

Stop Dating the Church (part 3)

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Date: 06 January 2008

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[0:00] Well, we are studying this little book, Stop Dating the Church, a study, a brief study in commitment to the church, what a life of commitment to the church will look like, and that's what we considered last week.

What does it look like to be committed to the church, and why is it worth being committed to the church? What can you get out of the church? What does the church provide that nothing else can provide? Things like the preaching of the Word, and the ordinances, the sacraments, and the benefit of sanctification that comes from the body of Christ, and the encouragement comes from fellowship, things that you can't get anywhere besides the church.

The church is something that's worth being committed to, and indeed we're instructed to be committed to it in the pages of the Scriptures. This is God's institution, His place, and the thing that He has promised to preserve until the end of the age.

And so it must be at the center of our lives, if it's at the center of God's plan for our lives. And so one who's committed to the church will join it. They'll make it a priority.

They'll seek to make their pastor's job a joy. They'll find ways to serve. They'll give. They'll connect and fellowship with other people in the church. They'll share that passion with others.

[1:16] And the question last week is, is the church a priority? And if you looked at your life in the past week to see, where does the church stack up with everything else? Is it one of the things that has to move out of the way so that the things that are really important can happen in your life?

Or do other things get out of the way for the church? Where are your priorities? Where do they lie? Well, having considered these things, we want to take a look today at two more subjects to draw this study to a close.

And the first is, if you're going to be committed to a church, what sort of church should you be committed to? If you're going to give time and energy and effort, what kind of place should you be giving that time and energy and effort to?

What kind of place are you going to be fed? What kind of place will you be blessed? And can you be a blessing? So we're going to consider the marks of a healthy church, characteristics that you should look for in a church.

And even as we go, perhaps evaluate our own church and see where we stack up with some of these things. And then, secondly today, we'll take a brief look at the Lord's Day, the day where we spend the most time together with the church to make sure that it is a profitable day for us.

[2:30] So, he calls this chapter choosing your church. And if you're here today, likely you've chosen your church and here is where you attend.

But what should characterize our church if it's to be a healthy, profitable church? In some ways, it's similar to things you should look for in a potential spouse.

Now, most of you here are married already. Some are not, though. And if you're thinking about being married, there are certain things that you look for in a spouse. And some of those things are non-negotiable.

Some of them you must have. You can't live without them. Other things it would be nice to have, but they're not necessary in a potential mate.

And so it is with the church. There are things that are non-negotiable. Things that you have to have. And then other things that maybe aren't quite so non-negotiable. When we did this with the young people, we had a great discussion starting with things that are negotiable and non-negotiable and a potential spouse.

[3:33] And their ideas were very helpful and very interesting to hear their discussion. We're not going to take the time to do that today. We could get too far afield and we're on a schedule. But I do

want you all to think about with me some of the things that must be found in the church.

Tell me some marks of a healthy church. Things that you need to have. Things that you should be looking for in a church. Things that should characterize this church. And then tell me whether they're non-negotiable or negotiable.

Whether you could live without them in a church. All right, so help me out. What are some characteristics of a healthy church? Roger. It's preaching the truth, non-negotiable. Okay, absolutely.

And that's Mr. Harris' first one. Is this a church where God's Word is faithfully taught? So we're going to flesh that out. But that's exactly right. Good. What else? Karen.

A teachable spirit that wants to embrace those truths. Okay, excellent. That's his number four, I think.

[4:35] Negotiable or non-negotiable? Non-negotiable. Right. Is this a church, or it's number five. A church, or number six, sorry. Is this a church where people strive to live by God's Word?

It's great if the Word of God is being taught, but are the people receiving it and living by it? Good. What else? Jeanette.

Okay, God-centered worship. Negotiable or non-negotiable? Non-negotiable. Right. Is it God-centered instead of man-centered? Excellent. Good. What else?

Dare. Emphasis on missions. Okay. An emphasis on missions. Reaching out to the rest of the world. Negotiable or non-negotiable? Okay.

Good. What else? I saw a hand towards the back. Oh, she took mine. Okay. Ed? Discipline. Discipline.

[5:31] Church discipline. Church discipline. Balance church discipline. Okay. Okay. Balance church discipline. Negotiable or non-negotiable? Non-negotiable.

