

# The Purpose of the Church: Community

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 31 January 2021

Preacher: Mike Scrivani

[ 0 : 00 ] Let's pray.

Not a building. That the church has been called by the Lord to proclaim the truth that He has given to us. That we are to, with that proclamation of the truth, make disciples.

We're to go and to share the good news of Jesus Christ, baptizing and teaching and equipping new believers to become disciple makers as well. And then last week, we focused on what Scripture has to say about the purpose of the church.

Which is to worship. And that when we are called to worship by the Lord, that's a lifestyle. That's an everyday event. We are called to use the lives that the Lord has given us to worship Him.

And so, there are many other things, I think, from Scripture that we could go to. But today, I really want to focus on this last very important aspect about the church and our purpose.

[ 1 : 23 ] It's that we are a community. We're a community. A supernatural community. Brought together by the Lord. So, if you have your Bibles, would you stand with me as we honor the reading of God's Word together?

Acts chapter 2, verse 42 through 47. Speaking of the first church. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common.

And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God, having favor with all the people.

And the Lord added to their number, day by day, those who were being saved. May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word. Would you please be seated? Now, as a teenager, you're very self-conscious, aren't you?

[ 2 : 41 ] Very self-conscious, especially of your clothes and what you're wearing. And it's interesting, if you go into a high school, while they all talk about how it's important to be an individual, they really dress very much the same.

And they follow the same trends. And I remember when I was in middle school and high school, one trend that we had was that we wore no-show socks. You guys know what those are?

Socks that come below the ankle. So when you put your shoes on, it looks like you don't have any socks on. I don't know why that was the trend. It just was. And I also know that if you wore your socks up high, especially in gym class, you're going to get teased.

So we wore no-show socks. I also remember that when I would come home or whenever I'd see my dad mowing the lawn or working outside, and he'd have shorts on, and he'd have his socks on pulled up high.

Because that was the trend back in his day. And, you know, I remember teasing him and, oh, you know, you're so dorky. Look at your dorky socks and everything. But guess what the new trend is now?

[ 3 : 51 ] You watch kids. You look at kids. I'm watching my son and his friends. They wear their socks up high. In fact, they wear all different kinds of patterns and styles in their socks. The sock has become a really important part of the outfit with our younger people for whatever reason.

But it's come back around. And so I bring that up because we follow trends. And sometimes in the church, we can be convinced that we see a church down the street doing something that is effective.

And so we think we can do the same thing here with the same results. And it's interesting if you look around, especially the newer church buildings that are being built.

They may look a little bit different on the outside, but on the inside, they look very much the same. It's something called a warm industrial look. It's made to look like it's incomplete.

So you look up at the ceiling and you see the exposed duct work and all those things. Well, that is by design. And so for whatever reason, I'm sure there was a church. It just so happened that the building they were in looked that way and God was using that place.

[ 5 : 02 ] And somebody came in and worshiped there and looked around and said, Oh, it must be, this must be what we need to do in order to get people in our church. And so we do that. Whether it's the architecture of our building or different programs that we implement, sometimes good if they're correctly motivated.

But we have this thought often that we can follow the trends of what we view to be a successful church with the belief that we can have the same results if we put them to work here.

And so I bring that up too because I think, especially for our church, as we're looking to transition into having community groups, there could be the thought that this is a trend.

This is something that other churches are doing. And so, you know, Pastor Mike is wanting us to move in this direction because it's a current trend. It's a current fashion.

But I want to show from you from Scripture today, I hope that you will see that that is not the case. What we're trying to do is go back to that first church.

[ 6 : 12 ] What were they doing? Why were they so successful? What was it about their community that resulted with them having good favor, not just with those inside the church but outside of it? And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

I know I mentioned it before and I'll say it again. I do believe that the church's future is ancient. Instead of looking for new trends and ways to draw a crowd, we need to go back to what Scripture says, to what God says about this is what I want for my church.

