

Wednesday Encouragement  
September 16, 2020

We try our best not to have the Wednesday Encouragement come from the same person two weeks in a row, but I had something very specific I wanted to share with you. And I'll also note, if anyone is ever interested in writing a Wednesday Encouragement, just let me know and I'd be happy to take a look!

As the weeks have gone on since we returned to in-person gatherings, one thing that has also returned is the presence of guests in our gatherings. Honestly, I wasn't sure how long it would be before people would, again, feel comfortable coming to a church for the first time. Yes, we have information on our website and social media that describe the precautions we're taking, but visiting a church for the first time is intimidating when there AREN'T also pandemic elements to take into account.

And so, in my opinion, that makes it even more important for us to make sure that guests feel welcome and at home when they come to New Life for the first time. And so there's a few things that I want to point out:

1. With many people wearing masks, a lot of us feel unsure about whether someone is a guest or just someone we don't recognize. This is also affected by people who attend different services on different Sundays. I'll say this: you should never be afraid to introduce yourself to someone just because you're not positive you haven't met them before. It is much better that we err in that direction than to not talk to them altogether. I doubt anyone would ever be offended, especially if you phrase it like this: "Things are so crazy right now, so it's possible we've met before, but I wanted to make sure. My name is....."
2. With so much time spent apart, a lot of us are tempted to circle up and catch up with our friends. While that is important, make sure you're taking intentional steps to have just as many conversations with people you don't know as well.
3. If I had a nickel for every awkward "do we shake hands or not shake hands" moment I've had in the last few months, I could probably at least buy myself a cup of coffee or two. And it's okay that we acknowledge that it's awkward. But what's more important is to not let the potential for awkward interaction stop you from introducing yourself to someone. If it's awkward for you, it's awkward for them and if you're willing to laugh about it, my guess is that they will too. I'll tell you how I'm trying to approach it: no matter where my comfort level is, I don't want to do anything that forces them out of theirs. So I ask if they're comfortable shaking hands, or I wait until they offer a hand before I do anything else. Again, letting the potential awkwardness stop you from greeting someone is probably the worst outcome in those situations.
4. This is really the most important encouragement I can give you today: someone's first visit to a church (or specifically NLCC) could also be their last, which, to me, means each of us need to do our part to make sure the environment here is welcoming and loving. Hospitality is absolutely shown to be of high value and potential impact in scripture.

Hebrews 13:1-2 (NLT)

13 Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters. 2 Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!

You and I, we have no real idea of the effect our hospitality (or lack thereof) could have on someone who walks through the doors of New Life for the first time. It could be the reason they come back for a second visit—or

the reason that they don't. Think back to the first time you visited New Life, or any other church for that matter. How important was their hospitality?

I'm confident God will send us more first-time guests on Sunday and hopefully some second and third-time guests too. Will we be ready?

In Christ,

Kraig