

# Why Your Church Matters

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[ 0 : 00 ] And so it's great to be here. I had a chance to hang out with the guys last night. Sean and Ed and Todd just talking about eldership, talking about what does it mean to build a pastoral team.

Again, I've been in my church for 40 years. It started as a church plant. 40 years ago, I was recently married. About a few months after my wife and I got married, we were looking for a church.

We found this church that had only started the week before. So it had been planted, and then we came the second week at the church. And we thought, hey, this is a good place. Let's don't leave.

And so we never did. So my four kids were all raised in the church. Nine of my 17 grandkids are in the church now.

And so I just had a chance last month to baptize my oldest granddaughter. And so I've had this life in this church, and it's given me a passion for this text and this message.

[ 1 : 07 ] And so we're going to jump in. We're in Psalm 84. I'd like for you to stand as we read God's Word. And then we'll just exposit it in our time together.

Psalm 84. How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord.

My heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. Even the sparrow finds a home in the swallow and nest for herself, where she may lay her young at your altars, O Lord of hosts.

My King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever seeing your praise. Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

As they go through the valley of Baccah, they make it a place of springs, and the early rain covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength.

[ 2 : 24 ] Each one appears before God in Zion. O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer. Give ear, O God of Jacob.

Behold our shield, O God. Look on the face of your anointed. For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

For the Lord is a sun and a shield. The Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you. Lord, bless the preaching of your word.

This limited vessel that you have put before these people, I pray that you would minister through me and to me as we gather to hear and consider what you have to say to us this morning through your word.

[ 3 : 29 ] We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So I grew up in the Lutheran church.

Small church outside of Atlanta. And Lutheran church would be a church where there's pews and then there's a raised sort of area there called the chancel and then an altar at the end of that.

And so the altar against the wall. So it's kind of coming from the Catholic tradition. So there's the focus would be on the altar. And so as a kid looking at it, it was not an ornate church, but I did find a certain amount of wonder there.

The woodwork, the things, I just felt like there's no place like it. So I used to love and go and sit in church and just imagine things about the building.

And one of the things I began to notice is between the chancel and the altar, there was another platform you stepped up on and then there was some space to the altar and there was a rail around that space.

[ 4 : 39 ] And it mostly stayed closed, so there's a whole rail around it. The only time it ever was opened is for communion when the center would be moved aside and the pastor would be able to walk up to the altar for communion.

So sitting there, I'm seven, eight years old with an imagination, I started to think, I think the reason that rail is there is because on the other side of that rail is a hole that leads straight to hell.

And so to me, going to church was fascinating because I felt like, is somebody going to fall in today?

My idea was you needed that rail because if you didn't have that rail, you could just be walking around up there and actually tip over into hell and it's all over. And so the rail was there set up to keep us from falling into hell in the middle of church.

And then the pastor though, and he would stand up there and he would stand in front of this space when they opened it up and he would do this. And I kind of imagined him kind of like a hockey goalie, kind of protecting people.

[ 5 : 48 ] He was sort of a lifeguard, right? He just kind of, he was there to make sure, he was ready to move in case anybody accidentally walked up and started to fall in. He would grab him and send him back.

So the role of the pastor was primarily to physically keep people from falling into hell. So it was a place of wonder for me. And I love going and speculating about what it might be like to fall into hell.

And so one day I got the courage up after a service to go up to look down into that hole.

And I walked up and I was, you know, of course you're not supposed to be up there for your kid, but I got up there and I'm walking up and I go up and I peer over this rail and all I see is just parquet floor.

You know, and I have to admit I was a bit disappointed. And actually, I won't say that was the reason I was turned off from church. But there was something in me that said this really isn't that special a place.

[ 6 : 55 ] It's just a building. It's just a place people go. And I was a jaded seven-year-old or eight-year-old when it came to church.

It just became where my parents took me until I got old enough not to go. My goal today is to stir in your hearts a love for the church, which is awkward because you're sitting in church already.

So I'm kind of preaching literally to the choir. But I can think we can have experiences like I had as a kid where we see that the church isn't all we thought it would be when we came or when we started going to church.

My church, where I've been for 40 years and where I raised my family, is not a place of continual wonder. I'm always discovering parquet floor where I thought wonder should be.

We can be pretty mundane. It can feel like a place of problems.

[ 8 : 02 ] Church promises amazing things but sometimes delivers parquet floors. Psalm 84 is written about an Old Testament worshiper anticipating amazing things on the way, really, to church.

