

- Recently, I walked into the gym, and I saw a guy that looked up, and noticed and recognized me as his pastor. And this guy just blurted out, didn't say hello. He just said, "Oh my gosh, I'm so far from God." And then the very next thing he said it jarred me. He said, "I had no idea how much I miss going to church. I'm so far from God. And I had no idea how much I missed going to church." Things are so different today aren't they? How many of you miss the good old days? Remember back in January and February, the good old days back when you could like travel, and make plans and go anywhere, and things have changed so much. I've heard so many times we're living in unprecedented times. It's unprecedented times. This is an unprecedented season. I would give anything for precedent, anything precedent. I just want some precedent. Can anybody give me a little precedent? More people today they're just tense. I'm tense. I'm easily agitated. People are so uneasy at best. Some people are terrified and incredibly angry at worse. Since this I talked to so many people who just have a deep sense of feeling disconnected, or feel hopeless, or they're lacking confidence in the future, lacking direction, questioning everything and everybody. Where's the conspiracy? Who's behind this? Who can we trust? Who's telling us the truth? They're slipping back, lot of people into destructive habits and bad rhythms. And so many people in some form or another would just say, life's just not working the way I want it to work. Things just aren't going well right now. Such a heaviness, such an uneasiness. And that's why the title of today's message is this. What Your Life Is Missing. What your life might be missing. At all of our churches and those of you online, let's pray together today. Father, we ask that by the power of your spirit, and through the truth of your word, that you would help us perhaps discover what we are missing so we could know you intimately and serve you passionately. We pray this in Jesus' name, and everybody said Amen. This guy at the gym, he was so nice. I had no idea how far I'd drifted from God. And, oh my gosh, I had no idea how much I miss going to church. Somebody say church.

- [Audience] Church.

- Type that in the chat, if you will, church. Type in church, church, church. I want to talk to you today about the church, and give you just a little bit of context from Scripture. The root Greek word that's translated as church in the New Testament it appears 107 times. And the word is ekklesia. Ek means out of, klesia comes from the root word calling. This word means both at the same time to assemble, to gather, and called out. That's who we are. We are the church. We're gathered together to be strengthened, to be called out, the word is ekklesia. The first time that the word is mentioned in all of the New Testament is actually mentioned by who do you think said it? Jesus mentioned the church the very first time. Jesus, to give you context, he was kind of talking to his disciples, and he gave them a pop quiz. He's like, let me ask you a question. And he said to his disciples, who do people say that I am? And the disciples were like maybe reaching, or maybe they were telling the truth, they're like, uh, John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, other prophets. And then Jesus turned the pop quiz on to Peter, and he said, no, Peter, you tell me, who do you say that I am? And the spirit of God gave him wisdom, and Peter said, "You're the Messiah. You are the Christ. You are the son of the living God." And Jesus said to Peter this. The first time the church is mentioned in all of Scripture, Matthew 16:18, he said, "On this rock," Jesus says, "I will build," what? Say it aloud all of our churches. He said, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Jesus said, "I will build my church." It's his church. Jesus loves his church. He cares about his church. He loves and wants to build his church. I want to tell you for just a moment about some events that happened at church, around church, or

because of the church in my life. I just jotted down on a piece of paper in about maybe three or four minutes, just randomly thoughts about the church that came to my mind. And to give you a little bit of context, my family grew up attending church, but we were not committed to Jesus. We were churchgoers, but we were not intimately connected to Jesus, or following him faithfully. And so here's just a list of how my life has been influenced a short list of the different ways from the church. First of all, when I was maybe five or six years of age, we went to church one week and I came home, and my mom said that I told her I felt like I was supposed to be a pastor one day, which is completely bizarre because I don't ever remember really even liking a pastor growing up, but for some reason I felt drawn to the church. And even as a very young child felt like maybe I was supposed to be a pastor one day. Then years later in youth group, I just felt drawn to God. I would go to youth, but I didn't