Right. Good. These things are all on his list in one way or the other. You all are doing quite well, at least according to his list, which is not the definitive list. It's just the one he came up with.

We could look at Mark Devers, Nine Marks of a Healthy Church. There's all sorts of lists. We could come up with our own, but give me some other things. Jim? Pastors above reproach.

Okay. Pastors above reproach. That's on his list. Negotiable or non-negotiable? Non-negotiable.

That's right. Good. What else? So far, we've got all non-negotiables.

Somebody give me a negotiable. Oh, nobody's that brave. Is it negotiable or not? Jim? A good rhythm section. A good rhythm section. Oh, wow.

[6:29] All right. I think it's time to close the floor to comments. Negotiable? Negotiable? No?

Yeah, okay. Okay. Right. Negotiable. Highly so, in my opinion. But anyway. Anything else? Joe? I think being a college student, I see this a lot, that a negotiable would be a strong need center, like activities for get-togethers and things like that.

It's a nice path that it can be taken more of an emphasis than the truth. Okay. Excellent. That's something that would be very nice to have, especially if you're a college student or a healthy high school ministry, if you're a high school student, ministry to age appropriate if you're in college, a healthy college, thriving singles ministry, or same for high school, and so on.

Helpful to have those things, but I don't think necessary. I think it is a negotiable, because so long as the Word is being faithfully taught, you can come and profit from the ministry of the Word.

And I think sometimes those things can take away from the ministry of the Word and separate families, whereas families should worship together, but that's not my point to get into all those things. But that's an excellent example.

[7:49] Good. Anything else this morning? Okay, Ed? Different social programs that could be devotional. I mean, they're good in their place, but they could also...

Okay, social. Give me an example of a social program. Well, you have welfare outreach in your church where you need people.

Okay. Okay. Ministry to the poor and needy. In some respects, at least within the church, I think that's probably a non-negotiable word to care for those in the body.

But yeah, whether or not we have a center for the homeless attached to our church, yeah, that's a negotiable thing. Right. Good. Good. Okay, well, why don't we take a look at his list, and if there's something you feel is missing at the end, you can add that on.

Again, he gives us ten things of great importance in choosing the right church that we should commit ourselves to. Number one, and this has been mentioned, is this a church where God's word

is faithfully taught?

[9:00] It doesn't mean the word is occasionally mentioned. It doesn't mean that it's cited at the beginning of a sermon, but it's never actually preached from the way he put it.

He said, I used to sprinkle my sermons with scripture. I would preach my own ideas and sprinkle it with scripture so that it sounded good. And scripture was just the seasoning instead of the meat, instead of the main course.

And in a healthy church, the scriptures will be the main course. We're going to take God's word and we're going to dig into God's word. word. It's not just something that's mentioned in passing. If we really believe that all scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, if we believe that, then we'll make that word central in our worship.

We will, as Pastor Bob often says, sing the word, pray the word, read the word, preach the word. We'll do all of these things by God's grace.

And that's what Paul instructs Timothy to do. 2 Timothy 4.2. He doesn't just say, preach, be prepared in season, out of season, correct, rebuke, encourage with great patience and careful instruction. He says, preach the word.

[10:12] It is the scriptures that must be faithfully taught. And so we are to make the scripture central to what we do as a church.

What evidence do you see of that at our own church here? Are we putting the scriptures at the center? Are the scriptures faithfully taught here? Any evidence of that here?

We're not looking for paths on the back. We want to see how we stack up. Expositional preaching. Okay? And that's what expositional preaching is.

It's expositing the word, taking the word, and explaining it. And so we seek, by God's grace, to take the word and preach that word. And as we've said, sing it, pray it, read it, preach it.

If you come to a worship service here, you're going to hear the word read. And by God's grace, you're going to hear it preached. And that must always be the case. And there's always room for improvement in these things. There's always a temptation for a preacher to stand up and speak his own mind instead of speaking what the scriptures say.

[11:18] And so pray for those that preach and teach in that respect, that we might keep the word at the center of what we do. Secondly, let me ask you a question.

Is studying a book like this, often at Sunday school we study books. We go through books. Is that not putting the word at the center of our teaching and preaching?

