

BEING

SERIES

40 days to being more like Jesus

BEING Series Week 6 - Keystone Habit 5 - Choose Church

February 11, 2024 - Pastor Isaiah Fern

Our desire is to see everyone in the church flourishing by choosing to be planted in true church community and be equipped to be sent out.

Today we finish the Being Challenge: 5 Keystone Habits: **Community, Studying Scripture, Prioritizing Prayer, Seeking Solitude, Choose Church**

Key Scripture: Psalm 92:12-15 NKJV "The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. 13 Those who are planted in the house of the Lord Shall flourish in the courts of our God. 14 They shall still bear fruit in old age; They shall be fresh and flourishing, 15 To declare that the Lord is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him."

According to Psalm 92 there is a difference between being a **part** of the church and being **planted** in the church. This is our desire for your life, but it takes choosing church.

P.I. For the last 17 years I have moved from being a part to being planted here because I have simply stayed grounded and consistent. If you would have known who I was when I was 13 years old to who I am today, you might agree that I have drastically become more like Christ and my life is producing more fruit than my 13-year-old self was.

- Can you see that in yourself? In what ways?

Some will hear this message feel motivated to do something. Some are still growing in your faith as a new believer, and you are still in a season of learning and growth. You need to simply prioritize attending church services weekly and growing in your knowledge of the Word with other believers.

Some used to be really involved and have been sitting back in a season of rest and now you are going to get clarity to get back in the game and begin to participate again.

Maybe you've never learned or cared about this part of following Jesus and you will be inspired to attend church services weekly or begin serving on a ministry team, get plugged into a life group, or serve those in need outside the church.

Maybe you have been super involved and the Lord will direct you to take another step and be sent as a church planter, pastor, ministry leader, or missionary. Perhaps you have been serving

your life away and the Lord will lead you into a temporary season of rest and reflection to regroup and take care of your family and neighbors outside the church.

1 Timothy 3:15 "If I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth."

ekklēsia - an assembly of Christians gathered for worship, a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly. Used 118 times in scripture to describe the assembling of multiple people. A support or foundation.

3 reasons why to Choose Church and 4 ways to be part of the Church:

1. You cannot flourish without it.

- **Can you think of someone who is growing dramatically in their relationship with God even though they have stopped choosing church?**

Zach Zehnder writes: "I've known many people who have stopped choosing church for a variety of reasons. I can tell you with confidence that I personally have never, ever-not once in my life seen someone who has stopped choosing church grow dramatically in their relationship with God. Usually, it has the exact opposite effect. I've known many people who were growing in their relationship with God, got "burned" by the church, left, and a year later, their lives have spiraled out of control. It's tragic. This isn't what it was meant to be."

"I've known many people who have stopped *choosing church* for a variety of reasons. I can tell you with confidence that I personally have never, ever-not once in my life seen someone who has stopped choosing church grow *dramatically* in their relationship with God.

- Zach Zehnder

- **Maybe you and I being involved in church can help change this?**

Maybe leaving a toxic or unhealthy church has helped dramatically to alleviate stress and anxiety, but growth and consistent transformation only happens in a church community of Jesus followers.

Maybe Good News isn't a good fit for some people or the Lord is leading them on to add value to another local church...that's ok. That is a transplant and should be done by the direction of the Spirit, not frustration.

God's desire is that you would FLOURISH for decades to come. Consider a palm tree.

The promise for those PLANTED in the church is that they will flourish, yielding fruit into old age.

Palm tree roots are not like regular trees. Instead of having a few large shallow roots they have hundreds of pencil diameter roots that hold on to a huge amount of soil. They cannot be easily dislodged. In addition, the trunk is fibrous and will not crack or split like wooden trees. There are no branches to crack off. The palm fronds are flexible and can withstand a great deal of

wind. Even when a palm is knocked down by a storm, most palms have the ability to grow new roots directly from their downed trunks. In this way, they can even survive a hurricane that's strong enough to topple them.

- How do these facts about a palm tree affect how you read the core verse for today?

- What does this say about you in this metaphor?

"When we see a noble palm tree standing erect, sending all its strength upward in one bold column, and growing amid the dearth and drought of the desert, we have a fine picture of the godly man, who in his uprightness aims alone at the glory of God; and, independent of outward circumstances, is made by divine grace to live and thrive where all things else perish." -

Spurgeon

Our desire as pastors is to see every member of the church so planted within the church that they are FLOURISHING and FRUITFUL.

- Has the church family played a major or minor role in shaping your story?

