CITYLIGHT
CHURCH

SERMON NOTES & TRANSCRIPT

The Church Is For Me

Why the Local Church Is Precious, and Why You Need It Every Week

The church is a treasure worth selling everything to have. Its memories, its present reality and its future are all precious, so make gathering with the church a rhythm and a routine in your life.

PREACHED BY
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SERIES
Stand-alone message

MAIN TEXT
Matthew 13:44-46

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Sermon Transcript

Amen. Well, you can turn in your Bibles with me if you have them to Matthew chapter 13. I do want to encourage you, there's no condemnation in this, but if you do not bring a physical Bible to church, I would really encourage you to try to start doing that maybe next week.

> **ROMANS 8:1** ESV
>
> 1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

We're going to be getting into some stuff next week, I think it'll help you. My preaching style lends towards having a Bible with you, you know. And I know some of y'all use your phone. There's no condemnation, you know. You just get in the second group that goes into heaven.

The standby list, you know. But if you've got your physical Bible, this is the lightning lane right here, okay? This is a fast pass when you get to heaven, for the Disney lover in you, amen. And just as we get into next week, it will be helpful, 'cause I'm a little... Don't let the button-up and the black and the funky music fool you. I'm a little old school. That's why I call Him the Holy Ghost. I love it. 'Cause I'm old — I love it in my soul. Amen. All right, Matthew chapter 13.

Matthew chapter 13. I'm just going to read here quickly from verses 44 through 46.

> **MATTHEW 13:44-46** ESV
>
> 44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, 46 who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

They say, "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it." Today, I want to preach a message that is — the title is just a phrase that has been running around in my head as we've been coming up to this particular Sunday.

Today, I want to talk to you on the subject of the preciousness of the church, the preciousness of the church. There was a little song that we used to sing back in the '90s. I don't know if you've ever heard it, but it just said, [worship] How precious is the love of God?

> **PSALM 36:7** ESV
>
> 7 How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

How precious is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ? And I got to thinking the other night — I'll go ahead and tell you where this thought came from. I'm on a diet right now, if y'all are wondering why you can barely see me. Enough people

called me fat on the internet, I said, "Well, I better get a hold of this."

And so I'm on a diet right now. So like anybody who's on a diet and doing good, I'm looking at food on the internet like it's going out of style, y'all. I could tell you how to cook just about anything right now, you know? You learn how to cook beef Wellington and stuff when you're on a diet, you know? And so I know the perfect temperature and time for baked potatoes right now. It's just right in the front of my brain. And so I was thinking about, of all things, potato salad. I was thinking about potato salad.

And for me, there are two potato salads that stand above all the rest in the world. Now, number two — the number two potato salad, I'm going to hook y'all up in case you ever find yourself there, I'm going to tell you where to go. If you ever find yourself in Adrian, Michigan, okay? South of Ann Arbor, west of Toledo, west of Detroit, okay? East of Ja— I'm trying to help y'all find it, okay? If you're ever in Adrian, Michigan, there's a place there called Hoagie Man. And Hoagie Man had... Their sandwiches are fine, but their potato salad...

Oh my God, let's just have a moment of silence for the Hoagie Man potato salad. It's so good. I don't know what it is. I tried to find a copycat recipe online. Turns out when there's only one store in one place in a small town, the copycat recipes don't go around, you know? But so that's the number two. But the number one, the number one potato salad, my favorite potato salad happens to also be your favorite potato salad. That's MeeMaw's potato salad. Now, Beau is back there trying to tell me it's Jackie's potato salad, so we're going to need 15 gallons of that next week, Miss Jackie, so we can test and see.

But my favorite potato salad in the world, it's MeeMaw's potato salad. I have the recipe for it. I don't think I've ever made it. I like to keep these recipes. Part of the reason it's good is because it's delicious. That's one of the reasons. But more than that, it's my favorite because it's precious. It was something that you only get in MeeMaw's kitchen. You only get it at MeeMaw's table. You don't get this just anywhere. You gotta go sit at MeeMaw's table to have MeeMaw's potato salad. And my grandmother is not alive anymore, so that makes it more precious.

And so it's a precious thing. This is precious potato salad. I just want to tell you this morning that the church is precious. The people, the songs, the messages. The messages. The messages. We have people with us for the first time today, folks. I'm going to need y'all to pick up on some of these cues. And even the buildings. The buildings are precious. You know, we get into this — let me tell you, if you want to decode someone real fast... See, now I'm already there.

Well, let's just go. If you ever want to decode someone's spiritual immaturity, listen for this phrase: "The church isn't the building, it's the people." Okay, yeah, that's true. What do you do with that? Right? That's why people say that, 'cause they just don't want to go to the ch— Here's why they say it. They don't want to go to the church building, so they try to sound spiritual. It's the people, it's not the... Okay, that's fine, but you know where those people are? I promise you, let me rip the roof and the air conditioners out of here, and the church ain't coming back.

And so, you know, everything is precious when it comes to the church. The trimmings of it are... They're just, it's precious. All of it is. I remember, and I do sympathize for some of you. I know some of you probably think I don't. I sympathize when I put a curtain over the tile you've been looking at forever, or I come in and I mess with an area that you're used to in the church. I'm sympathetic to that because when they do it to my home church, can't stand these people. Hey, y'all need to leave it alone.

The stage was fine the way it was. I know we haven't had a choir in 20 years, but the choir loft is just fine. That's how I feel, 'cause it's all precious. It's precious. The stairs are... It's just that stuff is precious to me. The songs, the little... I think

about, when I think about church, I think about Kaye Oneal, the receptionist. When I got saved, she was the receptionist in the church, Kaye Oneal. Her husband played drums at our church. An old vintage Rogers set, by the way. Yeah, so back in the day stuff, you know.

And so I think about Kaye Oneal. I think about the intercessory prayer meetings on Tuesday night, where they had a bunch of ladies come in there that didn't know how to work the sound system, so they had a boom box on a cart that they rolled in, and a little lamp that they turned on. And they handed out these little, like, programs for everybody — it was called The Intercessor. That stuff is just precious to me. I think about Sunday night services. Sunday night services, where stuff's a little different than Sunday morning, and it went a little harder.

And, you know, back in the day when the pastors wore suits and ties, which I'm not against. I just have to do the singing. And when I stop singing, y'all, I'm going to get me a tie. Amen. And I think about — but Sunday night the preacher, he took the tie off. And it was just something different. I think about that stuff. I think about a youth group in the '90s. Come on, somebody. I think, you know, with good names. I think, you know, Crossfire. You know? And then we had a youth pastor come in and called it The Zone.

He said, "Why? 'Cause you gotta get in the zone." Maybe that's a good name for the church. We'll call it The Zone. So you gotta get in the zone. I think about Windell Rottenberry, who played the bass at our church. I'm a bass player, so I'm, you know... And we would sing these little songs. Like, we'd sing [worship] Anybody remember that? And we'd get to singing that song, and then we'd hit that little "Jesus," and Windell'd take that moment, that little space — "Jesus" — and I'd stand down there worshiping at the altar, smiling and getting tickled.