Roger. The book puts the word at its center. Okay, right. It places all its truths from the word. Right, excellent. We take what other authors have digested from the scriptures and try to give you the gist of what they've gotten from the scriptures.

Still keeping the word at the center of it. Good. You can still study a book in a Sunday school class and be centered on the word. Secondly, and I don't think anybody mentioned this one, but is this a church where sound doctrine matters?

Doctrine is what the Bible teaches about a particular topic. Doctrine distinguishes us from other churches because of our differences with them on varying issues and different subjects.

[12:26] And so then some say, well, doctrine divides and love unites. And so we don't need to emphasize doctrine. We shouldn't emphasize doctrine. Or no creed but Christ. And people that do that make a false dichotomy, I think.

You don't have either love or doctrine. You have both. And you hold them together. And you can't say that doctrine is a bad thing because it shows your differences with other people.

Doctrine is healthy. We must understand what the word of God teaches about particular subjects. And we must hold to that firmly. Otherwise, we'll find ourselves straying in what we believe and then straying in what we practice because what you believe always affects what you practice, what you do.

And so we must hold firmly to the truths that we hold dear. Listen to what Josh Harris says. He says we don't have to choose between caring about doctrine and loving Jesus. The two pursuits are not opposed to each other.

In fact, they are inseparable. A concern for truth doesn't take us away from a deeper relationship with him. It leads us closer to him in greater worship, adoration, and obedience.

[13:33] But still, there are those who don't like to emphasize doctrine. There are those who will attack doctrine and the things that we believe and hold dear. 2 Timothy 4, 3 and 4 For the time will

come when men will not put up with sound doctrine.

Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to this. And that's what we can't let happen.

Just say whatever makes people feel good. No, we hold to the doctrine that we hold dear and can't let it go and become itching ear teachers and preachers of God's Word.

Now that doctrine has to be held in love. Don't divorce love from it. And don't hold it in arrogance. We're not to look down our noses and say we're so much superior to all these other people who don't have their doctrine correct.

It must be held in love, but it must be held. You can't let it go in the name of love. What evidence do you see of that at our church?

[14:36] Of doctrine being something that's significant and important here. Jason? You're not allowed to teach or preach unless you agree with our confession of faith. Okay. Okay.

Good. Not allowed to teach or preach things contrary to our confession of faith. Where else do you see that importance? Chuck? 1689. Okay. Right.

We have a confession of faith. And to join, you must be in general agreement with our confession of faith. A summary of doctrine.

Of what we believe the church teaches. Vital for a church to have a document like that. So that we can define what we believe.

So that others can see how we're different. So that people who want to join know and understand what we believe. You'll get that if you go through the membership class. We try to include doctrine in our preaching and teaching.

[15:40] And not shy away from doctrinal teaching that comes from the scriptures. Right. So that's the second thing. Doctrine is important. Third. Third.

Is this a church in which the gospel is cherished and clearly proclaimed? The message of Jesus Christ. His birth. His life. His death. His resurrection. His ascension.

And why it's necessary for salvation. And for all of life. That message must be plain. To all who come through our doors. We must understand how the grace of God saves us.

And enables us to live our Christian life. And that's something that sometimes we can tend to miss the focus. The gospel we think of as necessary for salvation.

And it is. But then it's necessary for the rest of life too. Is this a church that emphasizes both? Does it preach the gospel so that men might be saved? But does it also preach the gospel so that men might live?

[16:38] Does it show the relevance of that gospel in their everyday life? I need the gospel message every day. I need it when I fall into sin. And go for repentance. I need the gospel message when I think that I can get through a problem in my own strength.

I need to be reminded of my weakness and my total dependence upon Christ. I need it when someone sins against me. I need that gospel message every day. Is this a church where the gospel is cherished?

Where it's loved? Where it's held dear? And clearly proclaimed. And so we make it our aim here to proclaim the grace of God. The work of Christ.

To preach the gospel. To call unbelievers to repentance and faith. Each Lord's Day. Pointing each one to Christ as the source of our salvation. And the source of our strength.

Is the gospel loved? Is it cherished? And then closely related to that. A fourth mark. Is this a church committed to reaching non-Christians with the gospel?

[17:36] Should be true locally and abroad. Globally. It doesn't mean dumbing down the message and making church more palatable for any and everyone.