2. **We need a place to be refilled and renewed.**

Hebrews 10:24-25 ESV "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

EXAMPLE: a pool gets dirty and needs a shock to clear up the water and be ready to go again.

This is what living on mission is like. When we interact with people in our neighborhoods, parks, jobs, restaurants, and everywhere else, we're exposed to brokenness and darkness, bombarded by bad news, and we actually welcome it because it fascinates us. The more we get out into the world and connect with people who need Jesus, the more we're exposed to the world's contaminants.

Quite often our body, brain, and soul need a shock. We need a place where it can consistently go to hear good news...to shock our system back. The gathering of God's people (church) is the place you can go to get your system shocked. I don't think we realize it, but other people can see what our pool looks like and that it needs to be cleaned.

We also need a place where we can hear difficult but true messages that will challenge us to become more like Jesus. We need space to meet and maintain relationships that will provide a practical example of what it means to follow Jesus as a husband, wife, parent, teen, kid. To provide opportunities to disciple others and be better equipped to live a life worthy of the cost Jesus paid.

- How can you relate to this in your own life?

3. It was our Savior Jesus' idea and He loves and chose to prioritize Church.

In all 4 gospels, Jesus was found in the temple or synagogues (the church buildings of the time). Jesus loved being in the gathering of believers.

Matthew 16:18 NASB "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."

He started the church through the Apostles. His strategy for you to grow and for the world to be reached is the Church. Jesus is our model and He knows what's BEST for us.

At times we might get annoyed by, inconvenienced, hurt by...yet also befriended by, helped, encouraged, made better by those within the Church.

- **When was the last time you were amazed by the fact that you are part of Christ's body?**
- **Have you ever thought about this privilege?**

Four (of many) ways to participate in church life:

- **When does someone become a part of the church?**

Pastor Isaiah's thoughts: I think at salvation they become the church and when one begins serving/contributing they are activated as the church.

- **What do you think?**

Recall Story Ice Skates: enjoyed learning and new fun but now told he's required to be on the hockey team. It is a big shift. And even though it is a good thing, it took him a bit to realign his thinking and his lifestyle for this responsibility.

Analogy to someone who grew up attending a church that seemed to actually care about what they taught and was really enjoying it...even though it was challenging. He explained that for years he was taught salvation was a free gift but now he realizes that he's expected to participate in church life.

1. Eat the Word of God so you can grow.

The original church lived like this:

Acts 2:42-47 ESV "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 and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

The above is a common scenario in churches: prayer, communion, fellowship/community, and Bible reading BUT these things don't attract large crowds, so we start adding elements that will attract people. There comes a point when so many additions are made that you can no longer call it a church. We need to keep these things the main thing in order to flourish. It isn't always fun but it makes us healthy and strong enough to withstand storms.

2 Timothy 4:3-4 KJV "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

People will get sick of hearing the Word of God and just want to hear TED-talks, comedians, and life stories. **Be careful** what church community and what teachers you commit yourself to be fed by.

- Are you here to grow? How do you grow?

-being in a commitment environment where you equipped and challenged to be transformed.

-Instead of asking the question: How was worship? Did you have fun?

Ask: What did you learn? How were you challenged? How did today encourage you?

- Do you want to be taught or entertained?

A primary purpose of gathering regularly as a Church is to be taught the Word of God, not to be entertained by the way it is presented. Churches are not perfect. We need to find a healthy place to grow (even with its imperfections) and contribute so that others can also grow.

Author A. W. Tozer wrote, "Our most pressing obligation today is to do all in our power to obtain a revival that will result in a reformed, revitalized, purified church. It is of far greater importance that we have better Christians than that we have more of them."

- Unpack the validity of this quote.

Aren't you thankful to be in a local church where people show up to really hear the word of God...to worship him with all of their hearts? Not ignoring the hard parts. Not self-help talks and forced handshakes twice during the service but a community? We are a family committed to Jesus to help in one another needs and forgive one another. To hold each other accountable so we can become more like Jesus!!!?

2. Jesus literally started fights over His church being a house of prayer.

Isaiah 56:7 NASB "Even those I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples."

Jesus passionately cleaned out the temple to keep it holy: John 2:13-17 NASB and Mark 11:15-17

Jesus passionately loves the community of believers...the Church...What good news that God is far more concerned than we are about how the church operates. We can peacefully trust him.

A primary purpose of gathering regularly as a Church is to each pray for one another. How can we do this if we rush out? If we don't ask or offer? If we don't show up when prayer is offered?

