



I LOVE MY CHURCH

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Loving God by loving, serving, and supporting His house

We do not merely say we love the church; we put God first through our presence, participation, and provision.

STIGLER FIRST ASSEMBLY

Series Message 1

Sermon at a Glance

Series: I Love My Church

Message: First Things First

Exodus 23:19; Acts 2:42–47; Proverbs 3:9–10

John 1:29; Romans 5:8; Ephesians 5:25; Hebrews 10:24–25; 1 Corinthians 12:27; Malachi 3:10

Purpose: To call Stigler First Assembly to love Christ's church in a visible, practical, faith-filled way.

Message Map

- Christ loved the church first, and gave Himself for her.
- Love gives God's house the first of our presence.
- Love gives God's house the first of our participation.
- Love gives God's house the first of our provision.
- A church that puts God first becomes a church God can use.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE I love my church, and with God's help I will be present, participate, provide, protect unity, and pursue the mission.

Opening

Good morning, Stigler First Assembly! Today we are beginning a new series called I Love My Church. Over the next several weeks, we are going to talk about what it means to love the church Jesus loves, not simply as an idea, not merely as a building, and not only when it is convenient, but as a spiritual family and a mission worth giving our lives to.

Loving the church is more than wearing a shirt, sharing a post, or enjoying a service. Love is visible. Love makes room. Love sacrifices. Love shows up. Love serves. Love gives. Love forgives. Love protects unity. Love remains committed to the mission even after the excitement of a special Sunday has passed.

"Love is not proven by what we say occasionally; love is proven by what we prioritize continually."

Exodus 23:19 — *The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God.*

God did not ask Israel for what happened to be left over. He called for the first of the firstfruits, and He connected that act of worship to His house. The principle is clear: **God is worthy of first place, and His people honor Him by bringing their first and best into the life and mission of His house.**

Today is not merely a message about money. It is a message about priority. If we truly love Christ and His church, then the local church cannot survive on the leftovers of our lives. It cannot accept only our leftover time, energy, attention, gifts, or resources. Love says, “Lord, You are first, and because You are first, what matters to You will matter to me.”

1. Christ Loved the Church First

Ephesians 5:25 — *Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.*

Before we talk about what we should give to the church, we must begin with what Christ gave for the church. The gospel always starts with God’s generosity, not ours. We love because He first loved us. We serve because He first served us. We give because He first gave Himself for us.

John 1:29 — *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*

Jesus was the spotless Lamb. We were the ones who needed redemption. He was clean; we were unclean. He was innocent; we were guilty. He was righteous; we were lost in sin. Yet the Father gave His Son, and the Son willingly gave His life, so that we could be bought back, forgiven, adopted, and brought into the family of God.

Romans 5:8 — *But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

God did not wait until we became worthy. Christ did not wait until the church had everything together. He loved first. He gave first. He sacrificed first. The cross is the loudest declaration in history that Jesus loves His church.

“If Jesus loved the church enough to die for her, can we love the church enough to live committed to her?”

KEY TRUTH **Our commitment to the church is a response to Christ’s commitment to us.**

2. Love Gives God’s House the First of Our Presence

One of the simplest and most powerful ways to love your church is to be present. Presence may sound ordinary, but it is deeply spiritual. You cannot consistently encourage people you never gather with. You cannot build meaningful relationships from a permanent distance. You cannot carry burdens you never learn about.

Hebrews 10:24–25 — *Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together ... but exhorting one another.*

The writer of Hebrews does not describe gathering merely as receiving something. We gather so that we can consider one another, stir one another toward love, and encourage one another. When you come to church, you are not only coming for yourself. Your worship strengthens somebody.

Your testimony gives somebody hope. Your handshake may interrupt somebody's loneliness. Your prayer may help carry someone through the hardest week of their life.

The original message notes that gathering at the beginning of the week is a way to give God the first of our time. That is a worthy habit. Before the week becomes crowded with demands, we say, "Lord, I begin with You. I begin with worship. I begin with Your Word. I begin with Your people." Sunday worship is not a religious box to check; it is a weekly declaration that Jesus is first.

SAY: "My presence is part of my ministry."

PRACTICAL COMMITMENT Plan for worship before the week plans something else for you.

