

Why Go to Church? 2

by Anton Bosch

Anton Bosch emphasizes the importance of church attendance for spiritual growth, community, and belonging within the body of Christ.

Duration: 44:51

Scripture: Deuteronomy 19:15, Matthew 26:50, Luke 10:37, Acts 1:18, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Topics: "Church"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of reading the Bible systematically rather than relying on chance or selective reading. He warns against using a promise box to only focus on positive messages, as God's word also includes rebukes and negative aspects. The speaker shares that he has received harsh emails and even curses in response to his preaching, indicating that the topic he is addressing is sensitive. He then reads from 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, highlighting the analogy of the body and its members to emphasize the importance of unity and support within the church.

Transcript

We're in the book of Corinthians, and we're going to read again from 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and from verse 12. 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 12. And I've been speaking, this is the second message on the subject, I don't have to go to church.

I don't have to go to church. And as you know, I've been writing on this subject also. Originally it began as a series of articles, and I then felt, no, it was important for us to preach this as well.

And this has turned out to be one of the more controversial series of articles I've written. I received this week some very, very harsh emails from people in different parts of the world in reaction to the series. And in fact, the one I opened this morning, the guy actually cursed me.

Now obviously, we've hit a nerve. Obviously this is a sensitive issue and a sensitive subject. And so I trust that we will be able to hear the word today, and that we will be able to be doers of the word.

So let's read from 1 Corinthians chapter 12, and I'm going to read from verse 12 through 31. For as the body is one, and has many members, but all the members of the 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 ear 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? And if the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the 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 presentable parts have greater modesty.

But our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to the 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. And 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. And let me recap, because it's two weeks since we started this series.

And so let me remind you that we began by saying that the statistics are that 77 million people in America never attend any kind of church service. 77 million people. That 43% of all people in America who claim to be born again, not just those who claim to be Christians, but those who claim to be born again, 43% of them never go to church except for weddings and funerals and other special occasions.

In other words, almost half of the Christians in America never go to church. And that is frightening. And remember that I said that one of the most severe things that the church can do, the most severe form of discipline the church has, is excommunication.

Putting people out of the church. And yet for some reason, millions of Christians have chosen to excommunicate themselves. That's the most amazing thing.

That people would impose upon themselves this very extreme form of discipline and of punishment. And the purpose of the church is not about the preacher. You know, one of the things that seemed to be common in the emails I received this last week in response to the first article was that you preachers just want people in the church so that you can have an audience and so you can get money.

That's the accusation. Now those who are part of this church know that I'm not here for the money. In fact, I receive very little.

That I would much rather be somewhere else. And quite frankly, right now my daughter is in the last few weeks of her pregnancy and she has just been in hospital for a few days. And my heart is there.

I'm not here because I want to be here. I'm not here because I want to build a congregation. We're here because we're serving God's people.

The church is not about serving the preacher. The church is about each of us serving one another. And yes, there are churches where it all revolves around the preacher and where the preacher wants a lot of people so that he can have his ego stroked and he can have a good income and all of those sorts of things.

And I trust that we are not one of those churches. But that this church is about caring for people. Feeding one another.

Each one looking out for the interests of others, as Paul says, rather than for their own interests first. And so this message is not about me. This message is not about building numbers.

This message has got nothing to do with that. This message has to do with each one of us, first of all, being protected. Each one of us receiving the nurture and the care and the love that comes from being part of the body of Christ.

And thirdly, each one of us attaining the full potential of the ministry and the gift that God has placed within each one of us. It's not about me. It's not about this building.

It's about you and about each one of us individually. And so we saw in Acts chapter 2 verse 47 that the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. Part of getting saved in the book of Acts was being added to the church.

You couldn't get saved and not be added to the church. That was just impossible. If you got saved in the book of Acts, you became part of the church.

And by the church, I don't mean the church universal. At that point, the church was only one church, and that was the church in Jerusalem. And so in the passage that we have read in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, he speaks about the body.

And you see that that body is, again, not a theoretical thing, where people say, well, I'm part of the universal church. But you can see that the emphasis here in 1 Corinthians 12 is not part of some airy-fairy pie-in-the-sky thing, but this is a real thing where the hand feeds the mouth, where the eye guides the hand to be able to pick up the food. This is a relational thing.

This is about relationships. It's not about a theoretical membership of some universal thing which we cannot see and which we will not see until the day that Jesus comes. So 1 Corinthians 12 is all about how we relate together, how we as individuals relate one to the other.

