

## **From Critic to Contributor**

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It's an "open secret" that people are leaving the institutional Church in droves. Books are published on the topic, people blog about it frequently. It is not unusual for a Christian to be in a conversation and say, "When I was part of that church..."

But what about the "stay-ers," those who choose to stick with their local congregation through thick and thin? How does one stay well? It's one thing to stay in a church and complain about it from the inside. It's another to stay in that congregation and to be an active participant and contributor. The latter takes great humility and a heart surrendered to God. The former takes ... well, I won't get into that rant!

The church I have served for the past three years has gone through a very difficult split, and then a further splinting. I have seen many people leave the church, and a minority stay. In commending that "faithful remnant," I have observed some qualities in them that has encouraged my heart and challenged me to continue to be part of this messy body of Christ.

**These stay-ers SERVE.** In general they have served for many years in a variety of ways. They serve God and His Kingdom first and foremost. Show me a person who is actively serving in a church and I would bet they will hang in there through thick and thin.

**These stay-ers are OTHERS ORIENTED.** People who positively contribute are more concerned with the welfare of others than themselves. This is a HUGE attitude and mindset issue. People who are "consumer Christians," those who go to a church for the sermon, the music, the children's or youth programs ask the question, "What will I get out of this church?" Contributors ask, "What can I give to others?"

**These stay-ers want the church to GROW.** That is, contributors have a concern for their own personal growth as well as the maturity of the congregation. Those who leave tend to be on the "remedial track" for maturity because they do not journey for the longer term with the same community who could challenge them. Those who stay have a much greater opportunity to mature in the context of long-standing relationships.

**These stay-ers are ultimately POSITIVE.** Contributors believe the local church serves an important function in the Kingdom of God as well as in society at large. The local church is not perfect, in fact it is awfully messy at times. And yet it is the conveyor of grace and truth and hope. It is a "bride" waiting for the bridegroom. It is a body with different parts serving together.

I believe the greatest challenge is to remain in a local church and go through the paradigm shift from critic to contributor. So, are you a stay-er? If so, hopefully you will have the fortitude to be a contributor to what God is doing through your local church.