

Grace Community Church, PCA

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March 11, 2012

#6 "Committed Member: the Cure for Aimlessness"

Series: What is a Healthy Church Member?

Psalm 42:1-4

**This Sermon series is loosely based on Thabiti Anyabwile's book, *What Is a Healthy Church Member?*

[Scripture Introduction]

[Scripture Reading] Psalm 42:1-4

[Prayer for illumination]

[Sermon Introduction] Have you ever lost something that left you absolutely befuddled?

I lost something in the last two weeks that I think might drive me insane. I figured it would show up, because it is something that is not easily overlooked. But it hasn't. I have looked everywhere. Of course, if you ask my wife what everywhere means she will tell you that I looked in 1 or 2 places. But really, I think I have looked everywhere where I brought this thing, and I can't find it.

I'm sure you all know what I am talking about right? You've lost something that is something you thought would have been hard to lose. It's frustrating. And it just keeps nagging at you. What do you do if you don't find it? You eventually give up on it.

No matter how frustrated I get, I have told myself I cannot give up on finding this thing. And to show you my resolve at finding this thing, I want some of you to do me a favor. All of you that have the Reformation Study Bible, can you take the dust jacket off of it and check to make sure my name isn't inscribed on it?

---I didn't think any of you had picked it up by accident; I just had to be sure. Because it is going to keep bugging me until I find it.

---If you ask the right question to the right people, you might find what you are looking for. Of course if you didn't have it, it would have continued to bug me and nag me until I found it or gave up on it.

There is something else in life that nags the soul. And it is far more powerful and disruptive than not being able to find something that you should. Have you ever wondered, "What should I do with my life?" There is no more nagging question for the soul than this.

I have heard it said that there are three important decisions every person must make in their life: Who is my master, what is my mission, who is my mate. Master, Mission and Mate.

If you are a true Christian, that first decision has been made Jesus Christ is your master, even when you fight against Him. If you are not a Christian, the other two don't matter.

As for a mate, that is a decision that partly out of your hands. You're only half of the equation. Then even if you find the other half of the equation, you still have to make sure your equation is Scriptural. By the way, this is why I believe the church and the pastors and elders should assist the parents in evaluating whether or not children have found an acceptable spouse. Enough said for now.

This middle decision, what is my mission; this is the decision I want us to focus on this morning. This is the decision that until it is resolved nags at your heart and it won't go away. Aimlessness is very frustrating and for Christians it can be detrimental to their faith.

Aimlessness isn't something that is age specific. Everyone at every stage in life face the question of purpose and meaning.

For high school students and college students it can be very frustrating to see their friends and fellow students graduate and have a clear sense of where they are going in life.

Those who are moving into their 40's and maybe into the 50's begin to realize that half of their life is over and questions of purpose begin cropping back up, especially if the children are out of the house or are about to be. If your guiding purpose in life it to raise kids, what happens when the kids are gone?

And I can use this same line of thinking when it comes to work. If your guiding purpose in life has been work and making money, what happens when you retire?

The truth of the matter is that we face this decision of what is the mission of my life? This question keeps coming up at every stage of our lives, from high school to college to employment to marriage and kids to retirement. And at every stage you will answer this question or you will find yourself feeling like you are just floating aimlessly in life.

Even when you reach your 70's and 80's or 90's you could still be troubling especially when you look back at your life and you wonder, did I do anything that will have a lasting effect for the good of those I love or did I just float through my entire life aimlessly?

We look for meaning and purpose in our lives. We need it or else something inside us tells us we are just aimlessly floating along. That question of mission never goes away, because God built into us a specific purpose and meaning. The Westminster Shorter Catechism question number 1 asks, "What is the chief end of man?" What is our meaning, what is our purpose? The answer is this. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Let me give you a few verses to show you that the Westminster people weren't just pulling this out of thin air.

1Co 10:31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Rev 4:11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

So there are only two options for mankind regarding purpose and meaning. Either man seeks to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, or He doesn't.

And because God designed us, there is no purpose aside from the glory and enjoyment of God that will ultimately satisfy our hearts.

[FCF] Now, there are some people that think they have found something that will satisfy them, something other than God. And for a while they will appear satisfied. They have set a course for their life and everything seems good. But since God's glory is not their aim, the best way I can describe them is that they are sailing after the clouds. Let me tell you what I mean by this.

Suppose that Gardner offered to take you out on his sailboat, and when you got there he told you he was going to determine your course by following that big fluffy cloud that looks like a nice cuddly teddy bear. And you say, "That sounds like a great idea. What could be wrong with following a teddy bear?" You jump in and off you go. After a few hours of sailing, you realize something. You have no idea where you are. You are lost because your course has in effect been aimless.