We are designed, as we said, to function within the context of that body. My hand has no ability to exist or has no function on its own. You can't cut your hand or your arm off and put it on the mantle and say, you know, there it is, it's going to wave at people.

My hand and my arm and every part of my body only has its value as it is part of the body. Each one of these members of my body can only function in relationship to the others. And our thumbs are very clever and very powerful, and of all of our fingers, I guess the thumb is probably the most important, and the scripture speaks about those members that have a more important function.

But at the same time, even though my thumb may be more important than any of the other members, in the sense that I could possibly come by, if I had to choose, I would choose to lose one of the other four, but never lose my thumb. But in spite of that, the thumb is not able to function on its own. If you just had the thumb, you could do very little.

You could not really open a door, you can't open a jar, you can't pick up anything. Your thumb is fairly useless unless it has the other fingers with which it can function. And so each one of us, even though we may have many gifts, even though you may be particularly gifted, and you may have many abilities in the spiritual realm, without interfacing with other members, your ability to make an impact and to fulfill the purpose for which God has called you and saved you becomes very, very limited.

But when you begin to interact with others, and as the body of Christ begins to function together, and one does his function, and the other one does his function, we're able to become very much more effective than we would be individually. And so we need the life that comes through the members of the body of Christ. So that's basically where we got to last week.

Now, one of the other things that we need is that we need the sense of belonging that comes from the church. The sense of belonging. God made us as social creatures.

It's really, and even in the prison system, what is the worst form of punishment in the prison system? It's solitary confinement. When someone is put in the shoe, or whatever they call those places, where you're cut off from any kind of interaction with other human beings, that is very, very harsh, because we are designed to interact with others, to work within the context of a social framework. And the world has its systems.

The world has its families, and has its tribes, and has its nations. And each one of us find ourselves fitting into the world in one of those frameworks. It may be the tribe of the Lakers.

Shame. It may be the tribe of the Dodgers. It may be the tribe of those who do some job or the other.

We define ourselves by some kind of connection and association within the context of the world. And then, of course, we have our national connection. So mostly here, people are Americans.

Some are Mexicans. Some are South African. We have our, and when people meet me in the street, when they hear me speak, one of the things they ask me is, what nation do you come from? What is your language? And so we are defined, and we relate within the context of those things.

And we find it very hard to operate outside of that context. I find it very hard to relate to the American culture in many ways. I find it very easy to relate to my own culture.

That's just the way we are. Now, when it comes to when we get saved, we are born again. And we become part of a new family.

Now, I'm not suggesting that we have to turn our backs on our human family. But we do become part of a new family. We have new brothers and sisters.

We have new relationships. And certainly, we become part of a new tribe. And the thing that we should be, where we should find our connection, should no longer be the country club, or the football club, or this club, or that club, or this kind of association.

But where we should find our identity should really become the church. That is where we belong. And, you know, as much as you, if you were not a lawyer, as far as I know there are no lawyers here today, praise God, but if you were not a lawyer, you would find it very uncomfortable to fit in with a club where all the lawyers gather together.

In South Africa, in the city I come from, we have the Victoria Club. It's a very English posh thing. And the lawyers all meet there together.

And at one time, I was involved in a court case, and the lawyer took me down to the Victoria Club for lunch. And all the lawyers were there together. And, in fact, the opposing lawyer was there also, and we sat at the same table.

I couldn't believe this. They were fighting each other in court a few minutes ago, and now they sit at the same table, and they have fellowship, and they all talk the same stuff. But I'm not a lawyer, and I felt very uncomfortable.

I did not belong there. At the same time, if you put me together with other Christians, I feel a lot more comfortable. And so, as Christians, we need to forge those relationships where we belong.

We need to recognize that we're part of another tribe. We're no longer of the world. Yes, we're in the world, but we're no longer of the world.

And so where are we going to find our social interaction? Where are we going to find others that we are able to relate to? And the sad thing is that many Christians continue to try and relate to the people in the world. They still want to go down to the pub, or to the club, or to whatever it is that they used to go to as part of the world. You know, those relationships, what they do is they, as we preached the whole message on that before, you remember, evil communications corrupt good manners.

They just pull us down. But we need to belong to the church. We need to find a local church where we can relate to, where we can feel at home, where others speak the same language that we speak, where others have the same values that we have, where they have the same goals and the same purposes we have.

We need to find that relationship and the context of the new tribe. In fact, we are part of a new nation. And I really dream of the day that we cease to recognize ourselves as being American or Mexican or South African, but we identify ourselves by the fact that we are part of a heavenly country and that that is what unites us and that is what makes us different.