know God, but I felt drawn to him occasionally. And then I was actually voted, not because I was a spiritual superstar, but maybe because I was well liked enough, or nobody else wanted the role, I was voted to be president of my youth group. And it was at church I discovered I really probably don't know God because they asked me to pray out loud and I panicked because I didn't know how to pray quietly, or privately, much less out loud, and I realized maybe I'm really not connected to the God of this church. Then I went to college on a partial athletic scholarship, and partial religious scholarship because I was the president of my youth group even though I wasn't a Christian. And it was at college that I fell deep into sin, and started reading the Bible, and decided to become a follower of Jesus, and immediately for no apparent reason, I just decided I need to go to church. So all by myself, 19, 20-year-old, I'd get in the car and drive to the closest church. I just felt drawn for some reason, all by myself to church. I started to make new friends at church, and they were very different from my old friends. You see, before I was a Christian, I thought everybody was a Christian. I grew up in Texas and in Oklahoma, and we weren't Muslims, and we weren't Buddhists, so I just assumed we were all Christians. When I became a Christian I looked back and I thought all my old friends none of them were Christians because these new friends were so passionate about doing something that would make a difference for God, and would way outlast this life. I met new friends through the church, and I started being disciplined through the church learning God's Word, being corrected and encouraged, and sharpened through the church. I started growing spiritually through the church. I got my first whole Bible through the church. I got a half a Bible through the Gideons who gave me a New Testament, but some strange guy I'd never met before felt called to give me a whole Bible with my name engraved on. Some guy from the church that just randomly gave me this gift. I started to learn to be generous and give in the church. When they called for an offering, and I didn't give anything, and the lady sitting next to me, who I didn't know at the time took out a \$20 bill and said, "Hey, let's never come unprepared to give. I'll give this to you so you can give it to God." I was so blown away by her generosity that it started a journey growing toward generosity. I heard about Amy from some friends at church. This girl is like overboard for God, just like you they said. And I wasn't sure this was like pre social media. I couldn't check her out and stalk her. And so I just asked some friends at church who confirmed, oh, yeah, she's the real deal, you should get to know her. So I called her and I left her a message, and she's in the room and can confirm this. I said on her voice message. If you don't know what that is, we had little machines. And I said, "Hey, Christian babe, take me to church, or lose me forever." Is that true? And then I said, "And the verse for the day is, and now these three remain faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love." 1 Corinthians 13:13. And I left that message. And I recorded that message with a little black device I put on a landline, and then we played it at our wedding. Take me to church, or lose me forever, who says that? Who says that? And

our first date, we went to a Bible study at her church and then a Bible study that I led. And we grew together spiritually, and suddenly for no reason, these two young kids just felt called to serve God with their whole lives in the church. I proposed to Amy. Guess where I proposed? In the church. I think I might have a picture even of that. Proposed to her in the church. We prepared for marriage in the church as my pastor prepped us for marriage. We shared our covenant vows, and promised to give our lives to one another. And I would love her as Christ loves the church. And we do that in the church. Suddenly we felt called to start live church. And that's where the fun really got heated up. We saw miracles upon miracles, and we experienced heartbreaks upon heartbreaks, the highest highs and the lowest lows. And we continued to love Jesus in his church. We had six kids and they were all baptized in the church. If you know my kids today, they're not perfect, but all six of them all love Jesus. And they all faithfully serve and love in the church. How did that happen? I give a lot of credit to Amy who is an incredible godly mom, and home educated our kids, but, truthfully, I give so much credit to you all, our church family who helped disciple them in LifeKids, and helped raise them in Switch. I'd tell my kids one thing and they wouldn't believe me then what you would tell them the same thing. They're, oh my gosh, this is amazing because together we help disciple each other's children. I have four daughters, three of them are married, and they all married young men they met in the church. And all three of their godly husbands are on staff