

Stop Dating the Church

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[0:00] Last week we began a brief study, Lord willing, just three weeks, on Josh Harris's little book, Stop Dating the Church. A study on commitment to the church and to the local church in particular.

We talked about the problem with church daters, those who don't commit themselves to the church. Maybe they attend occasionally, maybe they even attend regularly, but they're never really committed to the church.

They don't want to be involved. They're not involved. They don't want to get their hands dirty. And we saw that there were three things that mark a church dater, somebody that's not serious about commitment to the church.

Who can remember one of those three things that identifies, that marks out a church dater? Things we need to look at and see, is this in me? What are those things that mark them out?

Okay, self-centered is one. The person is focused on themselves. And if you're going to be committed to the church, you're going to have to be focused on other people. So self-centered.

[0:59] Dare? Independent is the second one. Those two go hand in hand. Don't want help from anybody else. Don't want to give help to anybody else. I'm a man unto myself. And so I'm independent. And that's not going to lead to faithful commitment to the church.

All right? What's number three? Critical. There's too many things wrong with the church. It's boring. They're hypocritical. There's division in the church. The people there aren't very friendly. I don't like that church. It's just not a good church. And so it's not worth committing myself to. And a person that's unwilling to commit is often very critical.

And that helps them justify their lack of commitment. But we saw that the person who's marked by these things, the person who's not committed to the church, is really doing himself harm.

He's cheating himself of the benefit that could come with being involved in a local church. He's robbing the church of the blessing the church could receive from his service or her service to the church.

[2:01] And so he's doing harm to the church. And in some ways, he's cheating the world of his involvement in the church's witness to the world. And so he's only harming himself. The church and the world by not being committed to a local church.

And to help us understand why the church is so significant. Why it's worth our devotion. Why it's worth our commitment. We try to see the church from heaven's perspective. From the viewpoint God gives us in the scriptures.

That the church is the bride of Christ. That Christ loves the church. As a husband loves his bride. And so we should love the church too. It is the body of Christ.

And the body needs to be built up. Not torn down. And so we're to be a part of that body. Not trying to separate ourselves from it. And the church is a holy temple.

That's dwelt by the Holy Spirit. And if we view the church in that way, how could we not be committed to it? If church is a good idea, and it is. It's God's idea.

[3:03] It's not some man-made invention that we can take or leave. If it's a good idea, then you need to be attached to a local church. Not good enough to just say, well, I'm part of the universal church. I'm one of God's people, but I'm just going to go it alone.

I don't really need to be part of any one particular local church. That doesn't cut it. That's not going to work. And we want to consider why that is today. You need a concrete place to put what you believe about the church into action.

And to help us see our need for commitment to a local particular church, we want to consider some things that only the local church can provide. Things that you need. And things that you won't have

if you're not committed to a faithful body of believers.

A faithful, visible representation of the body of Christ. A local church. Like this one. Or some other local church. But a church. Not just the universal church.

Some people may have had bad experiences with particular churches before. And that's why they don't want to be committed. I'm not going to attach myself to any other local churches because I've been burned. There's that critical attitude coming out again.

[4:13] Maybe they're just lazy. But they don't want to attach themselves to a local church. But that is not going to work. I'd say I'm part of the church.

The big church. But not a particular one. Try that in your marriage sometime. Don't try it. But imagine it. Okay? Imagine it for a moment. Telling your wife, I'm committed to our marriage in theory, in my heart.

I am married to you. But I don't want there to be any concrete expression of that. I'm not going to live with you. I'm not going to help you raise the kids. I might even be out with other women.

But I'm still married to you. Okay? I'm committed to you in theory. That's not going to work. Your marriage isn't going to fly. And the wife isn't going to buy that sort of idea that you're committed to the marriage, but there's going to be no concrete expression of it.

It doesn't work with the church either. To say, Christ, I'm committed to you, but I'm not going to express that in any real, visible, tangible way. We can't ignore the institution that He ordained for us to belong to, the church.

[5:22] That connection has to be expressed. Remember, we're living stones built into a spiritual house, not stones off by ourself. We're being built up together into a holy temple. And that means you need to be part of it.

And it means that it's sinful not to be part of what Christ has ordained for us. Listen to Charles Spurgeon on this point. And our author quotes Spurgeon.