This is my expectations of you. And in seeing that, to incorporate that into our church in whatever ways that we can and so that we are a church that the Lord uses in mighty ways to bring much praise to His name.

And so, also, we know that we have been designed by our Creator for community. We've been designed by our Creator for community.

And it's interesting, if you think about it, God is one in three persons. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There's community within the God who has created us. And we have a need for that.

[ 7 : 28 ] You know, I know some of you might be more of an introvert like me, more of a homebody, but eventually you get tired of that because you know that you've got to be around people. You have been made for community.

And it's good to be a part of a group seeking to achieve something that is greater than any one member of that group could achieve on their own. There's a great point made last Sunday night in our study by Cameron about, you know, you look at sports and how attached people get to their sports teams.

And you go to a game where your favorite team is playing and they're winning and the stranger next to you becomes your best friend for that hour or two hours that you're watching the game and you're giving high fives and everything. We like to feel like we're a part of something that is greater than ourselves, achieving something that we couldn't achieve on our own.

And I believe that's a God-given desire, a need to be in a community, a need to be in fellowship with other believers, working collectively to achieve more for the name of Jesus Christ than we ever could achieve on our own.

The first church was fully devoted to being the kind of church that God commanded them to be. And so the question that I first want you to think about is, do we express that same kind of desire today?

[ 8 : 57 ] Do we express that same kind of devotion today that we just read in Acts 2 about this first church?

You know, when I first came here, if you remember, the sermon I preached in view of call was Matthew 25, the parable of the talents.

This is the one that I always think about. Whenever you talk to me about, well, what's your philosophy of ministry or pastoring or whatever the case may be, it's Matthew 25, the parable of the talents.

You remember that parable? There's a master and he has three servants and he gives them a different sum according to their ability. The first two risk.

They take what the master has given them and they put it to work. They take a risk to multiply it. And when the master comes back, he's pleased, isn't he? He's pleased to have seen his servants taking what he's given them and putting it to work and multiplying it.

[ 9 : 58 ] Then you have the third servant. And his thought was, I'm going to preserve what the master has given me. I'm going to play it safe and comfortable. I'm going to go bury it in the ground.

And as we go through that parable, we realize that he didn't really know the master. He didn't really know the character and the attitude of the master. And in the end, that servant was cast out because he did not know his master's will or do what his master desired for him to do in wanting to be comfortable instead of willing to be devoted to the work that he should have been devoted to.

And so if we are going to fulfill the great purpose that the Lord has given us as his church, we must be devoted to the things that he intends for us to be.

Giving him our best because he gave his best for us. Fulfilling our fullest potential for the glory of his great name.

And so again here in Acts chapter 2, we see a record of the first Christian community. A church that was devoted to the Lord's will. A devotion which produced, we also see, tremendous results day by day as God was adding to their number those who were being saved.

[ 11 : 29 ] You see that? You ever see that and you wonder some things? I do. I wonder first of all, why don't we see those same results today? Day by day, the Lord was adding to their number those who were being saved.

Why don't we see that same thing happening today in our churches? Why do we think that is? Do we think that God has quit?

Do we think that God says, you know, that's good enough. I'm good with that. I hope that you don't think that. God hasn't given up. I don't believe that he's content.

We're still here. We still have a mission that he's given us and he's expecting us still to go out and accomplish it. Or maybe do we think that God is no longer able?

Well, that was a different time. You know, Pentecost had just happened and the apostles were there and, you know, just a different time. We can't expect the same thing today. Well, I do beg to differ.

[ 12 : 32 ] Because the issue is not with God. The issue is with us. You and I. He's not the issue.

We are. And so, again, I ask, are we as devoted to the purpose that God has for us to be as the first church was? And then, again, I ask of you.

Do you desire to see God doing that here? Do you desire to see God adding to our numbers Sunday by Sunday, month by month, not because we're trying to draw a crowd, but because we're committed and we're devoted to the things that the Lord has called us to be?

