

Why Go to Church? 1

by Anton Bosch

The sermon emphasizes the necessity of being an active member of a local church for spiritual health and fulfillment of one's purpose in Christ.

Duration: 48:18

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12

Topics: "Church"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of putting our faith into practice rather than just listening to teachings. They highlight the need to attend the practical part of the Christian course in order to grow and graduate spiritually. The practical part of the course is divided into two aspects: interacting with unbelievers in the world and participating in the church community. The speaker explains that just as a heart cannot exist outside of a body for long, we as Christians need the church to shape and mold us into the image of Christ.

Transcript

Turn with me please to the book of Corinthians, 1 Corinthians, and chapter 12. The first letter of Paul to the Corinthians, and chapter 12. And I began to write on the subject an article this week, which in fact is not the one that's in the bulletin this week, it will be in the bulletin next week, and as I was writing I felt that in fact it should be more than just an article, it needs to be something that we need to preach, and although we have touched on maybe some of these things at different times, we need to be reminded about them again.

And really the question is, should I be part of the church, should I go to church? Because it seems that most Christians today think that that is an optional, that is something which I can do if I want to, if I don't want to, it really doesn't matter. And if we read from 1 Corinthians chapter 12, and I'm going to read from verse 12 through 31. 1 Corinthians chapter 12, 12 through 31.

For as the body is one, and has many members, but all the members of that one body being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and have all been made to drink into one spirit. For in fact the body is not one member, but many.

If the foot should say, because I am not a hand, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? And if the ears should say, because I am not an eye, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set members, each one of them in the body, just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you, nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor. And our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty.

But our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it. That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.

And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. Or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ and members individually.

And God has appointed these in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles, are all prophets, are all teachers, are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts, and yet I show you a more excellent way. The question as to whether we really need to go to church or not, is a very important question that we need to answer.

According to the Barna Research Group, who are a group of researchers who do surveys, particularly in the Christian field, according to the Barna Research Group, there are 77 million Americans who never go to church except for a funeral or a wedding. 77 million Americans never go to a church. Of those who profess to be born-again Christians, so we're not speaking about people who are part of a nominal denomination, those who profess to be born-again Christians, the statistic is that 43% of those never go to church.

In other words, almost half of all of the Christians who claim to be born-again never go to church. And you look at that and you look at our own church and we say, well, how many people claim to be members of this church? I don't know. I've never tried to look at that statistic.

But I guess that this 43% is a good representation of this church possibly. How many of our members are in the church this morning? I don't know. I don't want to do the sums, but it's probably in this kind of ballpark.

And so it leads to ask the question then, really, can I be a Christian and not go to church? Do I have to go to church if I am a Christian? And I hope that we'll be able to answer that question this morning and we may need to carry it over to next week. I'm not sure if we're going to be able to finish it. But as I sat down to think about this and I began to say, well, do we really have to go to church if we are Christians? Let me say, before we answer that question, that there is a distinct difference between going to church and being part of the church.

Of the half of the Christians who do go to church, I don't know what percentage of those are really part of the church and what percentage just go to church. And I suspect that the percentage of those who are really part of the church is very, very small, maybe 10% or 20% of the total figure. What is the difference between the two? Well, those who go to church, they happen, they go on a Sunday morning, they will listen, participate in the worship, they listen to the sermon, they may give money to the church, and they go home.

And they may come next week again. Every week they may come on a Sunday morning to hear the word of God. And I'm not speaking generally, I'm not speaking specifically of this church.

They are not members of the church, they are simply going to church. The passage that we read in the book of Corinthians, you'll see that a member is defined by one who is an integral part of the body of Christ and who fulfills a function the same way as every part of my body. I don't have parts of my body that go to my body.

I don't know if you have, you may have dentures. And they are not part of your body. They happen to go into your body, but they're not really part of your body.

But everything that is part of my body, that is organically part of the body, has a function within my body, it plays a part. Some of them have a less important role, and Paul deals with this in great detail. And so there are some parts of my body that seem to be unimportant, like my hair.

And so I see Tacho's got rid of his today. So we say maybe my hair is unimportant, but it's there for a reason. It has a function, it keeps me warm in the winter and keeps the sun off in the summer.

And so every part of the body has a function. Some are more important, the heart has a far more important function. You can shave your hair off, but you can't cut your heart out.