So Spurgeon says, I know there are some who say, Well, I have given myself to the Lord, but I do not intend to give myself to the church. Now, why not? Because I can be a Christian without it.

Are you quite clear about that? You can be as good a Christian by disobedience to your Lord's commands as by being obedient. What is a brick made for? To help build up a house.

It is of no use for that brick to tell you that it is just as good a brick while it is kicking about on the ground as it would be in the house. It is a good-for-nothing brick. So you Rolling Stone Christians, I do not believe that you are answering your purpose.

[6:20] You are living contrary to the life which Christ would have you live. And you are much to blame for the injury you do. That's what happens when you don't attach yourself to a church. And what are you going to do?

You say, Well, I am a Christian, so I have these concerns that Christians have. I want to see the gospel spread in the ends of the earth. I want to show compassion to the needy and to the poor. I want to be a faithful servant to others.

I want to help the underprivileged. But you have got to have a place where you can put that into action regularly, concretely, tangibly. And that is the local church.

You cannot just go on a mission trip for one week and say, Well, I have done my duty as a Christian. I have served. I have been a blessing to people who are less fortunate than me. No, you need to be somewhere where you can be doing that regularly, on a day-to-day basis, engaged in those things.

See, God has ordained the church as the means to reach our world with the gospel. And one of the ways that happens is when people in our community see that whatever it is they're teaching down there at Grace Fellowship Church, it's making a difference in their lives.

[7:25] It's making a difference in the way that they live. When people see transformed lives, and isn't that what the church does, what God does in the church? He takes our lives and He transforms them.

And when people see that, it's an open door for the gospel. What better way to demonstrate to your friends the significance of the gospel than to bring them to church to see what a bunch of gospel-believing people look like, how their lives have been changed.

And if we remain isolated from one another, we're not nearly as visible as a living testimony to the transforming power of God. And as people come and they see, you invite your friends to come and see what a difference it is.

They're going to see things that they won't see other places. They'll see that the church provides things that no other medium can. A campus ministry can't do what a church does. A Bible study can't do it. An internet sermon can't do it.

God's ordained that certain things take place in the church. And if you're not devoted to the church, then you're missing out. And so what is it that you get from the church? Why will you benefit from being committed to the local church?

[8:29] Let's think about several things. Things that will benefit you and that other people will look at and say, well, that's awfully strange, but it's obviously doing something good in the lives of these people.

Well, one is preaching. Now, that's one thing maybe you could get apart from the church. You can get CDs and internet sermons, but isolated from the rest of these things, it's not going to be enough. But this is something you get in the church. Faithful teaching of God's Word. And that's going to be strange to the world around us. A person up here, a talking head, is boring. That's not an effective way to communicate anymore.

So says the world and the entertainment industry. But here are several hundred people gathered together, and they like to listen to preaching. They like the talking head up there. They benefit from it.

They profit from it. And that's going to be strange to them, but a great benefit to all who sit under it. There's something else. There's other things that we get from the church that we can't get anywhere else.

[9:24] Baptism. Both of the ordinances. We'll talk about the Lord's Supper in a moment. That's going to look strange to the world. Somebody getting dunked under the water. But here's a means of grace that God has ordained for the church.

It can only be done rightly in the church. And it's something that God requires of each of His followers, that they be baptized. All who repent and believe are to be baptized.

And that must take place in a church. And so if you don't have a church that you're attached to, then you're not going to be able to follow your Lord's command to be baptized. To give evidence of your union with Christ, having been washed of your sins, joining the body of Christ.

It goes hand in hand with membership in the church. And so here's something else that only the church can provide. Preaching, baptism, the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper also is something very different that's going to stand out to those observing us.

And it's also a necessary means of grace that Christ instituted for the church until He comes again. What does He say? Do this in remembrance of Me. He doesn't say, do this if you're able to get around to it.

[10:31] He doesn't say, do this if you feel like it. He says, do this. And so if you're not participating in the Lord's Supper, and you're one of His children, then you're living contrary to His command.

You're disobeying. And the only place you can get the Lord's Supper rightly administered is in the church. And so if you're not committed to a local church that's administering the Lord's Supper on a regular basis, then you're living in disobedience.