Do you desire to see the Lord do that here? And then, do you believe that he can? Do you believe that he can? We must stop being devoted to what is comfortable and start being devoted to what is biblical.

And so, the main idea for this morning's sermon is directed at each one of us individually. Your devotion, as a believer, as a follower of Jesus Christ, as one who has been born again, your devotion determines our impact.

[ 14 : 06 ] Every single one of us who is a part of Highland Park Baptist Church, your devotion determines our impact. To become the kind of Christian community that the Lord intends for us to be, we must devote ourselves in the same ways and to the same things that the first church devoted itself to.

Now, I want to back up and say real clearly, in case there's any misunderstanding, ultimately, whatever is achieved here will be achieved by the Holy Spirit's working through us.

Still, your devotion determines our impact. Your desire to be used by him to be devoted to the things that God has called us to be determines the kind of impact that we will have on Bartlesville, Oklahoma, the United States, across the world, which we, I pray, hope God will use us to do that. So, let's look at what the church was devoted to. And there are six things. Six things. It could be five. Six things. We'll see how it goes with time.

But we'll get to number one first. A community devoted to being Christian. What were they devoted to? Well, first of all, they were devoted to being a Christian community.

[ 15 : 23 ] There in the beginning of verse 42, and it says they devoted themselves. A church is a Christian community. That means that it is made up of Christians who have been saved by the

same Savior, who are devoted then to the same Savior, and who have been called by him to accomplish his purposes together.

And so, we must be devoted to being a Christian community. Now, what does that entail? Well, it means at least this. We are an open but closed community.

We are an open but closed community. Unbelievers are welcome here. But membership and service and leadership and teaching positions within the church, those are restricted to believers only.

Why? Scripture tells us to. For one reason. 2 Corinthians 6, 14 through 15. Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness?

Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? Now, again, we must stress here that we certainly absolutely want unbelievers here.

[16:50] We want them to feel welcomed by us to be here. We should be praying that the Lord draws them here. That the people in our church invite unbelievers here.

Why? So that they will hear the gospel. And we pray, be saved. Not to draw a crowd. Not to get people in here so we can pat ourselves on the back.

But to hopefully and prayerfully see the Lord save them through the proclamation of His Word.

Now, again, tragically, we've seen instances in the church where they are content with just getting people in here. Just getting people in here. And they try to be less Christian in order to do so.

For example, when I was first a youth pastor, we were going to take our kids to a youth conference where they would be encouraged to share the gospel.

[17:53] They would be equipped in how they can share the gospel. And they would be encouraged, as a matter of fact, at that conference to call their friends or text their friends on the spot and share the good news of Jesus Christ with them.

Well, some of our parents got wind of that and pulled me aside. And they said, you know, it sounds like such a nice trip and we're glad you're willing to take our kids with you to do that and whatnot. But we're real concerned about that part where they're going to be asked to share the gospel with people. Because, you know, we've got friends. We know their parents of the kids that they might be asking.

They belong to a different faiths. And we're just concerned that that's going to be rude. And could you talk to them about that and maybe, you know, not encourage that part of the conference? What are we doing here? Why are we a Christian church? This is what we're supposed to do.

[18:54] We're going to discourage. You want us to discourage our kids? Yeah, go ahead and bring those kids in. And, you know, it's great. And we'll have a good time. And I'll draw a crowd. But that does not accomplish the Lord's purpose for His church.

If we believe, as our Lord said, that He is the way, the only way, then that is the message that we know that has saved us. That's the message that we proclaim. A church that isn't devoted to being Christian quickly becomes unchristian.

And then, what's the point? If we're unchristian in this church, then what's the point? We're just drawing a crowd. We just become a country club. We become like any other group in every other way.

And we're wasting our time. We can't be like Christ while trying to be like the world. We must be devoted to being a Christian community. Second, we, like they, must be a community devoted to the Word.