Unless you sail by something that is fixed, like GPS, the stars, landmarks on the shore, unless you sail by a fixed point, you are in effect sailing aimlessly.

Many people sail through life this way. They look for meaning and purpose and they settle on big puffy clouds of environmentalism, or social justice, or money, or fame, and pleasure, or work, or family. Not to say these things are bad in and of themselves, but they are not sufficient things to give our life meaning and purpose.

Ecclesiastes 1:14 "I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind." There is only one thing that is fixed immovably for all eternity that can suffice to both give us direction and satisfy our heart and that is the glory of God.

Either your purpose is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, or you are in effect sailing aimlessly through life. Those are the only two options.

Now, it is nice to talk about glorifying God. But where does the rubber meet the road?

How do we glorify our savior Jesus Christ? Here's how we do it. We make that which was important to Christ, important to us. What was important to Christ? There were lots of things. The orphan the widow, the hungry, the oppressed.

I am going to be so bold this morning and say that the thing that was most important to Christ though was the church.

So the way we glorify Christ is by honoring the Church and by making it of utmost importance to us. Yes we can sing His praises. We can testify to his goodness and grace whenever the opportunity presents itself. But since Christ himself is not visible right now, I believe that one of the most important ways we can glorify Christ is to honor that which He honors.

This is the way honor works. We glorify Christ when we honor what He honors.

Let me bring up my wife again as an illustration. I know twice in a single sermon is getting risky. If you want to honor me and I'm not in your presence, you can do so by showing honor and respect to Victoria. If you don't believe me that honor works this way, that we honor someone by honoring what they honor, if you don't believe that honor works this way, consider the reverse.

Dishonor my wife. Disrespect her and see if I don't take that personally. Disrespect my wife, you disrespect me. I learned this first hand. I did this this past week, not intentionally but I did show some disrespect for someone and their spouse corrected me. We honor people by honor who and what they honor.

The same is true with Christ. When we cherish what He cherishes, when we love what He loves, when we protect what He protects, when we devote ourselves to the things that Christ devoted Himself, we glorify Him.

And Ephesians 5:25 says that Christ gave Himself up for the church! If Christ gave his life for the church, should we not also be willing to do the same? Is that not a glory to Christ when we spend our lives cherishing, loving and protecting that for which Christ gave Himself?

In your bulletins I ask the question, "Why is the Church central to God's people?" There is a sense in which this question makes no sense. Technically, the Church is God's people. The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*. It is a reference to a congregation or an assembly of people. Literally, it means "those who are called out."

But the reason I put that question in the bulletin is because I want you to make this personal. Why should the church be central to your life, especially if you are believer?

And I'm not talking about the Church universal here. The True Church, the invisible church, the gathering of all those who are truly believers in Jesus Christ, the universal Church always manifests itself in a local church. The only place you see the Universal church is in the local church.

Why should the local church be of utmost importance to you? If your aim in life is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, you must be committed to a local church. Why? Because that which is necessary for glorifying and enjoying God is ordinarily found in the Church. I'm not saying exclusively found in the church—that would lead us into Roman Catholicism. I believe there is serious and even heretical error there. So I want to stay clear of saying that the local church exclusively provides that which is necessary for glorifying and enjoying God. But, I do want to emphasize that those things which are necessary are ordinarily and consistently and dependably found in the local church.

Hopefully, you haven't put your Bibles away yet, because I want us to go through our passage.

I chose Psalm 42:1-4 as a jumping off point for this message because of two reasons.

- 1) The psalmist begins in verse 1 stating that his heart is thirsting for God. As a deer pants for water so my soul thirsts for Thee. There is a great desire to be with God.
- 2) There is a ridicule that this psalmist is facing because others don't see his God. Verse 3 they taunt him, "Where is your God?"

The psalmist's answer to both of these two situations is the house of God. Verse 4, as he pours out His soul, where does he want to go? To the house of God.

[Proposition] If your aim is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, you need two things. You need Christ, and you need grace. Without these two things you will not, indeed you cannot, glorify God and enjoy Him forever. And where do we ordinarily find these two things? In the local church.

So here are the two reasons why the local church should be of utmost importance to you.

[MP1] 1) Church is where we find Christ.

[Exposition] The Psalmist asks in verse 2 "When shall I come and appear before God? His answer in verse 4 is when he goes to the house of God.

I know this sounds like a simple Sunday School answer, but it really is profound. If your desire is for Christ, commit to a local church that preaches Christ! I could take you all the way back to week one in this series on expository listening. When a preacher is preaching Christ, Christ is speaking to his sheep.

And then we could go to week 2 on being a biblical theologian, which is someone who sees Christ in every passage. Biblical theologians don't operate in the abstract but in the everyday lives of believers.