Unfortunately, I don't think we're easily going to get to the point where someone bumps into us in the street and says, what country do you come from? And we'd confess and say, I'm from heaven. We're just not there yet. But I dream of the day that we will so identify with our heavenly country, with our new citizenship as citizens of heaven, of those who belong not to this world, but to another, that we would boldly make that declaration in every relationship that we find ourselves.

So we need that social interaction that feeds us, that strengthens us, that comforts us, that encourages us. And so we need the care and the love and the sense of belonging that comes from a good church. You know, one of the things that makes cults attractive, unfortunately, is the sense of belonging.

People look at the Mormons or at the Moonies or at the whatever other cult you want to, Jim Jones or David Koresh, and why do people go there? Because they see that people stick together. They see a

sense of unity. They see a sense of belonging.

They see a sense of identity. And that's what attracts many people. One of the reasons why Islam grows at the phenomenal rate that it does here in America and in Africa is the sense of identity.

And particularly black people are drawn to that because it identifies them. They can wear a special cap and they wear special clothes and that makes them stand out. That means that they belong somewhere.

It identifies them. But you know, we are members of the greatest society, of the greatest fellowship, of the greatest brotherhood that the world has ever known. And I wish that we could come and just understand the privilege that is ours to say, I belong to the church.

I may not be a member of the country club. I may not be a member of this exclusive society or of that exclusive sorority, but I am part of the church of Jesus Christ. This is a great privilege.

This is a great honor. And this is a great blessing that the Lord has bestowed upon us. We need to be part of the church because we shape one another.

Proverbs says, as iron sharpens iron, so a man shapes the countenance or the face of his friend. As iron shapes iron or sharpens iron. As you know, in my part time, in my spare time, I make knives.

We use a very hard steel to make those knives with. What do I use to shape that steel? To shape it into the shape of a knife and to sharpen the edge and to make a tool that is useful. I don't use feathers.

Feathers just won't cut it. I can't use cotton. It just doesn't work.

What will shape that iron is another piece of iron that is harder than the iron that I'm working with. And unfortunately, that's not always an easy process. As you grind and as you cut and as you shape that piece of iron with another piece of iron or even with a stone, a kind of stone which is harder than the steel that you're working.

And one of the sad things, it's not sad, but one of the painful things of being part of the church is that we are shaped by one another. And unfortunately, we are often not shaped by the pleasant experiences in our interaction. But we are often shaped by the hard experiences in our interaction.

Those unpleasant interactions, those unpleasant relationships. As much as we don't want to encourage, we don't want friction in the church. We don't want discomfort.

We don't want painful relationships. But you know, oftentimes Christians run away from those painful experiences. But it's exactly those experiences that God uses to shape us.

As the iron can only become more useful as it is processed through the hard abrasive experience of being rubbed up with another piece of iron, so unfortunately, there are some areas in our lives that are so entrenched that the only way that God can deal with them, the only way God can change them is by bringing us into contact with somebody else who is a little bit more abrasive than even I am, and we don't enjoy that. And we say, well, I'm out of here, when in fact that's exactly what God is trying to do. You know, the same thing happens in marriage.

Not all marriages run perfectly. Every marriage has its ups and downs. But you know, God puts us together in marriages so that we can shape one another, so that we can rub the hard edges and the sharp

and the rough edges off one another.

That's part of the process. Unfortunately, young people look for the ideal partner where there will never be any kind of friction and any kind of difficulty. Well, guess what? If you find that individual, that person is not going to strengthen you.

That person is not going to make you any better. You may have a wonderful, peaceful existence from there on, but you're not going to learn anything and you're not going to change. And often times it is those relationships which are the hardest, that are the most effective at changing us, at teaching us, at making us to be what God wants us to be.

And that's the process we don't like. And that's the reason why many people reject the church. That's why probably the majority of these people that I've mentioned, 43% of Christians in America, why they don't go to church? Why? Because they had some experience or experiences.

We talk about Christians who have been burnt. They've been hurt. And so they run away.

But what are they running away from? Maybe they're running away from the very process that God is trying to use to change them, to teach them, to shape them. Now, I don't know why, but for some reason in God's infinite wisdom, He chose not to change us through some miraculous process. This happens for some people.

And unfortunately that skews our thinking because we think, well, you know, here's this man and he has this wonderful testimony that he was like this and God miraculously changed him and he became like that. Now that happens to some people, but it doesn't happen to all of us. Most of us have to go through a process.

