

What Does It Mean To Be A Member Of The Local Church

by Sandeep Poonen

This sermon focuses on the significance of church membership, emphasizing the spiritual aspects of belonging to a local church. It is structured around four P's: Protection, Prayer, Participation, and Proclaiming. The speaker delves into the idea of receiving protection within the church as a family, the importance of genuine prayer as a form of giving, the necessity of actively participating and encouraging others, and the mystery and boldness required in proclaiming the gospel message.

Scripture: Genesis 2:18, Ephesians 6:18, 1 Peter 4:7, John 1:13, Matthew 5:14, Ephesians 6:19

Topics: "Church Membership", "Spiritual Community"

Description

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Transcript

One of the things that I wanted to share on was on church membership. We've been thinking a lot about church membership lately. We've had quite a few people join our church recently and so I've been thinking about what it means spiritually about local church memberships.

I wanted to share my thoughts on that. I'll share my screen so that it's easier for you to also see and I wrote it down very simply as four P's. Four P's to make it a little bit simpler to remember.

Nothing spiritual about making things in a particular letter or anything like that. It definitely doesn't translate to other languages but what it is to be easy to remember and I'll share it with you upfront what are the four. We get something and we have to give a few things.

We get protection and we want to give three things and I'd like to ask all of us to think about whether we are giving these three things. Praying, are we participating and are we proclaiming and I just use those words just as an introduction to think about those thoughts and the first is what we get. Before we give anything we get and we get a ton of things in the church but just to think about the word protection.

You know whenever we join a family we get protection and God wanted us to join a family. Think about when Adam was created. Did he belong? Yes, he did.

The church is a place where we can belong but did Adam when he was created did he belong? Yes, was he protected? Yes, he was protected by God but God saw that Adam needed more than just to belong to God. He told Adam it is not good for humans to be alone as Genesis 2 18. God wanted Adam to have a family and all who are born again belong to Jesus Christ but God wants more than that for us.

He when God wanted Adam not to be alone he didn't give Adam a fishing buddy or a business partner. He gave somebody to Adam, Eve who he could live life with and have a family with. So even among us humans it's easy to belong superficially.

We can belong to a soccer club, we can belong to video gaming clubs. That could become many times in young people that can become our community and we can belong to the church that way too like a club. Video gamers talk about all their characters in the video game.

Well we come to the church and we talk about all the different characters in the Bible and you know we learn lessons from them and we draw meaning out of it but that's not what it means to belong to the church. The protection of the church is like the protection that there is in the family. Constantly thinking about the word families that belongs to the church has helped me.

The care and the support that we get that is uniquely found in a family and in the body and we fundamentally see two children in the world today. Children who are growing up secure and children who are growing up insecure and I think spiritually too God wants us to grow up secure and he gives the family for that for our protection and our security and at NCCF well in every church there should be the protections of good teachings that leads us to Christ. That's been such a wonderful protection.

So many Christians are living spiritually frustrated and defeated lives partly because of bad teaching that are getting them to go down the wrong path. We also have the protection of godly examples. It's a tremendous protection that we get in the local church whose faith we can imitate.

Jesus said pray because the harvest is plentiful but the labors are few and also in the church we have elders who are not who've been taught not to be interested in financial gain or a bigger platform or more honor but spiritual growth from each one of us. That's a tremendous protection and as I was thinking about this I want to constantly grow in my gratitude and we want to raise our children to grow in our gratitude for the protection. That first word P protection for the security that I have received that we receive and we continue to receive from a godly church for a Christ healthy church.

The next thing but then after that we get certain things but then we got to give. The first thing we have to give is prayer and I don't know if that's the first thing we think we ought to give and as I was thinking about it it's such an easy thing for us to give. Prayer.

Prayer is not time spent on our knees. It's not the number of words we say. It's the heart.

It's a burden. Even a four-year-old can pray genuine prayers. If a four-year-old has a sick mother I have a feeling that four-year-old will know and the mother is sick with some very difficult disease the four-year-old can pray and it's an instinctive response to a burden not at the end of the day it's an instinctive response to a burden not a act of religious discipline.

