I read the results of a survey one time where 5 out of 6 Americans felt that the church, and being involved in a church, is not necessary. Some over 90% of Americans say they believe in God, but some 85% say that church is irrelevant and not necessary for them to grow spiritually.

Now the mindset that most of us grew up with, and have been immersed in, is the culture of rationality. And this mindset has often filled many of us with skepticism about many things. In fact, it has often caused us to think that there is disconnect between fact and faith, between that which is real and religion, and between how we develop physically and spiritually.

And yet we need to realize that God is a God of consistency. God is congruent and you cannot separate the physical part from the spiritual. The Bible tells us that we are whole human beings, that we are body, mind and spirit. We are not separate parts.

Take a look at Ephesians 4:11. Now as I begin to read, please note that God has given different gifts, and gift mixes, to his church. The names of gifts I am going to mention right now all exist right here in this community. You name the gift and one of you has it.

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers... why?... to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may he built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

And verse 16 says. “From him the whole body, joined together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

So what is the purpose of the church? The church is this community where you connect to the fullness of Christ’s presence in this world. When Jesus walked on this earth God chose to reveal his fullness in the person of Jesus. This means that all of the attributes of God were centered in this one person.

Jesus, therefore, had the gifts and could do the things of God while on earth. For example, he could calm the storms of nature, walk on water, and call forth Lazareth from the dead. Jesus had all the characteristics of the creator—he could touch a person’s eyes and make them see.

But after the resurrection of Jesus, and his ascension into heaven, now the Holy Spirit of God has given and bestowed all these attributes to Christ’s church. All these attributes and characteristics now exist in this community. The church is the body, the family of God, the presence of Christ in our world today.

Now the historical church, unfortunately, has often ruined this concept. The message has often been so focused on one’s individual faith that it has forgotten about community. The focus has so often
been on “my God and I,” that we have forgotten that Jesus is bigger than just me.

With the focus so prevalent on me and my personal faith, this has often led to divisions and splits among believers and in churches. For in our sinful nature, if faith is all about me, then I can simply decide what I like or don’t like; I can lift up my understanding and ideas as right; I can disregard the faith and ideas of others.

So, one of the realities from the brokenness in sin of this world is isolation and division. We live as self-dependent and independent people, rather than interdependent, and that leads to many saying. “I don’t need the church.” If faith is only personal, and it’s all about me, I’m going to worship when I want to, by myself out in the woods somewhere or not at all.

And yet God said I have a better idea. I’m going to restore the brokenness of this world through this new community of faith, centered in the unity of interdependence. So, you see, if I want to experience the whole power of Jesus in me, I need to hang in this community of Christ. In other words, you and I were formed for God’s family.

God does not entrust any of us with all his gifts and abilities. It is impossible. So rather, all these gifts are present right here in this family and community of Christ. And my life transformation will only take place as I am an active and involved participant in this community. This does not happen by simply being a member; it comes by putting our faith in Jesus Christ.

You know, people have often asked me through the years how they can hear God speak to them? How can they hear his voice? My answer is that it is only as you are an active participant in the body of Christ and are putting your faith in action that you will hear God speak.

I have told the story before about the farmer who one day, while working in his field, thought the clouds in the sky were spelling out the letters P C. As he gazed at these letters he thought it was a sign from God. He thought that God was telling him to go and “Preach Christ.”

When he shared this revelation with some elders at his church, and when he told them he was selling the farm to go to the seminary, these elders had him come to a meeting. They warned him that they didn’t see these preaching gifts in him, and that he had misread this sign in the sky. When he asked them what they thought P C stood for they said, “Plant Corn.”

Why are we formed for God’s family? This community is the expression of Christ’s love and compassion in the world. 1 John 4:13-17 says. ‘This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.’

In the world we are to be the expression of Jesus. And every time we fail to connect in the body of the church we affect the lives of those who need to hear the Gospel. We deprive those who need the care and love of Jesus, and those who need to be fed and supported through our mission efforts. If you and your gifts are not involved, our mission is not what it could be.

As people decide that individualism and self-worship are for them, and that the church is irrelevant
and something they don’t need, people are not being reached in this community. Some people are not getting food and are dying. And our kingdom building work, and outreach to the lost and seeking, is not happening as God willed.

Why are we formed for God’s family? It is because God has chosen the church to be his center for mission. It is where we are to love others in this family. It is where we rejoice with those who rejoice, and sorrow with those who sorrow. It is where we serve together because on our own, with the values of the world that we don’t need the church, we don’t accomplish even a fraction of what the church can do together in community. We need each other.

Finally, why are we formed for God’s family? The church is the source of Christ’s light. There are three metaphors that Jesus used for a community like Messiah—light, salt, yeast. Light penetrates and eradicates darkness. Salt flavors and preserves. Yeast lifts and elevates.

Jesus’ strategy is not to start a religion, but a revolution. His strategy was that the world would be changed by the growing influence of a community/family like ours who lives under his authority. See, my friends, this is a community of light that eradicates darkness.

And yet, wow, it seems like evil is having its day in this world. It makes us wonder oftentimes if we are making a difference. Is there hope that evil can be defeated? And yet we need to remember that salt takes time to work. Yeast, you need to wait patiently for the dough to rise.

In my lifetime, who would have thought that apartheid would have been defeated in South Africa, and that Nelson Mandela would go from prisoner to president? Who would have thought that an African American would be President of the US? Who would have imagined that Messiah would be the dynamic ministry it is today?

The darkness, my friends, cannot overpower the light. You see, the true light has come into the world and the darkness cannot put it out. Yes, it takes time, but God is bringing forth many positive changes in this world through his church.

I need to ask you today, what difference has this church community at Messiah made in your life? What would it mean to this community and area if our church ceased to exist? I think of all the people through the years who have been helped, and reached out to, through this ministry.

I think of all the baptisms, the funerals, the weddings, the confirmations, the Sunday School students, the mission trips, the musicians, the cared for through Stephen Ministry, the supported through the food shelf and mission support.

What if we weren’t here? Just think of the children’s lives who have been nurtured and changed in this place. Just think of all the people who have grown in their faith in Jesus, and in their hope for living. Just think of the marriages that have been helped, the hearts that have found healing, the people given strength and support through challenges. What if we weren’t here?

We are formed for God’s family! When enough people live together demonstrating the heart and mind of Jesus we are changed and renewed as individuals and as people. And as we are changed, we can change the world. Why this family and community of faith?—because this is where and how Jesus has chosen to do his mission.