And that process is painful. But through that process God is teaching us and He is shaping us and He is molding us. And that's as long as we subject ourselves to that process.

The moment we withdraw from it, then there is no longer a tool that God can use to grow us, to strengthen us, to test us, and to make us into the kind of people that He wants us to be. And so we need one another. And we need particularly, now I'm going to, this may shock you, we particularly need those people that we least like in the church.

Because it is through them. Now, hear me, I'm not condoning uncharitable behavior. I'm not condoning people who are rude and obnoxious.

But you know what? Those are the very people that teach us grace and patience and forgiveness to be like Jesus. It's easy to be like Jesus when everybody is nice. It's easy to be forgiving when nobody ever upsets me.

But it's exactly when people do upset us, it's exactly when people rub us up the wrong way, that we have to learn to be like Jesus. And so we think, well, you know, we'd love to have a church, and I would love to have a church where everybody is spiritually mature, and everybody is perfectly balanced together, and where everybody just, where there's just this perfect harmony. But the fact is that we need those strong ones, but we also need the weak ones, who rub us up the wrong way, so that God can, through them, teach us the things that He wants to teach us.

We have the wrong impression sometimes when we think that all we're going to learn is we're going to learn from the pulpit. And that's a sad thing. There are many people who only come to the service on Sunday morning because they say, well, that's when the pastor's going to teach, and so I'm going to learn on Sunday morning.

But you know what? If you don't form part of the rest of the life of the church, you're missing out on a very important other aspect of what God is trying to teach you, and what God is trying to do in your life. It is only in the church that we can receive confirmation of what God is saying to us. What I mean by this is that I believe that God continues to speak to us.

Now, be very careful here. You've heard me say many times that God has spoken through His Word, that God does not give us anything in addition to, over and above His Word. That is true.

There is no other revelation. And if anybody ever comes and says, I've received a word from God and this word is something in addition to, or in contradiction to the Word of God, then you have to reject Him as a false prophet. But at the same time, God is speaking to each one of us individually, and He's simply taking His Word and applying it to our hearts.

And God is trying to steer each one of us in a particular direction. God is dealing with me in my life in certain areas, and He's dealing with you on certain things. And when we learn those lessons, He moves on to the next thing.

Now, how do we know what it is that God is saying to us? First of all, I need to hear what God is saying to me, and you need to hear what God is saying to you, through your personal reading of the Word of God. We need to be reading the Word in that way. Now, I don't want to get too sidetracked on this, but it's important to understand this concept.

Many people read the Bible just as a historic book, or about what God has to say to the church, what God is saying to other people. No, our reading of the Scripture has to be a personal thing. Every time we come to read the Word of God, we have to say, God, I want you to speak to me.

I want you to address my life. I want you to teach me certain things that you want me to know. It has to be a personal thing.

And so we read the Bible in that way. And so we read, and the Bible says something. How do I know that that is definitely what God is trying to say in my life? Well, I need confirmation.

Remember, this is a principle that comes from the Old Testament, and that is carried through to the New Testament, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word shall be established or confirmed. So how do I know that this is definitely what God is trying to say to me today? Well, I need some confirmation. How do we get that confirmation? Well, if you don't have a good church, then what happens is, one of the things that happens is people open the Bible and they say, ah, that's what God is saying.

I don't know if I told you that guy who did that, and he opened the Bible and he stabbed the verse which says that Judas went out and hanged himself. And he said, this is not the message that God, this is not God's word for me today. Let me find some other verse.

So he opened the Bible again, he stabbed it, and it says, go and do thou likewise. This can't be it. Let me try a third time.

So he tried the third time and it said, do what you're going to do quickly. Now, we can't read the Bible that way. Unfortunately, many people do.

But you can't read the Bible that way. Because God chooses to speak to us through a systematic reading of His word, not through chance. Pulling a promise out of the promise box.

You know, the promise box is wonderful because it has all the good and positive things, but God's not always saying positive things. Sometimes He's rebuking us, sometimes there are negative things. And there are none of those in the promise box.

So you're never going to hear everything that God has to say. So you have to receive what God is saying through a systematic reading of the word of God. So I've read the word and I've got a message.

God is saying to me, He's trying to teach me this lesson. How do I know that that's what God is saying? I know it because I receive confirmation in the church. Somebody shares something with me.

Somebody shares a testimony. Maybe just in an interaction in the hallway as I speak to someone. They say, you know, I've been reading and you know, God has been speaking to me about this.