A community devoted to the Word. Look again at verse 42 in the second part of that. There it says, And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.

[20:03] God has designed His church for the proclaiming and the explaining of His Word. And again, we see the church, the first church was devoted to their coming together to hear the Word preached and taught.

And so, likewise, today, this is why we have Sunday school classes for all ages in our church, why we have Awana, and youth group, and different Bible studies, and book clubs, why there is a sermon every Sunday morning, because we know from God's Word and through experience that the Word of God is necessary for our spiritual growth and our development.

The Word of God purifies us. It convicts our hearts of sin, making us see where we've fallen short, but where Christ has never fallen short.

And the joy that we have in Christ, it is encouraging us then to know that Christ has paid it all, that you are His, and you belong to Him, and you can never lose that salvation.

And it has a unifying effect as we realize that we all stand on equal ground before the cross. All sinful. All totally saved.

[ 21 : 15 ] By a Lord who has been gracious to us in ways that we never, ever deserved. And so, in 1 Peter 2, 1-3, one of many scriptures where there's an encouragement from the church to be in the Word of God, to devote themselves to the Word of God.

There, His instruction is to put away all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, all slander, like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

And so again, as believers, for our church, it is absolutely necessary that we be devoted to the teaching, the preaching, of God's Word, because we need it for our spiritual growth and development.

Now, it's interesting, if you look at a professional athlete. Yeah, part of it is they're just physically gifted, but there's more to it than that. They are very mindful of everything that they put into their mouth.

Right? They eat, and I think they probably enjoy it, but more so than that, they see it as fuel. This is going to help me get bigger, faster, stronger, so that I can be better in whatever sport it is that I am playing.

[ 22 : 34 ] And so likewise, in a church, we've got to be mindful that what's going to grow God's people and equip them is going to be the Word of God. So that's why I don't come up here with, you know, hey, I read this article out of the newspaper or Time Magazine.

Let's talk about that or reference Scripture a little bit and then move on to something else. No, we must be devoted to the Word of God because if we aren't, we'll become spiritual wimps.

And God will not be pleased. Look at what He said in Hosea 4.6, My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me.

And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children. And so we've got to understand that the church cannot operate on truth that it is not taught.

Believers cannot function on principles that they have not learned. We must be devoted to the Word of God.

[ 23 : 42 ] In my personal Bible study time, I've been reading in Nehemiah. And this week, I was in Nehemiah 7 where the people are assembled. The walls have been completed and the people are assembled to hear the Word of God read.

And as it's being read, they weep because they realize that they have not been obedient for generations. But as the Word of God is read, the priests come through the people and they explain more of what God's Word means.

And their weeping turns into joy. So they realize that we have sinned against God, but He is so gracious and loving to forgive us. We need that.

Every time we come in here to hear the Word of God, praying that it will convict our hearts of sin, but knowing that we have these promises from Christ that are true, that are sure, that we can depend upon always and forever.

So we must be devoted to being a Christian community, to being a community devoted to the Word, and then thirdly, a community devoted to fellowship.

[ 24 : 46 ] A community devoted to fellowship. There again in verse 42, it says there that they were devoted to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship.

And if you read the New Testament, throughout it all, believers are continually called to stimulate one another to holiness and to faithfulness through the many one another statements contained within the Word.

I chose just Romans. I'm going to hit you with just some scriptures real fast from Romans about the importance of our fellowship. Romans 12.10, love one another with brotherly affection.

Outdo one another in showing honor. Romans 12.16, live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

Romans 14.19, so then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. Romans 15.5-7, may the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another in accord with Christ Jesus that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father

of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 26 : 04 ] Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God. Romans 15.14, I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.

You see, church should never be a place where anyone is able to show up anonymously and leave anonymously. These people knew one another.

These people were totally invested in one another's lives. If you show up and leave and exclude the importance of the fellowship of the church, you are missing out on something that you desperately need.

