

Six Habits of Spiritually Happy Men

Habit #6: Spiritually Happy Men Are “Part” of a Church

Unedited Transcript

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Good morning, men. We want to begin by asking you to turn in your Bibles to Second Corinthians, like I said, First Corinthians, Chapter 12. While you're getting settled, let's go ahead and do a shout out.

Today we want to welcome five men who have just started meeting. They call themselves Friday Fishin', part of the First Church of the Nazarene in Tallahassee, Florida. They meet on Fridays at 7:00 a.m. just like we do here. Dave Pullen is the leader, and by the way, Dave, Mike Heller is your area director, and I've passed his name along to you. So you can expect to hear from him, and he'll just try to help you in any way he can. I wonder if you would join me in giving these new men from Friday Fishin' a warm and arousing Man in the Mirror welcome. One, two, three. Hurrah. Welcome, guys. We are really glad to have you with us.

Continuing to tell you some of the stories that are happening around the country and the world. Because of what you are doing here, the investments that we're making in building a discipleship network throughout the United States, through your leadership, through your prayers, through your support, I want to tell you a little story about some men who go to San Diego State in California.

They are part of Athletes in Action. Their chaplain sent us in this picture, and he has three How God Makes Men book study groups going. He said that the men are having a radical experience with Christ learning about how these different Bible legends, these men we know, have things to say.

Paul, for example, says, "It was truly encouraging to see the humanity of Biblical legends, but even more, to see the greatness of God that didn't give up on them, won't give up on us, and through his amazing grace uses us." Andrew said, "After some reflection, it made me realize how literally any possible situation can be used for God's glory. There is no cookie cutter route to becoming a better man."

The chaplain has three groups going. By the way, his name is Jimmy Brown. One is for the baseball chapel, and this is most of the guys in the baseball study group. Then also a coaches group, and then one for other sports like lacrosse and things like that. What caught my attention is that Jimmy said, "In fact, some of the females in Athletes in Action are wanting to read the Book, too, wondering what all the buzz is about."

San Diego State, Larry Niggli, our area director there, is supporting the work of the chaplain on the campus, and that's our ministry. That's our ministry together. I wanted you just to be encouraged by that.

Just take a moment and look into the faces; pick one of these guys, just look into his face, and just think about how his life is going to be different because of the people that are investing into him, the men that are discipling him. These men that are discipling each other. The difference it's going to make in his life, in his family's life once he marries his children, his community, his vocation, his church. Just think about all the difference that that will make. What we are doing here is so significant and so meaningful.

We are in this series, Six Habits of Spiritually Happy Men. Today we're going to wrap it up. Habit Number Six, Spiritually Happy Men Are Part of a Church. Let me ask you this question. How many of you are in a family - by the way, I don't want you to actually answer the question, this is a rhetorical question - how many of you are in a family where you are estranged from your parents, from your siblings, from your children? Almost all of us have some kind of estrangement, at least in some point in our lives, from our parents, from our siblings, from our children. That is at the core of what we're going to talk about today, because a church is a type of family as well.

First up - I know I should, but. Most of us have heard someone say or have said it ourselves, "I know that I ought to be more committed to church, but I just don't feel like church inspires me. I don't feel like it challenges me. I don't feel like it meets my needs. Besides, I'm getting everything out of my small group." Now, the problem with that is that when you are not part of a church, the opposite of church is what? Isolation. Withdrawal. The problem with isolation, the problem with withdrawal is that you end up being estranged from this family that God has put together for us to help each other.

There are reasons why we say, "I know I should, but." There are reasons for it, there are good reasons for it. We have needs. When you think about what a church is, a church is the single biggest collector of people who are sinful. All right? So the church, by its very nature, is attracting siblings, if you will - brothers and sisters - who suck. We go to a church, and a lot of times our needs don't get met. These are real needs - needs for communion, communion of the saints.

Then you have some jerk who coughs, coughs, coughs, doesn't cover his mouth, and then wants to shake your hand during the greet and meet time. Give you his cold. A little more seriously, hurt feelings. Brothers and sisters who maybe are not real high up on the emotional intelligence chart and say stupid things, or lack integrity in their relationships, or try to violate the process of relationships and guilt you into doing things and shame you into doing things.

There are other real needs. It's like when you think about why people jump church - I wrote down a couple of them - these are real things. Kids - "There's no real good ministry there for our kids." Doctrine - "The church is not teaching the doctrine that I believe." "I don't feel like I'm being fed." (You hear that a lot for people jumping church.) "I don't like the music," and that's legitimate. Then there are all of these interpersonal dynamics.