I say, but that's exactly what God's saying to me. Or even more powerfully, you come on Sunday morning, you're struggling with this issue and you know, and you hear the word preached and that's exactly what God has been trying to say to you in your private devotions. Now you know this is God speaking.

Because God spoke to me and when I was privately reading, now God is speaking through some member of the body of Christ. Now if you reject the body of Christ, how are you going to receive confirmation? How are you going to know that this is definitely what God is trying to teach me? What happens then, and I'll tell you how people do it. They stab their fingers in the Bible as I've just described.

But worse, they begin to become fatalistic and they look at everything in the world. So they pray for a parking space and suddenly they get a parking space. And they say, yeah, this confirms that God is definitely... But then they don't get a parking space and they say, oh no, no, no, God is not... You can't build your life on that.

God gives us clear direction. But we only get that clear direction through the reading of the word and through the body of Christ. So we need the church in order to find that confirmation that we need of what the Lord is saying to us.

The church protects us. Now I'm not trying to say that you can only be saved and remain saved if you stay in the church. I know there are cults that teach that.

But folks, the reality is one of the reasons why God has established the church is that we may be protected within the context and the confines of the numbers of one another. I think I've shared with you before that in the wild a lion doesn't have any chance against a herd of buffalo. If you've seen African buffalo, they're huge animals with vicious horns, very fast.

Lion has no chance against a herd of buffalo. But if they can isolate one of that herd and especially the weaker ones, the young ones or the old ones, if they can separate them out from the herd then they have a chance at killing that animal. And that's exactly what they do.

And so the lion will come and they will attack the herd, not because they're going to grab any one of that, but simply so they can scatter the herd. And if they can scatter the herd, they will isolate one, and if you've ever watched Discovery Channel, you'll see exactly how they do this over and over and over again. So they separate one out that's weaker, that's not able to keep up with the rest, or somehow become separated from the rest of the herd.

And then they will pounce on that one, and they will attack that one. Now the Bible says that the devil goes about the roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. And he uses exactly the same trick, the same technique.

As long as we stand together, we cover one another's backs, we support one another in prayer and in fellowship and in encouragement, we're strong. At the moment he's able to separate us, and we stand out on our own. And we don't have the support structure of others.

That's when he's able to easily attack us. I don't know exactly what happened in the Garden of Eden, but you remember there was Adam and Eve. And then the devil came, and he tempted Eve.

And there's a lot of debate and discussion about where was Adam when Eve was tempted? Now I don't know where he was because the Bible doesn't tell me. But it seems to me that whether he was physically standing next to her, or whether he was physically absent, the fact is that they were not standing united. The devil was able to get Eve on her own.

This is not a statement about women, this is a statement about the fact that there is strength in numbers. And if Adam and Eve had stood together, they may have had a chance against the wiles of the devil. But because he was able to address Eve on her own, he was able to tempt her and cause her to sin.

And folk, that's the same principle. We have folk here who come out of drugs and out of alcohol, and they know that you can't fight those demons on your own. And I don't mean demons in a physical sense.

We all know about the success rate that one of the most successful programs is Alcoholics Anonymous. And what makes it work? The fact that they can stand together. That they support one another.

When does it not work? When people reject the support group. When they think they can do it on their own. And folk, that works in the world because AA is not a Christian system as such.

How much more does it not work in the church? And I don't mean getting victory over drugs or alcohol, but every area in which we struggle. And we all struggle with so many areas, so many things. Unforgiveness, bitterness, lust, materialism, and so on.

It goes on and on and on and on. And you know, in the context of the body, we're able to support and strengthen and be accountable to one another. And we're able to gain victories that we would never be able to gain if we were out there on our own.

And so, we need one another. I'm going to close on this point tonight, today. Why did God save us? Because He wants to make us happy and wants us to be fulfilled.

Well, I suppose there's some truth in that. But one of the reasons why He saved us is He saved us that we may serve Him. You see, it becomes such a self-centered thing today.

And so many aspects of the Gospel that is being preached today is self-centered. God saved us because of me. Now, in fact, one of the reasons He saved us is that we might be able to serve Him and serve others.

That's why we if that wasn't there, well then, why doesn't He just save us and take us to heaven? Why did He leave us here? Well, He's left us here and we're still on this earth for two reasons. One, because He is shaping us. And we've spoken about that.

And one of the ways He shapes us is through the church. But the other reason we're still here is because we still have a job to do. We have a function.

We have a duty. We have a responsibility. And I'm not speaking about our jobs or about our families or about our country.