3. Love Gives God's House the First of Our Participation

Acts 2:42 — *And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

The first church did not merely attend; they continued. They learned the Word, shared life, ate together, prayed together, gave generously, and witnessed publicly. Their faith was not built around spectatorship. Everyone had a place in the family and a part in the mission.

1 Corinthians 12:27 — *Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.*

A body cannot function when only a few parts are active. The eye cannot say, "The hand can do everything." The hand cannot say, "The feet will take care of it." God has placed different gifts, experiences, personalities, and callings in this church because the mission requires all of us.

The question is not whether you have a gift. Scripture teaches that the Spirit gives gifts to the body. The question is whether your gift is available. Love does not say, "Someone ought to do something." Love says, "Lord, what have You placed in my hands, and where can I use it?"

Where can we all find a place to serve.

KEY TRUTH Consumers ask, "What did I get?" Disciples ask, "What can I give?"

4. Love Gives God's House the First of Our Provision

Now we come directly to the firstfruits principle emphasized in the source message. Scripture speaks often about money and possessions because they reach deeply into our trust, our loyalties, and our priorities. Jesus knew that our hearts and our treasure travel together.

Proverbs 3:9–10 — *Honor the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty.*

Notice the order: honor comes before increase. Faith comes before sight. Firstfruits are not what remains after every other claim has been satisfied. The worshiper deliberately gives God first place and trusts Him with the rest.

Tithing is not a fee for attending church. It does not purchase favor, guarantee a trouble-free life, or place God in our debt. Tithing is worship. It is a tangible confession: “God is my source. Everything I have belongs to Him. I trust His wisdom more than my fear. I choose His kingdom before my comfort.”

Exodus 23:19 — *The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God.*

The local church is not the only ministry worth supporting, but it is the spiritual house where we worship, receive pastoral care, disciple children and students, equip believers, help families, support missions, and reach our community together.

Faithful giving strengthens that shared mission. It keeps ministry from being something we merely admire and makes it something we actively carry.

“God does not need my money, but He does want my heart—and my giving reveals where my heart is.”

KEY TRUTH Putting God first is not about what God wants from you; it is about what God wants for you, a heart free to trust, worship, and live generously.

5. A Church That Puts God First Becomes a Church God Can Use

Acts 2:46–47 — *They, continuing daily with one accord ... did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God ... And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*

Imagine what God can do through Stigler First Assembly when we put Him first together. Imagine every generation worshipping together. Imagine children learning the Word, students finding identity in Christ, marriages being strengthened, addicts finding freedom, lonely people finding family, believers discovering their gifts, missionaries being sent, needs being met, and people who are far from God coming home.

That vision will not be carried by one pastor, one board, one staff, or one ministry team. It will be carried by a church family that says: “We love what Jesus loves. We will be present. We will participate. We will provide. We will protect unity. We will pursue the mission.”

CONGREGATIONAL DECLARATION — INVITE EVERYONE TO REPEAT EACH LINE.

I love Jesus.

I love His church.

I will be present.

I will participate.

I will provide.

I will protect unity.

I will pursue the mission.

God will have first place in me.

Closing: Return to First Love

The deepest issue today is not merely whether we attend enough, serve enough, or give enough. The deepest issue is love.

When love for Jesus is alive, obedience stops feeling like an interruption. When we remember the cross, sacrifice becomes a response of gratitude. When we see the church as Jesus sees her, commitment becomes an honor.

Perhaps you have been wounded by church people. Your pain is real, and healing may take time. Loving the church does not require pretending that hurt never happened. It does mean refusing to allow human failure to separate you permanently from the body Jesus loves. There is grace to forgive, wisdom to rebuild trust, and courage to belong again.

Perhaps you have never surrendered your life to Christ. Before you can belong fully to a church family, you must be born into the family of God. Jesus, the spotless Lamb, gave His life to redeem you. He rose again, and today He offers forgiveness, freedom, and new life to everyone who will repent and believe.

Matthew 6:33 — *Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

ALTAR CALL

Today, let us respond in three ways. First, if you need salvation, come and surrender your life to Jesus. Second, if church hurt, disappointment, or distance has weakened your connection to the body, come and ask God to heal your heart and restore your love. Third, if you are ready to put God first through your presence, participation, and provision, come and consecrate yourself to the mission of this church family.

We are not coming forward to promise perfection. We are coming to say, “Jesus, You loved me first. You gave Yourself for me. Today I give You first place again.”