But they're all necessary, they all have a function to play. And so if I am part of the church, it doesn't mean that I just go to church, it means that I'm actually fulfilling some responsibility, I have some part to play. I'm a vital part of that body.

During this last week, we happened to see on television a program on the first heart transplant that was done. And I'm sure I need to remind you where the first heart transplant was done. It wasn't done in America, it was done in South Africa.

And it was a story about, in fact, there was a race between two American surgeons and a South African surgeon. But the amazing thing was to just see, and I don't know whether it was a mock-up or whether this was a real picture, but they showed the chest and how scary it was to this Dr. Barnard who did the operation, to see the cavity of a man's chest without a heart in it, after they had removed the diseased heart and before they put the new heart in there. But to see that this was a mind-blowing thing for them, to see a heart, a chest cavity without a heart in it.

And so if they never put another heart back in, that man would be dead. And as it turned out, I think he lived another 18 days, the first man, and then the second man lived quite a few years. But as much as that body needs that heart, the church needs you, needs that part that you play within the body of Christ.

And so we're not really speaking about going to church today. We're really speaking about being part of that church. And so why should I be part of the church? Why should I be a member of a church? And I

don't mean signing up in a form and having a membership certificate, but actually being a functioning member of the church.

And as I sat down to think about some of these reasons, why is this important? You know, one of the first things that came to mind is that, you know, that the worst punishment that the church can impose on anyone is excommunication. That's the worst punishment that the church can impose on someone. That's a terrible thing.

And I've only ever had to excommunicate a few people. And it's a very, very hard thing to do. And it's an extreme thing.

It's not something that we can do lightly. It's something that we would only do after several warnings and after having worked through a disciplinary process. The time eventually comes that we have to say to someone, it's best that you leave.

If that is such an extreme thing, how come then that so many Christians choose to excommunicate themselves? This is something that none of us would choose. None of you would be happy if I made a public announcement one morning and said, so-and-so has been excommunicated. That would be a terrible thing.

That would be a shameful thing. And yet, you know, the reality is that many Christians excommunicate themselves. They just cut themselves off from the church.

They never have anything to do with the church anymore. They never speak to church people anymore. They're just out there in the world.

And I don't mean people leaving one church, going to another. I mean people just don't go to church anymore. They've excommunicated themselves.

They've imposed upon themselves the most severe form of discipline and punishment that the church could impose upon them. That doesn't sound like a good thing, does it? It cannot be good. And yet people choose to do that.

I don't understand it. In Acts chapter 2 and verse 47, in fact a few times in the book of Acts, we find those words, the Lord added to the church. The Lord added to the church.

Now, that simply means you can't join the church. Unfortunately, too many people choose to join the church, like it's a country club or it's a gym or something. You just pay your fees and you get a certificate and you join the church.

Now, the Lord added to the church. I believe that, and I'm not saying that when the Lord adds someone to the church that that is a permanent thing that can never be reversed. The time comes when the Lord could say, I need you to move on to somewhere else, preferably some kind of mission field, some kind of new church that needs to be planted, or some other area of service.

But when God adds someone to the church, do they have the right to say, I'm not going to go there anymore, I'm no longer part of that church? If it is God who adds people to the church, then surely it's only God who can remove them from that church. This is something I'm very aware of. As you know, it's not easy for me to be in this church.

This is not the church down the street for me. This is the church on the other side of the world for me. And I need to be sure that I'm here because God has put me here.

But you know, as much as I need to be sure about that, you need to be sure about that. You need to be able to answer the question, is this where God wants me to be? Now, if this is not where God wants you to be, then you're wasting your time being here, quite frankly. Then you better find out where God wants you to be.

Where God has added you. But if this is indeed where God has added you, if God has placed you as a part of this church, what right do you or I have of just doing our own thing? Of saying, God, you put me here, but I don't like to be here, I'm going to go down there. Do we have that kind of right? I don't believe we have.

Because, you know, in the passage that we read, it says that God puts the members in the church as it pleases Him. Because God has a perfect plan for every church. God has a perfect plan for this church.

He knows the people that He needs here. He knows the skills that He needs. He knows everything about what is necessary to make this a healthy body, a healthy church.

And so He will bring people here. But when we say, you know, I'm not going to be where God wants me to be, I'm going to be over there. How can we expect God's blessing on our lives? And the problem is, and the sad thing is, that there are so many Christians who are not in church.