at our church where I can keep a very close eye on them all for the glory of God. And our whole life, honestly, everything that I can find that's anything meaningful is a reflection of the work of God through his bride the church. And it's not because I'm a pastor. It was before I was a pastor. It's because I'm a follower of Christ, and I'm a part of the bride of Jesus. His church, and I hope that many of you have some type of a story like that, where here's how God used the people of God. Here's how he used the church. Jesus said, "I will build my church." I want to talk to you today about the church. In fact, what I want to do for the next few minutes is I want to kind of do a little test with you. And I want to share with you something to see how it connects with you. I want you to see if this moves you, sparks you, stirs you, or if it kind of just bores you. I'm gonna show you a portion from the Old Testament, Proverbs 31. Now those of you who have been around the church, ladies, you know that Proverbs 31 is all about a godly woman. These unbelievably high standards, which make men glad they're not women because these standards are too hard to live up to, just saying, but these are amazing standards of a godly person. There's 22 verses about the godly wife. And what's amazing about these 22 verses is they're actually an acrostic poem. What that means is each of these 22 verses start with one of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and spell out all these beautiful qualities of the godly bride. For example, if I would do this with Amy, I would say ABC like Amy is adorable, A. B, she is beautiful. C, she is Christ-like and that's kind of what this does. Essentially, this godly bright exhausts the entirety of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Now, what we need to know is any time you read the Bible, all the Scripture points toward Jesus. You look in the Old Testament and you can see images, and prophetic utterances of Jesus. I asked our staff who is the main character of the Bible? And everybody hesitated. That's why we're taking applications for staff members right now at Life.Church, no. Jesus is the main character of the Bible. And even in the Old Testament you see images of Jesus. You see images of God, the church, like Song of Solomon it's a very graphic love story between a man and a woman. It's also a metaphor, a portrayal of God's love for the church. And what I want to do is show you in Proverbs 31 out of the Passion Translation a potential metaphor, or series of metaphors about the church. So let me explain what I'm gonna do. When we look at the husband, what I'm gonna do is put in parentheses Jesus, as perhaps this husband represents maybe Jesus. And anytime we see the godly woman, the bride, I'm going to put in

instead the bride of Christ Jesus the church. And so let me just demonstrate so you'll know clearly what I'm doing here. Perhaps looking at a metaphor in the Old Testament about Jesus and his bride, we'll start in verse 10. And this is what the real text says. It says "Who could find a wife like this one. She is a woman of strength and mighty value. She's full of wealth and wisdom. The price paid for her was greater than many jewels." Now here's how I edit it. You can see in parentheses, here's what I put. Who could ever find a church like this one. Christ's church is full of strength and mighty valor. See if this does anything to you emotionally. The church is full of wealth and wisdom. The price paid for the church was greater than many jewels. Verse 13 and 14. The church searches out continually to possess that which is pure and righteous. The church gives out revelation, truth to feed others. The church tastes and experiences a better substance, and her shining light will not be extinguished, no matter how dark the night. She, the church is known by her extravagant generosity to the poor, for she always reaches out her hands to those who are in need. Her husband, Jesus, is famous and admired by all. Even her works of righteousness she does for the benefit of her enemies. I edited this next verse, but you'll see what I did. There are many valiant and noble ones, but you have ascended above them all. Popularity can be misleading, and followers, wealth, and worldly clout is vain, and so quickly fades, but the church, the bride of Christ lives in wonder, awe, and fear of the Lord. She will be praised throughout all eternity. The Proverbs 31 woman, or maybe even a metaphor of the bride of Christ exhausts the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Question. Does that connect with you emotionally? If it does, it's probably because you recognize you don't just go to church, but you are the bride of Christ. Jesus said, "I will build my church." And he's been building your life to be even more about you, but to be a part of a bigger calling, a bigger mission in this world. Does this connect with you emotionally? Now, if it doesn't, what's missing from your life? Why is your life maybe not working the way it should? Why is it that