He did it every time, too, so I knew it was coming. I'd have been mad if he didn't do it. I think about all of these things. I think about how the guests were greeted. You know, our pastors at my home church always got up and said, "If it's your first time or your first time in a long time." Does that sound familiar to anyone? Right, right. That's where it comes from, from hearing it there. I even liked the choir robes, probably 'cause I didn't have to wear one. Everybody wearing them hated them things. It's 1,000 degrees inside here. These things need mini splits that come with them.

And it's just all of that stuff is precious to me when I think about those things. And specifically for me, the church was a refuge from a dysfunctional home. Like, I grew up in chaos. And so when I came to church and saw all these little things, all the pastor's idiosyncrasies — which thank God your pastor doesn't have any of those, amen. And so his idiosyncrasies and the things the worship leader would do and the way the ladies acted in the church and the people that were in the foyer and even the little guest mugs with the cellophane in them and all that — all of it was precious to me because it was a refuge.

And honestly, when I look back at it, some of the stuff we did, like, it is so dumb. We did some dumb stuff. We used to sing this all the time, y'all. I'd know we were going to sing the song when it would happen. Y'all remember the song "Days of Elijah"? Well, we would come out of this bridge. You know, there's a little bridge on it about there being no God like Jehovah. And we'd come out of that, and then we'd key change. "Behold, he comes."

Well, I'd always know they were going to do the song because they'd roll in these tombs that they had made for a Christmas play. But we were getting our money's worth, amen. And they'd roll them in, and they'd sprinkle them — the top would look like stone. It was styrofoam. And they'd sprinkle them with baby powder. Okay? And we'd hit that key change. "Behold, he comes." And all these people would bust out of the tombs like it was the rapture of the church, and they'd bust out. And the church would go nuts, y'all.

You want to talk about — they were throwing babies out of the balcony when this was happening, son. We were having church. And that is the dumbest. If someone came in and said, "Hey, I got an idea," I'd go, "Don't come back to our church. Just go, you need another home, amen." But even that kind of stuff, it just blesses me because there's a preciousness to the church, to this apparatus, this thing that we do. There's a preciousness to it. And this morning I want to talk to you a little bit about what makes the church precious.

If you're ready, why don't you go ahead and give the Lord a good praise right there, amen. Okay. So number one, the first thing that makes the church precious is the memories are precious. The memories are precious. You know, I was saved in 1997, which means I am right on the heels of my 30th year of being a Christian and being born again. And so, you know, if you're new to the household of faith in the church this morning, I just want to let you know, if you've gotten saved recently or in recent years, you're building your memories right now.

But for those of you who've been in church for a while, you've got memories in the church. You've got those memories. The hymn writer called it "Precious Memories." Precious memories, oh, how they linger. You know, just, they're precious memories. In fact, the hymn calls them unseen angels. These precious memories are unseen angels that encourage us and comfort us in life. The Bible actually encourages us to recall these precious memories over time. To take time and revisit and recall these precious memories.

> **PSALM 77:10-12** ESV
>
> 10 Then I said, "I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High." 11 I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. 12 I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.

Psalm 77 verse 10 says, "Then I said, 'I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High.'"

I'm going to remember the time when the Lord came through in my life. In fact, I will tell you this, interestingly enough, that this verse, speaking of precious memories — for those of you familiar with the Brownsville Revival — this is the verse Steve Hill was preaching on Father's Day of 1995 when the Holy Ghost hit that church like a tidal wave. So that's verse 10. Verse 11, "I will remember the deeds of the Lord." I'm going to remember what He's done. "Yes, I'll remember your wonders of old. I'll ponder all your work and meditate on your mighty deeds."

I'd ask you this morning, do you remember when the Lord set you free? Do you remember when He brought you out of whatever you were in? Do you remember when He took your feet out of the miry clay and set you up on a rock and set you on a high place?

> **PSALM 40:2** ESV
>
> 2 He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.

The Psalmist said that "the lines have fallen in pleasant places."

> **PSALM 16:6** ESV
>
> 6 The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.

He says, “He set my feet in a broad place.”

> **PSALM 31:8** ESV
>
> 8 and you have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy; you have set my feet in a broad place.

Do you remember when the Lord took you from whatever life was like and brought you into newness? You’ve gotta revisit that from time to time. You’ve gotta revisit... And maybe that’s not just the moment you got saved, but, you know, I was thinking about it one day.

Somebody was asking me how I was doing and I said, “Well, you know, 10 years ago I was begging for the stuff I’m feeling right now.” You know? I still got problems, but if I could see myself when I was 30 right now, oh, I’d be highly impressed with myself. Amen. I got a lot of what I was asking the Lord for. A lot of it’s come to pass. So when you look back and you remember what the Lord has brought you from, I’m talking about having those moments. It’s precious to revisit those testimonies of His power. I’m talking about revisiting those services.

I hope that everybody in here has one church service that you can remember where you’re just like, “You know what? I love going to church. I love preaching. I love the worship. But whoa, there was this one time — August 3rd, 1998 — and God just touched me in a powerful way.” And I remember this preacher was there, and he said these three things, and we sang this, and I went to the altar and God touched me in a powerful... I’m talking about having precious memories. To revisit those places, to go back to those places.

That’s one of the things that makes the church precious. And not only is it just the testimonies that I think we should revisit, I do think it’s the trimmings that we should revisit. Now, my greatest enemy as a pastor is your preference for how you like church to be. I do want to just tell you that right now. Some of y’all would just be fine if I’d sing those songs, and preach that long, and set the AC to that temperature. Amen. But listen, while we can’t do that as a church, we have to go together to the place the Lord is calling us.

There is something about going back to those places in our mind. It’s not just the testimonies, but the trimmings of church. Those songs from that time, the style from that time. I thought about — I don’t know that I’m going to do it, I probably won’t, but I had a thought the other day about having a dress up Sunday. I think it’d be good to see everybody in some suits and some ties and some dresses with the little — what do they call them things? Doilies. Yeah, the doilies around the neck. And I think we need to have a dress up Sunday, but we’re going to wait till — we’re going to do it on February 1st.

We’re not — that is not an August event. But I just remember, you know, just to look back, those trimmings, the songs, the style, the... You know, I know some of you come in here and you go, “Oh, I love sitting in these chairs, but God touched me in a pew.” And you gotta remember those trimmings. You know, there’s things that God has delivered us from that might be precious to you, like pink carpet. If you didn’t go to a church with pink, orange, or green carpet — or purple — you didn’t hear the gospel, my friends.

You were in — your preacher was a false prophet, amen. You know, you gotta... I’m talking about just the tr— you gotta revisit those trimmings because they’re precious. You know, I was saved in 1997, and I was saved in the heat of the Brownsville Revival. You’re going to hear me talk about it from time to time. In fact, writing this message this morning, I thought, “How far is it?” ‘Cause I know it’s right over there. Only like an hour and 10 minutes away. I think I’m just going

to go over there one day and walk in the parking lot and just pray and speak a blessing over that church for all the good that it's done in my life.

But I remember a few years ago, I was getting ready to — we were moving out of a house, and I was painting the house. You know, I'm painting, like, every room. You know, we're talking, like, a week of painting, you know? Which for me is, like, two weeks of painting, 'cause I don't know what I'm doing, amen. And so I'm in there, and I'm painting. And as I'm painting, I'm listening to these old songs, you know. All these old Brownsville songs — the revival fire songs, and that old one about a blessed time that's coming soon.