Being so sensitive to the seeker that we've lost the substance of the message. No. The gospel is offensive. It's a stumbling block. And we don't remove the offense of the gospel.

But we do make every effort to reach the world and our community with that gospel. Is this a church where we reach out with the gospel and seek to draw others to a knowledge of the Savior?

Are we missions and evangelistically minded? Any evidence of that at Grace Fellowship Church? That we seek to reach others with the gospel? Ed.

Okay. We're a member of an association that supports and sends missionaries. We try to make it a point to pray for our missionaries on Wednesday nights from the pulpit on Sunday mornings.

[18:39] We support missionaries with our finances. You might have noticed on the yearly calendar this year that we're making an effort again to have a quarterly evangelistic Sunday where we have a more pointedly evangelistic message and encourage you all to invite lost friends and loved ones in to hear the gospel.

Not in the last couple of years, but we have had VBSs in an effort to reach the community and so on. I think it's an area where we could do better. And there are some plans that you'll be hearing about soon, Lord willing, at our annual meeting or the preliminary meeting with respect to evangelism to make a more pointed effort to reach out with the gospel.

But a healthy church will be committed to reaching non-Christians with that gospel. Fifthly, is this a church whose leaders are characterized by humility and integrity? Somebody said pastors that are above reproach.

The leaders in the church should be trustworthy. They should be follow-worthy. Do they practice what they preach? When you read 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, do you see a portrait of your ministers? Are they servants? Do they seek to serve others instead of just expecting everyone to serve them? Are they held accountable? Over the last 20-some-odd years, God has been good to give this church faithful ministers of the gospel, two of the godliest men I know.

[20:15] And we ought to be thankful for them. And we ask you to pray for us. We do seek to keep one another accountable. We do seek to be transparent before the congregation.

Pray for us. We're not sufficient for this. Our sufficiency is from Christ and from Him alone. And so you pray that God would grant us grace to be characterized by humility and integrity.

Sixthly, is this a church where people strive to live by God's word? Again, something else that was mentioned already here this morning. It's wonderful if the word is faithfully taught, but is anyone living according to that word?

Are they listening to it? Are they taking it and applying it in their lives? Does it make a difference in the way they live? Are the members of Grace Fellowship Church any different from the people that live across the street that never go to church?

Does it make a difference in their day-to-day life? It will show in our church life, our home life, our school life, our work life, our fun life, our athletic life. Every part of our life it should show.

[21:22] James 1.22, do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Is this a church? Is it a balanced, healthy church?

And here's two things. Should the church be more focused on outreach and taking the gospel to those that have never heard it? Or should it be more focused on building its members up?

On seeing to it that its members are doing what the word says. Growth and grace. Well, a healthy church will be balanced. And we'll have both of those. It will be reaching out to the unbeliever. And it will also be seeking to cause the believer to grow in grace.

And so we seek to disciple young believers. We have people here that take young disciples under their wings and seek to help them in their growth and grace. Many faithful members here.

People that do the word. We praise God for you. It makes a pastor's job a joy to have people that don't just come in and come out and never let the word affect their lives, but that actually live it. And may God grant grace to continue in it.

[22:22] And if you're falling short, pray that it will help you to live the word. Lord, is this a church where I can find and cultivate godly relationships?

We have a need for accountability, for encouragement. It comes to the one-anothering that we spoke of last week. It's a church where people are part of one another's lives.

It can be hard work. It can be difficult work, but it's work we must give ourselves to. Building one another up in love. It can be pretty difficult to do this if you're coming from a significant distance, but not impossible.

It is important to be part of a local church for this very reason. And if you're not local, then you have to make all the more effort to be involved and to be in the lives of the people in the church.

We seek to create opportunities for this here through our fellowship lunches. So we have opportunity after the service.

[23:26] I love after the services here. I love that people hang around and that they talk to one another and that they find out what's going on in one another's lives so that they can pray for one another throughout the week.

It's such an encouragement to me to walk out after a Sunday morning or a Sunday evening and to see people staying here, sometimes up to an hour after the service, because they love each other, and because they are developing those relationships that help with accountability and encouragement and all of those things.

There's hospitality going on in people's homes. We have a church picnic once a year. There's softball games. There's all sorts of opportunities to develop and cultivate those relationships. And if you're not in the habit of doing that, if you're the first one out the door, stick around for a little while. See the benefit that comes from fellowshiping with the people of God. See the benefit that comes from having people in your home and getting to know them better.

