.
4. Don't use leaving as a threat, especially for financial purposes. (Example: "You'll miss my money" or "This church won't be able to make it without me")
5. Celebrate good parts of the church's ministry. Don't remember or emphasize only the bad.
6. Avoid gossip like the plague.
7. Don't purposefully take others with you. People may follow you, but don't pressure them.
8. Be up-front with the pastor/leaders of the next church you join.
9. Join with another church sooner than later. Time between churches is a spiritual danger zone.
10. Join with the intent to serve; and commit to serving behind-the-scenes during the first several months before seeking to be in any type of leadership. You may need a time to heal and relax from the previous church situation. Use the transition to get a fresh start and build new margin into your life...but don't sit too long! Find ways to serve/connect, and look for every opportunity in your new church to share the Gospel and minister to those far from God.

## **Can a church grow through church transfer?**

- If a Christian leaves one church to join another, the church that received this Christian did not "grow externally" in the New Testament sense. The church may "grow internally" (see the notes just below), but we don't want to equate church transfer growth with what we see in much of the Book of Acts.

**External (Salvation) Growth** = Growing larger in number as people are saved. Our overwhelming goal is reaching those who are separated from God. We are called to make disciples, which begins by leading people to confess Jesus as Savior and Lord and be baptized.

- *Matthew 28:19 - Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...*
- *Acts 2:47 - The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

**Internal (Spiritual) Growth** = Growing stronger in faith and becoming more like Jesus. Internal church growth can lead to the external growth of people being saved.

- *Matthew 28:20 - "...teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you."*
- *Luke 2:52 - Jesus grew in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and men.*

- Transferring from one church to another is certainly appropriate at times. God redeems these situations for His glory. The goal is not for Christians to be overwhelmed with guilt about moving to a new church. The goal is to be thoughtful and prayerful, and for churches to value compassion and cooperation over competition with one another. We want to be partners in the Gospel, even as God might lead people to be members at various local churches over time. To God be the glory!