Do y'all even know that song? The one about the wedding, and the bride being united with the groom, and how we shall see the King when he comes. You know? We shall see the King. You know, it's a great song. So I'm singing these songs, and I'm painting the house. And as I'm doing it, I'm like, "This is weird." Like, I knew it. Like, I should be listening to AC/DC right now. I should be — you need some cranking music when you do stuff like this. And I'm just painting, and I'm doing it.

And then as I'm doing it, I'm thinking about it, and the Holy Spirit speaks to me and says, "You like these songs because you worshiped to these before you knew how the sausage was made." See, this, it's work for me now. See, I'm over here working. So, some people go back to Israel Houghton songs, and those bless 'em. Israel's too new. I was doing that stuff. I was a professional by then. I was a professional worshiper when Israel Houghton came out. I can't listen. Hillsong, I'm a little... You know, it's gotta be old Hillsong to touch me.

You know what I'm saying? The new Hillsong, Hillsong United and stuff like that, no, I was a professional. But when I go back to when the Lord touched me before I was involved in all of that, those songs just minister to me. Man, I'm telling you, you gotta revisit these precious memories because they make the church precious. In Jesus' name. Number two. Number two, the reality of the church is precious. The reality of the church is precious. I'm talking about what's right in front of us. The present, the here and now. The reality of the church is precious.

I was reminded of a story in the scripture where a man said he was distracted from his mission because he was busy running here and there.

> **1 KINGS 20:40** ESV
>
> 40 And as your servant was busy here and there, he was gone." The king of Israel said to him, "So shall your judgment be; you yourself have decided it."

He was busy running here and there. Man, I'm going to tell you, it's easy to overlook the preciousness of the reality of the church because we're busy running here and there. And there's no condemnation when I say this, but people who don't come to church because "that's my only off day" — I need you to hear me. There's no condemnation, but you don't understand the precious reality of the church. If it's your only off day and you go, "I'm not going to go," I'm telling you, there's a refreshing in the house of the Lord.

> **ACTS 3:19-20** ESV
>
> 19 Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus,

“Well, I don’t like the songs you sing or the way you preach.” There’s a refreshing in the house of the Lord that ain’t got nothing to do with me. It ain’t got nothing to do with any of the other pastors in the area. It ain’t got nothing to do with the preaching, the singing, the volume, the lights, the temperature, none of it. There’s something about getting into a place where people are joining together saying the name of Jesus Christ, that there’s a refreshing that comes through the room in those moments. Talking about the preciousness of the reality of the church.

It’s easy to get distracted in the present day with the things we have to do, and then look back at the history of the church with rose-colored glasses. See, the people busting out the graves, it’s precious to me. It’s a memory. In the moment I knew that was a thing. Like, in the moment I was like, “This is very cool. This is very cool. We’re singing ‘Days of Elijah’ and people are resurrecting in our church right now.” They were wrapped in white. They ran out the back of the sanctuary. Guys, it wasn’t a small ordeal, this — and it wasn’t one guy either, amen.

We had a lot of tombs, amen. So don’t get me talking about this, ‘cause there’s a lot to dissect on this. At some point we need to do an autopsy, no pun intended, on this. But for me, I can look at that and I can go, “That was precious. We don’t ever need to do that again.” But there are some people who can’t do that. Somewhere there is someone who moved away from Alabaster, Alabama, who is making their pastor’s life miserable because they won’t let this “Days of Elijah” idea go, amen. They’re somewhere in the middle of Mississippi and the pastor’s like, “She’s coming to my office again.

I know we’re about to talk about...” Telling his secretary, “If you hear the words ‘Days of Elijah,’ an appointment just showed up.” You know? And so, some people can’t let go, ‘cause we look through rose-colored glasses and sometimes everything back there is great, and everything right now is a problem, and it’s not good enough, and it’s not... No, the present reality of the church is we’re in the spot we’re supposed to be in. You’re in the time you’re supposed to be in. You are where you’re supposed to be right now. If you were supposed to be in the ‘90s right now, you’d be in the ‘90s.

But God has you right here. Talking about the present reality of the church. It’s easy to overlook this stuff. But today the church offers you great value. Today you can get encouragement in the church. You can get discipleship in the church. And let me just say this, because discipleship is a big deal. But when I got here, I made sure that I dispelled the notion that discipleship happens in classrooms and groups. It can happen in there. In our church, discipleship starts in the pulpit.

You’re going to get good stuff here. That’s going to get you where... I say I still need to shake it out of a few of you, amen. I can tell it got quiet on me. But we are about to start Wednesday nights. We are not starting Wednesday nights because we need discipleship. We’re starting Wednesday nights because I need to have youth group without the building being empty, amen. Y’all are going to be blessed, but I’m not doing Wednesday night for you. I’m doing Wednesday night for teenagers who need a moment to come together and worship the Lord in their own environment and with their peers.

And y’all are going to get some stuff while we’re at it. You just are the beneficiary of that. But I’m not doing Wednesday night because we need discipleship in the church, because we’ve got discipleship in the church. You can get discipleship. In the present-day reality of the church, you can get revelation from heaven. You can walk into a church and hear something that shifts your entire world. It can shift your worldview. It can shift the decisions you’ve gotta make. It can shift how you live in your home. It can shift how you operate on the job.

You can get revelation. You can come into church today, today. Somebody say today. Today, and get power. You can get power. You can get a touch from the Holy Ghost in the church today. You can get power. You can get the anointing in church today. You can leave with a little something on you that makes the difference. That’s what we say around here.

We say the anointing makes the difference. You can get a little something on you that you walk out of here with. I'm not talking about yesterday things. I'm talking about today things.

These are for today. So life's busyness can cause us to overlook the preciousness of the church, but I also want to just say that church busyness can make us overlook the church's preciousness as well. It can cause us to not see the reality of what's happening today in the church. And let me just say this to all the people who serve on teams. You know, we're in an interesting season. We're growing. And we have kind of an all-hands-on-deck situation going on, and so a lot of our kids ministry people are in kids ministry every single week, and I need them in kids ministry every single week.

We need that right now, and so sometimes they're not getting to interact with what's going on in here. Our production team is not wide and broad because it's all hands on deck, and so they're kind of always doing the things that they're doing right now. And if you serve, and you're not in the room very often for whatever reason that I'm not mentioning right now, I just want to say this to you, that you can get blinded to the reality of what God is doing today in the church because you're so busy with church busyness.

That's why I really encourage our people in kids ministry especially to make sure you're staying up to date with the messages and stuff. But you can get so busy and have your head down that you miss some things, like it is precious to be used by God. That's a precious thing. It's precious to be used of the Lord. But you can also have your head down and not see that people's lives are being changed, that people are being transformed. I've gotten a couple of testimonies this morning that I'm not going to share, but God is working in the lives of His people in this church today.

Today. Somebody say today. And I want to be clear. Those of you that serve in ministry, you make the world go round here. And we appreciate you greatly. You've gotta make church a regular event. You've gotta get involved in the process because it's precious today. And I want to encourage you, speak well of the church today. Speak well of the church today. I'm not just talking about this pastor and this church. I've only been here a year. People are going to say what they're going to say about me. Okay?