That's one of the marks of a healthy church. Number eight. Is this a church where members are challenged to serve? We spoke of this again last week.

[24 : 34] The pastors aren't to do all of the work in the church. We prepare you for service and give you opportunity to do it and challenge you to do it. And if you've sat in on a membership class recently, you know that members are given a sheet of ministry opportunities and asked to fill it out, areas where they would be interested in helping and serving.

Even last week, we encouraged you to be involved in serving. One of the marks of commitment to the church is that we want you to serve. That you'll be willing to get your hands dirty in the various opportunities.

And so, is it a church where members are challenged to serve? Ninth. Is this a church, in Harris's language, that is willing to kick me out? That's a little crass.

But is it a church, as Ed says, that practices church discipline? Biblical church discipline. The church ought to be concerned enough about you that they're willing to discipline you if you stray. Some parents will say with regard to disciplining their kids, my kids will think I don't love them if I discipline them. They'll think that I don't love them if I don't give them everything they want.

[25 : 42] If I don't let them do everything that they want to do, they're going to think that I don't love them. And to show my love to them, then I'm not going to discipline. I'm just going to give them free reign. I'm going to let them do whatever they want. Is that love?

No, it's not. It's going to destroy your children. And so it is with the church as well. It's not loving to someone to let them run amok in their sin. And let them go unrepentant in their sin.

And so, is it a church that loves me enough to take my sin seriously enough to point it out to me? And when I'm going on in my sin, not repenting, to call me to repentance. And if I continue not repenting, to take it to the whole church.

And then eventually to excommunicate me, to put me out of the church, so that the church loved me that much. And the goal of that discipline is always restoration. It's to bring the person back. That's how much a church should love you.

So much that they're willing to practice discipline in the church. And read the constitution of our church. You'll find that there's provisions made for church discipline.

[26 : 46] Sadly, it's something that we've had to do here. And so it is something that this church does. Something that we need great wisdom for. It's not to be taken lightly.

But it is something that must mark the church. And then his last one, is this a church I'm willing to join as is, with enthusiasm and faith in God?

Your goal in joining a church shouldn't be to change that church. Not really a good way to enter a relationship. Sort of like if you get married to somebody and you don't really love them for who they are, but who you think you can make them to be, that's not going to be a real healthy marriage.

Relationship. Missionary dating generally isn't a good plan. Those things aren't going to work out very well. Same with the church. If you go into the church thinking, I'm going to change the church. If you're going to be able to have an influence for good in the church over time, excellent, good.

We want people to have a good influence on the church. But if you're joining the church with the purpose of changing it, that can be a dangerous thing. Is it a church that you can join as it is?

[27 : 55] And this is not a perfect church by any means. You look at all of those things. And something I think he left off his list, although it's included in some of the others, is what I think Jeanette said, God-centered worship.

Christ-centeredness. Is Christ the center of what we do here? And that comes with being centered on the Word of God because the Scriptures are Christ-centered. And so really it's included.

But all of these things must mark a healthy church. And so we look at our own church and thank God where we see these things and ask Him for grace where we need to see improvement in these things.

And we must be careful in our attitude. If you have to move away and you're looking for a new church, whether it's because you're going to school or you've been transferred because of work or whatever, be careful in your attitude.

Remember one of the marks of somebody not generally committed to the church is that they're critical. Don't let these criteria turn you into a critical person when evaluating churches, which one you should join, if you should have to move away from us.

[29:02] Use them as criteria so that you can find the best church. But don't let it turn you into a bitter, nitpicking Christian that is critical of the church.

But also use the criteria so that you're not wasting your time or your life with a church that doesn't love God and love His Word. All right, so there's some...

Oh boy, we're going to have to fly now. Those are some marks of a healthy church. The last thing that we want to consider in our topic as we draw it to a close is the Lord's Day.

To take a look at some ways to make the day more profitable for us. Many times people have assumptions about the Lord's Day or about church.

Assumptions, attitudes, habits that are not helpful. That prevent them from getting the full benefit that they could be getting from that day, from their church. If people come, and you see this in young people a lot of times, with a sullen attitude, with the assumption that it's not going to do me any good, it's going to be boring, it's going to offend me, those become self-fulfilling prophecies.

