

SERIES: SPIRITUAL FORMATION: HABITS OF A HEALTHY HEART

Part 5: Church Involvement & Service

Hey everybody. It's good to be with you again this morning. Thanks for the opportunity to dive into God's word together.

We are in part 5 of a series we've called "Spiritual Formation: Habits of a Healthy Heart." And the main idea is that what we do flows from who we are. In other words, if we love Jesus, we will shape our lives around that and develop habits in our lives to reflect that. Not because we earn extra points with God, but because He has done everything for us – and our response is to love Him and obey Him and choose to line our lives up with what He says is the best possible way to live our lives. If we really believe that God's way is the best way to live, we would want to cultivate living in ways that He says are best. The verse that we are basing this series on is Proverbs 4:23 – "*Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.*"

Last week, we mentioned that this idea wasn't just an outgrowth of who we are, but it's also formative. The habits of a healthy heart that we are talking about developing shape us into who we become. One habit we talked about last week was the habit of solitude: getting alone with God and taking that time regularly.

This week, we are taking a look at another habit of a healthy heart: church involvement and service.

When we think about church involvement and service, in our minds, we tend to separate those ideas. We think church involvement is that we come here on Sunday morning, and we sit and listen and pray and sing, and service is what I do for others outside of these walls. It might be. Service might be something we do outside of our church family, but in a lot of ways, church involvement and service go hand in hand.

If you were in Kroger today and you asked people, "What do you think about Church", you'd probably get a bunch of different responses. Some people might think of the Catholic church – going to Mass or going to confession or something

like that because so many people in this area have grown up in the catholic church. Some people might think of an old building. Maybe when you ask people what they think about church, people might say that it's full of hypocrites. People might say that church is about preachers yelling at you always talking about hell.

Here's the thing: when we talk about being involved in the church body, we aren't just talking about coming to church on Sunday mornings and singing the songs and praying the prayers and listening to an awesome guy talk to you about Jesus – although that's part of it. The church is people. So, when we talk involvement in the church body and serving, what we're really talking about is developing the habit of being involved with people.

Last week, I asked about those of us who are introverts and those of us that are extroverts. While the introverts love the discipline of solitude and the extroverts struggle with it, the opposite is true with this discipline. Involvement in the church is living life together with Christian brothers and sisters as the church. The first thing the Bible says is that it is “not good” for us to be alone. This is because even God exists as the Trinitarian community of Father, Son, and Spirit. We are made in His image and likeness and so we made for loving community. God intends for us to be together as His people.

Did any of you grow up in church, this church or another? Remember when you were in Sunday school class, like four years old, and the Sunday school teacher would say, “This is the church, this is the steeple, open the doors and see all the people?” You're doing the finger puppet thing. And when you're like four years old, you think that's so creative. Finally, you figure it out and you go home and show your Uncle Bernie, who grabs your nose and goes, “Hey! I got your nose!” How many have uncles that did that? It's so lifelike. A nose with a fingernail!

But that's the message of the church. It's people. All across the world there are millions of people meeting in different types of buildings worshipping the same God we are. This part is huge: God didn't just design us to be involved with one another, but He designed us to be dependent upon one another.

Dependency is not a bad thing. When you and I were born, we were dependent on our parents to feed us and to nurse us and to clothe us and to care for us. You grew up. You learned how to walk. You were a toddler. Your parents maybe put a bucket on your head and then videotaped you as you walked into walls...maybe that's just what I did to my kids. But you were a little more independent now that you could walk.

When you were a teenager, you wanted independence. You're like, "Leave me alone!" You go to your room. You turn on the TV or the music, and you want to be an individual. Some of that attitude has carried over to you into adulthood. But if you're really honest with yourself, you want to be connected with other people. We're dependent on other people for our physical needs, so why would it be so weird to think we would be dependent on one another for our spiritual needs? That's the way that God has designed the church is that we would be dependent on one another. That's the church.