You need to be in fellowship with other believers. The Bible does not envision the Christian life as being lived apart from other believers in fellowship and Christian community.

Our fellowship is necessary for your and our discipleship, for mutual accountability, for encouragement. You need that and you need to give that to others.

[ 27 : 23 ] One thing I think the church should be and I'm so thankful that our church is, is multi-generational. We have a multi-generational fellowship. And, you know, at times we divide up by age for certain reasons and we understand why that is.

That makes sense for many things but it doesn't make sense for everything that we do as a church. And I think it's tragic in many cases that I've experienced or heard of that older generations within the church are not being treated as well as they ought to be.

They're being made feel to be more pushed out to the fringes or just pushed out altogether and that is tragic. Tragic.

But I'll tell you especially speaking to you and the older generations and the conversations that the younger generations that I have had with people here they long for and desire to be in fellowship with you.

And you may think well why? You've lived life longer than they have. You've walked with the Lord often longer than they have.

[ 28 : 45 ] You have something of value to share and they know that and they desire to have a relationship with you where they can receive that knowledge that you have to share.

Knowledge of the Christian life. Knowledge of God's Word. And this is biblical. This is what churches were doing.

They were multi-generational and there was an emphasis placed upon the older generations teaching the younger generations. For example Titus 2 1-6 But as for you teach what accords with sound doctrine.

Older men are to be sober minded dignified self-controlled sound in faith and love and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior not slanderers or slaves to much wine.

They are to teach what is good. Who are they teaching? And so train. Who are they training? The young women. To love their husbands and children. To be self-controlled.

[ 29 : 50 ] Pure. Working at home. Kind. Submissive to their own husbands. That the Word of God may not be reviled. Likewise urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Now we see Paul specifically talking about the women in the church in that case but guess what?

Who is Paul at this point? An older pastor. And who is he writing to? Titus. A young pastor. Giving him instruction for the benefit of the Lord's church.

This is absolutely essential and critical for the development of our church and God's using our church.

And so I encourage all of us to be a part of these community groups. And we're working on how we're going to divide them but one thing that is so valuable I hope that you see this is that they be multi-generational because we're all guilty of going to a group of people that we share we're in the same phase of life with and that makes total sense in many cases but not in every case.

Our younger people have so much to learn from our older generations and I'm telling you older generations if you're involved with this and you pour into a younger person you are going to be so blessed by that.

[ 31 : 15 ] God is going to encourage you in so many ways by how you see that you still have a great purpose for him and his church and when you're fulfilling it it will give you a sense of feeling of purpose and satisfaction that you'll be so thankful for.

And you know what I'm so thankful for the people in my life who were older than me that God put in my life in times when I desperately needed their influence.

I'll never forget a guy who was old enough to be my grandfather when I was a little boy. My grandparents lived in Baltimore we lived in Kansas I didn't see them more than once or twice a year.

Chris Stringfield was his name and I'll never forget him because he made a point every time we were in church to come and share something with me from God's word to come and ask me about what was going on in my life.

He asked my dad for prayer requests and he would come and he would talk to me. I got to college and he would send me letters encouraging me. I'll never forget him.

[ 32 : 22 ] I'll never forget what he did for me. You have an opportunity to be a blessing in somebody's life far beyond what you would ever think. I think of my Sunday school teacher Elma Ross and I think of how she was again a woman retired teaching a bunch of young rowdy third grade boys and man she loved us and we felt her love.

Yeah there were some times we maybe had to get kicked out of the classroom if we were misbehaving but she would come back and she was always again present in our lives present in our lives loving us we learned a lot about God's word through her wonderful example.

I think in ministry of a man in Leavenworth named Bob Goff a guy who had been in the church longer than anybody else and I remember hard days as a young pastor not knowing what I was doing where I would call him on the phone and say Bob can I come to your house?