you feel disconnected? Alone? Trapped? Hopeless? Desperate? What's missing from your life? Maybe it's church. And maybe the church is missing you. Jesus said, "I will build my church." I want to suggest to you a very real shift in mindset. And please hear me when I tell you, this is so much more than a play on words. This is a change of thinking to truly understand the church for which Jesus gave his life, and the church for which he's building. We do not just go to church. If you can go to church, you can leave a church. You don't just go to church. The church is not a destination. The church is an identity. It's not a building. It is a people. And that's why we don't just go to church. We are the church and we are here for the world. What's profoundly interesting to me is that the first time Jesus mentions the church, he says, "I will build my church." And then he didn't say, I will build my church, and the church will care for widows, which was very important to him. He didn't say I'll build my church, and there will be peace on Earth, which he said, "I came to bring peace on Earth." What he said was I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. In other words, the first time he talks about his church, there is a very visible, very clear, very plain reminder that we are engaged in a war. What's missing from your life? Maybe you're not engaged in the war, making a difference, pushing back the forces of darkness as you've been created called by God to do in as his church. Maybe you recognize, man, it is crazy out there. Man, we are in a war, but I'm not engaged in the war. I'll give you a visual of it. Back when I was in college before I was a Christian, there might have been some alcohol, maybe a lot. Pabst Blue Ribbon, cheapest beer in town back in that era. I don't even know if that exists anymore, but it was like 99 bottles for \$4, or whatever it was. And I was at a party, and this guy from another fraternity came up to me, and he just walked up and he pushed me pretty hard. He goes what's up? He pushed me hard. Well, if you don't know that can be an affectionate form of greeting for a guy. You just go up to a friend and

you push him hard. That can be affectionate. So I thought he was like being cool. And so I just pushed him back kind of hard. I said, not much. And the next thing you know, he put his arm around me to put me in a headlock. And, again, this may be confusing to some of you, but that can be a very bro to bro type of like, hey, we're cool together putting each other in a headlock. And so I thought we're being buddies. And so I just backed out of it kind of quickly, and I aggressively pushed him away just to say, we're really good friends. Well, evidently he had a different strategy because the next thing I know this guy who like a running back came at me full speed, put his shoulder into me and threw me into a wall. My butt went through the wall. I was back and he's laying into me for no reason. I said, "Oh, so we're not being buddies, we're in a battle." Now I see how it's gonna go down. Some of you, you would be wise to recognize there is someone attacking you, whose mission is to steal, kill, and destroy. And we are in a battle, and we are to engage in the battle as the church, and our battle, listen to me, it's not against flesh and blood, Paul said. It's not against mask wearers, or not mask wearers. Come on somebody. It's not against those who vote one way or vote another way, or post one way or post another way, but our battle is against spiritual forces of this dark world, and we are called to be a light, to be a force of love, and to push back the kingdom of darkness. Listen to me, what's missing in your life? Maybe it's the church. Maybe the church is missing you. Maybe you're yeah, yeah, I believe in Jesus. I believe in God, and all this stuff, but you're not engaged in the war. You're called to be engaged. And I don't know what this would mean for you right now, because right now the world is different. And so it may have to be a little different. If all you can do is watch online, or all you can do is maybe come once in a while to a physical, whatever it is. Let me just encourage you, plead with you, beg you to engage in the spiritual battle. What might be missing maybe is just the power of community when iron sharpens iron, and together you strengthen, and lift, and love, and convict, and correct, and encourage each other. You can't do it alone. I got to have your back, you got to have mine. We cannot fight alone. Maybe for you it's prayer. You want to do some real spiritual warfare. You get down on your knees, you pray, heaven opens up, and the power of God descends upon this Earth. You ask for his will on Earth, as it is in heaven. Engage in prayer. Don't just sit by and watch the news all day long, and just be blah, blah, the world is coming to an end. Do something about it, engage. Hey, listen, you have spiritual gifts. You're part of the body of Christ. Every part of the body of Christ is important. If all you're doing is like streaming a