[30:10] If you come expecting to be bored, then you're going to be bored. If you come expecting to be offended, then you'll find something that's offensive. And if you come thinking, this isn't going to do me any good, then you're not going to listen, and you're not going to profit, and it's not going to do you any good.

And so you've got to lay those assumptions aside to begin with, with respect to God's day and God's house. There are attitudes that we come with, and arrogance that can limit our benefiting from God's day.

I don't need a day set aside. Who's God to tell me that I need a day set aside to worship Him? I don't need that. And if you come with that attitude, then no, you're not going to benefit or profit from it.

Or apathy, come on, I don't really care. Well, of course you're not going to profit, then, from the Lord's day. There are habits that keep us from profiting from the Lord's day. Being up too late Saturday night, sleeping in too long Sunday morning, daydreaming, focusing on our friends instead of God, saving our homework or our housework or our whatever work for the Lord's day instead of keeping it free from those things that clutter it up.

Those are going to prevent our benefiting from the day. So how do we make the most of the Lord's day? And it is the Lord's day. It's His day. Different from the other six.

[31:22] It started all the way back in creation. It was encoded in the Ten Commandments for us. One day in seven. And then that day changed when Jesus rose from the dead. We remember His resurrection each Lord's day.

A day that God has set apart for our rest and for His worship. And if that's the case, if God has given us a day that's that important, that significant, it would make sense to have a plan to make the most of it.

Things to do before you come to worship, during worship, and after worship. If you're an athlete, tell me what you do before a game. You warm up.

Yeah. Yeah. If you were to go to a basketball game last night, and you got there before actual game time, you would have seen the players out on the floor warming up, getting loose, stretching, doing the things that they're going to do in the game.

They're going to make passes. They're going to work on layups. They're going to execute things that they're going to do in the game. They warm up. They get loose. And what happens if you don't warm up before a game? No. Okay.

[32:24] Scott, be more specific for me. What happens if you don't warm up? That's right. That's accurate. But what happens? The first quarter you lose, you get behind, and you're not sharp.

Exactly. Yeah. You come out cold. You can't hit a shot for anything. Somebody's going to pull a muscle because they're not loose. And immediately you're behind, and immediately you're not going to have a successful game, at least for the first quarter, the first half.

And by then it may be too late to catch up. What do you do before a test? You study. What do you do before you go on a date? Get ready. Make sure that everything's good, that you're good to go. What do you do before worship? Well, nothing for many people. They do all these other things. Got a presentation at work. Well, I'm going to prepare. I'm going to be ready for it. All these things we get ready for. And then worship the most important thing that we have to do during the week. And we make no preparation for it. All too often. And so we don't receive a blessing. But if you don't prepare, then don't expect to be blessed.

[33:29] You've been wondering why you haven't been profiting from church. Wondering why I've been driveling on for three weeks about commitment to the church. What's the big deal about church? I don't see it. I don't get anything. I don't profit from it. So why be committed to it?

Are you preparing for it? It starts the night before. Not filling your mind with mindless drivel. I had to, you know, Saturday night, Saturday, excuse me, I can't speak all of a sudden.

Saturday night live is not good preparation for worship. It's not going to help your mind be ready for the next day. Try reading God's word and praying. Asking him to meet with you the next day. You ever pray that God's going to help you? Profit from the worship. Make sure you're right with God and man that you don't have sin unconfessed and unrepented. And then get to bed at a reasonable time.

You know how much sleep you need. That doesn't change on Sunday. You don't all of a sudden need less sleep on Sunday. And expect to be able to get the same benefit out of the day that you do every other day of the week.

[34:28] Don't shortchange yourself the day before you need it the most. And then Sunday morning, that's my one day to sleep in. Okay, you sleep in and then you're rushed. And you have time for a quick shower and you throw on some clothes.

And 15, 20, 30 minutes for hair and makeup. And then a Pop-Tart and you're out the door for breakfast. How ready are you going to be for worship? Well, not very ready. If you haven't taken time to prepare your heart, to be in God's word, to pray.

