

- We believe in God the Father, Almighty Maker of the heavens and the earth
 - And in Jesus Christ His Son, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
 - He was born of the Virgin Mary, He suffered under Pontius Pilate
 - He was crucified and dead and buried
 - He descended to the depths of hell, And then He rose again
 - He ascended to the highest heavens and is seated at the right hand of God
 - He will come again to judge the living and to judge the dead
 - We believe in the Holy Spirit
 - **We believe in the Holy Christian Church**
 - **We believe in the communion of saints**
 - We believe in the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection.
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- Why are you part of a church? Why do you attend services? Why do you serve? Why are you involved?
 - The church has been a part of my experience as long as I can remember. I have been an integral part of 9 churches in my life. I have learned bible verses and bible stories. I learned how to worship and maybe how not to worship.
 - I have seen many different expressions of church. I have taught Sunday School, led children, led youth and been a part of a variety of leadership teams. I have done community work, been a part of town events and gone on missions trips. I have sung in choirs and been in drama's. I have given many \$ to the church as well as helped paint, landscape and fix church buildings. I have counseled and been counseled. I have been deeply hurt and hurt others. I have encountered conflict and problems as well as joyful situations. I have been frustrated, angry, happy, worried, depressed, joyful, satisfied and sometimes wanted to just disconnect altogether. It's honestly been a lot of work.
 - What do I believe about the church. Why do I invest in the church? Why do I not spend my time on Sunday's doing my own thing? Why did I change careers to work full time with the church?
 - Why do I stay when some of my biggest hurts and pains happened in the church?
 - **THE LOCAL CHURCH IS THE HOPE OF THE WORLD.** Including me!
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- The church was not created by nor is it sustained by men.
 - Let me take you to the first time that the church is mentioned in the bible.
 - The religious leaders were pushing Jesus. They were threatened and offended by him. They questioned, insulted and even demanded that he prove himself.
 - Right on the heels of one of these encounters, Jesus left the crowds with his disciples, and as they are walking along, Jesus asked a question.
- Matthew 16:13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"*
- We've been traveling together for a while. You hear whispers. You are among the crowd to hear what they won't say to me. I know what the religious people say, but what about the crowds?
- 14 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."*
- These are all good answers. They give some credit and gravitas to who Jesus might be. They knew he was special, but all their answers fell short. They didn't reach high enough.
- 15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"*
- This is a watershed moment. I have been pouring my life into you. You have watched me. You have participated with me. So what do you think?

16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

- It's where the disciples, at least Peter, begins to see and believe in Jesus for who he was.
- He is the one brave enough to voice something that would be considered blasphemy to the establishment.
- The significance of the answer is not lost on Jesus. It represents a leap forward in their understanding of him. Jesus' reply is big and wide and breathtaking.

17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven."

- God speaking and you are listening. He is revealing me to you. That is amazing news.
- He doesn't stop there.

18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

- Jesus announces his intentions. He describes something that is going to be eternal and amazing.
- **THE LOCAL CHURCH IS THE HOPE OF THE WORLD.**
- For the remainder of this time I wanted to share with you why I love the church.
- Why, despite all that sometimes happens, I cannot walk away from it.

I. The church belongs to Jesus and is loved by him.

- Jesus called it "my church."
- A picture that used over and over to help describe this is one of a bride and groom. The church is called Christ's bride.

Ephesians 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body . . . 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." 32 This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church.

- The church is God's bride, whom He loves.
- To God, the church is beautiful. He died for her. He is passionate about her.
- People say all the time: "I don't need the church. It's not for me. I prefer just being with God on my own. We talk while I'm fishing. God and me are tight without the church. It's just boring and filled with people I can't stand."
- "God, I love you but I want nothing to do with your bride." Hmmmm . . .
- I don't have the option of ignoring the church. I am not to hold it in contempt. If Jesus loves the church, then I should too – warts and all.

Revelation 19:7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.) 9 Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" And he added, "These are the true words of God."

- Some day, there is going to be an amazing feast, where the church as Christ's bride sits down with the groom – Jesus – to celebrate in a way that will take the best wedding you have even been to or been a part of and put it to shame.

II. It's where I get to practice and experience true community.

- Jesus uses an interesting word that we translate church: Ekklesia – it simply means “called out ones”
- It was not a religious term at all. It was a term used to describe a group of people called together for a purpose.
- It is a group of people called out by him that belongs to him.
- Another way to describe the church is Christ's body.

1 Corinthians 12:27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Romans 12:4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Colossians 1:17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church.

- The church is the place where we experience community.
- Over and over I hear stories of people who came into be a part of a church. They got connected. They began to hang out with others. They began to experience a level of care and belonging that they had never had anywhere else.
- There were people who accepted them the way they were. Who helped them out when they needed it. Who prayed for each other. Who challenged them while loving them. I've seen the joy and power from this.
- Sadly, I've seen people who got discouraged or hurt. They withdrew from relationships. They stopped and slowed down their connections. They quit serving. It damaged them.
- The church is where people of every type and ability and intelligence and economic status and race and gender can learn unity in diversity because we have the same Savior, Jesus.

Ephesians 5:29 After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church – 30 for we are members of his body.

- It's not simply the place where I can experience amazing community, it is where I get to practice it.

- The church is where we learn to love one another.