You're depriving yourself of the good that could come from participating in this means of grace. And so if you're only here on Sunday mornings, we happen to observe the Lord's Supper on Sunday nights, then you're missing out on what God has ordained, what God commands us to do.

Something that can only happen in the local church. Another reason that we must be committed to it. Think about church discipline. Something that obviously only comes in the church, but it's something that takes sin seriously.

It takes the church seriously. It's a way of keeping you accountable. Knowing that if you fall into sin, you will be disciplined by the church. You're not going to find that anywhere else. You need that level of accountability.

[11:37] So you need to be in a local church. These things mark the church, and they must be part of our lives. Therefore, we must be part of a local church. It's not optional.

To say that you're part of the universal church with no need for a local church is to say that you don't need preaching, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the accountability that comes from church discipline. It's also a neglect to our witness in the world that comes from being such a distinct entity that's so different from the rest of the world.

Yeah, we need to be part of a local church. It's that important. It's that significant. There are other things that come, other benefits that come from being in the local church.

It benefits our sanctification, our growth in grace, our holiness. Hebrews 10, 24, and 25 says, And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Okay, we're to consider, we're to think about ways we can spur one another on, stir one another up towards love and good deeds. That's growth and grace. That's sanctification. That's holiness. And so what is the author of Hebrews' conclusion then?

[12 : 47] Well, you don't need the church if you're going to stir one another up, so don't worry about it. No, what does he say? What's the very next thing? Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the day approaching.

We need our brothers and sisters in Christ to help us in our walk with the Lord. We need them to stir us up. And if we forsake assembling together, if we're not committed to the local church, then you're not going to have that benefit of your brothers and sisters helping you in your walk with the Lord. You know that you have blinders? Blind spots? You know that there's things in your life that you can't see? Sins that you're living in that you don't see.

And so, here comes a brother and sister in Christ and they do see it. And they can say, listen, Aaron, I've seen this in your life and I really think it's a deficiency.

I think you're walking contrary to the Scriptures. What? What are you talking about? And then they slowly walk you through it and you begin to have your eyes open. And if you're not committed to a local church where people can see you on a regular basis, where they can be part of your life, day in, day out, week in, week out, then that's not going to happen.

[13 : 54] You're not going to have that benefit of the help in your walk with the Lord, your growth and grace and sanctification. You don't get that outside the church. You'll have pastors there to watch over your souls, Hebrews 13, 17, and to shepherd you, 1 Peter 5, 2.

You don't get that outside the church. It's going to help your growth and grace. Corporate worship, another thing that you can't get anywhere else. Yes, you can worship alone and we encourage you to do that.

Your private devotions and your family worship. But there's something that comes from worshiping together as the body of Christ, corporate worship. What we're going to do here in a few minutes in the hour for worship that follows this is that's unique.

It's irreplaceable. That's what our author says. Something unique and irreplaceable happens when we worship together. It's not just you as an individual who's a temple of the Holy Spirit. You are. But it's us together that are built up.

And here the Spirit meets with us. Christ meets with us by His Spirit. And we worship together. He says, When the church is together to worship and hear God's Word preached, nourishment and encouragement occur that can't happen quite the same anywhere else.

[15 : 05] Our corporate worship edifies and strengthens us and glorifies God in ways nothing else can. If you're not part of the local church, you're going to miss out on that expression of corporate worship.

And so if you're not a member of the church, if you're not in faithful attendance, a faithful participating member of the church, you may be in danger. Something else we see in the Scriptures is that you're not just missing out on preaching, baptism, the Lord's Supper, growth in grace, sanctification, all of those things that come from the church, corporate worship.

In addition, and this is quoting Mark Dever, who's quoted in this book, in the New Testament, it seems that the local church is there to verify or falsify our claims to be Christians. Just joining the church is going to entail a process where your life is examined to some extent to see if there's fruit in your life, to see if there's evidence that you're a Christian.

Being a part of a church, you're going to hear teaching on a regular basis that tells you how a Christian ought to be living. Imagine with me for a moment a person that's not attached to a local church. They're not regularly there.

They believe that they're a Christian. Oh, they think they're a good person. But they're living in flagrant violation of God's thought. They're living contrary to the Word. But they think they're okay. If they were a part of a church, someone could point that out to them.

[16 : 27] They could see that inconsistency. Their pastor would help them see it. A brother or sister in Christ would help them. And they would say, maybe I'm not. Maybe it's not so that I am a

member of the body of Christ.