And by the way, let me just encourage y'all. I'm a big boy. You don't ever have to defend me. In fact, I'd encourage you not to. Okay? If I need to be defended, I send Ashleigh Mayfield out there, amen. You don't have to defend me. It is easy to misunderstand what you're not present for. Amen? And so, but I want you to hear, speak well of the church. When you speak well of the church today — not, "it's not like it used to be," not, "well, we don't do this anymore," and, "well, I wish we'd still do this," and, "well, you know, the preacher don't wear a suit anymore," and, you know.

Well, you wear one in this temperature. Amen. You know? In fact, it's amazing how few sports coats we have in our church. We probably ought to start praying for some sport coat people to sanctify us. Amen. But speak well of the church, 'cause it positions you in faith to receive from the church. Amen? Give the Lord a praise right there. Amen. Give the Lord another praise and we'll cut it in editing. Hallelujah. I'm just kidding. We'll clip that and put that on the internet.

Amen. So, amen. I do want to just tell you, speaking of discipleship starting in the church, starting in the present reality of the church, I was reading in 2 Peter this morning, and 2 Peter 2 talks about false prophets and apostles. False prophets, false apostles, false teachers, and it says this about them. It says, "They entice unsteady souls."

> **2 PETER 2:14** ESV
>
> 14 They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children!

They entice unsteady souls. These false teachers and false prophets, they get in and they entice unsteady souls. One of the benefits of being in the present reality of the church — I'm talking about being here today — the preciousness of the reality of the church is that it keeps you from being unsteady.

It steadies your soul. It helps. You know, a lot of people who want to fight that process, they'll say things like, "Well, I don't need to go to church to know God." Okay. But the Bible doesn't say anywhere that Jesus Christ has been given to the head of those who sit in their basement on Sunday morning.

> **EPHESIANS 1:22** ESV
>
> 22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,

Come on. So at some point you have... There's something about getting into the church, and what it does is it steadies you. It steadies you. So starting next week, starting next week, I want you to know my preaching dynamic is shifting a little bit.

And thank God, 'cause have we not just been in like 12 weeks of the most uncomfortable stuff I've been up here talking about? Amen. You know, I told that one Tennessee joke, and it's just been downhill from there. But next week I'm starting a series on the Lord's Prayer, on the Lord's Prayer. I'm probably going to spend somewhere in the ballpark of 30 weeks on the Lord's Prayer, which will be intermittent because we'll have things come up, so it'll be a little bit longer than that. But I'm starting this series because Jesus, quoting the prophet Isaiah, said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer."

> **ISAIAH 56:7** ESV
>
> 7 these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."

Prayer. "My house shall be called a house of prayer." I want you to know I'm believing in 2027 that there is going to be a revival of prayer in this church. And so that is a good place to give the Lord a praise. In fact, why don't you just raise your hands to heaven right now and say, "Teach me how to pray, Lord. Teach me how to pray, Holy Ghost." Hallelujah. So I'm going to be starting next week a long series on the Lord's Prayer, and there's going to be some stuff shifting up here in the pulpit. There's going to be something different that I'm going to be doing up here in the pulpit.

And I'm telling you, you want to be here every week for that because my goal will hopefully be to steady your soul. Amen. Number three, number three, the expectation of church is precious. The expectation of church is precious. Let me just tell you Matthew 16:18.

> **MATTHEW 16:18** ESV
>
> 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Jesus says, "And I tell you, you are Peter." Look at your neighbor and say, "You're Peter." You're Peter. Y'all are like, "I don't know if I'd want to do that or not." Amen. "You are Peter, and on this rock I'll build my church," listen to this, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

I just want to tell you this morning, contrary to what you've heard on the news, and contrary to what you hear on the podcast, and contrary to what you hear people griping around the dinner table, the church is not getting worse and worse. The church is not shrinking. The church is growing. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is still taking territory. We're still expanding. We're still seeing the Kingdom of God grow because this gospel shall be preached to the whole earth.

> **MATTHEW 24:14** ESV
>
> 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Amen. The church is alive and well. Now, I do want you to know there is a tension that we feel because it feels like the world is getting worse and worse.

Especially in our context around us, it's like — do you ever just turn on the news and go, "What?" You know, when I started realizing things were getting real crazy in the world is when I started listening to people who I disagree with on everything talk to people who I disagree with on everything and a couple of more things, and this person sounded like they were making sense. You know? I don't try to get political. That's not my go-to. But when Bill Maher started to sound like me and him were in agreement, I went, "What in the world is going on right now?"

You know, he'd been on TV a long time and I've been like, "You know, this guy's crazy." And then something happened a few years ago and I'm like, "You know, I think I believe that, too. Hey, I don't know what to do with that." You know? The world is getting a little crazy. The world's getting crazy. Did you ever think you'd see a day where people would call Fox News liberal? You know what I mean? We're just in that kind of — it's a crazy world we live in right now. That's the world.

That's not the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is getting better and better. And here's the thing. The Bible actually speaks to this tension.

> **ROMANS 8:19** ESV
>
> 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

In Romans chapter 8 it says, "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God." There's another translation that says the creation waits with groaning.

> **ROMANS 8:22** ESV
>
> 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

It cries out with groaning. And it's groaning for the revealing of the sons of God. In fact, that's why, as a church, we're building. That's why we're building, because there's no other option.

The world is crying out, the creation is crying out for the revealing of the sons of God. And the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is called to take territory. So what are we going to do? We're going to build. We're going to answer the desire of the creation that calls out and fulfill our great commission at the same time.

> **MATTHEW 28:19-20** ESV
>
> 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

That's why we are a building church. And it's precious to look toward these things through the lens of faith. Things aren't getting worse and worse, but better and better. There's no mechanism on earth that can stop the church of the living God.

It doesn't exist. And you may have moments where something happens, but no, you may have a power outage one Sunday, but that can't stop the church of the living God. You may have a road getting cl— we were going to a church one time where they closed the whole road down that goes to the church. No, you can't stop the church of the living God. The church is going to keep growing and keep prospering. The church, in fact, actually thrives under a little persecution. If you see the church persecuted — do you want to know why underground churches are, like, powerful and growing around the world?

Because the church thrives on a little persecution. You know, I want you to know about me. I try to keep a little fight in me. I'm not trying to just be blessed as the pastor. Just blessed by everything that happens in church. No, I try to keep a little fight in me. You know, they don't like it when I'm in minister meetings, 'cause I got a little fight in me. You know, I'm looking at the other preachers. You want to go? I got a little fight in me, 'cause you need a little bit of that pressure. It does something.

And I mean, think about it. When — a few years ago, they tried to shut the church down for whatever reason that they do. I mean, and it's one of those things, I kind of just went with whatever everybody was doing a few years ago. You know, I'm not a scientist. I don't know what's going on. But it does worry me that this virus seems to die on impact the moment it hits the doors of a strip club. Strip club, safe. Church, unsafe. And then they would say it's because y'all sing. Well, I don't know what they do in there.

I ain't never been in one, but you know, I think it's gotta be worse than singing. Y'all hear what I'm saying, huh? I mean, I don't know. And so when all that's happening — you know, that is a measure of persecution. And guess what? That persecution came on the church. Well, folks, right now we're seeing a revival in Gen Z that is unlike anything we've seen in about the last 20 years. We're starting to see some things that we saw in the '90s when God was pouring out His Spirit all over the nation and all over the world rise up in this generation.

