

*“Tube-Church”* -Pastor Bob Leroe, Cliftondale Congregational Church, Saugus, Massachusetts

I invited a couple to church recently and was told, “Our church is watching the popular TV preachers.” I thought about this, and wondered:

- Does the TV preacher ever visit this family at their home (in person)?
- When there’s an illness in the family, does he stop by the hospital and pray with them?
- Will he get on a plane and fly cross-country to Massachusetts to baptize their children?
- Later on, will he conduct classes and confirm their children?
- Will he participate in their kids’ high school baccalaureate service?
- Will he attend graduation, birthday, retirement and anniversary parties at their home?
- Will he preside at weddings for them (after conducting premarital counseling)?
- Does the TV preacher ever call them on the phone just to see how they’re doing? Could they easily call him at his office or his home?
- If there’s a death in the family will the TV preacher conduct the funeral?
- How does this family receive Holy Communion? Will even one of the deacons or elders of any of the TV ministries bring the Bread and Cup to them?
- Will the TV preacher invite them over to his office for coffee?
- Does the TV preacher ever stop by where they work to see them?
- Can they list their TV preacher as a referral, for a character reference?

- When they don't understand or agree with something they hear in a TV sermon, are they able to discuss this with the preacher after the service?
- When they are facing a tough decision or transition in their lives, does the TV preacher meet with them and offer pastoral advice?
- Do they enjoy fellowship activities with the people of TV preacher's congregation?
- Do they really worship, or merely "watch" church?
- Do they use the Church Library of the TV preacher's church to borrow devotional books and Bible study materials?
- If they're having problems with housing, healthcare, employment, transportation, etc., will the TV preacher get involved, offer assistance, and give some good local referrals?
- What kind of religious education are their children getting, since they don't go to Sunday School or Vacation Bible School?
- When they move into a new home, will the TV preacher come and do a house blessing?
- Will the TV preacher give them opportunities to serve the Lord on a church board or teach a class or sing in his choir?
- If he by chance happened to be visiting the North Shore on vacation and passed them on the sidewalk, would their TV preacher greet them by name?
- Of course, none of the churches around here can attract the kinds of celebrities and musicians that flock to most TV ministries; none of the pastors here are best-selling authors, but the churches of our community can offer individuals a close, personal, caring relationship.
- The only way TV preachers--make a connection with people is by regularly asking them for money, to support their church. Jesus warns of preachers who "smile a lot, dripping with practiced sincerity...don't be impressed with charisma; look for character...a genuine leader will never exploit your emotions or your pocketbook" (Matthew 7, the Message).

--Most TV preachers, say some very good things, but they are no substitute for the worship and fellowship of a local church.

A child was walking to church, and was asked why he walked so far. His answer: "Because people care about me there."

Perhaps the reason TV church is "enough" for some people is because it offers a no-commitment, "leave-me-alone" religion. The TV preacher is far enough away to pose no threat to people, who may even prefer him "at a distance". They don't have to be concerned that he might confront them with something they'd rather not hear...because they can easily grab their remote and turn him off or change the channel.

*Church matters.* Being involved in a local church is as vital as breathing. Church gives us strength to handle the tough choices and stressors that come to us, and gives us opportunities to live out our faith as we actively participate in church ministries. Church is rooted in community, being part of a family of faith. You're missing a LOT if you're only connected to church via TV. A sign of genuine faith is a commitment to a local group of fellow-believers. "Let us consider how we can spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