And so be called to repentance. You're not going to get that outside the church. Another way that people will know that we're His disciples is if we love one another.

And if you're not attached to a local church, if you're not regularly in the lives of people in the local church, how are you or anybody else going to know if you love the brethren? If you don't have opportunity to express that love in concrete ways like you will in a local church, how will people know?

How will you know? Or that evidence won't be there if you're able to love the brethren during good and bad, whether they're lovable or not. You need the church. And I don't misunderstand.

The church can't save you. But being in a church helps you to know that you are saved. And so there's many benefits that come from being involved in a local church.

[17 : 32] In fact, it's necessary for us to be involved in a local church. But still, something keeps some people back from real commitment. And the things that keep us back are the things that mark the church data.

The things that we've already talked about. That self-centered attitude. We don't want to sacrifice ourselves and our time and our money. It's going to take effort. And so we'd rather...

I'm going to have to put too much in and I'm not going to get enough out. That's a self-centered attitude when in reality, you're robbing yourself. The less you give, the less you're going to get in return.

That proud independence. I don't need other people to point out my sins. I don't want people helping me in my walk with the Lord. I want people to know my problems. I'm okay on my own. I can deal with it. That spirit keeps us away.

And that critical eye, consumers instead of worshipers, criticizing instead of coming and profiting. When you are here, you're nitpicking. There he goes again. He made the same mistake he made last week.

[18 : 29] He stumbled over his words again. He didn't use enough illustration. He said, I'm going to be critical and I'm not going to profit from it. That's going to keep you from commitment to the church. So there are benefits that come from being part of a church.

Things that you can't get anywhere else. And so you must be part of a church. But secondly, that's chapter three and now we're going to race through chapter four of his book which is called Join the Club.

And we want to see what it looks like to be committed to a church. What will it look like? If you are committed to a local church, what's that going to look like in your life? A picture of commitment. Now there are all sorts of things that you can be members of, that you can be committed to. Somebody tell me some things that you can be a member of, that you can join, that you can be committed to.

Church is one. Okay? That's something you can be a member of. What else is there in your life that you can be committed to? There. Okay, family. You're a member of your family and need to be committed to it. Good. What else?

[19 : 32] A gym. Yeah, you're going to work out. You're going to be committed to your membership at the gym. You're going to be a member down the street so you can make all your New Year's resolutions. Okay? Jim? Elks, moose, or?

How can you be a member of? The Elks. Oh, okay. Okay. Yeah. Clubs. I thought you were talking about the animals. I don't know.

I don't get that. Okay, yeah. The Elk Club. The Moose Club. I don't really even know what some of them do, but yeah, you can be a member of it. Okay? What else can you be a member of? Political learning.

A political party. Okay. And people get all fired up about that. You can tell they're committed to it by how excited they are about it. Okay? What else? Are there any athletes here?

You can be a member of a team. You can be a member of clubs, organizations. There's the Lions Club and the Rotary and all sorts of things that you can be a member of that you can join.

[20 : 40] And you can tell what people are involved in and what they're maybe members of or what they're really committed to by what they get excited about, what they love to talk about, what they give their time to.

And you take a minute, or you can do this after the class if you want, or go home, and ask yourself, if somebody were to walk with me in my life for a week, what would they know I'm committed to? What would they know is important to me just by the way I live? The things I give my time, my careful attention to. People are very connected, very committed to their teams, clubs, organizations, and so on.

They'll push anything out of the way to make room for practice and meetings and games and events. Are you willing to do that? And are you doing that same sort of thing for the church? Or is church one of the things that gets pushed out of the way to make room for the really important things? Well, I've got something that's more important than church, and so church, that's going to get pushed aside and this is going to take its place.

[21:43] If that means I'm going to have to miss service, no big deal, because this is the thing that's really important. Or do you take the other things in your life and you push those aside and you say, church and commitment to God and His people is the really important thing, and so other things are going to get out of the way for that?

John Stott says, if the church is central to God's purpose as seen in both history and the gospel, it must surely also be central to our lives. How can we take lightly what God takes so seriously? How dare we push to the circumference what God has placed at the center? So what is your club? What are you passionate about?