message every now and then, yell at people. And you're not using your spiritual gifts somewhere, and listen, 70% of you, you're not using them in a church right now because you're not coming. Maybe you can't, maybe whatever, but I'm gonna tell you just find a place to use what God has given you to make a difference in this world because you actually serve someone else, and guess what? You're fulfilled as you use your gifts to make a difference. You can give, for God so loved the world that he gave. One of the ways you're most like God is when you give, and thank you to those of you who are giving to the work of God through the church, or giving into the community and seeing needs of people, and say, hey, as a church, we want to be a blessing. You can invite people. You can invite them online. Guess what? Anybody can come to Church Online, anybody in the world with access. You can invite people back. Listen, here's the deal. As a church in a war when you wake up, you wake up with a search and rescue mentality. We are ambassadors of God called to help people be reconciled to God. The church is not a place we go, it's who we are. Who are we as the church? Listen, we will lead the way with irrational generosity because we truly believe it's more blessed to give than receive. And that's why on top of all the normal things during the season, you, I mean like you, you're giving as a church have helped eliminate over \$6 million of medical debt for COVID-19 heroes. You did that as the church to witness into

the lives of families. You right now are funding over 100, that's a lot of local mission partners helping injustice issues, and feeding people and educating people, and helping those who are in need. You are involved. You are the church doing this. There are people around the world that are hurting, unable to work and unable to eat. So we picked one part that we could impact. In central America because of your generosity there are millions of families eating today because you the church are engaged in the war. We believe that the local church is the hope of the world that we can do infinitely more together than apart. It's not about us. It's about the church. So we'll do what we can to serve other churches because of your generosity. There are 27,000 churches signed up to use the free Church Online Platform. There are churches able to be online because of your generosity and it is free to them, but it ain't nowhere near free to us. Our costs have gone way, way up. And what have you done? You funded the mission to help other churches. You've given so generously. We're now giving grants to other churches to help them keep the doors open. The YouVersion Bible App because of your generosity, a massive team, a massive team, putting out the number one Bible distribution system in the history of the world completely free on 433 million devices, millions. Do you realize that we as a church can do that? The same word of God that changed my life. We can give freely to people all over the world. We're in a war, we're in a war. We'll do anything short of sin to reach people who don't know Christ, to reach people no one's reaching we're gonna do things no one's doing. We are not spiritual consumers. We are spiritual contributors. The church does not exist for us, but we are the church and we exist for the world. What are you? You're the church. Come on church what's missing? The church. We're full of faith and not fear for God has not given us a spirit of fear, but a power, and of love, and of a sound mind. If you're at a physical location, would you mind standing? Heck if you're in your living room, you might get up off your sofa, or get out of your bed for just a moment. What are we? We're the church, the bride of Christ. We are united standing against one enemy whose mission is to steal, kill, and destroy. And we are united around one mission to lead people to become fully devoted followers of Christ. Paul said in Ephesians 3:20, he said this. Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly more than all we can ask, think, or imagine according to his power, that is at work within us, within you, within us, within you, to him be the glory, where? In the church, in the church, in the bride of Christ throughout all generations, forever and ever, Amen. Who are we? We're the church, the bride of Christ known for generosity, seeking justice, expressing love, not backing down in the face of opposition, but taking the message of Jesus all over the world. What's missing from your life? Maybe it's the church and maybe the church is missing you. And as you prepare your hearts to worship, I would love to invite you to engage in the spiritual battle. Step in, step up. Because of the one who gave his life for you our only reasonable response is to give our lives for him. If you can see it, if you can feel, he's moving in our cities, he's moving on our streets. His name is Jesus. He is good. We are the church and we exist for the work. Lift up your voices, lift up your hands, and worship our God, give him praise.