When you jump ship, though, what are the results? Well, who's going to baptize your babies? Who's going to marry you? Who's going to visit you when you're sick and in the hospital? Who's going to bring you a meal? When you're trying to nurse your spouse back to health, who's going to serve you communion? Who's going to confirm your children in the faith? Who's going to preach you the Word of God? Who's going to help you grow in your faith? Who's going to bury your dead? Who's going to put you into relationships? Who's going to create a safe place for you to have relationships?

There are so many reasons we can say, "I know I should, but," but they pale in comparison to the benefits that come from being part of a church. Why do men leave church? Well, apparently, one of Satan's most effective strategies is simply to entice or dupe or lure men to stop going to church.

What is the result of that? Well, the result of that is that we become, and usually it's some petty little thing that's going on - by the way, I mean, if it's a real need that's stop being met, change church. We don't talk about that when we talk about marriage, but if there's something wrong, just leave. Leave her. Go find a church where your needs are being met. Most of the time, that's not really what's going on.

Most of the time what's really going on is there's some minor irritation that we let get under our skin, and then Satan works it until we're duped into thinking that, "Well, I'm just going to stop going to church." The problem is, and what's really going on here, is that when you stop going to church, stop being part of a church, you become estranged from your Father for the failings of a few siblings. That's what's really happening when you stop being part of a church. You become estranged from your Father because a few of your siblings let you down, and that's the big idea today.

The Big Idea today is this. **Don't be estranged from your Father because a few siblings let you down.** That's what it means in Hebrews Chapter 10 Verse 25 when it says, "Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing." Notice two things. Number one, the Devil enticing men to stop going to church is nothing new. It was happening when Paul wrote First Corinthians. Let us not stop gathering together as some are already in the habit of doing. It's like quite a centuries old phenomenon. It's nothing new.

Everybody is, "Oh, the church is falling apart." All the nuns. All the nuns. "The church is falling apart." Honestly. Do you really think the church is not going to survive? Come on. Get real.

Don't be estranged from your Father because a few siblings are letting you down. Some are going to do that, but don't be part of the some that then gives up the habit of meeting together. Notice the word habit. We're talking about habits. What is a habit? A habit is a behavior that we repeat until it becomes virtually involuntary.

Take your choice. You can go play golf four weeks in a row and that'll be your habit or you can go play church four weeks in a row and that'll be your habit. That's the deal. That's basically what it boils down to.

So what do we mean by part of a church? Oh. I tell you what. I'm so excited to talk to you about this, because I have been struggling for at least two decades to find just the right words, just the right words to express this habit or this discipline or whatever you want to call it. The idea of being part of a church - finally, I found a Biblical way of describing it.

When most of you came through the second-timers table, you heard about the five defining disciplines of growing men, and one of them was that you would actively be involved in church. You would have active church involvement. That's how I used to say it. Then, I've taught this material before, and I've taught it as being active in a church. Spiritually happy men are active in a church.

That whole concept of participation, engagement, activity and all the other words that we could use, but the problem of titling it is it still, I never have found the word that gives the fullness and the richness of what it means to be part of a church. Go to church. Attend church. Engage in church. Be a member of a church. All of these different ideas, but I'm so excited to show you in First Corinthians 12, the way that God talks about this.

In Verse 12, First Corinthians, Chapter 12, it says this: "The body is a unit" - now this is a Greek word for body that is a synonym for the word church. It's a different Greek word, but it's a synonym for church. "The body (or the church) is a unit though it is made up of many" what? "Parts." If you're using ESP, it might say members. They form one body. "So it is with Christ, for we were all baptized for one Spirit into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we are all given the one Spirit to drink. Now, the body is not made up of one," what? "Part, but many parts."

Then drop down to Verse 27: "Now you are the body, the body of Christ." Each one of you is a part of it. In the verses in between those texts, there are three concepts that Paul is trying to get across to us. Beginning at Verse 15, Verses 15 and 16: "If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body."

In other words, you can't elect out of the body. It's just like, if I have a brother, and he says, "Well, I'm not part of this family anymore," guess what? You're wrong. You just can't say you're not part of the family. You can say you hate me. You can say you want to be estranged. You can say you want to be isolated. You can say you want to withdraw, but you can't say you're not my brother. That's what Paul's saying here. Just because you're into the things that you're into, you can't say that you're not my brother anymore.

Verse 16 says: "And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be" what? "a part." A part of the body. Throughout this text, let me see. I've highlighted it in blue the number of times Paul has used part here in the text we're looking at. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 times.