And it gets a little hard to recognize 'cause they're on TikTok, and they go around "six, seven" and do all this. I don't know what all that is, but, you know. But, you know, everybody give the Lord a good "six, seven" right there in the house of the Lord, amen. My daughter's in the production booth going, "I hate being his child." Just, you know. And so everybody give a good "six, seven" for Ali this morning, amen. And so... But I'm telling you, you put a little persecution on the church, just a little bit of a light persecution.

I like that phrase out of Romans, "this light, momentary affliction."

> **2 CORINTHIANS 4:17** ESV
>
> 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,

You put a little persecution on the church, it pops out revival in a generation. You can't stop the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen. Makes me think about tribbles from Star Trek. Anybody remember tribbles? Some of y'all are thinking, "I like Star Wars," and I'm going to pray for you, amen. But 'cause Star Trek is greater than Star Wars, amen. I could've got up here and said, "Praise Satan," and got a better reaction than that. My God. Got a lot of Star Wars people in here.

Take it easy. I know where everybody's at on the teams now, amen. But I think about Star Trek. You know, Star Trek, they had tribbles, and what tribbles would do, if you didn't know this — they were these little furry creatures, and they would multiply. They would breed and replicate really fast. And they replicated whenever you would feed them. You'd feed them. You'd feed them a little bit, and then you'd have a bunch of tribbles. They'd reproduce. And feed it a little bit, and reproduce. And then by the end of it, they're falling out of the air vents in the ship and everything, and you got tribbles coming out your ears.

And I'm telling you, you just feed the church a little bit of persecution, and like a tribble, we'll just multiply. More people will get saved. More revival goes forth. Oh, man, I'm telling you. Hallelujah. They tried to shut us down. We won't take it, amen. So I'm talking about the preciousness of the future of the church. And this is what I just want to encourage you with today. Some of y'all are in here going, this isn't your normal — I didn't want it to be. 'Cause I want to encourage you with this today. This is the big thing I want you to know. It's time to make church a rhythm and routine in your life.

If you're here for the first time 'cause you saw the sign or somebody invited you, or whether you're here all the time, or whether you just show up once in a blue moon here, I want to encourage you, it's time to make church a rhythm and routine in your life. Something that is occurring all the time. It's something that I naturally — every seven days, I... Makala was telling me about one of her dogs yesterday. And every week, one day a week, they would take the dog to the store with them. And the dog somehow got trained and knew, just figured out, on that day we go.

So on that day, the dog's getting antsy all day long, ready to go on a trip. It just knew. I'm telling you, you need to get the church to where it's a rhythm in your life. And when Sunday comes, if you're not up and in the house of the Lord, it feels off. It feels... Just make it a rhythm. It's a rhythm, but it's a routine. It's a routine. Just something that we do. We do it like clockwork. On Sundays, we go to church. We do this, we do this. And listen, I feel your pain, okay? I know you gotta come and you gotta find a parking space.

Listen, when I stopped local church ministry several years ago, I just... Finding a parking space at church, I just... Ooh, it was rough. 'Cause when I got there, I was the only person there. I have hundreds of parking spaces I can park in. You know, I feel that. You're going to find every little inconvenience to not come, but make it a routine. We're just going to do it. We're just going to fight through it. It doesn't matter. If my hair don't look good, I'm going to church. If I'm wearing my sweatpants, I'm going to church. Hey, if I didn't get up on time to shower, I'm just going to stink, and I'm going to lift my hands like this today, amen.

You know, you just find a way. You gotta make it a routine. You gotta make it a thing that you do on a regular basis.

> **HEBREWS 10:19-25** ESV
>
> 19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and
> living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest
> over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean
> from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope
> without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and
> good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the
> more as you see the Day drawing near.

The author of Hebrews said this, that, "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh. And since we have such a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." I want you to hear me. This "I don't need to go to church" is one of the easiest lies to believe. That is not a far stretch from logic for most people. Because the church can be a disappointing place. It can be a disappointing place. You just cannot get... Hey, I'll tell you, we had a guy write me Monday, he left the church.

He left the church because I didn't respond to a Facebook message quick enough, okay? And that happens. And so he said, "I'm done. Preacher don't respond to Facebook messages. I'm out." Okay. Now, I'd left him for a few days, by the way, so I'm not blameless in it. But it would be wise for you to go ahead and unhitch your attendance here to the speed at which I respond to Facebook messages. 'Cause I am going to leave you on read for a few days. Okay? I love you. I got stuff happening. Amen. Welcome.

All right? And so he left because he's disappointed. There's disappointment in church. You just get disappointed. Some of you in this church, I'm your fifth pastor. You know what I mean? You've gone through pastors leaving. You've gone through change in leadership. Some of you have seen youth pastor, and children's pastor, and music pastor. And I mean, you know, just over and over. And there's disappointment in church, so it makes sense. Why do I need to go to church? These people are unfaithful.

God is faithful. These people are unfaithful. And then you see the stuff you see on the news and what other preachers are doing in other places, and you just go, "I don't know what to do with that. Why even go to church? I can't trust these people. I'm not going to do that," you know? Or he said, she said, you know? It can be anything. And you can get into this, "I'm just going to watch online. I'm just going to watch online. I mean, I can watch the internet preacher." And hey, I like the internet preachers. I am one.

I'm an internet guy. I like it, you know, but you can get into, "I'll just watch online. I don't need to go to church. I'll just watch this guy." I mean, and why would you come here if you can listen to Steven Furtick or Billy Graham? I mean, you can listen to every message Billy Graham ever preached on the internet. Why come here if you can listen to Adrian Rogers, and Charles Stanley, and R.W. Schambach, and Rod Parsley, and — anybody else you can think of? So I'm trying to be careful because some people y'all might watch are close to our church. Amen.

I'm not trying to... You know, I mean, you could do that. Why would I go there? Well, because, I mean, my friends, you need to be in the house of the Lord. Every person needs a church. Every person needs a moment where they just kind of drop, they get in the house of the Lord, everything pushes to the side, and you have a moment. Every person needs a pastor. And I may not be the pastor you want, but I'm the one you got, amen. Everybody needs a pastor. Everybody needs somebody who's kind of got eyes on the spiritual direction of a co— I was listening to a pastor this week, and he was talking about preaching.

It was a pastors' conference. And he said, "You know, all these pastors won't go out and pray about what they need to preach." He said, "It's not that hard to figure out what to preach. What does your people need to hear?" So you need somebody who's thinking, "What do these people need to hear? What steadies them?" And so I actually read this week in Deuteronomy that when the people go out into battle, when Israel goes out into battle, it is the job of the priest to stand in front of them and remind them of what the Lord did previously.

> **DEUTERONOMY 20:1-4** ESV
>
> 1 "When you go out to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own,
> you shall not be afraid of them, for the Lord your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.
> 2 And when you draw near to the battle, the priest shall come forward and speak to the people 3 and shall say to
> them, 'Hear, O Israel, today you are drawing near for battle against your enemies: let not your heart faint. Do not
> fear or panic or be in dread of them, 4 for the Lord your God is he who goes with you to fight for you against your
> enemies, to give you the victory.'