But that's not without reason. When people gathered at the temple, which is the reference of this text, that's where he's headed, God met with them.

It wasn't just the place of God. It wasn't just representative God. It was the presence of God that they sought. We who live on this side of the resurrection who are partakers of the new covenant, who have the presence of God within us through the indwelling Holy Spirit, and who have had our sins permanently atoned for by the blood of Jesus Christ, we don't take literal journeys to a literal temple.

We ourselves are the temple when we gather together. The Apostle Peter makes this point. 1 Peter 2, he says, As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men in the sight of God, chosen and precious.

You yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

[ 9 : 30 ] Peter is stirring in New Testament believers the heartbeat of Psalm 84. We should anticipate amazing things when we gather as God's spiritual house.

Our spiritual journey in Christ is not just a private thing. And friends, you are probably aware everybody seems to be on some spiritual journey these days.

And many of those people profess the name of Christ, but they primarily view their relationship with Christ as an individual thing, as an internal thing, as a quiet, reverential thing, or as a pilgrimage of sorts, but it's private pilgrimage.

The Bible doesn't teach us that. The New Testament teaches us, Peter teaches us, that we all are the spiritual house where personal spiritual journeys find meaning.

My basic point is simply this. Your spiritual journey needs the church. And I have three points coming out of that from the text.

[ 10 : 46 ] There's no better place to call home than the church. I'm basically making the argument. There's no better place to call home than the church. Number two, there's no better place to make a difference than the church.

And number three, there's no better place to prepare for eternity than the church. So our first point, there's no better place to call home than the church.

Let's go back to verse 1 through verse 4. Verse 4.

Now to get this psalm, you need to put yourself in the mindset of an Israelite of old, living out in some village in the countryside.

There's no church, as we know it. There's no Bible study. There's no worship service. The things that build your faith happen somewhere else. In Jerusalem, more specifically, at the temple of Jerusalem.

[ 12 : 19 ] If we transport this to current thinking, imagine being in a small town in the middle of New Hampshire. You want to be a good Christian, but you don't have any functional access to God in your town.

No way to offer prayers. No way to hear the Word. God isn't going to meet you there. You have to go to Boston. That's where God meets with people.

You can be a good Jew, a good follower in your village, but you can only meet with God in Jerusalem. So you plan and you save and you prepare for a pilgrimage to the temple.

It's at the temple where you get access to God. It's at the temple where you receive the peace of God. It's at the temple where you can experience God Himself. It's at God's house where you feel truly at home.

So the psalmist begins with his longing. How lovely is your dwelling place. My soul longs, yes, faints, for the courts of the Lord.

[ 13 : 32 ] This is serious longing. The King James Version says, my heart and flesh cry out. One commentator translates it, my whole being craved, yes, exhausted itself for Yahweh's courtyards.

What is he craving? The temple? Stone building? No, he loves the temple, but he loves it because it's the dwelling place of the living God.

It's the temple where God promises to meet with people, with poor, guilty sinners, to extend His mercy and awaken joy in them. That's what the pilgrim longs for.

Not a good seat at the show, not an experience to add to his Instagram, not to fulfill a religious responsibility. We don't know much about the psalmist. He's a son of Korah, which means his life was devoted to worship, but he's in a place where apparently he can't fill out what he believes is his primary purpose.

He needs to go to Jerusalem, to the temple. What we do know is that the one thing he most wanted was to meet with God and he had to find his way to God to do that.

[ 14 : 49 ] But friends, we are so different. The God we meet has come to us, has left Boston, and come to New Hampshire, has sought us out.

In Christ, God ended the temple worship system forever. He broke out from the confines of temple to the world in Jesus.

John says this in the first chapter of his gospel, the word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. And you probably know that word dwelt is a corresponding Greek word for the same Hebrew concept that's in verse 1 of this song.

How lovely is your dwelling place. Literally, he templed, he tabernacled with us.

And because of the Holy Spirit, the tabernacle of God now dwells with us and in us as the people of God. We are the temple of God because he dwells within us.

[ 16 : 02 ] When we gather together, we set up in essentially the tent of God wherever we are. I had a chance to be Friday night with one of the small groups here.

And, you know, they're just eating dinner and chatting and talking, but you're aware in that moment that up and down this street, people are meeting and gathering and talking. But the temple of God is here because the people are gathered in Jesus' name.

Wherever you meet, that's why you want to be in your CGs because it's a chance in the middle of the week to express that tabernacle experience with one another.

