

WHY YOU NEED TO JOIN A GOOD CHURCH FOR THE GOOD OF YOUR MARRIAGE

<https://fiercemarriage.com/why-you-need-to-join-a-good-church-for-the-good-of-your-marriage>

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Ryan: As a marriage ministry, we get a good number of messages being written into us from people from all walks of life, from all manner of encouragement they'll give us. They'll also tell us some of the criticisms they have.

Selena: And the marital struggles that they face.

Ryan: And the marital struggles. That's mostly what we hear about. In all the cases that we hear... and friends, we've heard it all, okay? Just hear me when I say that. I've read them all. We've heard them all. In every instance, whenever a couple comes to us, whether it's online or in person, my first question for them is always the same. It's always the same. And it's simply this: are you plugged in to a good church? Are you plugged into a good church?

I will tell you, Selene will say the same thing, 95% of the time, if they're going through a really hard time or there's perpetual dysfunction, the answer is almost always no. That's just the plain truth. That's observation.

And so today we're going to talk about this. We're gonna talk about why this might be the case and how to go about changing the trajectory, if that's you. We're not here to just wag the finger. We're here to encourage you as a brother and a sister in Christ to call you out. By the way, that's who you are as a Christian. You're called out.

What does that mean to be called out? Set aside. That's what the church is in essence. So we're going to talk about that today. So we'll see you on the other side.

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Selena: So you talked about a good church. Ryan, what defines a good church? I mean, I'm a believer, so why do I have to go to church? I mean, we run into people like this all the time that are like, you know, I believe in God, but you know, I go to church occasionally. And when I do, here's the church I like to go to, but you know.

Ryan: I guess the point that I'm trying to draw out and illustrate is that when people are in dire straits in their marriage, it's so rare... I can't even think of an instance off the top of my head. It's so rare that that couple is in perpetual dysfunction, perpetual hurt, perpetually fighting. And it's rare that that couple is that's the case. And they're also part of a church and they're, I'll say, involved. I mean, they attend and they actually put weight in the church as the weight should be placed in the church.

Selena: Members of the church, they're known in the church. The church knows them. They know the church. It's very rare to be in that position and also have a marriage that's dysfunctional.

Ryan: Is there a correlation between it? Like if you don't go to church, your marriage is going to fail. That's not what I'm trying to say. I'm trying to say that there seems to be a correlation between the type of thinking that disregards the church and the type of thinking that leads to a perpetually dysfunctional marriage. There seems to be a correlation there.

And so I just want to talk about that. Why do we, as a society, take like... we don't take greater issue with this is what I'm... So we had an instance where we met this new acquaintance and got to talking and realized they send their kids to Christian school. And so we naturally asked, "Oh, well, where do you guys go to church?" "Oh, we don't actually go to church."

Selena: "We believe, but we don't-

Ryan: We're believers.

Selena: We go to church like... you know, this one church has this awesome Halloween event, harvest event, right? There's things that draw them to the church, but they don't faithfully go every Sunday.

Ryan: In other words, they sit at the buffet of churches and some days they feel like tasting from the pizza church. Other days they feel like tasting from the fruit salad church. We all know which one that is. Methodists.

Selena: It's cold in here, but it's getting hot.

Ryan: We're not pulling any punches today.

Selena: It's getting fiery.

Ryan: So they're in a consumer mindset at the smorgasbord buffet of churches. Now, how do we get there? That's what I want to talk about.

Selena: I'm ready.

Ryan: Stick with us because I'm hoping to traverse some significant ground here. What strikes me about this couple is that they're... not that they send their kids to a Christian school, but don't attend church. What strikes me about this couple is that there seems to be no cognitive dissonance over calling themselves believers and not being a part of any sort of assembly of believers. That strikes me because it's like, how... okay.

Selena: Does my hand walk on its own over here without being attached to my body, right?

Ryan: That would strike me. I would be pretty stricken by that. Or what if my head just fell off?

Selena: That didn't make my point.

Ryan: If my head fell off and I kept talking.

Selena: Right.

Ryan: That's not how things go. That's not how things exist. Believers don't exist outside of the church. That's not a thing.

Selena: This is what strikes you though.

Ryan: Is that there was no dissonance in him saying that. He didn't pause. He didn't have any sort of flinching. It's just like, that's just what... that's okay. So how did we get there? How did we get here? We are the product of a history of ideas, right? We are in the West. We are the output of things like the Renaissance and then the Enlightenment and then the modern period and the postmodern period, and then whatever it is we're in now, post-modernism. We've unmoored from truth. There's no such thing as a meta-narrative. That there's no grand thing that brings everything together, right?