What do you talk most about? What do you find yourself thinking about the most often? What do you spend the most time on without any coercion from anyone else? What do you read about the most? What do you research the most?

What are you known for? It's natural that people are going to know us for our occupation. So he's a programmer. She's a teacher. He's a pastor. That's good. But beyond that, what are you known as? He's the hunting enthusiast.

[22:46] He's the car fanatic. She's the musician. He's the book lover. He's the golfer. She's the sports mom. He's the sports nut. He's the technological whiz.

He knows everything about all the latest gadgets. She's the photographer. Now, there's nothing wrong with being known for those things. But is anybody here known for being involved with their church? He's the one that's so involved with his church.

He's the one that, man, he backed out of a club meeting over here. He missed a practice or a game here so that he could be at church. Is anybody known for being involved in their church?

Think about that. Your passion, he says, is what you talk about, think about, and dream about. It's what you give your time to without complaint. It's what you find your identity and what you're willing to sacrifice for.

Now, here at our church, we try to limit the number of church events, meetings, so that you can have time for family and other things that are important in your lives. We're not talking about giving every moment or even every day to the church.

[23:46] But where are your priorities? What is important to you when you take a look at your life? Here's a brief profile of commitment. Here's what it'll look like if you're committed to the church.

Number one, you join. Some things you're born into, like your family. Others, like your class, you graduate into. You're in your grade by virtue of your age and having completed the work in that class.

But other things, you have to go out and join. There's teams, clubs, and the church. And some people will go their whole life hanging around the church but never actually making the most basic of commitments and that's joining.

But that's not how it was in the early church. Acts 2.41, after Peter's preached at Pentecost and thousands believed and were baptized, it says in Acts 2.41, excuse me, those who accepted his message were baptized and about 3,000 were added to their number that day.

That's the language of membership. There was a number. There was a membership and the 3,000 that were baptized were added to that number. They joined with that number. And then the very next verse says, and they were devoted to the apostles' teaching and the breaking of bread, to fellowship and to prayer.

[25:01] They were committed to what they had joined with in the church. That's the pattern. In the New Testament, it should be the pattern for our life as well. The most basic level of commitment to a local church is to be a member of it.

To join it. To be attached to it. Somebody finished the quote for me. Jim Elliott said, wherever you are, be all there. Thank you. Whoever that was.

Who was it? I heard several. Okay. Be all there. Wherever you are, be all there. Be a member of the church that you've been sort of flirting with, dating, hanging around.

Get committed. Get married to the church. Wherever you are, be all there. That's the pattern. A person that's committed to the church will join. Secondly, make the local church a priority.

Make sure that, it's what we've already said, that other things get out of the way of the church and not the other way around. Show your children that the church is a priority in your life so that they'll see the significance of it as they grow up.

[26:00] Do that on a day-to-day basis with your everyday schedule and activities. Do that on a large-scale basis. Here's what may sound like a radical statement. Church ought to be the number one consideration when considering moving away for college or a new job.

Whoa, that's a little extreme. What if I can only get a job in one particular place? Okay, there may be situations where there's something like that. But how about flipping your priorities around and saying, I'm going to find where there's good churches and then I'll think about going to school or getting a job in one of those places.

That's making church a priority. Significant. In your life. And if you parents are modeling that then it will be important for your children or helpful for your children as they see that in your life.

Not for you just to tell them, well, when you think about going off to school you need to make sure you find a good church. If church hasn't been a priority in your life then they're not going to buy that. And you say, well, it's not important for you.

It's not going to be important for me. I'll go to school, job, wherever I want. And so you make it a priority. You join, you make it a priority. Thirdly, and this is in the book, I'm not just saying it for my benefit, if you're going to be committed to a church you seek to make your pastor's job a joy.

[27:21] If you're committed to a church this will be one of the marks of that commitment. That you seek to make the job of your elders a joy. Hebrews 13, 17. Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account.

Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. And so, if you're committed to the church, pray for your pastors, please. We have to give an account for the way we've ministered to you.

Pray for yourselves. We need good leaders and good followers. We need a healthy church. And that will only come from committed people. Your love of God's Word will give us joy.

Perhaps above all else, we want people in our churches that love the Word, that read it, that study, that memorize it, that love to hear it preached, that listen to it, that absorb it, that live by it, that make it a priority in their lives.