"You can tell how popular a church is by who comes on Sunday morning. But you can tell how popular Jesus is by who comes to the prayer meeting." - Jim Cymbala

- **Ouch. What does this quote say to you?**

3. Discover your gifts and contribute.

1 Peter 4:10-11 NASB "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Ephesians 4:11-13 NLT "Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. 12 Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. 13 This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ."

Remember the story about the difference of eating at a restaurant versus having a family dinner. Unless you are physically unable to, you would be expected to help contribute in some way at family dinner. It is selfish & for some sinful to be fed at this church and not contribute here. This is consumerism, and that is not the heart of Christ for His church family. Jesus is setting the ultimate example by serving and says do this to one another.

No team puts up with players who refuse to contribute unless they are currently injured or their name is actually not on the roster. No army puts up with soldiers who don't carry their own weight.

Some of us treat Gods house as if we were a 30 year old living rent free in the basement, with free wifi, and a fridge you can browse through whenever you get hungry.

- **If Scripture commands us to serve one another, isn't it a bit strange that we don't make that a bigger deal?**

There are some of you who are in a season where you physically cannot because you have major health problems, special needs children, are fostering kids, or you are working 80 hrs a week. There are seasons of receiving and balancing of time to spend on your family, career, school, outside ministry, but those are only to be seasons.

- Are we prioritizing the right things in those seasons? You may be choosing a lot of good things but are they the things you are called to do?

- Have other members of the church served you and how did it impact your faith?

4. To know if we are healthy.

Example: our kids have regular checkups to see if they are on the right growth trajectory. If they are not on track the doctor makes changes. Can you imagine if we did that at church?

- **How do you know if you are maturing in Christ?** You need an honest outside opinion.

A primary purpose of gathering regularly as a Church is to allow others to get in our business.

Matthew 18:15-20 NASB 15 "Now if your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that on the testimony of two or three witnesses every matter may be confirmed. 17 And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, he is to be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

Don't be offended if you are held accountable because every opportunity to repent is an opportunity to become more like Jesus. We are being shaped into his image failure by failure and glory by glory.

- **Share your experience with accountability. Have you recognized it as an opportunity to become more like Jesus? What would happen if you did?**

Judgment of those who are still not in the "family of God", who have not made a decision to surrender to Jesus is not what the Bible says. Biblical "judgment" of each other with the lens of accountability and the heart of helping each other become more like Jesus is accountability and what the church brings us. It is what keeps us healthy.

1 Corinthians 5:12-13 NASB "For what business of mine is it to judge outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? 13 But those who are outside, God judges..."

Remember though...Matthew 7:1-3 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 3 Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"

Like the tree grows, there are stages of growth. It could take you years to grow but there is growth happening. There is no such thing as a healthy tree that is not growing.

- **What did you hear today and what action are you to take in your own life?**

- **Do you need to be more committed? Do you need to take next steps as part of this family?**

- **Does someone need to hear this message? In a loving, non-judgmental way?**

Extra scripture and notes on using your gifts:

Roman 12:3-8 "For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness."

1 Corinthians 12:27-31 NIV

27 "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. 28 And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? 31 Now eagerly desire the greater gifts."

Ephesians 4:11-13 NLT

"Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. 12 Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. 13 This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ."

Summary of Romans 12:3-8:

Prophecy Service Teaching
Exhortation (comfort/encouragement) Generosity
Leadership
Acts of Mercy (helping those in need/afflicted)

Summary of 1 Corinthians 12:27-31 & Ephesians 4:11

Apostles ("sent ones"/missionaries)
Prophets (specific God given message for a generation/people) Pastor/Teachers (protect and equip the local church)
Miracles Healings Helps Administration Tongues

Summary of 1 Corinthians 12:8-11

Message of wisdom Message of knowledge Faith
Gifts of healing Miraculous powers Prophecy
Distinguishing/discerner between spirits Speaking in different kinds of tongues Interpretation of tongues

Leadership Structure of the Local Church

Pastors/Elders Deacons - Titus 1:5-9, 1 Peter 5:1-4, 1 Tim. 3:1-7, 8-13, 5:17-18,
Ephesians 4:11-13

"The primary spiritual leaders of a congregation are the elders, who are also called overseers or pastors in the New Testament. Elders teach or preach the Word and shepherd the souls of those under their care...The biblical role of deacons is to take care of the physical and logistical needs of the church..." - Dr. Benjamin Merkle

"What does a deacon do? He ministers in the name of Jesus among lonely, sick, elderly, orphaned, widowed, dying, poor, and deprived people." - Tim Keller

Think of Pastors as the team's personal trainers/coach, not massage therapist, and deacons as the team nurse/doctors.