

January 14, 2018

## “Deeper – A Journey to Spiritual Maturity”

“Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.” 1 Peter 2:2

### “Gather – The Priority of Meeting Together”

“And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.” Hebrews 10:25 NLT

#### A. What is the path to spiritual maturity?

1. Spiritual maturity is developed by obediently following God’s Word.
2. Spiritual maturity is developed by realizing that all that God calls us to do is for our good.
3. Spiritual maturity is developed by putting into practice the Word of God on a regular basis.
4. Spiritual maturity is developed as we gather in a community of believers!

“For he holds the whole body together with its joints and ligaments, and it grows as God nourishes it.” Colossians 2:19b

But...

*The American church is steadily declining.*

In a 2002 survey of 1,159 U.S. churches, Rainer’s research team found that only 6 percent of the churches were growing—he defines growth as not only increasing in attendance, but also increasing at a pace faster than its community’s population growth rate. ‘Stated inversely, 94 percent of our churches are losing ground in the communities they serve,’ he says.”

*Less than 20 percent of Americans regularly attend church – half of what the pollsters report.*

*Established churches (40-190 years old) are declining.*

“So what is the future of the American church? Does declining attendance mean declining influence? If present trends continue, the percentage of the population that attends church in 2050 is estimated to be at almost half of 1990’s attendance—a drop from 20.4 percent to 11.7 percent. Olson’s projections for the years leading up to 2050 are less than encouraging. He estimates a drop to 16.6 percent in 2010, and 15.4 percent in 2020.”

*Average attender meets about 1.6 times a month.*

*And thus the influence on our culture continues to be lost....*

#### B. The intent of gathering as a church...

1. Gathering with fellow believers helps me to become less “me- focused”.

*It starts on a specific time that is not always my choice.*

*It doesn’t ask me for my song preferences or service options.*

*It doesn’t meet at my most convenient times as there are other things I need to do.*

*It isn’t just open to my circle of friends. I don’t know all these people and don’t even know if I like all these people.*

*And the list goes on....*

2. Gathering with fellow believers helps me become more of a contributor rather than a consumer.
3. Gathering with fellow believers helps me to find my place as part of the body.
4. Gathering with fellow believers helps me to exercise my spiritual gifts.

“The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ.” 1 Corinthians 12:12

*“We weren’t created to be independent, autonomous, or self-sufficient. We were made to live in a humble, worshipful, and loving dependency upon God and in a loving and humble interdependency with others. Our lives were designed to be community projects. Yet, the foolishness of sin tells us that we have all that we need within ourselves. So we settle for relationships that never go beneath the casual. We defend ourselves when the people around us point out a weakness or a wrong. We hold our struggles within, not taking advantage of the resources God has given us.” Paul Tipp in Whiter Than Snow. (p.147)*

#### C. The blessing of gathering with others...

1. God designed, from the beginning, for us to be in community.
2. God has always had a plan for His followers as they met together.
3. God uses the community to challenge us to grow in our journey.
4. God uses the community to help us be accountable.
5. God uses the community to develop teamwork.
6. God uses the community to encourage one another in our journey.
7. God uses the community to impact our culture.

“Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ’s body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.” Romans 12:4-5

#### D. The priority of gathering as a church...

1. Our faith is fueled by hearing God’s Word being shared.  
“So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ.” Romans 10:17
2. Our faith is strengthened by personal connection.

“Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.” Ephesians 4:15-16

3. Our faith is built together as we are led in corporate discipleship.

“Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. 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.” Ephesians 4:11-13

4. Our faith is challenged to greater levels as there is strength in numbers.

“I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.” Matthew 18:19-20

#### E. My mission of gathering as a church...

1. I need to be consistent in my church attendance.

“I will praise you every day; yes, I will praise you forever.” Psalm 145:2

2. I need to anticipate God to do something significant as we gather.

“Come close to God, and God will come close to you.” James 4:8a

3. I need to be intentional about my gathering with other believers...“I am here to meet God!”

“Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and praise his name.” Psalm 100:4

4. I need to be focused and not allow myself to be distracted to rob my worship.

“For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.” 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

5. I need to be engaged in worship...spirit, soul, and body...in spite of how I feel.

“Praise the LORD! I will thank the LORD with all my heart as I meet with his godly people.” Psalm 111:1

6. I need to reach out to those around me as God wants to use me in making a difference in someone else’s life.

“This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. <sup>26</sup>If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.” 1 Corinthians 12:25-26

7. I need to practice my spiritual gifts in the body.

“All of you together are Christ’s body, and each of you is a part of it.” 1 Corinthians 12:27