As we've said, 77 million people. A huge majority of born-again believers who are not part of the church. Are they in the will of God? The answer is no.

It's as simple as that. And if I'm not in the will of God, how can I expect God's blessing upon my life? Folks, this is the reality. And I don't want to scare anyone, but I think that we need to face these realities.

And when I looked at those statistics, I said, you know, here are millions and millions of Christians who have lost track of the reality and expect that they can have God's blessing in their lives when they are out of the will of God. The will of God clearly is for me to be part of a church. That's the way He designed us.

That's the way He designed the church. And if I'm out of the will of God, there is just no way I can expect God's blessing when I'm out of the will of God. And folks, that's a very sad reality that there are so many Christians who just are not experiencing God's blessing in every area of their lives because they have chosen to put themselves outside of the will of God.

And so God adds to the church. And God has a purpose for us being in a particular church. And I think one of the things that we need to resolve in our minds, those of us who are here this morning, is to say, is this where God wants me to be? And if this is where God wants me to be, let me commit to that.

And maybe it's a good thing we don't have visitors this morning so we can speak frankly. The same way as when I'm married to my wife, and you are married, most of you, those who are married, we all know that there are good times and bad times in marriage. You're saying that's right? To the good or the bad? To the bad.

But there are good times and there are bad times. And if we're going to just break up the marriage because we're going through bad times, then what stability is there in the marriage? What kind of

assurance do we have that this thing, if each partner is just going to up and leave, well, we know that that's what happens in the world today. Get married one week and two weeks later they divorce.

But God's plan and God's purpose is that we make some kind of commitment. And that that commitment sees us through the hard times. And in our marriage of many years, Inna and I have been through some hard times.

But because we made a commitment, we've been able to see through those times. And we've been able to say, we do not have an option just to up and leave. And because we have made that commitment, the good times have come again.

And you know the same with the church. If we're going to leave the church just because there are hard times, then you're never going to experience the good times. But when we make that commitment, we say this is where God wants me to be, for better and for worse, I'm going to stick to it.

Because if this is where God wants me to be, he's going to bless me. And in his good time, I'm going to know an abundance of his blessing and he's outpouring upon my life. In 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 13, we read that by one spirit, we are all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slave or free, and have been made to drink into one spirit.

Now, one of the problems we have when we speak about these things is that people say, well, when I get saved, I become part of the universal church. You know, that's the airy fairy, pie in the sky, theoretical church, which does exist. And all believers are part of that church.

In the Apostolic Confession, they speak about the Holy Catholic Church. They don't mean the Roman. The Apostolic Confession doesn't refer to the Roman Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church simply means the universal church. All Christians are part of the universal church. But here, when he speaks about being baptized into one body, you can see that the context is he's speaking about a local body, a local church.

So one of the things that happens when we get saved is God puts us into a church, into a local church. In other words, we can ask this question, if I have not been, have never been, or am not in a local church, am I saved? You see, it's part of the deal. It's part of the package.

When you get saved, you get put into the church, into the local church. You get saved into a local church. And so, if I'm not part of a local church, am I saved? I don't know.

You answer that question. Now, in the passage that we read, you'll see that he speaks about the function of the different parts of the body, the function of the eye and the hand. Why do I have an eye? Why does my eye exist? To be an eye.

That's its reason for existence, to be an eye. Why does my hand exist? It exists to be a hand, to do the things that a hand does. And if according to that passage, God has given to us and made each one of us with a different gift, why do you and I exist as a Christian? We exist to fulfill the function for which God has called us.

This is very important when you look at that passage. You'll see that each one has a particular mission and function and has a particular responsibility. Sorry.

And so, when Chris Barnard took that heart, that healthy heart out of that young woman who was killed in a motor accident and was declared brain dead, took that healthy heart out, put it on a stainless steel bowl just before they put it into the sick man, could that heart exist like that indefinitely? No. It could continue for a very, very short while while it was connected to a pump that was putting blood through it. But even then, it died.

And it had to be shocked to be brought back to life again. And so it is every part of my body. You can cut my hand off, and you can freeze it, and maybe it'll survive for a few hours.

And they may be able to reattach it again with all of the wonderful things of medicine. But there is no way you can cut your hand off and put it on the mantle in the living room. And there it is, you know, waving at people.

It only is what it is as long as it is attached to the body. And, folks, the reality, and this is one of the things Paul is saying in this passage, is that you and I are only what we are supposed to be in the context of the body of Christ. We do not have an existence outside of the body of Christ.