God's presence is God's presence. We've seen that. But there's something else as well. Verse 3 helps us see why we need this dwelling place of God.

You see, the dwelling place of God isn't just a great place. It's also the safe place for us.

[ 17 : 13 ] It's the place of safety. Look at verse 3. Even the sparrow finds a home and the swallow a nest for herself where she may lay her young at your altars, O Lord of hosts.

So small birds make their nests near the altar. What does that mean? We've got to call the exterminator. We've got to fire the custodian.

We've got to turn it into a bird sanctuary. What does that mean? No, the metaphor here is one of safety and protection. Remember Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount.

Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor gather in barns and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

Now we have to understand this verse in the context of the world around the Jews. It's good to keep in mind the altars of other religions during the psalmist's time.

[ 18 : 22 ] These were altars where children were sacrificed to appease the anger of tribal gods. They're altars where slaves were forced to perform abominable acts to satisfy the lusts of God.

yet the place where the Lord of hosts dwells even the holy altar that no one can approach out of fear of death without atonement for their sin is a nesting place for the small and the weak.

If the temple can be a home for pigeons is what the point of that that it can be a home for pilgrims as well. If the church can be a home for pigeons it can be a home for pilgrims as well.

In college I was a Marxist. I was an atheist Marxist. That was my degree. That's what I studied. And about two and a half months before I graduated I was radically unexpectedly converted to Christ.

And this was down in North Carolina where I went to college. And my first experience going to a church as a new believer was at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

[ 19 : 53 ] A church that had been started and was run by army paratrooper rangers. It was just full of military.

Literally a week before I had been talking about I had been railing on America as a military state. The next week I find myself surrounded by military in a church.

And at that point my appearance hadn't changed all that much. I did not look like I fit in. I clearly didn't fit in. I didn't know how to relate. These people around me they're all jarheadish.

and they were all very fit which is a big thing. And they just seemed it was just intimidating to me.

And then we started to sing and I realized they're singing with a passion. They're weeping as they're singing. And I started to realize I'm nothing like these guys.

[ 21 : 03 ] But I think I fit more here than I do anywhere else I've ever been. I graduated went back home to Atlanta looked for a church found one out east of Atlanta out in the sticks and it was a rural church.

It was good sort of a charismatic Baptist split. I was neither charismatic or Baptist at the time. But I went and I just found this is a crazy place.

None of these people I have been studying marks for the last three years. None of these people have ever gone to college. I don't know what to say to them. I don't know how to relate to them.

When they would tithe they would literally have a table up front and people would put vegetables there. First fruits were really the first fruits of their gardens. And I don't have anything.

I'm not like any of these people here. But yet again I had this experience. I'm nothing like anybody here. But this feels more like home than any place else I go.

[ 22 : 14 ] We are in a culture that insists that my individuality is affirmed in its entirety the way I want it affirmed.

And for us to have relationship to us to be in a space together there must be an affirmation of my individuality and how I want to express it.

Acceptance is based on total affirmation. Relationship requires total affirmation. That's not the church. You may come from very different backgrounds.

very different places in the country. Maybe different places outside of the country. My church is made up of people who have professional degrees and people who have never finished high school.

And people who have had long term drug habits and people who are in law enforcement. It's just a variety. People who are 90 years old.

[ 23 : 22 ] People who are 10 years old. Five years old. And it's not even that diverse a place. We probably have maybe 20 or 25 different ethnicities in the church.

But it's not that diverse. But what draws us together is not the things we share from the world. When we come together we don't build our acceptance on affirmation of our individualism.

We build it on a shared need for mercy and grace at the throne of God. That's what binds us all together. We are needy people. The one thing you and I have in common is our need.

And that we look to the one who can fill it. And out of that we have fellowship with one another. But it's not just a home.

The church is not just a home. Point two, there's no better place to make a difference than the church. Verse five, blessed are those whose strength is in you.

[ 24 : 30 ] I'm just going to get a quick water here. Whose strength is in you. And whose heart are the highways to Zion.

As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs. The early rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength. Each one appearing before God in Zion.

Verses five through seven describe the processional to the temple. This is to be understood both as a physical journey, traveling, but also an inner journey.

Note verse five, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. Long before the psalmist embarks on the physical journey to this temple, his heart has mapped out the way.

Can you see the expectancy? This is not a cold heart expecting church to change it. This is a heart prepared. This is a person who is longing for something he cannot get in the other way and so he's going.