He'd say yep come right now and just to sit with him and just to talk with him. To be encouraged by him. You know how helpful that was to me? Please please do not miss out on this opportunity to be used by the Lord like that in somebody else's life.

And you know what else is sad? In our culture there's so many there's so much fighting amongst the generations isn't there? It's tragic.

[ 33 : 53 ] The younger generations often we see in our society look at the older generations as those who are holding us back while the older generations look to the younger generations and say you're the ones who are messing everything up.

And there's this fighting. What a wonderful opportunity for our church to show the world how it ought to be. And they come in here and they see people of different ages, different backgrounds, different races, loving one another, encouraging one another, a part of one another's lives.

That's a powerful testimony to the gospel that has saved us. That we truly have been transformed. Please, I encourage your participation in these groups.

And you know what? A lot of these groups are already taking place. Just we haven't called them community groups. I know there's different groups they meet after church and you go off site and you meet somewhere and you eat and you're in community with other believers.

All we're trying to do is add discipleship to it. It's already happening. It's already happening and it's good for us to do this. It's biblical.

[ 35 : 08 ] This is what that church was doing. Fourth, a community devoted to being Christ centered. So there, I mention in the end of verse 42, talks about to their being devoted to the breaking of bread.

This is a reference to communion, to the Lord's supper. And so our fellowship is symbolized through our coming together to take communion, acknowledging again that we have been united together in Christ to one another, calling us to examine ourselves, purging sin from our lives, from our church, so that our fellowship will continue to be maintained and our community will be healthy. Fifth, they were a community devoted to prayer. End of verse 32, and the prayers. They were committed to praying.

When the Lord was with His disciples the night before His crucifixion, He felt their sense of fear and anxiety and concern. And He told them, as He knew and was preparing them for the fact that He would soon go to the cross, He gave them a promise in John 14, 13 through 14.

He promised them, whatever you ask in My name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.

[ 36 : 37 ] This first church trusted in that promise. They believed that. And so they devoted time to come together to pray, trusting that God's promises would be fulfilled.

They were praying according to His will. You know, at the end of every sermon I pray, and what I hope that you understand is that that's not just a time to transition from the sermon to the invitation. In many ways, I think that's the most important part of the sermon. God's Word has been explained, and now we are going to God in Heaven asking that He would apply what we have heard to our lives.

Prayer is vital and important. And sixthly, they were a community devoted to transformation. We see that in verses 43 through verse 47.

This church, this Christian community devoted to being Christian, hearing and obeying God's Word, being in fellowship, being Christ-centered, praying together, experienced amazing, transformative results.

[ 37 : 49 ] First of all, we saw that they were inspired. They inspired awe. Verse 43, and awe came upon every soul. This church was so closely following its purpose, their fellowship was so genuine, that people from both inside of that community and outside of that community kept feeling a sense of awe and seeing what God was doing through them.

That all didn't come from the architecture of the building or its programs. It came as a result of God being actively at work through these devoted people. We see also that they experienced the miraculous in verse 43.

And many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. God was answering their prayers offered in accordance with His will and miracles were taking place.

You know what is a miracle that we often don't see, unfortunately, as a miracle today? The miracle of salvation. We'd be praying that we would see that miracle taking place more and more so in our community through God's work in us.

Next, we see that they were transformative in the fact that they shared. They all who believed were together. They had all things in common. Verse 44 and verse 45, they were selling their possessions, belongings, giving to whoever as they had need.

[ 39 : 14 ] Now, this is not promoting some kind of communal living. Not going to come back up here next Sunday and say, okay, everybody sell your house and all your possessions and we're going to pile it into a big pile here.

That wasn't taking place. As we see, they were still meeting in one another's houses. But what it goes to show is that they viewed themselves as stewards of whatever God gave them, not owners. my house, my bank account, my life. I don't own it. God has given it to me.

And if God is asking me to give it so that someone else in need can have, then I'm willing to do that because it's not really mine.

