

B R I E F  B O O K S

HOW TO WALK INTO CHURCH

TONY PAYNE



BRIEF  BOOKS

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How to Walk into Church

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*Look carefully then how you walk, not as
unwise but as wise... EPHESIANS 5:15*

CONTENTS

1. How to walk into church	7
2. What is this thing we call 'church'?	15
3. Why am I walking into church?	25
4. Before I walk into church.	35
5. After I walk into church	43
6. When church finishes but doesn't.	51
7. How to walk out of church.	57

1. HOW TO WALK INTO CHURCH

I suppose it must have happened upwards of 2000 times by now.

I exit the car, usually with a wife and various kids in tow, and amble in the front door, tossing off a quick greeting to whomever is handing out the folded sheets of paper that in church-speak are called ‘bulletins’¹

After a quick scan of the seating situation—who has already parked themselves where, who I might want to avoid and so on—I choose a spot not too near the front and sidle into the chosen row, smiling feebly at the person sitting on the other side of the seat that I’ve politely left vacant between us.

1 Or ‘handouts’. Or ‘newsletters’. Or ‘outlines’. Or...

HOW TO WALK INTO CHURCH

And there it is. I've walked into church.

Not exactly a taxing or impressive feat, and hardly worthy of having a book written about it, even a very short book like this.

But things are rarely as simple as they seem.

It doesn't take very much thought to realize that walking into church is a much more complicated and important subject than it first appears.

In reality there are countless different ways to walk into church.

For example, if it's your first time walking into a particular church then you might be wondering what sort of place it is, whether you'll recognize anyone, and whether it will be possible to avoid that enthusiastic-looking usher making a beeline for you. You might walk in hesitantly or apprehensively, with a murmuring hope in your heart that you'll find answers today to the questions that haunt you. You might be walking into church for the first time in a very long while.

On the other hand, perhaps you've walked into church every Sunday for so many years that any sense of apprehension, expectancy or searching has long since evaporated. Perhaps you walk into church with the same kind of resigned sag to your shoulders

1. HOW TO WALK INTO CHURCH

that you have when you walk into the office. You don't have high expectations, and they are quite likely to be met—as they were last week and the week before.

Or perhaps your walk into church will be like mine often was during those years when our five children were all under the age of twelve. After a week of long days and short sleeps, followed by the chaos of getting everyone out the door on a Sunday morning, and culminating in a circus of noise and infighting in the car, I didn't really walk into church. It was more of a stagger, followed by semi-collapse into a seat, followed by lengthy periods of zoning out.

Then again, some of us often walk into church in a manner not too different from walking into a stadium, or a shopping centre, or a movie theatre. We walk into church expecting to participate in some larger experience, or to gain some tangible benefit—something that will inspire and uplift us, something that will help us in our lives, and that will repay the investment we are making by being here on Sunday morning instead of sleeping in.

Of course, many Christians also walk into church with a sense of joyful expectancy. Perhaps that is you most Sundays, or at least a decent number of them. You're looking forward to meeting with God,

HOW TO WALK INTO CHURCH

and with your brothers and sisters in Christ. You're looking forward to the warm encouragement you get just from being with them; to the stimulation and challenge of the preaching; to the joy it is to sing together in praise of God and all that he has done.

How do you walk into church?

The answer to that not-so-simple question will partly depend on what sort of church you're walking into—whether it is one riven by division and quarrels, for example. It will also be significantly influenced by how things are going in your own life and whether you got a decent night's sleep the night before.

But most importantly, how you walk into church will be determined by *what you think church is, and what you think you're doing there.*

If you think church is a bit like going to the movies, you might walk in expecting to be entertained or inspired.

If you think church is an opportunity for personal devotion and worship, you'll probably walk in not wanting to interact too much with anyone else.

If you think church is something you have to do in order to 'do the right thing' or stay on God's good side, you'll walk in with a determination to do what needs to be done (and then leave as soon as possible).

1. HOW TO WALK INTO CHURCH

But if you were to understand what the Bible says about church—about what church is, and why we go there, and what we're supposed to do while we're there—then there is one particular way of walking into church that you would want to master.

This way of walking into church beautifully expresses what church is and what it's meant to be, and why we're all there.

It is this: we should walk into church *praying about where to sit*.



Why is praying about where to sit the best way to walk into church?

The answer to this somewhat unexpected question is simple: because it expresses perfectly what sort of thing 'church' is, and what we're doing there.