[ 25 : 38 ] He's got a heart set on pilgrimage as the New International Version translates it. Where's your heart these days? Do you have a heart indifferent to God during the week?

Is your heart distracted? I don't know if you're like me, but my heart, apart from the gathering of the saints, is incredibly distracted. I have seven different teams I need to follow as a fan.

I've got to have seven different fandom, and I've got hats for them all. And it just depends on the season, which hat I wear. But I have to devote myself to following these seven teams in order to be a faithful fan.

I love music. I have so many interests in my life. I love history. I'm reading and researching and studying and writing on history.

These are all distractions for me. I think they are a godly expression of who I am, but I can be distracted.

[ 26 : 46 ] Church can be something I'm trying to fit in. You might be distracted with other things. Or you might be someone who sort of lives and has that life where you kind of live down and you hope that the service on Sunday or some other activity will keep things going for you.

You depend on the gathering for your heart desire before the Lord. Do you struggle with those things? Certainly I do. What the psalmist is showing us is that our heart should be mapping the highway to Zion every day.

Do you map the highway to Zion every day in your heart? We learn in verse 6 that the journey isn't just a cakewalk. This valley of Bacca is not a place where you want to camp.

In the Hebrew it can be translated valley of weeping or the valley of tears. It isn't so much a literal place as it is an unavoidable experience.

The spiritual journey will take you through desolate places. Right now there are names and faces of people in my congregation and my fellowship world who are in the valley of Bacca.

[ 28 : 04 ] Some facing death. Some I deal a lot with the older saints. Some realizing they've gotten to a place and because of the decisions they've made they don't have enough income to make it and retire.

They have to keep working longer than they really should. Some whose families have fractured. Who can't even speak to their children.

People who are at odds with one of their marriages that are struggling and are in strife. people who are struggling. There was the prophetic words today. I really appreciated that these inward things we hide and protect rather than bring into the light and receive healing for.

People whose life experiences are dry and brittle and barren. Their souls are parched and the heat of trial has beaten them down.

I wish one of the challenges of being a pastor is you're exposed to so much human suffering but you can't rescue anyone from it.

[ 29 : 19 ] You walk alongside people in sadness and in tragedy and in suffering and sometimes walk them right into eternity with no answers to what they were dealing with.

I wish these people could take the bypass could take 495 around the valley.

I wish we could airlift them out but we can't. no spiritual journey goes around the valley of tears.

But pilgrims are never left to their own resources in the valley. Look at verses 6 and 7. As they go through the valley of Baccah they make it a place of springs.

The early rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength. Each one appears before God in Zion. We have the promises in our valley of God's sustaining grace.

[ 30 : 35 ] The early rain, the soaking rain that our souls need because they're dry. This is a promise of God's blessing and provision when and where you need it in the dry places on your pilgrim journey.

You need watering in the dryness of your soul. Not only that, as we as God's pilgrims, we won't fall short of the goal.

There's a promise here as well. Every pilgrim, each will appear before the God of Zion. We begin the journey in need, we travel through trial, but we are sustained for the journey along the way and we're guaranteed to make it to the end.

That's the promise. each one appears before the God in Zion. How?

Because we have the Lord of hosts, literally the God of divine armies who clears the path and makes sure nothing's going to get in the way of us completing the journey.

[ 31 : 47 ] But there's something you might not expect too, and this is really interesting. In verse 6, the psalmist says, as they go through the valley of Bacchah, they make it a place of springs.

In other words, not only does God meet them in the valley, but God meets other people because of them as they journey through the valley of tears.

One commentator says it like this, the context indicates that the valley is arid, but transformed by the presence of the joyful pilgrims. The rains follow the pilgrim journey.

Where the pilgrims go, the rain will come. When pilgrim Christians gather, pilgrim Christians make a difference.

So do you realize that you're not just saved to become a good church goer. You're not just saved to come into this community where it feels safe and where you find acceptance and where you can build relationships and you can order your life around the things of God.

[ 32 : 53 ] Jesus didn't come to earth to make church goers. He came to redeem sinners and turn them into true worshipers and then to send them out into a dry and broken world as witnesses!

And missionaries, yes, and as church planners. I believe at some point there will be people sent out from this church as church planners.

We're planning a church in September, about 35-40 minutes from where our church is, and some of the people who are going on that church plant are people who were in my community group back in 1989.