My thesis here is the Enlightenment was a time when philosophers and thinking evolved into... there's this notion of individual rights and liberties and the supreme explanatory power of the human ability to reason as an individual. So what that did was it took the individual's identity and it detached it from country, community, church, any sort of even familial thing, and said, no, you are an individual, an autonomous person in and of yourself. You have an intellect of yourself. You have your own individual rights. And you have

your own ability to reason and it's up to you to reason your way through this life and find the answers that you need.

And so it took the individual out of the group kind of in general. I mean, clearly there were still groups that existed, but the way that we begin to think and process life changed.

Selena: Right. We think of it in terms of ourselves.

Ryan: It's individualism and intellectualism. And then the modern period post-Enlightenment, I'm painting with very broad brushstrokes, The modern period basically unmoored us from the necessity of God. It was no longer optional to believe. It was actually kind of intellectually suicidal to believe because he's not rational. God is not something that you can just explain or prove empirically. God exists in a non-rational way. God is completely rational, but he's not rational in a human sense.

Selena: He's greater.

Ryan: Yeah, he's greater. He's not on our plane. Anyway, you have this individualistic bent. And so people begin to think of themselves as believers, but not beholden to any sort of community.

Selena: Not churchgoer. Not one of those believers.

Ryan: Well, nature is my church. And where's that come from? Because I stand as an individual before God. Therefore, I can go be with God anywhere. Who I gather with doesn't really matter because I'm with God. That's the thinking. Because I'm so detached from it, there's nothing I have to get from that church unless I happen to like the music, I happen to think the preacher's pretty good, I happen to think the Halloween events are pretty good, I happen to think... whatever the output is that I happen to enjoy at the buffet, that's the reason I go. And I think that orientation toward churches is eviscerated.

Selena: Yes. All of those things-

Ryan: Our society has eviscerated marriages.

Selena: Yes. I absolutely agree. All of the things that you've mentioned have just conditioned our hearts and minds to see church a certain way of how church is supposed to serve us. Church is supposed to be this place that I like to go. And yes, you should enjoy going there. I'm not saying that you should hate the church that you go to. That's not what we're saying at all, obviously. But if you

see it through your own self, it's always going to be self-serving. Your motives will always be self-serving.

The Bible has called us to continue to gather with the saints, but I don't think for the same reasons that we gather today all the time. We're trying to get back to those reasons of why we gather, why we fellowship. What's the importance of meeting in a church building, right? You say church is everywhere, well, because God is everywhere. So I don't need church. Well, what is church then? I mean, that begs the question, what is church? What are the markers that differentiate a church from not a church?

Ryan: I don't know how deep you want to get in that conversation, but I mean, if you have two groups of people that are gathering, how do you know one's a church and one isn't? How do you know? Well, one's going to have the word being preached and the sacraments baptism and the Lord's Supper being administered. The other can be whatever.

Selena: Right. And you said if a church is not doing communion regularly or doing it at all-

Ryan: Well, Jesus said to do this until I return. We were reflecting before this. We went to a church that we were there for years they never did communion.

Selena: Well, they had done it in the past and then they sort of... I don't know.

Ryan: Somehow they just like don't need that anymore.

Selena: Grow out of it? What does that mean? Yeah. It's like stopped doing it.

Ryan: Which nowadays is unthinkable in our church life that that would be the case. So, yeah, what makes a church? I think that's the bare minimum.

And then you've got another layer I would put in there: church leadership. There are officers of the church. I'm a three-office guy, meaning I think there's a preacher, a pastor, then there are elders. You have a ruling elder, and you have preaching elders and those things. And then you have deacons. So there's a pastor who's also an elder, but he's different, and then elders and then deacons. So there's going to be some sort of structure there. That's going to make up a church.

And there's other things like a church should have exegetical preaching from the word, not just kind of... we need to hear the authority of God's word translated... not translated, but interpreted in a way that the sheep can grow from it.

Selena: Right, right. And like you said in our talk kind of before, we need a hard reset. In the generation and the time that we're in, we need a hard reset in terms of how we as Christians understand church, how we view it.

Ryan: Who's we? So Christians in where?

Selena: In the West, I guess would be the one speaking because the persecuted church understands it probably pretty viscerally.

Ryan: I would... Sorry.

Selena: Go ahead.

Ryan: I would actually push back on that only because I think of the seed of a lot of non-Western churches is coming from the same place that can lead to some of the same conclusions that we're currently pushing back against. And what we're pushing back against is this. If I had to put it into a word, it would be the consumeristic church attitude.

For so long, churches have been seeker-friendly. And what has that done is it's created this kind of dynamic between us as church members, potential church members, right? I'm a free agent right now. You can kind of put highest bid, whatever. Convince me that your church is worth my gracing you with my presence. That's what the seeker-friendly thing does.

Selena: And my offering.

Ryan: "And my financial, if I choose, by the way. By the way, never talk about money. You shouldn't talk about money because that's offensive. But if you're lucky, I'll give you some." That's the attitude some of us approach church with.