It's truly God's. And so we must be generous. 1 John 3, 16-18. By this we know love that He laid down His life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

[ 40 : 16 ] Lay down your lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth. faith. They held their possessions loosely knowing that it was truly God who possessed them.

Then we see that they were also filled with joy. Again, day by day, they were going to church together. They were breaking bread in their homes. They were meeting together in their homes and sharing a meal in fellowship with one another.

And in doing so, they received their food with glad and generous hearts praising God. They loved being together. They loved going to church. Let me ask you this morning, were you joyful on your way into church this morning?

Let's be honest. Let's be honest. Well, why not? Another great example, I think, that came out last Sunday night. What are you doing the night before to prepare yourself for worship the next morning?

[ 41 : 21 ] I encourage you to spend some time Saturday night in prayer for you, for your friends, for your family, that God would use our time together to speak to you, to make you more like Christ.

Pray for our Sunday school pastors, pray for me, pray for anybody who is teaching, that we would equip those in our church. And you come ready for worship.

And I think increasingly you'll find that you will be more joyful as you gather here. And then we see that they were growing. Having favor with all the people, the Lord was adding to their number day by day, those who were being saved.

And so here we see it all comes back full circle. Their devotion resulted with their proclamation of the gospel, and with that, disciples were being made as they were fulfilling the Great Commission, going and making disciples.

Persecution did eventually scatter this church, but we know that as they went and as they formed more churches, they were continued to be established in the gospel, continued to be devoted to doing what the Lord had called them to do.

[ 42 : 36 ] Our church, Highland Park Baptist Church, is 87 years old. 87 years old. We're almost, as a church, 90 years old.

A lot of churches don't make it that long. Why do you think Highland Park has made it 87 years? Ultimately, we know by God's sovereign will.

By God's working through, though, this body. You don't just survive as a church for that long without people being devoted to the Christian community that God has called them to be a part of.

God has been at work, thankfully, through the history of this church. But I ask you, today, present members of Highland Park Baptist Church, what do we need to do right now to ensure that should it be another 90 years before the Lord returns, that this church is still active active in pursuing what the Lord has called us to be.

What we do now is critical to that, I believe. Ultimately, trusting that the Lord could come back tomorrow, we won't get to 90, and that'd be fine.

[ 44 : 05 ] I don't have a problem with that. I don't think any of you would as well. We have a purpose. This is our time. The Lord has called us to be in this community with one another, and we must be devoted to doing what He's called us to do.

Not pursuing what is comfortable, but pursuing what is biblical. And if we do that, God will be in the work and He will bless the work and He will be praised by it.

Three questions of application. We'll talk about these tonight. I encourage you to come back to these later on this afternoon, this week. First question, why does each individual's devotion to the church determine its impact?

Why is it so important that you as an individual be devoted to the church as a whole? Second, what area of devotion do you think you and the church is excelling at?

Where are we doing pretty well? We'll talk about this tonight, and then secondly, a follow-up, which area do you think you and the church need to be more devoted to? Where do we need some work? And then finally, why do you think it is essential to God that we be involved in the church corporately and in smaller fellowship groups?

[ 45 : 31 ] It's biblical. Why is it important? I hope that you spend some time thinking about that and praying over that. Bow your heads and pray with me.

Lord God, this is your church. We are your people. We thank you that you have given us your word to give us instruction, to give us encouragement, that we would read it, that we would be challenged by your spirit to devote ourselves to being the kind of Christian community that you've called us to be.

God, forgive us that so many times we pursue what is comfortable instead of what is biblical. Too often we get stuck in ruts and Lord, we need you to pull us out and to remind us that we have a very important mission to be involved with here.

So God, we pray that you would use Highland Park as you have in the past to continue to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, that we would be the kind of church that you've called us to be, that you would be well pleased with what results, that disciples would be made, that the gospel would go, and that many would hear the good news of Jesus Christ.

We pray this in his name.

[ 47 : 05 ] Thank you.