They've been in the church for almost as long as I have, and now they're going to start a church plant. I'm sending out some of my oldest and dearest friends to help start this church because they believe that the church is not simply the place of gathering, it's the place of mission.

It's the place of impact. Brothers and sisters, the world is a valley of tears. People hold up well at times.

[ 34 : 08 ] they distract themselves where they can. They try to make things better where possible, but you and I, we have the difference maker.

We are not the difference makers. The pilgrims in the valley are not the rain, but because they are there, God brings the rain.

He is the difference maker. It's not our morality that makes a difference. It's not our politics that makes a difference.

It isn't our religion that makes a difference. It's God with us on the journey. That's the thing the world truly needs, and that's who people encounter when they encounter the church.

This community around you needs you here. Wherever you meet in this community, community. And I do pray and hope that there will be a permanent location for you.

[ 35 : 10 ] I know how hard it is in an urban area to find a building that you can afford and occupy. And it might be part of your mission that at least for a while you're in the community but not visible in your own building.

But it doesn't mean you don't have presence. It doesn't mean that the very fact that you're here is God's blessing on this community. God puts you here in this dry and weary land because He intends to reach people through you.

He intends to rain mercy and grace on this community because you're here. Addicts don't just need recovery.

They need the company that are redeemed. The sexually broken and confused don't need moral persuasion. They need compelling pictures of men and women living with joy in God's design for singleness and marriage.

I as a Marxist atheist did not need a different philosophy. I needed a Savior. The lost don't need maps.

[ 36 : 18 ] They need guides. The world doesn't need the weight of more religion. The world needs the water of life pooling up in dry places because the people of God go where there is no life.

Brothers and sisters, whatever you are, be the church. Make a difference. And let's see the third point.

There's no better place to prepare for eternity than the church. Verse 8, O Lord, God of hosts, hear my prayer, give ear, O God of Jacob. Behold our shield, O God, look on the face of your anointed, for a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.

I'd rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the Lord, God is a sun and shield. The Lord bestows favor and honor.

No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you. Verses 8 to 10 are the point of the journey.

[ 37 : 29 ] To worship God. The reason I'm going is to hear from God, to engage with God, to know God, to worship God. The main reason the pilgrim leaves everything and makes the journey is to worship God, the God that he knows.

It's not about him, it's about God. There's simply no place he'd rather be. You can see that in his declaration in verse 10. A day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.

I'd rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. This isn't about humility. Well, you know what? I don't need to have a big role here in the church. I can just serve in various ways.

I don't need to be noticed. It's not about that. This is about location. This is about where I orient. I'll sacrifice all this world gives to me to be close with God.

As Charles Spurgeon commented, even a glimpse of the love of God is better than ages spent in the pleasure of sin. I found that out in 1981.

[ 38 : 37 ] You in various ways have found that out through your lives. If you're here today and you've not tasted and seen that the Lord is good, once you do, it will change your view of everything in your life.

life. Why? Because life is more than this world has to offer. And life is beyond what this world contains.

Being in God's house is preparation for life in the eternal kingdom. We're going to take communion at the end of this service. And the reason we take communion is in some sense not only to recognize what has been done but is a foretaste of a meal that is to come.

If we're part of any church for any length of time we'll find ourselves wondering a lot of things. Is this the best fit for me? Do I like it here? Am I going to have to sacrifice something in my life to stay here?

Am I going to have to change my plans for my future in order to be a part of what's going on here? Is there something better? Some place with less problems? Some place with better ministry?

[ 39 : 53 ] Is the church going in the direction I want to go? Listen I get it. You don't think pastors think about that when it comes to church? And we run them and we ask who's in charge here?

What is going on? How did the church get this way? We have questions about church as well. It's why many ministers I think the average lifespan of a minister career is about seven or eight years.

men lose sight in ministry of what they're there for. But when we wrestle with those questions we cannot treat the church like anything else we belong to.