The seeker-friendly movement, which said that church exists to evangelize the lost... some of you are going to really push back against this and that's fine. We can talk. Just don't write us off. Church exists to reach the lost. I would say the church exists for that purpose. Like we preach the gospel. Like none of us ever heard the gospel outside of somebody who's in the church universal telling us. So absolutely the church exists to fulfill the great commission. But church as a organizational assembly, as a body, which there's biblical grounds for saying being a member of a church is good, that exists for a different reason.

That exists for the communion of the saints. That exists for the care of the saints. That exists for primarily and ultimately and most grandly unto the

insatiable glory of God. The insatiable glory of God. That's why the church exists. So when we become believers, by default, we are part of the visible church here on earth. But we need to find an assembly to gather with. And there's biblical precedent for that sort of thing.

But this seeker-friendly movement has caused many to totally change their orientation toward the worship experience. So we'll say, "I don't like going to that church because the music's not good," or I don't like going to that church because they don't have the programs we need. Or I like this church because even though the preaching's not great, they have the program for the kids, right? It becomes this... you're picking out of a catalog as opposed to responding to the reality that God has called you out of the world. He's called you out of death, raised you to new life in Christ. And now we are the gift of the Father to the Son. God gave the church to Christ as his bride. And we are to be wrapped with the urgency for the glory of God. Do you see how that's a completely different orientation to why you go to church on a Sunday morning?

Selena: Yes. Ideally the message is evangelistic in nature, not by a pastor preaching an evangelistic message, but because the Bible is so winsome in what it talks about.

Ryan: Well, the word preached will always call believers and unbelievers to repentance.

Selena: Absolutely.

Ryan: Our whole life is one of repentance and believing the gospel. For the believer, more fully.

Selena: Yes.

Ryan: Stepping into that union with Christ more completely.

Selena: So as couples come to us with their frustrations, with their failures, with their struggles, and we ask them, well, do you attend a church like this? And they all the time say no. What is the encouragement here? What is the direction that we're trying to lead you in, right? I think first is, like you said, do we see church the way that it's supposed to be viewed? Do we understand the purpose of it is not to go somewhere, get coffee and have fun with friends, and talk about the Bible. That's a Bible study, right?

Ryan: That happens. It does happen. Don't get me wrong. Those things all happen.

Selena: They all happen. But the objective is we are gathering as the saints set apart for the glory of God to worship him, to confess our sins, to be assured of the pardon that He has given us, to take the sacraments, to experience the baptisms, to be brought in together and do these things that Christians do because we are there to glorify God. And how you can probably, listener and viewer, already see how those things will trickle down into your marriage and how the teaching of the word is so important for your marriage.

Ryan: I've heard it said... so God spoke, right? So God has spoken to us by His Son and He's given to us His Son. And I've heard it said that the church is the yes and amen to all of the imperatives of Christ. It's saying that yes, everything that you've done, yes, amen. We're responding to that. That's what you said. We're responding to the need to repent. We're responding to the assurance of our pardon. We're responding to your call to the table, to the Lord's supper. We're responding to the word you've given us and letting it bear its weight on our lives. We're responding to seeing the visible sign of people being brought into the fold of God's covenantal people through baptism. We're responding to all that together because we're responding to you, our bridegroom, Christ. What a wonderful thing to behold.

And I think this attitude that begets the sort of thinking that says, I call myself a believer, but I don't have to be a part of a church, that attitude is an attitude that makes little of the reality that we have in Christ.

Selena: It devalues that, so therefore it devalues the things that God values. It devalues church, it devalues marriage. You won't act the way you should in your marriage. I don't know how to say it any clearer. I think it's just... when I'm sitting under the authority of scripture and it is mining out the sin in my heart, what other response do I have but to reject scripture and say, I got this God, or to embrace it and say, Lord, your will be done, and see the fruit that comes from it.

Ryan: Yeah. Yeah. Again, marriage podcast, where are we going with this? I think for today, we just want to encourage you, if you're not in a church, really ask some questions.

Selena: Questions like?

Ryan: Like, why? Or what is the church? Who am I called to be as a Christian in response to Christ? As a member of the church, what am I called to do? And then begin to sketch out, what does a good church look like? Now, we have opinions, but also we don't know everything.

So we're going to withhold some of our opinions and just say this, find a church that preaches faithfully through the full counsel of God, meaning your pastor is not going to skip swathes of scripture because they're too hard, they're too culturally inflammatory. That he will preach the full counsel of God with boldness, with faithfulness, and with conviction. You're going to want to find a church that...

Selena: Has a sacrament.

