Message from Pastor J.T.

July 15, 2026

Hello friends!

I'm still out. If my itinerary proves true, I'm visiting the Route 66 Museum in Barstow, California today. Please pray for Abby, the boys, and me as we finish the journey home by Saturday!

In the meantime, please enjoy this article by my friend Craig Nash, senior editor of Good Faith Media. Craig is a friend of mine, and we went to college together at East Texas Baptist University. His perspective is one I frequently seek out when it comes to broader issues of faith and culture. I hope you enjoy this selection from the online version of their magazine.

Grace + Peace,
Pastor J.T."

Still Choosing Church

by Craig Nash | Apr 21, 2026 | Opinion

In his 2018 comedy special, *Kid Gorgeous at Radio City*, John Mulaney tells the story of returning to church with his parents after a long absence. He once had to explain to his then-wife about his childhood of going to church every Sunday when she asked him, “Even if you were out of town?”

“Yes, they have [churches] out of town,” he told her.

He then told the audience about how strange it is to have grown up in church but to no longer have any real connection with organized religion as an adult. “I like to make fun of it all day long,” he said. “But then, if someone like Bill Maher [asks], ‘Who would believe in a man up in the sky?’ then I’m like, ‘My mommy [does], so shut the f&%k up! Stop calling my mommy dumb!’”

Mulaney humorously gives voice to something I feel deep in my bones.

I can write passionate, sympathetic tomes about the myriad legitimate reasons why people have left Christian faith communities. From abuse scandals and hatred of “the other” to the unholy alliance between many evangelicals and Donald Trump, people in 2026 cannot be blamed for walking away from church. Even progressive churches, in their failure to name their privilege and renounce their complicity in white supremacy, have given people reason enough to leave.

Furthermore, the reflexive impulse to critique those who leave by blaming them for whatever the church did or by saying, “God didn’t let you down, people did,” is yet another good reason for their exodus. Those responses reveal our need for control and domination, and are desperate attempts to avoid any accountability for the part we have played in their disappointment

with church.

At the same time, like Mulaney, I can be the prince of hypocrites when I hear someone else expressing why *they* have left church by using the same reasons I have articulated above. When others say things about their experiences I know to be true, my shoulders still tighten up, and I feel the need to make the grand pronouncement, "God didn't let you down, people did!" Or, I want to let them know that they just "haven't found the right church yet," as if they are somehow unaware that there is more than one church in their town.

It doesn't take too much therapy to understand what's going on when I have this reaction. While Mulaney's joke implied a defense of his mom, I am trying to protect the reputation of my own ongoing decision to remain firmly rooted in the life of a church.

Despite all the pain religious communities have caused the world, there is something in them we are drawn to. I know this is true because I have seen how pervasive "church life" is replicated in places outside the walls of a sanctuary.

I've witnessed acts of communal grace and pastoral care in the same direction" take place in bars in **remote corners of the world** and in my own neighborhood. I've seen how protest movements employ liturgy and ritual through chants and songs written long ago, and that stand the test of time. I've even seen Eugene Peterson's phrase, "**a long obedience in the same direction**," lived out among neighbors and friend groups who remain committed to one another's well-being.

And in all those spaces, I have also seen betrayal and the utilization of power to retain privilege and dominance. Although the church's claim to divine connection presents its own set of hideous problems, religious communities don't have a monopoly on injustice.

The reality is that any community can be an agent of grace or a purveyor of pain. "And with these our hells and our heavens so few inches apart, we must be awfully small and not as strong as we think we are," the late Rich Mullins sang.

I'm going to keep choosing church. I'm not naive to problems in my own little rag-tag group of hippie doubter-believers. I also think I've got a good one—people willing to fight for justice and take the risks associated with inclusion in a culture that rewards exclusion.

But I'll still give a smile and a nod to my friend whose church is reading the *New York Times* in a crowded coffee shop on a Sunday morning. God is a **wild one**, unbound, and I'm glad God is on the loose.



Craig Nash

Senior Editor at Good Faith Media.