Ephesians 4:25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

- We are a church where people can come as they are. In doing so, we rub elbows with people who are different than us, who are also broken, and who are on this journey with me.
- God's Kingdom will come in its fullness one day. Until then, we have a bunch of broken people collaborating with God to express His will on earth.
- We worship imperfectly. We teach the truth as best we can. We love in our own disfigured way. We lead with a limp. We pray that God's Kingdom will come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And we practice. We try to imitate Jesus as He, the Master Sculptor, chips away at our rough edges, preparing us for what is to come.
- As we imitate Jesus, we become more like Him. When I embrace how to live a life of no secrets, to learn the humility to ask for forgiveness, to extend forgiveness when I've been wronged, to try new things and fail.
- The church is where I can do this in community. I love this about the church.

III. It's how Jesus revolutionizes my life.

- Jesus said, “I will build my church.”
- Jesus is at work. Peter himself described the church this way:

1 Peter 2:5 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.

- God uses the church – the rest of these “called out” people to change my life.
- The local church is not a finished product. It is more like a lab environment. It’s where we practice for the new heaven and new earth.
- As we imitate Jesus, and learn to treasure, love and follow him, we become more like Him.
- In that lab we experience unity and conflict. We experience grief and joy. We experience love and loss. At every one of these moments, Jesus is working on our character and our soul.
- The church is God’s workshop to mold us into the image of His Son. That is why I am committed to the church in good times and bad. God is making us into His new creation through the tension, the pain, and the triumphs of life in community.
- Discipleship does not happen in a week, a year, or a season. It happens over a lifetime. As we walk with God from our seeking phase to maturity, He grows us. The pressures of a student are different from the exhaustion of a young parent or the loss of a senior. God meets us and molds us in a church context in each of these seasons. His Spirit moves remarkably well at all ages and stages to apply His power to differing situations.
- Moreover, we need each other. Our older warriors need the enthusiasm of youth. Fatherless kids need men to look up to. Our middle-aged leaders need the wisdom of our sages. I am committed to the church because we are all better when we lead across the spectrum of ages.
- The church finds people broken by our sin-scarred world, invites Jesus to do His revolutionary work, and joins Him in the process of miraculous transformation. I am committed to the church because Jesus changes people there.
- God is not about turning bad little boys and girls into good little boys and girls. He is about taking dead things and making them alive. In the wake of this new life, anything is possible.
- I grow because of you guys. I don’t get that kind of growth anywhere else. Sometimes I love it. Sometimes I hate it. But I am always thankful. There is one more reason I love the church:

IV. I get to be part of the greatest challenge & cause in history.

- Listen to Jesus’ words.
18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.
- We, God’s called out ones, will prevail against every plot, strategy, or strength of Satan and his angels.
- God has chosen the church to reach this entire planet for him. To see people saved from darkness. To spread the good news of forgiveness, freedom and transformation in Jesus.
- The church is God’s plan A to reach a lost world. There is no plan B.
- When Jesus mobilized His disciples to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth, he invited them to do it as a community, which within months had multiplied to 5,000+ people. When the church sent out Paul and Barnabas to reach the Mediterranean basin they went from city to city planting churches.
- When you look around the world at peoples who have been reached with the gospel, the common factor is the church – the local church. Like Hope Chapel. We are God’s Plan A.
- The world is dying and we, the church, are the world’s best sending platform.
- Our church is filled with mothers, fathers, business owners, workers, neighborhood leaders, musicians, executives, athletes and students. God has put us in jobs, neighborhoods, clubs, teams, bands and groups with people that need Jesus.

- Not only that, we get to support, through our resources and by even being willing to send our best and brightest, to take good news to every corner of this world.
- God invites me to charge straight into the fight. To face down the gates of hell. To make a difference that will not just last for a year or 5 or 10, but for all time. I want a part of that. I don't want to sit on the sidelines.
- God calls ordinary, sloppy, broken misfits and reclaims them to bring the best news in the world to the darkest corners of the earth.
- I love the church because it is the very place that mobilizes people, money, and ideas to take the best news ever to those who have the most need.
- **THE LOCAL CHURCH IS THE HOPE OF THE WORLD.**
- When we say, "We believe in the Holy Christian church, we believe in the communion of saints" what we are saying is that we believe that the church is Christ's. It belongs to him.
- It is the place to experience and practice community, to allow Jesus to revolutionize our lives and so participate in God's plan for this world. It will be victorious and I get to experience it with you guys.
- Many years ago the C&MA send missionaries to the Philippines. They founded some local schools to train pastors for local churches.
- One pastor went to a village that had never heard and preached for 7 days. At the end, only 4 men had embraced Jesus.
- These 4 men met every week every week for worship under a mango tree, being mocked and humiliated by their wives, families, neighbors and friends.
- First man would prayer the prayer they remembered the pastor praying, the second would lead in the song the pastor taught them to sing, the third would preach the sermon they remembered the pastor preaching, the fourth would pray the closing prayer they heard the pastor pray.
- They did this every week, just rotating men. They met this way for 4 years.
- Then began to pray that God would reach their village. An epidemic started. People were sick and dying, but not the families of these 4 men. Village began to come and ask them to pray, and they did in Jesus name and people began to be healed.
- The next Sunday hundreds gathered under the mango tree. But they only have one week of material. So they walked 4 days to find the pastor to teach them more. He stayed for 25 years.
- That church has grown and send dozens and dozens of people to all over the Philippines and changed many, many people.
- When the faithfulness of God meets the faithfulness of God's people, God's works goes forward.
- My friends, that is why I love the church. That is why I am committed to her.
- I invite you to do the same. Don't just get your feet wet. Jump in.
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