Yes we must discipline ourselves to but the prayer that all of us can give must come out of a burden or genuine desire and again I'm thinking about the local church. We're all asked to pray in our personal lives. This is how we talk to God but I was thinking about that giving that all of us in our local church must give as being a member of NCCF.

It says this in Ephesians chapter 6 verse 18. This is kind of one of the verses that I was meditating on as I was thinking about what I wanted to share in Ephesians chapter 6 verse 18. If you want you can turn there.

It's amazing what Paul says with all prayer and petition pray at all times in the spirit with this in view be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints and he goes on to say some more prayer praying for him as well. He says I think about four times in one sentence he tells us to pray petition pray for all the saints pray and this is right after putting on the full armor of God after we've put on the full armor of God pray and pray and pray and pray after we put on the helmet of salvation after we take on the shield of faith pray and pray and pray and pray it's repeated and it's comprehensive at all times with all perseverance for all the saints and as I was thinking about prayer in the church context I wanted to give a simple expression pray we prayers not me prayers pray we prayers not me prayers the me prayer can easily become the prayer of the self-righteous and the we prayer is the prayer of the righteous I was thinking about that those two we prayer and me prayer the self-righteous me prayer we see that in Luke chapter 18 we know the story of the Pharisee and the publican I thank you God that I'm not like and I believe he was being factually honest he was probably I'd like to think he was saying things that he was actually doing and probably the tax collector was not doing tithing and fasting or whatever it is but the Pharisee was not praying to God he was praying to himself because it's me I thank you God and I think I counted there five times he uses the word I in that and you could also say well it's a thank you prayer I thank you God that's how he started but it wasn't a spirit of gratitude it was evil because he compared himself to others and when we thank God for what God has given us in our lives are we thanking God when we compare ourselves to other people Lord I thank you God that you've given me this and you're not giving them that because I see other people that don't have it then that's a I'm in danger of having a me prayer nothing wrong with being grateful for what God has given me but as part of being a local church God wants us to think beyond ourselves and God wants us to think about it in the terms of in terms of family and a beautiful picture of the we prayer is Daniel chapter 9 Daniel was one of the most righteous men that ever lived in the Old Testament and he gave us a we prayer this is righteous Daniel who had for years for decades had stayed away from sin Daniel chapter 9 I don't have time to read it but Daniel starts off by saying hey look I Daniel observed that it was time for the completion of the desolation of Jerusalem when Jerusalem was going to be no longer desolated and the people could return that what Daniel said was I gave my attention to the Lord to pray and to offer supplications and then he you know he could have surely looked at many most of the other people in Babylon his fellow brothers and saw that they were not praying but this did not draw David Daniel into a self-righteous prayer it drew him into a righteous prayer where he said we have sinned we in verse 5 we have committed and you look at that chapter it's all about we and our we have not listened to it what do you mean Daniel you listen to the prophets you're the one who didn't commit iniquity but this was Daniel look counting asking on behalf of us not me and that's that's what each of us when we commit to the local church this doesn't make us you know it's not that if we pray me prayers we're not Christians but God didn't want us to be alone God brought us into a local church to transition us and to mature us from me prayers to we prayers to where we say Lord our this is our problem open shame belongs to us in verse 8 verse 13 Lord calamity has come on us verse 15 we have sinned we have become wicked Daniel was probably one of the most righteous men that ever lived all the Hindu