How do we respond to this? Ultimately, I think we have two choices. We can choose the world's way here, or we can choose God's way when it comes to connecting to the church body. As I was thinking through this and thinking about how to talk about it with you, I thought of it this way: On the one side, you have the world's message—what the world says about connecting with others. Then you have God's message, and then you have the church's response – how the church responds to God's message.

The world's message: "**I'm all I need.**" A lot of people say that. "I don't need to go to church. I'm all I need." If you've ever had a chance to talk to someone about church, you've probably heard this response before. We're not all we need. We weren't created to live alone. God designed us to have a relationship with Him and a relationship with others. God's message is that **you're an orphan without Christ.**

When you were a little kid, did you ever get lost? You're in the mall or supermarket or something and you're walking around, and you grab a leg and you think it's your mom and you look up and it's not your mom? Then you get that feeling of panic. My mom used to take me to this store called House of Fabrics which I renamed House of Satan. As a little kid there is nothing to do in

there. My mom would take me in there for what felt like days. It felt like we lived there. She would look through fabric books and feel fabric and there's nothing to do as a kid. I can remember inventing games. I would take my hands and stick them in boxes of buttons and pull the buttons up and let them run through my fingers. Then I would grab buttons and walk around the store throwing them. Then I would sit down and see how long it would take for the employees that work there to pick them up. Then I would get other buttons and flick them at people. They would take fabric and wrap the fabric around cardboards. I would figure out ways to make teepees out of the fabric and then crawl inside and wait to be found. But this one day, my mom left. I don't know if she'd been in there for so long that she actually forgot she was a parent or what the story was. But I was lost. I remember running up and down the store thinking, "I'm lost! I'm lost! I'm an orphan. I'll probably be shipped to Russia to grow up in an orphanage. I have no family, no parents." Then I heard my mom's voice. When I turned and I saw her and her voice and her presence, I went running to her. That sense of being found! That's the church. When you're not with other people and you're living life alone, you are lost. You are an orphan. But when you become a Christian, you're no longer an orphan – God calls you into his family. If you know what it's like living like an orphan, alone, without anyone, and God has placed you in his family, why would you want to live life again that way again?

So, the world's message says, "I'm all I need." God's message says, "You're an orphan without Christ." The church's response is to **gather**. When the orphans are connected to a parent, they are part of the family. This is where God's family gathers together.

The second message the world has for us when it comes to connecting with God's people is "**I plan my life.**" God's message is, "You don't plan your life, **God gives direction.**" So, the church's response when we get together is that we would **seek His will**. As we gather together, we seek his will.

A third message the world has for us when we talk about connecting with the church is "**I'm in control.**" God's message is "You're not in control. **God is in control.**" And the church's response is to **worship**. That's what worship is. The focus is how awesome God is.

The last one: world's message is "**I can use people for my own benefit.**" We use people all the time. People use us, we use people. That's kind of the cycle of the world. God's message is "**God invites people to partner with him for his Kingdom.**" The world has taken God's intention for one another and has twisted this so bad. While God has the power to establish his own kingdom, God's intent was to invite people to partner with Him in the establishment of his kingdom. God doesn't need us. But he wants us to impact his kingdom. Of the 10 billion people on this planet that could be doing what I'm doing right now, God is using me right now. He doesn't need me, and I'm not even the best person for Him to use.

The church's response is to **rely on one another**. We can't do life alone.

In this series we've been talking a lot about commitments. As we are talking about church involvement, I want to challenge you this morning with three commitments. My hope and my prayer for us this morning is that we can commit to these three things. If we can do that, I think we will see a huge difference in how we connect with God and each other.