Yeah, you can remain a Christian, and I doubt that you can remain a Christian indefinitely outside of the body. The same way as no member of my body can exist outside the body. Why? Because it needs the rest of what the body provides.

It needs the nutrients, it comes through the blood, it needs the blood, it needs the oxygen, it needs the waste materials to be carried away. And I'm sure Michelle will be able to enlighten us more about how all of that works. But every part of my body needs the rest of the body to maintain its life.

And you and I need the body of Christ to maintain our life, and I'm going to speak about that in a moment. But more than that, we need the context of the body to fulfill our function. A heart is no good just there on a pedestal pumping blood from one tank to another tank.

Yeah, it's pumping blood, but it's not doing what it's designed to do. It's only doing what it should be doing when it's placed in the context of a human body and it's moving the blood around in that human body. And so you and I have a function.

God has called us to be something. More than just being a plumber or a mechanic or an electrician or whatever you are. More than a father or a citizen or a mother or a child or a scholar.

He has a dimension in your life which concerns, which has to do with your function in the body of Christ. And that function is, in fact, not just a subset. It's just not a minor aspect of who you are.

That is really the highest part of who you are. And that can only be fulfilled in the context of the body of Christ. And then the next thing is that the body, that we need the body to continue to exist.

As much as my heart or my hand cannot exist outside of the body, it can't fulfill its function outside of the body, but it can't even exist outside of the body because it needs what the body provides for it. And so every part of the body has two functions or two relationships. It receives and it gives.

It has things that it does. My heart, my eye, my hand does certain things. And so in the body of Christ there are certain things that we do, we give, and I don't mean giving money.

That's part of it, but it's giving my time, giving prayer, giving encouragement, preaching, whatever it is that God calls us to give of our skills and our abilities. But there is also a receiving. Every part of my body receives the nutrients and the care and all of the other stuff that the rest of the body does to keep that part going.

And so we can only function in the context of the body, but we need the body of Christ to sustain us. Now I know of these millions of people who are not in churches, they're saying, oh no, no, no, my life comes from Christ. I have a direct connection to God.

And yes, they have, we all have. But you know the amazing thing is that God has chosen in His wisdom to supply most of our needs through the body of Christ and not directly. And so while we can have a personal relationship and do and should and must have a personal relationship with Him, He chooses to provide most of our needs through the body of Christ.

How do we receive encouragement? We hear a voice from heaven, and this is why people get into this stuff. Oh, I heard a voice this morning, God told me I'm His son and He really loves me. Really? And tomorrow morning when you don't hear a voice? God died on you? God's not interested in you anymore? We can't survive, we can't live on that kind of thing because that's not how God chooses to encourage us.

How does He encourage us? Through somebody speaking a word of encouragement to us. As we sing the hymns, we're encouraged by the reminder of His goodness and His grace in the hymns. As the word is preached, as we support one another, we're encouraged by those things.

And I think that sometimes Christians have a very elevated view of themselves, that they are so important that God speaks to me personally, directly, He doesn't speak to me through anybody else. God chooses to speak through all of us. God chooses to meet my needs through other people.

I don't have a full-time, I don't have a secular job. And I've made it very clear that I work for God. I work for God full-time.

But I need to eat. So, do you think it would be very wise for me to get up in the morning and say, well, let me go outside and see, let me pick up the manna. Is that how God provides my needs? No.

He provides my needs how? Through the church. And I'm speaking about my physical needs to live, to eat, and to survive. He meets those needs through the church.

Do you think that God could give me manna every morning? Yes, He could do that. Nothing's impossible with Him, but somehow He chooses not to do that. He doesn't even make money appear in my bank account.

Money does appear in my bank account. How does it get there? Through believers who are faithful in giving. Now, if that is true of me, who am full-time in serving God, is that not true of every one of us? That if you have a need, God is not suddenly going to zap.

There you have the answer to your need. But in fact, He chooses to meet that need through the body of Christ. And when we cut ourselves off from the body of Christ, then we really limit God's ability to meet my needs.

And clearly, I'm not speaking about my financial needs. I'm meaning my emotional needs, my spiritual needs. My needs for the Word of God, my needs for fellowship, my needs for direction and for all of the wonderful things that God provides that we need to be able to be Christians.

