

Pk's Perspectives ... Absent Church Member

Dear Absent Church Member,

Today I saw your empty seat as I stood to welcome the people to worship. I wondered to myself what it was this week that had kept you away once again from gathering with other believers on the Lord's Day.

I love being your pastor, but I must admit that I experience sadness every time I see your empty seat. I visit the older members of our church in their homes because age and sickness has taken from them their independence and mobility. They long to be able to do what you so easily seem to give up most Sundays.

I'm not aware that you've been ill or that you're experiencing some kind of crisis — maybe you are. If so, I sure wish you would let me know. In your hardest times you need to draw closer to God and allow others to lighten the load of your burden rather than withdraw. However, it seems from your Facebook posts that most of the time you're simply busy chasing other things.

I used to think when you would disappear for weeks at a time that maybe I had done something or said something to upset you. But I've learned over time that kind of thinking has mostly been my own insecurity. My conscience is clear.

As a younger pastor I used to feel irritation when you were absent. Your lack of commitment frustrated me. But now my feelings have turned more to grief because I've come to realize your absence is not really about me. It's about you and what you are foolishly trading to keep up with this world. It's about what truly captures your heart and what you value most.

I see your beautiful children whom you love with all your heart. Yet you're setting them up to care little for God's church. One activity after another displaces any real commitment to the Lord's Day. I understand that everyone occasionally has something special that comes up, takes a vacation or a trip to visit family. But this is different. You cram your family with so much activity revolving around the kids that devotion to God is consistently squeezed out. Your kids are learning that church is something the family does only when they have one of those rare Sundays off from the activities. And even then, because everyone is so ragged out, on some Sundays you just can't get out of bed.

This letter is not to fuss or to shame.

You know that I've preached to you the grace of God. Your church membership, giving, attendance, and service don't earn you favor with God. It's all about faith. I'll never rant in the pulpit about your absenteeism. I'm always going to preach to the ones who are present. But I want you to know how much I care about you. I want you to understand that my greatest joy would be to see you love God and His church and to observe you growing in Christ. ... You're part of the flock God has entrusted to me, and every sheep is precious. You're not just a number.

God loves you and so do I. He has already loved you in Christ with a love that needs no further demonstration. ... I pray that if you truly know Christ, that you'll come to your senses like the prodigal son and run home to your heavenly Father who stands with open arms.

Until then, I will still be praying for you and possibly sticking my nose in your business. After all, I'm your pastor. (by Daryl Cornett, Pastor, FBC, Hazard, KY)

Cya in Sunday School & Worship, PK