

# Why I am not part of the church

Lukas Thiessen

I do not worship. I have nothing—or, if you prefer, no one—to exalt. I consider myself part of the church, though I do not hold its religious story as paramount. I am an atheist, and yet I am a stakeholder in the life of the church. I grew up in the church, and—like the DNA of my ancestors—my upbringing cannot be excised from me.

But the church is not my foundation. The church, Jesus, God, the Bible, religious belief, spirituality: none of these provides ultimate security for me. My foundation is manifold, not singular. I have boundaries, but those limits have various sources, only one of which is my church heritage.

I enjoy a lot about the media of worship: the hymns and choruses, the sermons, the gathering with a community, the sharing of a common story. But that story is not my cornerstone. I can sing a hymn of praise and appreciate the experience—but it rings false, because I do not believe in God. I rarely attend or participate in church activities, because I do not yearn for a fulfillment of a religious message.

For me, to live is a great adventure. At the same time, I believe that existence is meaningless. To make this statement is not to say that my life is meaningless. I have relationships, feelings, and desires that make life worth living, even when it is not pleasant, even when it is difficult, even when it is loathsome. I want to live well, even when to do so is difficult.

The church addresses the issue of how we should live our lives, and for this I am thankful. So many institutions deal with questions of their existence in pragmatic terms, rather than confronting whether they should exist at all, and if so, for what purposes. I do not say this as a criticism. At some point we all choose to act as though our existence has meaning.

If the church were a place or a space where wrestling with meaning were paramount, without holding fast to one foundation, I would participate far more. I cannot say what form such a change would take. The church is a place of change, and it takes many forms, but as long as it holds fast to a biblical foundation and a belief in God, I cannot fully participate.

## About the author

Lukas Thiessen graduated from Canadian Mennonite University (Winnipeg, MB) and earned a BA (honours) and an MA in cultural studies from the University of Winnipeg.