He says that you're a part of the body. You're a part of the church. Remember what I said in Verse 27? Well, what I said; what Paul said. What I said Paul said. "Now you are the body of Christ, the church." Now you are the church. "You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." You can't elect out. You can't say, "I'm not part of it." That's the first thing Paul covers.

Then the second thing he covers, starting in Verse 17: "If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But, in fact, God has arranged the" what? "the parts (us) in the body" - every one of them - "just as He has wanted them to be." All of those kooks that are sitting next to you in church, God has arranged them to be there. If you don't think you have any kooks in your church, then guess what? You're the kook.

"If they were all one" what? "part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts but one body." One church and many parts because that's what? Spiritually happy men. They're parts of a church. They're part of a church. We see in this that there is a necessity of different parts. That's the way it works. There is a necessity of different parts. That's what Paul's saying here.

For those of you who may think, "Well, I'm done with church and I'm getting everything I need out of my small group," here's what you need to know. You're not getting everything you need out of your small group. You got it? You're getting something out of your small group that you can't get out of the bigger church. You're getting that personal one-on-one connection. You're getting to know somebody. In a small group, a group that's small enough, I actually get to know who you are and care about you as an individual, and you get to know about me and care about me as an individual. That's the advantage of a small group.

Guess what? Small groups are what? Small. You end up, you just don't get all the parts of the body in a small group. Let me tell you what you get. You might get two guys that are feet. Now you're sure footed, but you only get one eye. You get nobody who'll listen, so you've got no ears and you've got two big mouths. Now, does that, okay. What do you end up with? You end up with a sure-footed, one-eyed, big mouth that doesn't listen. All right. Great. Well, at least you get to know each other, right? But that's a small group.

That's why we need the whole body. That's why we need the whole body.

Spiritual habit number two was Spiritually Happy Men are Part of a Small Group. They just are. They're also part of a church, habit number six. Two different things; complementary but different.

Then in Verse 21, Paul covers his third thing. The first thing he says is you can't get out. You can't get out of your family, number one. Number two, this family needs a lot of different parts, so that's why I've got all these kooky people running around.

Then number three says this: "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you,' and the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you.' On the contrary, those" what? "parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable and the" what? "parts that we think are less honorable, we treat with special honor, and the" what? "parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment."

Watch this. "But God has combined the members (or the parts of the body) and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers. If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."

What are the parts that he's talking about? What are the parts that he's talking about? Who are the parts that he's talking about? Us. We are the parts that he's talking about.

Continue on. Verse 27: "You are the body of Christ and each one of you is" what? "a part of it." Then he goes on, "And the church has appointed some as apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, those who have gifts of healing, are able to help others, gifts of administration, speaking in different kinds of tongues." One of the four places it talks about the different spiritual gifts in the Bible. This is not a comprehensive list, a representative list of some of the gifts, some of the different parts of the body.

You can just look at the list, and you see we need all of those parts of the body. You need somebody who has a speaking gift who can teach the Bible. You also need to have somebody with service gifts that can set up the tables so we can have a place to sit.

Wouldn't it be a mess if everybody at your table had the gift of teaching? Well, they're already a mess because most of you already do think you have the gift of teaching - and you don't. You should be quick to listen and slow to speak and slow to think you're a teacher. James Chapter 1, almost all of that verse.

Keep this in mind. The big idea. Don't be estranged from your Father because a few siblings let you down. Just don't do that. Just don't do that. Just don't be estranged, look. Our human fathers, some of them did it right, some of them didn't. For those of you who had a human father who did it right, you know that he loves you. You know that more than anything else, he wants unity in his family.

Now, my dad, I know that my father was ripped apart because of this disunity among the four brothers. I hated my brothers. Now, I hated my brothers because my parents didn't discipline us the way that we should have been disciplined. Basically, my brothers would do things to irritate me, I'd haul off and slug them, and then I would always get punished, but they never got processed. So after a few years of that, I hated my brothers.

Now, I love them now, but I got to the point where I just, and I quit high school. I was so mad about my whole family thing - there are many facets of it - but I was just so angry about the whole thing, I quit high school and I went, I didn't really join the Army. My dad forced me down to the enlistment office, but anyway, he wasn't going to let me hang around the house if I was going to be a high school dropout, which is probably a good thing.

The point of that is that from that moment on, there was such disunity in our family, such chaos, such estrangement, because I withdrew from the family. I went into isolation. Do you think for one second that a day went by when my father wasn't grieving about what I was doing? Don't be estranged from your Father because a few stupid siblings let you down.