That will give us joy. And if you love God's Word, then you're going to be committed to His church. Don't slander your leaders. It's a whole lot easier to critique a leader than it is to lead.

[28:26] Now, if there's legitimate concerns, please voice them. And please, don't voice them to each other. Come to us and tell us. If something is lacking in our ministry, but don't slander your elders.

It's painful. And all of this will be for your benefit, your commitment. It will be for your good. As it enables us to do our jobs with joy, that will help you.

Rather than us carrying around a burden and being limited in our ministry that way, our job being a joy is good for you. So there's another sign of commitment. You make your pastor's job a joy.

A fourth sign. You find ways to serve. In other words, you find ways to spend your energy, your time, and your gifts for the good of God's people in this church. Listen to 1 Peter 4.10.

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. God's given you these gifts, not just for your own benefit to serve numero uno, me, myself, and I, but rather to serve others.

[29:32] They belong to one another, in fact. You are members belonging to one another, and so you use your gifts to serve one another. This is really one of the main reasons why many people don't want to be involved, why they don't want to be committed, why they don't want to join.

They don't want to serve, or they don't think they have time to serve. We've got too many things going on. I don't need to add a bunch of needy people at the church that need me all the time to my list of already too long list of things to do.

And so they don't want to serve, and so they don't, they're not committed. And so our author says, instead of being an afterthought, investing our abilities to honor and glorify God in our church should come first.

A fifth mark of commitment at the church is that you give. Many clubs have dues where you have to pay to join. The church is very different. You don't have to pay to join the church. But if you're a member, you'll be eager to worship God in this way.

Eager to give of what He has given to you as a reminder that all of it is His anyway. And Harris says, because the local church is the place you're nourished spiritually, it should be the first place you invest financially.

[30 : 40] Remember Jesus' words in Matthew 6 about laying up treasure in heaven. And praise the Lord that you're a giving people. We're going to announce the results of our special offering last week and evidence that you are a committed bunch of people.

And again, we're not going over these things because I think everybody here is not committed to the church. It's to encourage us to remain committed, to grow in areas where we might be lacking and to wake some of us up, maybe, if we're not truly committed.

But don't think that we're hammering away on these things because we don't see them in your lives. We do see them and we give thanks to God for them when we see them in our church body.

Another mark of committed church members is that you connect with people.

Church, in many ways, is about fellowship. That's one of the things those early converts devoted themselves to. The apostles' teaching, the breaking bread, fellowship, and prayer. And fellowship isn't just chatting and finger food, although that can be part of it, but it's sharing your lives together, sharing in the joys and sorrows of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

It's excitement when something goes well for someone, sadness when things are not well with them. Their lives are part of your life. Remember, we took a whole book and studied the subject of fellowship in this adult Sunday school class not that long ago.

[32 : 08] And so fellowship is an integral part and a sign of commitment is people that are willing to fellowship, willing to share in one another's lives, willing to be involved with each other.

It's why the Scriptures speak so often of one another. And I'm just going to take a moment to list some of the one another's, where they're found and what they say.

We're to love one another. John 13, 34. Romans 12. And there's a bunch of them in Romans 12. Romans 12 and verse 5. We belong to one another.

It's talking about the use of our gifts. We belong to one another so they're to be used for one another. Romans 12, 10. Be devoted to and honor one another. 12, 15. Rejoice with those who rejoice.

Mourn with those who mourn. That's with one another. Romans 12, 16. Live in harmony with one another. Galatians 5, 13. Serve one another in love. That's one we've already talked about.

[33 : 06] It's a mark of a committed person is that they'll serve. Serve one another in love. Galatians 6, 2. Carry each other's burdens. Again, that's too much for some people.

That's going to involve getting my hands dirty. That's more time than I've got to invest. Don't want a part of it so they don't commit. But we're to carry one another's burdens. And your willingness to do that is a sign of your commitment to the church.

Ephesians 4, 32. Forgive one another. Well, if you're going to be involved and committed to the local church, you're going to get tangled up in each other's lives and you're going to sin against each other.

It's inevitable that fallen sinful creatures and their relationships with each other are going to sin. And so we're going to have to forgive one another. 1 Thessalonians 5, 11.

Encourage. Build up one another. James 5, 16. Confess your sins to each other. Pray for each other. 1 Peter 4, 9. Offer hospitality to one another.