So, I need to be in the church in order to fulfill my function, but I also need to be in the church in order that I might be able to be ministered to. So, the life comes through the members. They are the members of the church.

And, folk, as much as there are many people who say, I don't need the church, I don't need the stuff and the problems and the whatever else comes with the church. And, yeah, we don't. There are sometimes negative things in the church.

But as much as we don't need those things, there are many things that the church has that we do need that can only be met through the church. Fellowship. If you cut yourself off from the church, like those millions of people who have, where do they get fellowship? Because we are social beings.

We need that fellowship. I'll tell you where they get the fellowship. With the world.

And evil communication corrupt good manners. That fellowship is not going to build them up. It's not going to strengthen them.

It's not going to strengthen their faith. It's rather going to break down their faith and break down their morals and break down their values. And so I need the care that the church provides.

And you say, well, you know, the church doesn't show me a lot of care. Well, then maybe there's something wrong. But the church does care, and this church cares.

We need the love. Isn't it in the 60s they had that song, No man is an island? Maybe it's not from the Bible, but it's true. We all need love.

And we all need to be loved by more than just my cat and my wife. I need the love of other people. And God provides that need through the church.

Why did he create that need within us? Because his purpose and his design is that we should be part of the church. And so God meets those needs that we have for fellowship and for love and for belonging. That's a need that we never recognize very much.

We don't speak about that much. But that's a need we have. We all have the need to belong to something, to belong somewhere.

And you can choose to belong to the Rotarians or to belong to the Lions Club or to belong to this thing or that thing, but nothing is more important to belong to than the body of Christ. Nothing is more prestigious to belong to than the body of Christ. To many people, the things, the organizations they belong to are a badge of honor.

It's a thing of prestige to say, I'm a member of this club or of that club or the country club. But you know what? The most exclusive of all of these clubs, the most exclusive thing you can belong to is the church. Because you cannot buy membership of the church.

You cannot choose to join the church. It is something that God alone can do, is to place you in the church. And while we think it's not important, and while many people give up their membership of the church of Christ, the fact is that it is the most honored society because it is only made up of those who are saved, of the elect, of the saints.

It is not made up of whatever else. And so we have a sense of belonging. We need to belong somewhere.

As Christians, we can only be shaped. And we know that the whole purpose of all of my Christian life is that God may shape me as an individual, shape my life, my personality, my character. And we know that the world did a bad job of shaping us when the world had hold of us.

The world was shaping us and molding us into the image of the devil at the end of the line. But God's purpose and the reason that he has saved us is in Romans chapter 8 that he has predestined us to be conformed to the image of his son. That is the highest calling that anyone can have, is to say that God has a purpose for my life.

And his purpose is that I become like Jesus. That's the most amazing thing. There are, right now, there are presidential candidates who are putting all of their time and their energy and their money into achieving election to one of the parties.

And we say, well, that has to be the highest thing that a man can achieve, to be the president of the United States. You know what? That is nothing in comparison to becoming like Jesus. That exceeds being the president of the United States.

Because Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. And he wants to make us like himself. But how is he going to make us like himself? How do we become like Jesus? And again, we think that this is just a spiritual airy-fairy process that somehow he just gives us.

And we suddenly become like Jesus, just like that, overnight. No, he's chosen to put us through a process. Because in that process we have to unlearn the ways and the values and the mindset of the world.

And we have to learn the values and the mindset and the thinking of Jesus. And it's a process. And you know, he only teaches that process in the church.

You can't do the course in becoming like Jesus outside of the body of Christ. You can learn a few things outside, but the most important lessons are right here. And you know, those most important lessons are not just the preaching.

Yes, that's a very important part. That's the theory. And Michelle is learning to become a doctor.

But you know, she can go to all the classes that she likes. If she never touches a patient, she's never going to be able to heal people. She has to put into practice and she has to go to classes where she practically works on people.

And our Christianity is not just a theory thing. You can't just listen to the tapes. You can't just listen to the TV.

It has to be practiced. And you have to go through the process of learning to put these things into practice. But if I choose to not attend the practical part of the course, how am I ever going to graduate? And the practical part of the course is run in two places.

The practical part of the course is run out there in the world, when I interface with the unbelievers. But another very important part of the practical part of this course is only run in the church. And that's exactly the part that we don't like.

You see, because Proverbs says, As iron sharpens iron, so a man changes the countenance or the face of his friend. And the process that goes on in the church is the process we don't like. When I make a knife, I use iron tools to make, out of another piece of iron, a knife.