Okay. Final thing. Knowing your part is what will inspire and challenge you. Knowing your part; that's what's going to inspire and challenge you to be part of a church and being part of a church. Honestly, if you end up withdrawing into isolation and estrangement from your siblings because of whatever reason - right reason or wrong reason - and you stay there, I mean, there are seasons where you're making transitions, you can't find the right church.

I get that, but if this is a pattern, not a habit, you are going to never be the happy spiritual person that your Father wants you to be. As long as you remain estranged from the family, not only are you going to be unhappy, but guess what? The rest of the family's also always going to feel a little empty. They're always going to feel a little hole without you.

Here is what can inspire and challenge you to be part of a church? First of all, this text, and then understanding that church is about giving yourself to the greater good. There is a greater good than just me. That greater good includes your family, as a spiritual leader of your family. You might think you're not, but you might think you're getting all you need from a small group. You're not. But guess what? Even if you are, even if you were in a group where you were getting everything that you need, guess what? Your family's not there. You're family's not there.

The greater good is this: That a church is a redemptive leaven for you, for your family and for the community. The church is a redemptive leaven. Whatever else is going on during the week, you bring

yourself in to be part of a church, and the Holy Spirit is able to redeem and leaven what's going on in your lives. Renew you. Revitalize you. Regenerate you if you don't know the Lord yet. Sanctify you.

How does that happen? Well, it happens by becoming a disciple-making disciple starting at home. It happens by making an intentional effort. What do I need to do to become a disciple, but not only a disciple, a disciple-making disciple? You've heard me say it. Disciples not making disciples is an oxymoron. It doesn't make any sense. It's an internally inconsistent statement, but to become a disciple and then to help others become disciples, starting where? I've said this a thousand times? Starting where? At home. Disciple-making disciples starting at home. That's the solution to everything that we need to be inspired and to be challenged by our church is to engage in disciples.

How does churching make disciples? Well, I don't have enough time to tell you about it. That's the way these messages have been going. But I'll summarize and just say, first of all, four things.

Worship. Having a worship experience with our God is part of what it means to be a disciple so that we can experience the supremacy of the Father, so that we can worship Him in the beauty of His holiness and the majesty of His creation, in the generosity of His salvation, in the greatness of His love, in the mystery of His providence, you see. To worship.

Then, to grow. The process of growing is what revives us, breathes the Holy Spirit into our life. To worship, to grow, to fellowship. Decide to have a shared experience with the community of the brothers and sisters, the communion of the saints.

Fourth is to serve. We looked at a few of the gifts here. If you wanted to know all the gifts, you can go to Man in the Mirror's website, you can put in "spiritual gifts" and this week, it changes, but this week I think it's maybe the sixth return down. It's a spiritual gifts assessment tool. Just put "spiritual gifts" into the search window. You'll figure it out. You figure out how God has uniquely equipped you to be part of the church. I mean, one thing that will inspire and challenge you as much as anything I can think of is knowing what you're good for for the church. If you don't know what you're good for for the church, then what good are you? This will help you. This can help you.

Gosh, I wish I had more time. Well, none of this is going to happen if we isolate ourselves from God's plan to advance His kingdom on earth.

So there was this pastor who went to visit a man who had not been to church in a long while, who had stopped being part of the church. The pastor went by to see him. Knocked on the door. Man came to the door, looked a little embarrassed, but invited the pastor in. They went into the living room. The man invited the pastor to sit down. It was a cold night. There was a roaring fire in the fireplace.

Pastor sat down. Didn't say anything. Man started to feel a little uncomfortable. A few minutes later, the pastor got up and he went, took the fire tongs and picked a log out of the fire and put it over onto the hearth. Sat back down. Didn't say anything. A few more minutes passed. The log began to flicker, the flame went out, and you could see that it was starting to grow cold, after just a few minutes. Pastor got back up, took the fire tongs, picked up the log, put it back into the fire, and instantly, the log burst back into flame.

Pastor turned to the man, and he said, "Well, I guess I need to be going now." He walked to the door, and as the man let him out, he said, "Thank you for your sermon tonight, pastor. I will be in church on Sunday."

Man. The idea today is this. Just don't be estranged from your Father because a few siblings let you down. Let us pray.

Our Father in Heaven, Lord, we come to you, our dearest Father, and we do not want to be estranged from you. Lord, all of us who confess that at times we have let our siblings, our brothers and sisters, get us so ticked off and irritated and frustrated and discouraged that we have either at least felt the desire to isolate, withdraw or have. So Father, would you use your words here in this text to anchor us as part of a church, even if we don't feel like that's what we want to do, that our belief and our understanding of the Scripture would be so powerful and so strong that your Holy Spirit would give us the desire to stick it out with all those kooky brothers and sisters. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.