testament probably in many ways but he was able to say outwardly at we have sinned we have been wicked let us learn to give to the body of Christ and this is the Lord's challenge to me Sandeep how much are you praying we prayers how much are you praying for your brothers and sisters as we so you have not stumbled in a particular area but what about us and is there any giving let us give that and it doesn't have to be a long prayer um the picture I put for praying was this was washing people's feet because I saw that as a great way I can wash people's feet I can wash them even remotely I can pray for them and pray that a turban be put on their head I can pray for their sins to be forgiven them to be washed in the blood of Jesus that they may know the justification that comes in the blood of Jesus that they can know the holiness that is associated with the blood of Jesus so that the blood of Jesus is not treated as common and ordinary this is what we do and you know Peter says this is a verse I've been meditating on lately 1 Peter 4 7 the end of all things is near if we believe the Lord is coming be of sound judgment be of sober spirit for what for the sake of prayer for the purpose of prayer and when I was thinking about this one I'm not thinking about group prayer group meetings are wonderful group prayer meetings are great and they have their place we just had one yesterday among all the brothers but this is we prayers in secret and when alone you don't have to get together with anybody else but you can have we on our mind not me um Jesus taught us to pray if you he told us how to pray not my father who is in heaven forgive us my sins our father forgive us our sins give us give us this day our daily bread and this is a way in which we can wash the feet of others Jesus said that wash one another's feet and people try to practice that by taking a basin of water and washing people's dirty feet even though it's pretty clean but where we need to do this is to apply it spiritually and say Lord I'm detached from them but let me pray for this brother whoever comes to my mind and I also thought about washing our hands you know we're in the season where we've been taught a lot wash your hands what do you do what can I do when I'm washing my hands they say wash for 20 seconds well 20 seconds is a lot of time to pray for somebody I can pray for a loved one what if I what if we did that what if every time we washed our hands we use that small 20 seconds I don't have to kneel down I don't have to do anything I guess as I'm washing my hands say Lord who do I whose feet do I want to wash spiritually maybe it's my wife maybe it's my children maybe it's a brother in the church and we can pray we prayers not me prayers the next word along with that after that was participating now we've talked a lot about prophesying but I thought I'd use the word participating because it's not just speaking in the midweek groups another word for participating is supporting or encouraging if you seek and if you can see that picture over there people are rooting these people on people are holding up it's kind of small but hopefully you can see there are many different people holding up something there in the middle encouraging either with our words either through prayer holding somebody up through sharing in the midweek meetings for sure but through many other ways we could encourage what is the opposite of prophecy in the body of Christ it's paralysis if I'm not prophesying if I'm not encouraging others what am I doing in the body of Christ every single member has a purpose and if I don't have a heart to encourage if the body part is not having a heart to help supply blood then I should wonder if I have if I'm paralyzed I should even wonder if I'm in the right body of Christ should I find some other body of Christ which is also seeking to make disciples but where I can encourage them encouraging others in the body of Christ is not optional optional it's the basic function that's the way we have to participate it's not only by yes you know 1 Corinthians 14 talks about sharing in the midweek meeting that's the on the local church that's the clear explanation of it but it's not only that because of technology we can text we can phone call we can email we can smile if we share something and even if we share something in the midweek group we may not be encouraging them we may just be sharing knowledge and information that puffs up but never out of edifies and so I see the prayer and the prophecy going together I see the prayer and the participating going together if I'm praying for somebody I'd be more interested in participating with those people if I'm not