I shape that iron with other iron. And how does God shape us as Christians? With other Christians. With other Christians.

And you know, when I take that saw and I begin to cut that piece of steel into the shape I want it to be, if that iron had, if that piece of steel that I'm working with, if it had feelings, it would not be very happy with me. It would say, I'm hurting it. But what I'm doing is I'm taking it from a shapeless piece of steel into a beautiful implement that has a function and that has beauty.

But the process is not easy. And I use the same stuff that that is made out of to shape it. And God uses Christians in our lives.

And that's the part we don't like. Because God chooses to use the unpleasant experiences with other Christians. Yes, he uses the good experiences also.

But it's mainly the unpleasant experiences. When other Christians rub us up the wrong way. When other Christians upset us.

When other Christians talk too much. Those are the very things that God is using to shape our character and our personality. In fact, the reality is that in no part of life can you grow unless you go through times of stretching yourself.

If going to school was easy and you never had to challenge your mind, you would never learn anything. James has big muscles because he goes and he works out. And working out doesn't mean picking up one pound and putting it down.

Working out means taking that which seems to be too hard and doing it. And doing it until you can't do it anymore. And it's only at that point that the body begins to grow.

An athlete can only run faster because every time he practices he pushes himself a little bit further. And so his lungs and his heart and all of what makes him run faster, all of those things begin to develop. And, folk, we wonder why as Christians we don't grow when we never stress ourselves.

Every time there's a challenge, we run away. Every time things get a little bit hard, we pack up. And if we do that, we will become soft and flabby, intellectually stunted.

Because we're not challenging, we're not learning, we're not growing, we're not developing. And how are we going to become like Jesus? What aspect of Jesus is it that he wants us to become? Does he want us to become as intelligent as him? Does he want us to become physically like him? No, he wants us to have his nature, his personality. And that's exactly the area in which other Christians challenge us.

They challenge our patience. They challenge our love. They challenge our ability to be gracious.

They challenge our ability to be forgiving. They challenge our ability to be kind. Every one of those areas in which we so much want to be like Jesus, those are the very areas in which Christians give us a hard time.

But that's the process through which we learn. I think I mentioned to you the other day, I saw a man who, I think he was trying to hold his breath underwater for 15 minutes or something ridiculous. He didn't last one minute.

There are people who can do that. How do they do that? By stretching themselves. By enduring the times when their heart and their lungs feel like they want to burst.

They hold on for another few seconds. And they become better at doing that kind of thing. How do we become more patient? Not by avoiding every time our patience is tested, I just run away.

I'm never going to learn anything about patience. And so as Christians, we grow only, and we're shaped and we're molded through the church. And if we run away from that every time, we will never become the people that God wants us to be.

And so I've only given you some of the reasons, and I'll continue this when I come back again. But I trust that somehow we'll begin to understand. And I know I'm preaching to the choir, or preaching to the converted, because you're here this morning.

But folks, somehow we need to get this message out to people out there. To those friends that we know. To some of these 77 million Americans who never go to church.

To the 42% of born-again believers who never go to church. We need to get the message to them that you will never realize God's potential in your life until you commit to a church. Not this church necessarily, but to a local body of Christ where God can begin to feed you, and where you can begin to fulfill your responsibility and your function, and where you begin to develop the potential that God placed in you when you got saved and you got born again.

Father, we thank you for your word. And Lord, we thank you for the practical aspects of it. And Lord, as we look at these things, we pray that you would help us to be convinced of the truth of them.

Lord, that they may not just be things that the preacher believes, but Lord, that they may be something that permeates our very thinking. And Lord, something that we would commit to, each one of us, personally. And Lord, a message that we would carry out to those many millions of Christians out there who feel that they can exist without the body of Christ.

And so Lord, help us to make these things real. Help us to put flesh on them and to turn them into reality, not just in our lives, but in the lives of others. We thank you, Lord, for those folk in this church, Lord, who are working in the lives of people outside the church, trying to bring these truths and these realities home.

And we thank you, Lord, even for the testimony of the last few weeks of Hugo and Denise, who committed and become born again and have committed to a local body of a church, even though it's not this one, as a result of our brothers here who have worked and testified and labored in that field. And so we thank you for these things. Partners with your blessing, Lord.

And go with us, bring us together again safely on your appointed time. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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