[34 : 04] Hebrews 10, 24 and 25. We already saw. Consider how to spur one another on to love and good deeds. Boy, commitment to the church is hard.

That's a lot of one another and I've got to do. That's right. And it's worth every bit of effort you'll put into it because for all the one another and you do, somebody else is going to be doing it for you.

They're going to be holding you up in prayer. They're going to be shouldering your burden with you. They're going to be rejoicing when you rejoice. Loving you. They're going to be showing hospitality to you.

And so on. And so if you're committed to the church, you'll connect with people. You'll fellowship. You'll share. And finally, a seventh mark of commitment to the church is that you share your passion.

If this is what you're all about, it's going to spill over and others are going to know about it. Again, people know all sorts of things about you just by the way you live, by what you do, what you're excited about. Do they know about your faith?

[35 : 07] Do they know about your church? By the way you live, the way you spend your time and what you talk about. If you're a member, if you're committed to the church, you should be eager to spread the news and to get other people interested in it.

Now, I was struck as I went through those things in that book at how closely they align with our responsibilities for church members. In our church constitution, we have seven responsibilities of church members.

and slightly differently organized than the ones we've just gone over, but very similar. We're to give unreserved subjection to the Lord Jesus Christ in every area of life.

We're to give willing submission to Christ-appointed overseers in the church whose duty it is to shepherd the church. You hear that in the make your pastor's job a joy. Every member is urged to be in faithful attendance at all the stated meetings of the church, the services on the Lord's Day, the Lord's Supper, midweek prayer service, business meetings.

And remember, if you're a member, these are the things you committed yourself to. And I'd encourage you to go this afternoon and dust off your copy of the Constitution and look at those responsibilities of church members and make sure that you've continued in those things just as you were back when you first joined.

[36 : 26] Every member agrees to be willing to serve the local body of Christ. You serve one another. And under that point, it says, members must actively seek to cultivate acquaintance with one another so that they may be able to better pray for one another, love, comfort, and encourage one another, help one another materially as necessity may require.

Refrain from speaking ill of one another. Hear out the one another's in there. Written right into our Constitution, the things you members committed to. Agrees to submit to the corrective discipline of the church.

Agrees to give wholehearted cooperation in the outreach of the church by bearing witness, praying, giving, and that agreement, general agreement with our confession of faith.

You hear how this guy over here that's writing this book that has never seen our church Constitution takes a look at the Scriptures and he says, what are marks of commitment to the church? And he comes up with the same things that we have that churches all over the country and all over the world have.

Here's marks of commitment commitment to a local church. And so, have a look at your life and see what's really important to you.

[37 : 35] What is too important? What do you need to adjust? Does the way you live show that you're a member and a faithful member of the church? Do you know anything about giving your time and your talent to the church to clean, to minister at the nursing home, to fellowship, or to help out at fellowship lunch Sundays, to visit elderly folks that can't make it to church, to take some time in your devotions to pray for other people in the church, to speak an encouraging word to someone who's discouraged, to gladly forgive those that have sinned against you, to rejoice with those who have had great success, to help people move either from somewhere else to here or from place to place in the area, to prepare a meal for someone who's sick, or shut in, to disciple a young believer, to show hospitality, to usher, to greet people at the door, to operate the sound, all sorts of ways you can be involved in service to the church if you've taken time for these things, to fellowship with one another, and not just with your buddies, not just with your family members and your close friends, but with all of your brothers and sisters in

Christ. Do you know that right here in the church, there can be outcasts, there can be outsiders in the church, people that aren't ever really made to feel well, even members of the church, people that we don't reach out to and love and show that we get very comfortable, and that's natural to be comfortable with your family and your friends, but commitment to the church is commitment to the church, not just certain parts of the church, to everyone.

And so make sure that there aren't any outsiders, people that aren't being reached with the love of Christ. Open up to one another. It's hard to know and pray and rejoice and mourn if you won't talk to

And again, many of you do these things, and many of you are committed, and we're thankful to the Lord for that. But if you have seen something that's lacking in your life today, then pray and seek to change by God's grace.

[39:59] And it won't be something that you'll ever want to let go again. And so, may we be a committed people, a people that love and serve our Father through the church, and may God help us to that.

[illegible]