I'm speaking about our responsibility in terms of our Christian ministry or calling or gift that God has given to us. How am I going to serve if I'm not serving in the context of the church? Who am I serving? Oh, no, but I'm feeding the poor in Skid Row. Well, that may have its place.

But remember Jesus speaking in Matthew chapter 25 when He says, I was hungry and you fed me and I was naked and you clothed me and so on. You remember what Jesus said? They said to Him when do we see you hungry and naked and destitute? What was Jesus' answer? If you've done it to the least of these my brethren. Now there's a place for social responsibility as far as the unbelievers in the world is concerned.

But Matthew, Jesus at that judgment says, if you've done it to the least of these my brethren. Now the guy in Skid Row may be my brother, but he probably is not. But my brethren are those who are in the church.

So we have a responsibility towards one another. And I don't believe that He was only speaking about being physically hungry and physically naked and physically lonely. Yes, there's that to it as well.

That's part of it. But a very important part of that is that is those who are spiritually hungry, spiritually naked, spiritually lonely, spiritually thirsty. And so we have a responsibility to feed one another.

And as I said earlier, sometimes we look to the pastor to do the feeding. But in fact we should be feeding one another. We should be clothing one another.

We should be ministering and blessing and helping one another. And that's something you just cannot do if you're not part of a local church. Yeah, you can send your money to some aid organization.

You can send money to buy Bibles. You can do this. You can do that.

You can write on the internet like I do. But the reality of washing one another's feet just cannot happen outside of the context of the local church. And that's a very important part of my Christian experience.

Very important part of why God saved me. And if I'm not serving, even if you're part of this church or of any church and you're not serving, you're missing out on a very important part of God's shaping process, but of God's purpose in your life. And for myself, not just because I'm a preacher, but if I did not fulfill my ministry, if I had to stop preaching tomorrow, I would lose my purpose in life.

And you say, well, I'm not a preacher. But you know, you also have a purpose, a spiritual purpose. And when we don't have that, life becomes meaningless and it becomes about chasing dollars and chasing happiness and chasing fame and fortune and whatever else this world has to offer.

No, it's about far more than that. And that becomes a reality in the context of the local church. It's more blessed to give than to receive.

And unfortunately, if we never give, we never discover the blessing of what it is to give. And you know, many, many of the Christians who isolate themselves and don't find themselves in the context of a local church, they have no way of giving. And I'm not talking about money.

I'm talking about giving love, care, affection, protection, blessing, ministry, the many, many things that we're able to give one another. And so we've spoken about the fact that we draw from the life of the church. But it's not just about a drawing.

And every part of my body draws from the central system, draws from the blood and the oxygen and the nutrients that flow around my body. But every part of my body is also giving all the time. Every part is playing a role.

It has a function. So there are these two aspects. And if I'm not receiving and giving, I'm dysfunctional.

And if a part of my body just becomes a receiver and it's not giving, it becomes sick. And so as Christians, we need to be receiving, and we need to be giving. That's part of our function.

That's how we stay alive. That's how we become part of the, or become an active part of the body of Christ. Now I think I have one more message on this, in this series, but I trust that somehow by the grace of God we will come to an awareness, not just of the fact that I need to be a member of the church, be on the list of the church membership, but that we need to be actively part of the local church.

And that doing so we will find and fulfill God's calling and God's ministry and realize the potential that God has actually saved us for and called us, and that our life will get new purpose and new meaning in that process. Father, thank you for your word. Lord, these are things that we struggle with because in the process of becoming part of the body of Christ, we of necessity have to give up some of our individual rights and freedoms.

And Lord, that we find hard. And Lord, we pray that you would help us to just fit in where you want us to fit in, just to be what you want us to be. And Lord, that none of us would shortchange ourselves and rob ourselves of the blessing that you want to give us as being part of the body of Christ, but also Lord, that none of us would rob the church and rob you by withholding the gift that you have given to each one of us.

And so help us Lord to be givers and receivers. Help us Lord to submit to the process of shaping as you put us through that process. And Lord, forgive those who are harsh and obnoxious and rude and say hurtful things.

But Lord, help us to receive them as just part of the lessons that you're teaching us and part of the shaping and the molding that you're doing in each one of our lives. Help us to see you behind all of these things. Because Lord, you are the head of the church and everyone is just a member, but we are being directed by you.

Help us to see the greater plan behind this all. We ask this in Jesus' name. Lord, we pray for those who part from us now.

We pray that you would go with them, protect them and keep them. And Lord, as the rest of us come around your table, we pray that it may be a precious time of remembering what Jesus did. We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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