You know, my job is to go, "You're about to go into some form of a battle, so let me just remind you how powerful and how good and how faithful God is. And whatever you've gotta do, we'll get that into you that you can, because God is a big God, and He's for you. And if God is for you, what can be against you?"

> **ROMANS 8:31** ESV
>
> 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

So... But you can't just get that without showing up. Every person needs a church. Every person needs a pastor. Every person needs a spirit-filled gathering. Every person needs a place of renewal, and they need it regularly. That's why we're a Jesus-centered, Spirit-filled church for all people.

When you come here, we want you to hear about Jesus. We want you to have an encounter with the Holy Ghost, and we want you to be sitting by somebody who don't look like you. Because we're all in this together. The author of Hebrews instructs us to regularly gather for a time in His presence and His Word. And if you'll notice when we started through that passage of scripture, it sounds like real saved people he was talking to. I mean, listen to some of that, 'cause everybody wants to act deep about this not coming to church thing. "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence" — you know, so you're a confident believer — "to enter the holy places."

Okay, so you're going to the holy places. "By the blood of Jesus" — you're blood-washed, born again. "By the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain" — so they're living in revelation — "that is through his flesh." And I mean, 1 John says that if anybody says that Jesus came in the flesh, that person is of the Spirit of God.

> **1 JOHN 4:2** ESV
>
> 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,

So, "and since we have such a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart." You got a true heart. "In full assurance of faith." You're full of assurance in faith. I could keep going on here.

And then he says, "Don't not go to church like some of these people do. Get in the church. You need the church." Everybody say, "I need the church." I need the church. I need the church. I need the church. And today I'm just asking you to make the decision and to make church a regular part of your routine and your rhythms. It's almost impossible to be fully assured in your faith and to hold fast to hope and to walk in love and to love God and to serve your fellow man without coming to church regularly, without this moment of coming together regularly. And you need the church.

It needs to be the church. It needs to be the church. I just feel in my spirit right now the Lord's showing me — there's not a hierarchy in church, but there's a diversity in church. You know, we've talked a lot about "for all people" and it being for all people that are different here. You know, that there's a difference here. But spiritually, there's a difference here. Right? And, like, you need the church because some of y'all — like, oftentimes the people who feel the most spiritual in church are actually the most immature people in the church.

Like, you run into people who just think they are the stuff. And now, because I've been around and I've heard everything under the sun — folks, I came from a church where people busted out of graves when we sang "Days of Elijah." I'm a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen. And so I've seen some stuff, and what you notice is you see people who think they have it all together, their life is a mess. Their life is generally a mess, and they aren't as spiritual as they think they are. And then you will come up on these people who just go, "I don't have it all together."

And all of a sudden you sit back and you go, "I think that guy is more spiritual than I am." And you need that diversity. You need somebody who's going through something in church, and you need somebody who knows how to pray through something in church, and they both need each other. Because this person needs to learn how to pray through, and this person needs something to pray through. Sometimes you just need something else. You know, people who — if you're strong, what you need to do is you need to keep lifting heavy stuff.

You gotta keep lifting. So if you know how to pray, you gotta keep stuff to pray for. You gotta kind of keep that. And so you need both. You need people in the church who are gung ho for the Lord. We're seeing this in this generation where some people — they used to call it zeal without knowledge is what they'd say a lot.

> **ROMANS 10:2** ESV
>
> 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

And we're having that in this generation where people are eager right now. We got some teenagers, young 20s that are raising up. There's a revival amongst this generation, and they are gung ho. They are ready to take the world for Jesus.

But folks, I've got a lot of reps. Some of y'all have got a lot of reps, and you just need to... We have to bring that together. There's people who are getting saved, and they're grateful, and they want to get their life together, and they're... but they're still knuckleheads. And we've got some people who've got some wisdom. See, you've got knuckleheads and you've got gray heads. Amen. And you need the gray heads to help the knuckleheads, and you have to have this diversity. You don't get that, because what happens in small groups and, you know, online studies — I think it's great.

You know, there's stuff that we look at sometimes and, like, there's a lady that we're real impressed with her ministry, and she has a cohort of women, and I think that's great. But you can't just get it in a women's gathering. You need the church — there have to be men involved. Because that's a diversity that brings all things together. It's funny, man, there's times that I get up and I say stuff that registers with women more than it does the men. And then there's times that Ashleigh gets up and says stuff that registers with the men more than it does the women.

You need that diversity. We don't just need youth group. One of the things we're not going to have is we're not going to have a church where there's a Wednesday night full of teenagers that we never see again, because teenagers need this as well. You need all of it. I'm grateful for youth group. I'm grateful for those moments. But I'm telling you, there was nothing like those Sunday mornings and Sunday nights where I actually got up under my preacher. I got up under my pastor and that anointing — like, you only get this stuff in the church. You only get it in the church.

So I'm asking you today to just make a decision that this is what we're going to do. Moving forward, God's about to start doing something in the church. If I miss a Sunday, I'm missing way too much. If I miss a Sunday, I'm going to be lost. I need to make su— not going to hell, lost. Amen. Y'all went, "Wait, I will?" No, but just I need to make sure I'm staying up on it. Okay? You know, it's like a Netflix show. Every episode matters, amen. You know what I'm saying? You gotta get them all. You gotta get them all in. But to make that decision, to make that decision.

So this morning, what I want to do is I just want to encourage you. It's easy to do. Don't overcomplicate it. Those of you who don't come back, there's one of two reasons. One is you did not like it. In that case, you know, you're fine. You go wherever you want to, amen. But for those of you that have come back today and you don't come back again, and you want to be here, let me tell you what the problem's going to be. You're going to overcomplicate it. It ain't that complicated. Put it on the calendar. Put it on the schedule. It's just like anything else.

If you show up to work, you show up to school, you show up to dinner, you can show up to church. It ain't that hard. Don't let it live out here in the auxiliary. Make it part of the core of your routine and your rhythms and you can be back. Just throw it in the calendar. It's that easy to do. Make a plan. It's that easy to do. Make it part of your regular routine. It's that easy to do.

Now, this message is the epitome of preaching to the choir, 'cause I just talked about the importance of coming to church to a bunch of people who are here. But let me tell you something. There are people who are about to come into this church, and they might be a once-a-weeker or a twice-a-weeker or, you know — they say it's healthy now for people to show up to church once a month. That's "healthy" attenders showing up once a month. Y'all know we used to go to church three times a week and missed when we had something like the plague. You know what I mean?

"I don't feel good. I think I'm going to sit in the back." You know, but we're still there. And so as people come, what have we gotta do? We've gotta be the people who say, "Hey, we want you here. Sit with me. I want you here." I can't call everybody and make sure they're going to be at church. Get people's phone numbers. Ask, add them on Facebook. Follow up with, "Hey, you going to be at church this Sunday?" And you help make it a rhythm and routine in their life. Hey, if you appreciate and receive the word today, give the Lord a good praise.

02

Preaching Notes

Before You Preach

This message was preached on Back to Church Sunday, with many first-time and returning guests in the room. It is a warm, personal message: most of its force comes from the preacher's own memories of the church where he was saved. Swap in your own. The details matter less than the honesty of a person who found a refuge in the house of God.

It is also, as the preacher admits near the end, "the epitome of preaching to the choir." Say that out loud. The people who are present are the ones who will help the people coming in behind them make church a habit.