You know, before a basketball game, the things that the players do are things that they're going to do in the game. You say, well, I don't want to read my Bible and pray before church. I'm going to get more of that at church. Well, that's what prepares your heart for the corporate doing of those things when you get there.

Is reading, praying, making sure you're ready. And making sure that distractions are gotten rid of. If picking your clothes out Sunday morning is a thing that slows you down and puts you laid out the door, then do it Saturday night.

Excellent way to prepare for the Lord's Day. Sort of mundane, but if that's what it is, get rid of those other distractions. And the Sunday morning that don't prepare your heart for worship.

[35:35] And in the few minutes between Sunday school and service, don't spend it all talking with your friends. I know I've talked about fellowship and the importance of fellowship, and I don't take any of that back. And it's good to fellowship between services.

But make sure you get in here and give yourself a few minutes before to quiet your heart, to clear your mind, and to prepare. It's why we ask you to come in and, what does it say, quietly prepare for worship.

And we give you a passage to read, so that your heart can be ready for worship. All of these things, good things to do before you get there.

And then we're just going to run through these. Make the most of this day during worship. While you're here, you're part of a congregation that's gathered to worship. You're not an audience that's here to be entertained.

It means you're not passive in worship. Just waiting, what's going to happen to me today? No, you come, ready to sing. Ready to read God's Word. Ready to pray when someone leads in prayer.

[36:33] Ready to listen to the Word. Do you know that the singing, the reading of Scripture, and all of that alone isn't worship? We worship, and then we have the preaching. No. The preaching and the listening to the preaching are part of the worship.

The way you listen is part of the way you worship. Is God pleased by the way you listen to His Word? Listening with a view to applying it. Maybe jotting down some notes, some main points, so that you can come back to it later in the week and review it and apply it. And then after the worship, take time to fellowship with those people. Don't rush home. Sometimes, obviously, you need to leave, but make sure you take time to be with God's people. And to find how they were encouraged by the message and the other things that we've talked about with fellowship. The Lord's Day is what the Puritans call the market day for the soul. It's where you go and you stock up so that you've got enough for the rest of the week. That's not to say you neglect God's Word the rest of the week. But you store up. You prepare. You get ready for the rest of the week on the Lord's Day. And so, take the Lord's Day to make sure you don't forget what you've learned.

[37 : 44] Discuss it over the dinner table. What's been preached. Ask your kids what they learned in Sunday school. Make sure it gets rooted and it doesn't go just in one year and out the other. We're not saying that you spend the whole Lord's Day and you're going to have family worship for four hours in the afternoon.

In between the morning and the evening worship so that you're always involved in some sort of formal worship. But make sure the whole day is profitable. Make sure it's aimed towards receiving God's Word, retaining it, and then living it and applying it.

And then come back and do it in the evening. If you're only here in the mornings, you're missing half the blessing that you could be receiving. And all of that may sound a little bit too much for you, a little radical or over the top.

But when you think about the truth that your primary identity is who you are in Christ. It is God who made you and God who saves you through the work of Christ.

It is God who wants you to worship. It is God who wants you to profit from that worship. It is God who has something to say to you in worship. It is God who eternity will be centered around.

[38 : 47] God has given the ultimate gift to us in His Son. Why are we then so hesitant to center our lives around Him? Why are we so unwilling to give of our time to Him who gives us our time in the first place?

Why are we so thoughtless and careless about worshiping Him that we don't prepare for it? Why are the things we want so much more important to us than the things He wants? We have to remember that without Him we would be nothing.

We wouldn't be able to eat or breathe or play sports or work or perform or study or anything. Without Him we would be hopeless. And so He gives us a day on which to worship and we should be glad to give Him that day.

And to seek to honor Him and to praise Him and to profit on that day. And many of you do these things and do them well.

And we thank God for that. But I know that I have room to improve. And so don't take these as blanket categories. Don't say, Aaron, doesn't think we ever prepare for worship. I know that you do. But receive it as a challenge to excel still more.

[39 : 54] And if you do find yourself lacking, even as I do in some of these areas, may God use it to open our eyes and to make us more faithful, committed members of His church, more faithfully committed to His day, coming to hear His word, to profit from that word, to profit from fellowship, and to be of service to others in the body of Christ.

Well, our time is gone. May God bless all of these words to our hearts and make us committed to His church. Word is missed. Word is missed.