praying for them if I don't have a burden for them my participation is going to be more flinging advice and flinging thoughts and smart ideas but it's not backed with a genuine burden so I see them going hand in hand and that's the word we use often as prophecy we use the word encouraging it's supporting it's participating dear brothers and sisters this is the zoom meeting they say there are so many participants that doesn't mean you're participating though you could be listening your mind could be distracted somewhere else you may not be a participant right now you may not be engaged in this with us together and it's so easy in the midweek meetings to just put yourself on mute and just turn off your video and you're a participant but you're not participating you're not encouraging you're not supporting you've not spent any time caring for them in your thoughts and so we're sitting there listening taking in information good enough to share something but we're not participating we're not actively involved and actively involved doesn't mean speaking actively involved could be listening rooting for them encouraging them on so I hope it's clear of course we encourage participation in the midweek meetings through speaking as well but it's not in the midweek meeting alone it's every day of the week we could as we're caring I was talking to a brother who had a wife who had many children how is that woman going to encourage others she can pray a one-minute prayer she's washing her hands with genuine sincerity that's where it starts and if she's prayed for that person imagine if I'm praying for somebody for five days in a row and then I see that person I've got love in my heart even if it's five minutes of love it's genuine love I wasn't praying with the project in mind I was praying because I just the lord put them on my heart even if it was just five minutes if I meet them after five days I'd be five minutes of love that'll come through in my eyes that'll come through in my smile that'll come through in my words dear brothers and sisters let's pray we prayers and let us seek to participate whether or not we're speaking or let's be actively involved in the encouraging others and lastly the last word is proclaiming that I also got from Ephesians chapter 5 sorry Ephesians chapter 6 verse 18 19 and 20 we can turn there if you go back there I was in Daniel 9 but Ephesians chapter 6 verse 20 and then he says look pray on my behalf 19 and 20 he says pray on my behalf this is Paul asking the Ephesians to pray on my behalf that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador and chains that in proclaiming I may speak boldly as I ought to speak and from that word I got that proclaiming proclaiming and two words that I want to underline is boldly and the mystery the mystery of the gospel it really encouraged me dear brothers and sisters this week as I meditated on this that the gospel is a mystery it is not something that I feel I need to explain a lot of Christianity is chasing its tail because it is trying to sincerely explain the gospel but the gospel is a mystery the love of God is a mystery how can we possibly fathom let alone explain that an almighty God became a human and faced eternal torment to save me the love of God is good news but it's a mystery and as we've heard it's unexplainable it has to be revealed even our own children we can't explain them into the kingdom no one can be born by the will of man we have to be born by the spirit we have to be born by the will of God that's John chapter 1 and John chapter 3 so it's such a relief that we don't have to explain people into the kingdom we don't have to teach people in the kingdom we have to pray and proclaim and and if we had to pray and courage and proclaim how by being a light the light bulb is not explaining light it's not talking about the physics of the geometry or the particles of light it just shines and the salt doesn't explain all the particles of what sodium and chlorine or whatever makes us all it just tastes good and it was such a relief lord I don't have to explain many things I don't have to learn all the apologetical details of this or that I just need to shine I would just light the candle every day and shine I just need to make my co-workers and see that my life is tasty it's enjoyable Jesus tells me that he wants me to live a life with divine clarity you know the light and darkness and it's and that's an enjoyable life that I ought to be living it is the crystal clear clarity and light of a clear conscience that loves holiness that increasingly loves holiness that's what the light that has to shine I don't

have to use words but it's something that I carry around me that shows that I hate gossip that I'm careful with my tongue that I seek to be under submission of human authorities and I love holiness and it's the enjoyment that I get from the fruit of love and joy and peace with Christ not the pleasant pleasures of sin a genuine salt in my life that others can taste it's a mystery dear brothers and sisters but I hope that we can pursue that mystery and not try to explain it but be it in the earth and the other word was bold that I might have boldness to proclaim it that word boldness seems to indicate proclaiming it we must be bold dear brothers and sisters to proclaim it but that won't happen if we if our inner life doesn't match our outer life if we're proclaiming with our mouth but our inner life doesn't demonstrate that clarity of conscience and doesn't demonstrate that enjoyment I can't proclaim it but dear brothers and sisters that's what our church ought to be so let me share this slide in closing we're protected on the outside but let's seek to be a praying church in secret seeking to wash one another's faults in secret rooting for them participating in the church passing blood the blood of Jesus that justifies and seeks to make us holy to others rooting for them encouraging them on if you were using words if necessary and seeking to be a light and salt in the earth adding a little bit of taste bringing a little bit more clarity to people's lives dear brothers and sisters it's a tremendous calling God created Adam and said I don't like it that you're alone God created us and birthed us in the Holy Spirit and said it's not good for you to be alone I want you to be with a family that you can get the protection but then you have a function to play don't be paralyzed seek to pray for others seek to participate in the building up of others and seeking to proclaim to others who are lost around us may God help us

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