Firstly, whenever we pray, we express the bedrock truth that is the foundation of church and of everything: God is the gracious sovereign God, and our lives and purposes are in his hands. He is the Lord whom we serve, and his is the power that upholds the universe.

Whenever we pray, we declare our belief in this sovereign loving God. When we pray, we acknowledge our need, and we put our trust in the God who made

HOW TO WALK INTO CHURCH

us and redeemed us, who rules all things, and who has a purpose for each one of us.

This is just as true for church as for any other part of our lives. When we pray about where to sit in church, we're expressing our trust in God for what will happen in church today. We are looking to him and calling upon him as the Lord of the church.

We are also acknowledging that God is in charge of every aspect of church, and that our ideas and preferences and dreams about what church should be like come a distant second. We all have expectations or desires about what we will do at church, and what we will get out of it. But the church is God's, not ours. The church is saved and assembled and ruled by God through the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who calls us together, and in whose presence and for whose glory we meet.

If we walk into church praying, we're putting ourselves in the right posture or frame of mind towards God. We are turning our hearts to the one who is the centre of everything, including church.

Secondly, when we pray about where to sit, we're also putting ourselves in the right frame of mind towards *each other*. We have started to think about church as being about someone *other than me*.

1. HOW TO WALK INTO CHURCH

This can be quite a mind-shift, but it's a vital one. We come to church not only to be loved and blessed by God, but also to love and bless others around us. We come not to spectate or consume, nor even to have our own personal encounter with God. We come to love and to serve. As we'll see (in a few chapters' time), this focus on loving and serving and encouraging those around us is a prominent theme in the Bible's teaching about our role at church.

So when we pray about where to sit, we're trusting that what we do at church really matters; that God has something important for us to do—in particular, someone he wants us to sit next to, talk with, listen to, pray for and encourage.

Praying about where to sit... who would have thought that such a simple act would have so many benefits?

But so far we've only just scratched the surface of what the Bible says about church and our role at church. We need to dig a little deeper.



Matthias Media is an evangelical publishing ministry that seeks to persuade all Christians of the truth of God's purposes in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible, and equip them with high-quality resources, so that by the work of the Holy Spirit they will:

- abandon their lives to the honour and service of Christ in daily holiness and decision-making
- pray constantly in Christ's name for the fruitfulness and growth of his gospel
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Six Steps to Loving Your Church



If you'd like to take a group through the material you've read in *How to Walk into Church* then *Six Steps to Loving Your Church* is the course for you. There are six sessions in the course, during which you will cover subjects such as:

- your current attitudes towards church, and how they are expressed
 - what the Bible says about the meaning and purpose of church
 - what it means to love your church and the people who go there
- how all of us can be active encouraging servants before, during and after church, rather than just consumers or spectators.

Each session contains a mix of discussion, Bible study, video input and prayer, along with simple exercises to help you put the ideas into practice on Sunday.

Six Steps to Loving Your Church is best undertaken in a small group (of 6-10 people). To run the course you will need:

- the text of each study for each person (available for purchase as a workbook, or to download from **GoThereFor.com**)
- access to the video segments in the course (available on DVD or by streaming from **GoThereFor.com**).

The course includes leader's notes, which are available in the back of the printed workbook or as a separate download from **GoThereFor.com**.

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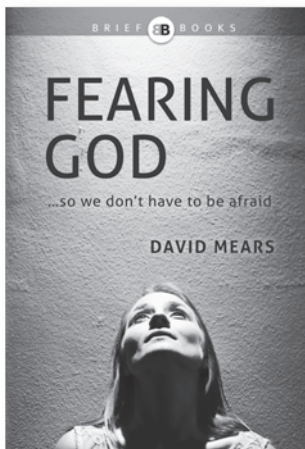
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Fearing God... so we don't have to be afraid

David Mears



Do you sometimes find yourself feeling embarrassed or uneasy when the idea of 'fearing God' comes up in the Bible? Would you invite your friends and family to a special guest service at church if you knew that was going to be the message?

Fear is taboo in Western society. Fear curtails freedom; it crushes dreams; it inhibits people. It should be avoided altogether.

But some kinds of fear are healthy—just as some kinds of fearlessness are foolish.

There is bad fear and good fear. And, oddly enough, fearing something can mean we are no longer afraid of it.

In this short book, David Mears takes us back to the Bible to look again at the fear of God—and more than that, to take delight in it and discover why the fear of the Lord really is “the beginning of wisdom”.

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