And of course we could hit weeks 3, 4, and 5 too, because each of those things, being gospel saturated, being genuinely converted, and being a biblical evangelist, each of those things are defined and only make sense for someone in the church who is seeking Christ.

So if it true that Christ is found in the church, then why do other things get more of your time, treasure and talents? Isaiah 55 starts out, "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. 3 Incline your ear, and **come** to me.

We find Christ in His church! Matthew 18:20 which is in the context of church discipline, Jesus says, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

In Matthew 25, again the context is between those who belong to Christ and those who don't. And Jesus will say to those who belong to Him, "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, Mat 25:36 "I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.

And the people respond, "When did we see you like that?"

And Jesus answers them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."

Christ is in His church. If you want to be near Jesus, you give your life to love what he loved and to honor what he honored and that is the church, especially the local church.

[Application] If I were to grade you on a scale of 1-10 based upon how important I thought the church was to you, do you think I would give you a high score or a low score?

Ligon Duncan once said, the Church is God's plan A and there is no plan B. Is the church your plan A? Is the church that which your lives revolve around?

Does the well-being and growth of the local church—And I am not referring to numerical growth at this point—Does the well-being and growth of the local resonate deeply in your soul?

If it does, and when it does, you will see some of your priorities changing. Even things that might have once been good for you, you will be willing to give them up for the purpose of your church.

Let me say this another way. Even good things can become bad things when they become first things. Therefore, things that you build into your life that take you away or that keep you from your local church, those are bad things. This is part of the reason para-church organizations are dangerous. Even if they were once something good, they become bad if they interfere with your life in the church.

So going back to Ligon's quote, the reason the church is God's plan A is because this is where Christ is found ordinarily, consistently and dependently!

[Transition] Now, how is Christ there? This is answered in point 2 in your bulletins. Where do we find Christ in his church? Preaching, prayer, sacraments, discipline

[MP2] Church is where we find God's ordinary means of grace!

There are two places the sinfulness of this world threatens our faith. 1. One is from those who don't belong to Christ. Just like the Psalmist had to face people who said, "Where is your God?" The Psalmist was ridiculed by people that thought he was crazy for believing in a God that no one could see. Similarly we are often ridiculed today for believing in a God that is revealed in a book that is 2000 years old.

Let me tell you, that if you listen to this assault on your faith long enough, it will bother you and get under your skin until you finally take it upon yourself to try to prove to them that there is such a God. And the moment you make it your responsibility to convince them that the God of the Bible is the true God, you have just set yourself up to have your faith undermined.

So in light of this daily or even hourly onslaught against the truth of the Bible, what recourse do we have? Where can we go find assurance that our faith is not just wishful thinking? The church and to the ordinary means of grace.

In preaching, we hear Christ speak.

In prayer, we feel the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit as we pour our hearts out to God.

In the Sacraments received by faith, Christ is tangible. In the Lord's Supper, there is the smell, the sight, the sound, the taste and the touching of the elements that confirm to us that Christ is present with His people.

And then in discipline, we have someone standing watch over us to tell us that we are walking toward a dangerous precipice for our faith and someone who can bring us back from the edge.

So these ordinary means of grace are ways in which Christ protects and builds up his people from outside attacks.

But you know, attack on our faith don't just come from out there, they come from in here too. Jas 1:14 "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire."

We have within us that Old man that Paul speaks of, that sinful nature that desires things other than the glory of God.

Where do we find the grace to fight the good fight, to keep the faith? In the Church and in the ordinary means of grace.

Thabiti begins this chapter in his book by listing several different reasons why people are not committed members of a local church. He says some are indifferent, some are ignorant, some are indecisive, some are independent, and some are inverted. You can read his book to see what he means by all those things.

But he says this about them. "At root, all of these perspectives on the local church stem from the same problem: a failure to understand or take seriously God's intent that the local church be central to the life of God's people.

Do you see your need for Christ? Do you see your need for grace? Then rejoice that God has not left you on your own to find that which you need to glorify and enjoy Him. Rejoice, that God has embedded Christ and grace into the very fabric of His people. Praise God, thank God that He has provided access to His Son and to His grace in the very body He has called Christians to be of.

[Conclusion]Are you a member of Christ's church? I'm not speaking abstractly here. Christ's universal church is manifested in His local church. Are you a member of Christ's local church? If you have Thabiti's book you can read for yourselves the many scriptural proofs that membership is biblical.

But this is where we find the cure to the aimlessness of the world. Our God given purpose for living—though it is not the Church—is found in the Church.

A healthy church member is one who is committed to his local church because that is where He finds Christ and where he finds the ordinary means of grace he so desperately needs. A healthy church member recognizes He needs Christ and He needs grace. And He needs Christ and grace if he is to glory God and enjoy Him forever.