



Pinehurst Post

We exist to love Jesus and live for Him.

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We envision a congregation whose love for Jesus and one another leaves a clear and compelling witness for Christ.

Retreat, Defeat, or Trick-or-Treat? By Ryan Reese

When my children are emotionally torn as we approach the entrance of the thrift store, I know that the Halloween season is upon us. Why are their little minds so conflicted? Because of the horror and ecstasy that awaits them once they pass through the doors. My boys *love* to dress up. From futuristic space soldiers to firemen, from super heroes to rustic cowboys slinging six-shooters, we probably have more costumes in our home than toys. This is why they can't wait to enter any store seeking to capitalize on the second-highest grossing holiday on the calendar—the shelves are lined with Halloween glory. However, this is also why my children are afraid. They know that a robot or Captain America suit are not all they are likely to find around the next corner. The gory, and even demonic, may greet them as well. Daddy had better survey the land first. There are some aisles we won't be perusing.

What should a Christian do about Halloween? Withdraw in protest? Throw a counter-cultural party at the church building? Or should we dress up the children, hit the pavement, and put a bucket of candy behind the door? Surely we have fans of each option residing together in this body of Christ, and that suits me just fine. Most Christian critics of culture would chalk this up to a matter of conscience for the believer. As the Bible says absolutely nothing about this holiday of pagan origin, we are left to use Scripture-inspired wisdom to inform our conscience. And as the Holy Spirit moves our conscience, so must we live (see Romans 14). Let's briefly consider each option.

RETREAT: Some believers in Christ decide to completely withdraw from Halloween activities due to the evil origins of the holiday and the dark spiritual themes that continue today. We are far removed from the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain, when people would disguise themselves as evil spirits to ward off spirits sent by the lord of death. But many Christians see no point in participating in an event that is still, for many, a celebration of sin and evil. And, again, one only needs to take a stroll around the department store to see that demons, witches and ghouls are still on the Halloween menu. For those with strong convictions in this vein, I say, with the apostle Paul, "abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God."

DEFEAT: Other Christians aim to give the ghoulish holiday a run of its money, choosing to participate in a more wholesome celebration on Halloween night. These alternatives have become quite common as "Harvest Festivals" or "Fall Celebrations." With this option you get the general, harmless fun of Halloween (tame costumes, candy, games, mazes, etc.) without all the dark baggage trailing behind. I've personally seen this done well and turn into a great time of fellowship among brothers and sisters in Christ. For those who prefer and condone such practices, no pie will be thrown by this pastor. By all means, act in accordance with your conscience.

TRICK-OR-TREAT: And finally, there are Christian families like my own, who actually participate in the madness. How can I justify

such a stance? First, I'm quite certain that there is nothing *inherently* evil in a child dressing up as butterfly and asking the neighbors for candy. I wouldn't be surprised if this is the depth of the meaning of Halloween for most Americans. Second, I see this as a great opportunity to get to know and enjoy my neighbors better. When else can I knock on my neighbor's door without being ignored or feared as either a Mormon or Jehovah's Witness? We live in an increasingly secluded society and I will take most any excuse to slap hands with my neighbor. Tim Challies says that "Halloween is a time that you can prove to your neighbors that you care about them, that you care about their children, and that you are glad to be *in* this world and this culture, even if you are not *of* this world or this culture." I'm not denying the dark origins nor the evil tenor associated with Halloween. For some this will be a night of evil revelry, and I don't take that lightly. But I am more afraid of neglecting lost neighbors than bringing glory to Satan by hitting the streets with little Thor and Boba Fett in search of candy. My conscience is clear because we aim to bring glory to God in our neighborhood, not the enemy. If, in the end, we are abducted by witches or find razor blades in our apples, be assured we will have a Harvest Festival at Pinehurst next year. Until then, think

about your approach to Halloween. How can you best show this world how great God is? Do *that*.



"As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God."

So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Romans 14:11-12



On Our Knees by Ryan Reese

This sentence was enough to break me: "What a man is alone on his knees before God, that he is, and no more." The quote is from Robert Murray M'Cheyne, a pastor who lived out his mere 29 years in nineteenth century Scotland. D.A. Carson used the quote in his book, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, to point out that there was a time when prayer was a greater priority in Christ's church. Why did M'Cheyne's words bring such conviction to my soul? Because I would rather you pick something else by which to judge my spiritual health and maturity.

You might be in a similar situation. I seriously doubt many of us would hold our heads high and show eagerness and delight if asked the question, "How is your prayer life?" Stammering or the changing of topics might be a more likely response to such a question. And even worse, we might be tempted to rattle off a list of excuses as to why we don't pray as we ought. We are too busy, we are exhausted, we never have a moment to ourselves, and the list could go on—but in the end we are not fooling anyone, even ourselves. We know that communication with God should be a prominent feature in the life of every believer. And we know that if prayer were more important to us, if we truly valued and enjoyed our time seeking the Lord in prayer, we would do more of it.

I'm not only convicted about my personal failures in prayer, but also the emphasis we show corporately, as a church. The New Testament doesn't tell us exactly how to worship together when we meet—there is no bulletin to be swiped from one of Paul's epistles. But we do have plenty of evidence of their most important practices. The

Bible shows us that the early church devoted themselves to the preaching and teaching of Scripture. This is prominently featured in our Sunday school hour, and our Sunday morning and evening worship. Sunday school teachers also meet on Wednesday nights during the week to study the Bible together and prepare for our lessons. One could truly call Pinehurst a people who devote themselves to the study of Scripture, though participation and depth could always increase. God's Word also informs us that the early church had fellowship together, spending time in one another's homes, eating meals together, and taking the Lord's Supper corporately. For this reason we mirror these practices as well. The Lord's Supper is observed once a month. Meals are enjoyed together at the church and in homes. Our fellowship can always increase in depth and frequency, but we have made great strides in making time for one another.

But when I compare the practices of the New Testament church to what we find today, one discipline is barely visible: prayer. Prayer seems to be the *introductory* thing, but never *the* thing. We pray *before* we eat, *before* the trip, *before* we teach and sing, and even sometimes as the *closing* ceremony. But prayer rarely shows up as the main event. And if it does, Christians run for the hills. If we want to feast joyfully on God, if we want to see revival, if we want to go deeper in our love for one another, if we want to be transformed from the inside out—we've got to stop running to the hills and start dropping to our knees. We've got to become a praying church—not just alone, but together.

Our devotion groups this semester are going to try to nudge us in that direction. We will still study the Bible and enjoy fellowship, but only to the extent that they assist our prayers. It's OK if you are uncomfortable at first. It's alright if you don't want to pray out loud or share many of your burdens as you begin. We'll even let it pass if you have your doubts about the effectiveness and benefit of prayer. The only place to start is where you are. The best time to begin is now. Let's go deeper in our enjoyment of God and of one another. Let's share our burdens with the only One who can carry them. Let's find what Peter, Andrew, James, John, Paul and the rest know we are missing.

Prayer groups schedule:

Women's Group 1: Monday nights at 6:30 p.m. (They are meeting in a different home each week. For more information, contact Janean Reese or Kathy Watson.)

Women's Group 2: Tuesdays at 10:30 a.m. at the church. (Contact Donna Lopez for more information.)

Men's Group: Saturdays at 7:30 a.m. at the church. (Men, just show up with your Bible.)