The first challenge of commitment is this:

1. Commit to Connect with God's People

God's plan for us is that we would be connected. How do we know that this is God's plan for us? Let's look at his word:

John 15:5 -- I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

John 10:11 -- I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Romans 8:15-16 -- For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Look at the relationship in the verses we just looked at: vine – branch, shepherd – sheep, Father – child. Those aren't peripheral relationships. Those are connection relationships. God's plan for his church is that we would be connected. You're not just committing to attend. You're committing to connect. That's what the church is – life on life.

The second challenge of commitment is to

2. Commit to Grow Spiritually through Church

The challenge here is to not confuse church attendance with spiritual growth. Just because you walk in and sit in a chair, it doesn't automatically mean that you're growing spiritually. Attendance can be this sort of misnomer. Just because you can say, "I come to church all the time", it doesn't necessarily mean anything except that you go to church all the time. If I spend a lot of time at Starbucks, it doesn't make me a grande mocha, but even more – catch this – if I spend a lot of time at Starbucks, it also doesn't make me a barista. Just attendance at church gatherings without your heart in it can give us the same misconception.

When I talk about this with people, one of the most common responses I get from people is that they don't want to commit to that level of fellowship, to that level of involvement in the church body because they are afraid. They are afraid that if they put their heart on the line and connect people will let them down and they will get hurt. I'm not going to lie to you and say that's not a possibility. People will let us down and hurt us, intentionally or unintentionally. But the myth here is that Christianity is just about you and Jesus; that you can be a Christian in isolation. We need to realize that it's sin that separates people and it is Jesus who takes sin away so that we can have fellowship. So, one of the primary purposes of the Christian faith is reconciliation—not just to God, but to one another through Jesus.

A lot of times we answer the question, what are we saved *from*, but one question we don't answer enough is what are we saved *for*? We have been saved into the community of the church. We need to be reminded that on the final day when we rise from our graves, we will rise together to be with Jesus forever as a family with our spiritual brothers and sisters and our Father God.

I mentioned this earlier, but you're not committing to just attend. If you're committed to spiritual growth through the church, you're committing to connect. So, is your heart in it? Are you here to rely on others? To seek God's will together? To worship Him together? To gather as a family? To serve together?

Lastly, our third challenge of commitment is to

3. Commit to find your role in the church body.

If you're involved in this church, you have a role. You and I play just a small part of the picture. Look at Ephesians 4:15-16 *"Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."*

1 Corinthians 12:14-20—It says, ¹⁴*For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.*

The ear doesn't say to the eye, "You should be an ear." The ear has a part, the eye has a part, the nose has a part, the mouth has a part – all the parts fit together to function as a body. You have a part.

If you don't have a role in the church, you are kind of like that missing piece of the puzzle. If you've ever done a puzzle before, you know how easy it is to lose a piece and not realize it. After opening and doing the puzzle once, and you miss a piece, then when the puzzle's put together the next time, what do you do? You don't go, "What a pretty puzzle!" You say, "Where's *that* piece? That missing piece." If you're not involved in the church – you're a Christian but you're not

involved in the church – you’re that missing puzzle piece. Because God has a role for you in the church.

How do you get involved in the church? Attending. Connecting. And serving. That’s how I’d say you’d get involved. Attend. But just don’t attend, connect. Don’t just connect with others, serve. Have a role.

Are you attending? Yes. Are you connected? I don’t know. I know some of you are. Are you serving? Do you have a role? Whatever it is. It might be a big role. It might be a behind the scenes role. Every role doesn’t have to be on stage. As a matter of fact, most of the roles that really help are not on stage. But where are you giving your time? Where are you helping in some way? There are a lot of different roles. So, the missing piece is you if you’re not attending, if you’re not connecting, if you’re not serving.

As we close, I want to leave you with some questions to think about:

- Will I consume or contribute? Will I just take things in or are you going to contribute with your life?
- Am I a getter or a giver? Am I about just getting stuff? I want to consume and get. Or do I want to give with my life.
- Do I expect others to serve me, or do I look to serve others?

I think those are some great questions to think about this week. I hope you’ll wrestle with them this week. Let’s pray.