Two tones to hold together: humor about the odd things churches have done ("some of it is so dumb"), and real tenderness about what those things meant. Never mock the people who love the old ways. Name objections plainly ("it's my only day off," "I can watch online," "the church disappointed me") and answer them without condemnation.

Introduction

Encourage people to bring a physical Bible. There is no condemnation in it: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). But a Bible in hand helps you follow along, and it will help even more in the weeks ahead.

> MATTHEW 13:44-46 ESV
>
> 44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, 46 who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

A man finds a treasure and sells everything to buy the field. A merchant finds one pearl of great value and sells all he has to buy it. Today's subject: **the preciousness of the church.**

There was a chorus in the '90s that sang about how priceless and how precious God's love is. "How precious is your steadfast love, O God!" (Psalm 36:7). How precious is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Illustration: the potato salad. I'm particular about potato salad. The number two potato salad in the world is at a little place called Hoagie Man in Adrian, Michigan. Their sandwiches are fine, but the potato salad is something else. The number one potato salad is MeeMaw's. Part of the reason is that it's delicious. But more than that, it's precious. You only got it in MeeMaw's kitchen, at MeeMaw's table. And MeeMaw is not with us anymore, which makes it more precious still.

The church is precious. The people, the songs, the messages, and yes, even the buildings.

If you ever want to decode someone's spiritual immaturity, listen for this phrase: "The church isn't the building, it's the people." That's true, but it's usually said by someone who doesn't want to go to the building. Rip the roof and the air conditioners off, and see how many of the people come back.

When I look back, I see how precious everything about the church was to me:

- the receptionist who was there when I got saved, whose husband played an old vintage Rogers drum set;
- the Tuesday night intercessory prayer meeting, with a boombox rolled in on a cart, one little lamp, and a handout called *The Intercessor*;
- Sunday night services, when the preacher took off his tie and things went a little harder;
- the youth group names of the '90s;
- the bass player who hit the same lick every time we sang "Jesus, you're a holy and anointed one," and I'd stand at the altar smiling because I knew it was coming;
- how guests were greeted: "If it's your first time, or your first time in a long time";
- even the choir robes, probably because I didn't have to wear one.

For me, the church was a refuge from a home life of chaos. All of those little things blessed me because they were part of the refuge.

Illustration: "Days of Elijah." Some of what we did was so dumb. When we sang "Days of Elijah," they would roll in styrofoam tombs left over from a Christmas play, dusted with baby powder to look like stone. On the key change into "Behold, He comes," people wrapped in white would burst out of the tombs like it was the rapture, and the church would go wild. If someone pitched that idea to me today, I'd tell them to find another church home. But even that blesses me, because there is a preciousness to the church.

This morning, let's talk about what makes the church precious.

1. The Memories Are Precious

I was saved in 1997, which puts me right on the heels of 30 years of being born again. If you're new to the household of faith, you're building your memories right now. If you've been around a while, you have memories in the church.

The old hymn calls them "Precious Memories," and it calls them unseen angels: they encourage and comfort us. The Bible tells us to deliberately recall them.

> PSALM 77:10-12 ESV
>
> 10 Then I said, "I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High." 11 I will remember the
> deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. 12 I will ponder all your work, and meditate on
> your mighty deeds.

REVISIT THE TESTIMONIES

Do you remember when the Lord set you free? When He brought you out of whatever you were in? When He lifted you out of the miry clay and set you on a rock? The psalmist says, "He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock" (Psalm 40:2). "The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places" (Psalm 16:6). "You have set my feet in a broad place" (Psalm 31:8).

It's precious to revisit these testimonies of His power. Not only the day you got saved. Someone asked me recently how I was doing, and I said, "Ten years ago I was begging for what I'm feeling right now." Look back at what the Lord has brought you from.

I hope everyone here has one service you can name, a date when God touched you in a powerful way: the preacher, the three things he said, the song, the altar. Go back to those places.

REVISIT THE TRIMMINGS

It's good to revisit not only the testimonies but the trimmings: the songs, the style, the general feel of those moments. Pink, orange, green or purple carpet. The pew where God touched you, even if you love these chairs now.

A pastor's greatest enemy can be people's preferences for how church should be. We can't freeze church in anyone's favorite era. We have to go together where the Lord is calling us. But it is still good to remember.

Illustration: painting the house. Several years ago we were moving, and I spent days painting the house. I caught myself listening to old Brownsville revival worship songs, and I knew it was weird: this is the time for AC/DC, not revival choruses. Then the Holy Spirit spoke to me: "You like these songs because you worshiped to them before you knew how the sausage was made." Ministry is work for me now. The songs from before I was a professional are the ones that still minister to me. They are precious memories.

2. The Reality of the Church Is Precious

This is the here and now.

There is a man in Scripture who lost the thing he was charged to guard, and his excuse was, "And as your servant was busy here and there, he was gone" (1 Kings 20:40). It's easy to look back at what was (often through rose-colored glasses) and get so busy going here and there that we miss what the church offers us today.

"Sunday is my only day off." There's no condemnation, but you don't understand the precious reality of the church. There is a refreshing in the house of the Lord, "that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:20).

"I don't like the songs or the way you preach." There's a refreshing in the house of the Lord that has nothing to do with the preacher, the singing, the volume, the lights or the temperature. When people join together and call on the name of Jesus, a refreshing comes through the room.

Some people can't let go of the past. To them, everything back there was great and everything now isn't good enough. But you are in the time you're supposed to be in. If you were supposed to be in the '90s, you'd be in the '90s. God has you right here.

TODAY THINGS, NOT YESTERDAY THINGS

Today, the church offers you:

- **Encouragement.**
- **Discipleship.** Discipleship can happen in classrooms and groups, but in our church it starts in the pulpit.
- **Revelation.** You can walk into church and hear something that shifts your worldview, your decisions, your home and your work.
- **Power.** You can get a touch from the Holy Spirit today.
- **Anointing.** You can leave with something on you. The anointing makes the difference.

These are today things, not yesterday things.

CHURCH BUSYNESS

Life's busyness can make us overlook the preciousness of the church. So can church busyness. To everyone who serves: you make this world go round, and we appreciate you. In a season of growth, many serve every single week and are rarely in the room. It is precious to be used by God, to see lives changed, and to know God did a work in someone because you were part of the process. But don't keep your head down so much that you never look up to receive the touch of God yourself. Stay current on the messages.

Make church a regular event. Get involved. And **speak well of the church**, not "it's not like it used to be." Speaking well of the work of God positions your faith to receive from it today.

THE CHURCH STEADIES YOUR SOUL

Second Peter 2 describes false prophets and false teachers, and it says this about them: "They entice unsteady souls" (2 Peter 2:14). Regularly gathering with the household of faith steadies your soul.

People say, "I don't need to go to church to know God." But God "gave him as head over all things to the church" (Ephesians 1:22). Christ was not given as head over those who sit in their basement on Sunday morning.

ANNOUNCEMENT (AS PREACHED)

Optional. Next week begins a long series on the Lord's Prayer. Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah: "my house shall be called a house of prayer" (Isaiah 56:7). Believe God for a revival of prayer in the church. Invite the congregation to lift their hands and pray, "Teach me how to pray, Lord."