The church is not something we attend. Friends the church is who we are. as we were singing today I just had this burden I felt this from the Lord and this isn't directed anybody or is concerned but I know that being in this location you've come here many of you come here for school or for a job and that you have a path that's somewhat uncertain about what happens after this and you're committed to this church and you're faithful to this church but you're in some sense thinking well okay but where's my career going to take me where's my vision what am I doing do I go back home what happens if I have kids and how hard is it to live in an urban environment that's so expensive all those things I get it and I don't expect most people to be like me and stay in the same church for 40 years that took amount of various places along the way

I had to make choices and they were not choices that were easily made but my burden is this and I think I can speak for Sean and the other guys as a pastor I'm not nearly so concerned about people staying in my church people will leave my church people have left my church people have disagreed with me or with our church and have left on principal reasons people have gotten upset with something and have left on personal reasons my concern is not that people have to all stay in the same church my concern is so many people leave a church without knowing where they're going to go and I'll just tell you from 40 years of experience and 30 something years as a pastor when people just leave a church with no idea of where they're going to go they never improve spiritually they wander together because we're not redeemed to be looking around for the next church or to leave churches we're unhappy with we're redeemed to be part of a community to work with one another

[ 43 : 04 ] God may lead you somewhere else if God is leading you somewhere else because of your profession or your career there's nothing there's no sin in that God will do that God brought you here because of those decisions if Sean said unless you came here to be involved in this church I don't want you here this would be an empty room maybe seven or eight people who came just for this church no but so we recognize as pastors people will come to our churches because God brought them to an area and we're grateful for that in the same way we want to be releasing to people who feel called to somewhere else my appeal is this don't be someone who's committed to just your church or not be a person of the church be someone who says wherever I go I am going to commit to God's people I'm not going anywhere in my life where I don't know I'll find a church if you go somewhere take a job go somewhere just relocate to another area and you don't know where you're going in terms of a fellowship then I think you've got it backwards search for that church is there a church for me there doesn't have to be a sovereign grace church is there a church that

I can get involved with are there people there are there pastors who could care for me when people do that even if they leave unhappy when someone comes to me and says I help you go look you might find there's a great church for you and I can bless you to go there you may find in looking there really isn't something better and I don't want you to feel like you burned your bridges here the nature of the believer is an acknowledgement that wherever I go I meant to be part of the church and I make that a priority that's my burden for you that you would do that you see according to the Bible the church is the only thing on this earth that will matter in heaven read

Revelation 22 we are the ones who are robed in righteousness the church we have the right to the tree of life the church and we can enter into the city of God we the church the dwelling place of God brothers and sisters if Jesus isn't alive and reigning in glory for the good of his church then what you're doing here is a waste of your time if there isn't anything beyond this existence we have on this planet then what you're doing here is a waste of time if we're just carbon and chemicals or we're just highly developed mammals then what we're doing here is a waste of time but if the Bible is true and this world is not all there is and we are created in the image of God and know him to find joy in him and if there's a place prepared for us where we will be with Jesus for eternity then what you're doing here today has monumental value it is weekly daily preparation for eternity it's what we do as the people of

God together that prepares us for eternity makes a difference in this world and gives forgiven sinners a home close the quote from J.

Gresham Machen is there no refuge from strife is there no place of refreshing where a man can prepare for the battle of life is there no!

[ 46 : 53 ] place where two or three can gather in Jesus name to forget for the moment all those things that divide nation from nation and race from race to forget the puzzling problems of industrial strife to unite in overflowing gratitude at the foot of the cross if there be such a place then that is the house of God and the gate of heaven and from under that threshold of that house will go forth a river that will revive a weary world what you are doing here matters for eternity how lovely is your dwelling place oh lord almighty let's pray heavenly father lord i do pray over this church god that you would establish it here lord the mission of this church knows that it's meant to be part of a community where many people are coming here for studies and they come here thinking this is a temporary stay and for many of it is but lord there's no reason why this church can't be used to prepare disciples to be missionaries elsewhere there's no reason why this church can't be a refuge for the broken the outwardly successful but the inwardly broken people where this church can't be a place where politics are left at the door where ideologies are not trivialized but are not accentuated in identity where men and women can relate to one another with honor and respect and build something the world doesn't fully grasp but needs to see lord where the gospel goes forth not just from the pulpit but from our lives our lives gathered together and our lives expressed as we encourage one another in mission and evangelism lord that there would be people who come here because they met somebody from this church and when they come they say well it wasn't you it wasn't something special about you it's this is what the people of god are like this is amazing i i to to to really settle in community and and do the work you called us to do so i pray for that oh god i pray for uh this coming year lord for for for students coming in people coming in because of the schools because of the industries here lord i pray that you would draw them in to this church!

there are! good!! in this area lord i pray that this church would never see itself as distinctly superior but would just simply be a one of a number of gospel preaching churches in an area where there are not nearly enough gospel preaching churches i pray that you would you would use this church mightily and that you would bless it oh god in its mission and i ask this in Jesus name amen!

amen