Ryan: Well, it has a high view of what it means to respond to God through things like the Lord's Supper. And find a church that has a healthy communion of the saints, right? You want some people that the light's on in their eyes. They're pursuing the Lord. They are pursuing one another. They're committed to growing alongside other saints. They're committed to you not being perfect, to repenting when repentance is needed. That's how friendships actually are sustained.

Like if you have a long history of, you know, broken friendships, it's probably because there's not a governing principle there that says like, Christ is our common goal and so we can withstand all this stuff.

Selena: Yeah. We can agree to disagree on some things and we can roll with the punches and we can forgive one another, and we can still come back to the table together and say, yes, you are my sister in Christ and I am grateful for you.

I think this message of church falls to different types of marriages. Like if you're newly married and you got relocated, you know, find a church as quick as possible. Be a part of the body. The caveat there is give it some time, you know, because I think for us, the church that we landed at was not my first choice. It was his convictions, him as the head and leader. We were sorting through some of these experiential things and things that we valued, but ultimately it came down to your conviction of this is what church is and this is how we do it will be worked out, but as close to scripture and as faithfully to being obedient to God's word as possible. And so I followed. And it took me some time to appreciate the things that they do.

Because I didn't know. And how prideful of me to just write off, you know, prayer meetings or write off, you know, different things that from a girl who came from, you know, a megachurch to think that, Oh, they don't have as many programs. Well, that's by design and good. But are they against programs? No, because now I'm a part of something that we brought in that God has just been growing.

Ryan: It's not like they haven't figured out what programs are.

Selena: No, not at all. Right? It's just me and my pride just stumble in the door by God's grace. And He is just like lifting my eyes to the goodness and the richness that is the church that so gratefully we attend now. I want that for everyone. I want the young marriage that's going to hit some bumps and get some lumps to be a part of a congregation that says, It's okay. Yes. This is part of marriage. You will grow. Yes. Let's pray together. Yes. Come and have dinner with us.

Ryan: Yeah. I mean, we've already had many experiences where brothers will call, you know, and they're going through something. Well, they're church brothers, people that we know we actually spend some time alongside. We're hearing the same message on a Sunday. And we're doing the same things, asking for guidance, giving guidance. That guidance is being received. It's being applied and it's helping.

Whereas if that guidance hadn't been there or somebody else, you know, they didn't have someone to call on or a common goal to head toward, where does that guy go? He's left to hope for the best basically and do whatever he can think up to do.

Selena: Church is not about perfection. It's about us gathering as saints, like you said. We're going to bump into each other and we're going to, you know, say some things that we shouldn't have said. You know, really good at putting our foot in our mouth, but ultimately it's not about us.

Ryan: But that's what the community is for.

Selena: Right. It's this covenant community. We can bump into each other. Just like a marriage, we're going to bump into each other, we're going to make some stupid remarks to one another, but because we're in this covenant of marriage, we're going to exercise forgiveness and kind of practice it.

Ryan: The covenant is strong enough. The community of our marriage is strong enough to withstand ourselves. Like frankly.

So I always say this when we talk about church, I'll say it again, is we can't say that we love Jesus and at the same time neglect His bride. That's not something that Christians do. And if you're doing it, this is your call to not do that because there's a very real sense that Christ cares for His bride and the bride is a corporate bride. And so we can't care for His bride less than He does. We need to continue gathering faithfully and honor our Lord's bride. If you don't know who Jesus is, we'd love that for you. He is literally the best thing that ever happened.

Also, this could be His call to you. Out of death and into life, out of darkness and into light. And what that might look like for you is to talk to a friend. We recommend you talk to a friend who's a Christian, if you have one, say, I want to know who Jesus is. I heard this podcast, these crazy people talking about church stuff.

Selena: And go with them to church.

Ryan: And ask them to read the Bible with you. Yeah, go to a good church, hopefully with them, that friend. If you don't have a good church nearby that you know of, go to this website, thenewsisgood.com. There's a little intro into the gospel there, but also there's a church finder that goes to Ligonier. As far as I can tell, they lead people to solid churches that I wouldn't mind recommending. So there you go.

Let's pray. Lord God, thank you for your church. Thank you for being called out... that you've called us out of darkness and into light. Lord, I pray that you'd help us as individuals, not feign autonomy. Lord, we aren't autonomous. We can't live on our own aside from you. We can't live on our own aside from the others you would have us live alongside. So I pray that you'd humble us where we need humbling. Lord, I pray that you'd embolden us where we need to be emboldened.

Lord, I pray for couples that are struggling, you would help them. Lord, if couples that are trying to find a good church, that you would lead them and they would have eyes that are full of faith and expectation for what you might do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Selena: Amen.

Ryan: All right, friends, this episode of the Fierce Marriage Podcast is—

Selena: In the can.

Ryan: We'll see you again in about seven days. So until next time—

Selena: Stay fierce.

PODCAST NOTES

- **Recommended resource**
 - thenewsisgood.com

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