3. The Expectation of the Church Is Precious

> MATTHEW 16:18 ESV
>
> 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Contrary to what you hear on the news, on podcasts and around the dinner table, the church is not getting worse and worse. The church is not shrinking. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is still growing, expanding and taking territory. "This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations" (Matthew 24:14).

THE TENSION

There is a tension we feel, because the world does seem to be getting crazier. That tension is to be expected. That's the world; it's not the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

> ROMANS 8:19 ESV
>
> 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

A few verses later, Paul says "the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now" (Romans 8:22). Creation is crying out for the revealing of the sons of God. That is why we are building: there is no other option. We answer the cry of creation and fulfill the Great Commission at the same time: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

It is precious to look toward the future through the lens of faith. Things aren't getting worse and worse in the church, but better and better. There is no mechanism on earth that can stop the church of the living God. A power outage can't stop it. A closed road can't stop it.

THE CHURCH THRIVES UNDER PERSECUTION

The church thrives under a little persecution. That's why underground churches around the world are powerful and growing. Paul calls suffering "this light momentary affliction" (2 Corinthians 4:17). Put a little persecution on the church, and it pops out revival in a generation.

A few years ago the church was told to close its doors. Today we're seeing a stirring among Gen Z that reminds many of us of the outpouring of the '90s.

Illustration: tribbles. In *Star Trek*, tribbles were little furry creatures that multiplied every time you fed them. Feed them a little, and soon they were falling out of the air vents. Feed the church a little persecution, and like a tribble, it multiplies. More people get saved. More revival goes forth.

Conclusion: Make Church a Rhythm and a Routine

This is the big thing: **it's time to make church a rhythm and a routine in your life.** Whether you're here for the first time, here every week, or here once in a blue moon.

Illustration: the dog who knew. A friend's family took their dog to the store with them one day every week. The dog figured it out. On that day, it was antsy all day long, ready to go. Make church that kind of rhythm: when Sunday comes and you're not in the house of the Lord, it feels off.

Make it a routine. You will find every little inconvenience not to come: the parking, your hair, the sweatpants, the missed shower. Fight through it. Come anyway.

> HEBREWS 10:19-25 ESV
>
> 19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new
> and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great
> priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts
> sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the
> confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up
> one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but
> encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

"I don't need to go to church" is one of the easiest lies to believe, because the church can be a disappointing place. People leave over small things. Some of you have been through pastor after pastor and staff change after staff change. You've seen what other preachers do on the news. And you can watch the best preachers in the world online. I like the internet preachers; I am one.

But **every person needs a church. Every person needs a pastor. Every person needs a Spirit-filled gathering. Every person needs a place of renewal, and they need it regularly.**

A pastor's job is like the priest's job in Deuteronomy 20. Before Israel went into battle, the priest stood before the people to remind them that "the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 20:1). You are about to go into some form of battle. Let me remind you how powerful, good and faithful God is. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). But you can't receive that without showing up.

When you come, we want you to hear about Jesus, to encounter the Holy Spirit, and to sit next to someone who doesn't look like you.

WHO HEBREWS 10 IS TALKING TO

Walk back through the passage. These are not weak believers:

- "since we have confidence to enter the holy places": confident believers;
- "by the blood of Jesus": blood-washed and born again;

- “by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh”: living in revelation (“every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,” 1 John 4:2);
- “let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.”

And to these people, he says: don’t stop meeting together, “as is the habit of some.” Have the congregation say, “I need the church.”

It’s almost impossible to be fully assured in your faith, hold fast to hope, walk in love, love God and serve others without coming together regularly.

THE CHURCH NEEDS ITS DIVERSITY

There is no hierarchy in the church, but there is diversity, and we need it. Often the people who feel most spiritual are the least mature, and the people who say “I don’t have it all together” turn out to be the most spiritual. You need people going through something and people who know how to pray through something, and they need each other.

Young believers on fire for God sometimes have “a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge” (Romans 10:2). You’ve got knuckleheads and you’ve got gray heads, and the gray heads need to help the knuckleheads. Small groups, online studies and women’s or youth gatherings are good, but they can’t replace the whole church gathered: men and women, young and old.

DON’T OVERCOMPLICATE IT

Make the decision today. If I miss a Sunday, I miss too much. It’s like a series: every episode matters.

It’s easy to do. Don’t overcomplicate it. Put it on the calendar. If you can show up to work, to school and to dinner, you can show up to church. Don’t let it live out in the auxiliary. Make it part of the core of your routine.

This message is preaching to the choir, because the people who heard it are the people who came. But people are about to come into this church who don’t have the rhythm yet. Be the ones who say, “We want you here. Sit with me.” Get their numbers. Follow up: “Are you going to be at church this Sunday?” Help make it a rhythm and routine in their lives.

03

Scripture List

Every passage read, cited or alluded to in the message, in the order it comes up.

Read

Read aloud in the message.

MATTHEW 13:44-46	44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, 46 who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.
PSALM 77:10-12	10 Then I said, "I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High." 11 I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. 12 I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.
MATTHEW 16:18	18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.
ROMANS 8:19	19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.
HEBREWS 10:19-25	19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Cited

Named or quoted along the way.

PSALM 16:6	6 The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.
PSALM 31:8	8 and you have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy; you have set my feet in a broad place.
2 PETER 2:14	14 They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children!
ISAIAH 56:7	7 these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."
2 CORINTHIANS 4:17	17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,
DEUTERONOMY 20:1-4	1 "When you go out to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them, for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. 2 And when you draw near to the battle, the priest shall come forward and speak to the people 3 and shall say to them, 'Hear, O Israel, today you are drawing near for battle against your enemies: let not your heart faint. Do not fear or panic or be in dread of them, 4 for the LORD your God is he who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory.'
1 JOHN 4:2	2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,

Alluded to

Drawn on without naming the reference.

ROMANS 8:1	1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
PSALM 36:7	7 How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

PSALM 40:2	2 He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.
1 KINGS 20:40	40 And as your servant was busy here and there, he was gone." The king of Israel said to him, "So shall your judgment be; you yourself have decided it."
ACTS 3:19-20	19 Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus,
EPHESIANS 1:22	22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,
MATTHEW 24:14	14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.
ROMANS 8:22	22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.
MATTHEW 28:19-20	19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
ROMANS 8:31	31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?
ROMANS 10:2	2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

Pastor Jason Mayfield

SENIOR PASTOR, CITYLIGHT CHURCH

Pastor Jason Mayfield is the Senior Pastor of Citylight Church in Saraland, Alabama, where he and his wife, Ashleigh, lead a church devoted to Building Lives on Jesus. His preaching is rooted in the Bible, full of hope, and grounded in one conviction: an incredible life is built on the finished work of Jesus Christ.

For more than 20 years, Pastor Jason has given his life to the local church. He has been credentialed with the Assemblies of God for 21 years and ordained for 14, and he has led revitalization in churches that went on to rank among the Top 100 Fastest-Growing Churches in America. He carries a deep conviction that the church can be both excellent and supernatural, and a passion for revival.

He is an author and the creator of Tear Up Your Bible and POWER 27, a daily rhythm of Bible reading, prayer and worship. His resources have helped more than 100,000 people go deeper in the Scriptures. Above every title, his greatest joy is seeing people meet Jesus, be filled with the Spirit, and grow into everything God has called them to be.

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