



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

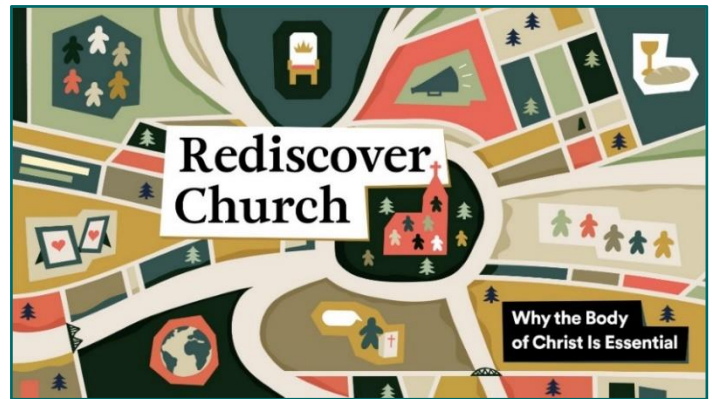
REDISCOVER CHURCH

Signposts:

Markers for the Journey

Various Scriptures

Tim Badal | October 8, 2023



We are in a series titled “Rediscover Church.” In some ways, this series is a bit reductionistic for some. Some will say, “Why do we need to look at these things? I know why we

need to have preaching. I know why we need to have fellowship. I know why I have to be here. I know why we need to baptize people. I know why we need to celebrate communion and be part of church membership. Why are these things important?”

Again, the routine can become rote. We can lose the substance and significance of all we are to be part of. These are things that God said should be part of His church. We should not only do them but do them with great excitement and great purpose in mind.

The second reason why this is important is that we need to recognize that there are people who are ignorant about these things. I don’t say that in a pejorative way; they just don’t know these things. They’ve come to church. They’ve come to experience salvation in Christ Jesus, yet they’re asking, “What’s next? What is my purpose and role within this body of believers called the church?” We want to rediscover these things and do so in order to serve and honor the Lord in the way that’s fitting to Him.

This morning I want us to look at three things that I’m calling “Markers for the Journey” which are baptism, communion and church membership. Again, these are things that are altogether routine for those who have been part of this church for a while, but it’s altogether right and good for us to reevaluate and reconsider. It’s right to ask if we are celebrating these things in the way God intended.

I’m going to do this under the heading, “Signposts.” Over these past few weeks, I have found myself on interstate highways more than I usually am. I’m becoming acquainted with those big green signs that litter the way all along the interstate. They tell us where we are going. They point the direction to where we want to head. They don’t just happen once in a blue moon; they’re happening almost every mile. At every exit, we see signs telling us, “Turn here. Head there. Exit this way. Enter this way.” The other thing these signs do is tell where we are relative to our destination. They tell us how much farther we have to go; how many miles before we get to our destination.

This morning I want you to see that in His providence, God has placed signposts on our journey for us as His followers. They’re checkpoints or mile markers for us, so we’ll know the direction we need to head. They give us confidence that we’re heading in the right direction. They also remind us that our destination is still ahead of us. They help us on our journey, but at some point our journey will come to an end. It will culminate in us standing face to face before our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. While we’re on this journey, there are three signposts I want us to see.

Signpost #1 – Baptism: I publicly commit to Christ.

Turn in your Bible to Matthew 28. Jesus is about to leave the earth and ascend to heaven. He’s leaving His disciples here on earth to fulfill their ministry. Here’s the plan of attack He lays out for them. Here’s what their MO is supposed to be—their *modus operandi*. This is their program.

He says this in verse 18: *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples."* He's telling them to preach the gospel in such a way that people will receive it and become disciples like them. That's the first imperative. "I want you to go preach." We talked about that last week.

The second imperative He gives is that He wants us to baptize these new followers. When we preach to them and they accept the gospel, the first thing we are to do is baptize them—which we're going to talk more about in a moment—into their relationship with Jesus Christ. We are to do *this "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."* The third thing we are to do is teach them *"to observe all that I have commanded you."* Then we're given a promise: *"Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Signpost number one is that you and I have been given a command by God as followers of Jesus Christ. There are lots of things we need to teach disciples about what we've been commanded to do, but we are set apart through this one act: believe and be baptized. The first mile marker, the first signpost, for every person who has bowed the knee to Jesus is to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Now, the reason why we need to rediscover this is because about a hundred years ago in evangelical churches, the practice became that you didn't believe and be baptized, as the book of Acts says over and over and over again. Rather, a time of separation began, meaning you would believe, you would live for some period of time, then you were baptized later.

What I'm here to tell you this morning, with all grace and humility, is that if that's your impression, you're wrong. If your idea is that you believe, live your life for a long while, then at some later point in life decide, "Now I'm going to be baptized as a follower of Jesus Christ," you are out of step with what the Bible says. Here's why.

Number one, it's commanded by God that we do this. This is the first command that we are given as followers of Jesus Christ. Number two, it is practiced by both Jesus and the apostles. All the apostles were baptized. Yes, even Jesus was baptized. In Matthew 3 we see Him fulfilling this practice. He headed down to the Jordan River where He was baptized by His cousin John. John saw Him coming, and he said, "Wait a minute. Let's flip this around. You should be baptizing me, Jesus, not me baptizing You." Look at Matthew 3:13-14 (NIV): *"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John tried to deter him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'"* Notice how Jesus replied: *"Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."*

Jesus is the second Person of the Trinity. Jesus is the perfect God-Man. Jesus is righteousness personified. I mean, there's no one righteous except for Jesus. So why does He have to fulfill righteousness? The only way we can understand this—and scholars agree with this sentiment—is that Jesus is saying is, "I was commanded by My Father to do this. That's why we're doing this." Jesus says, "I have been given marching orders that I was to come to earth, put on flesh, make My dwelling here and do some things which would culminate in Me going to the cross. I was to preach. I was to do miracles. I was to do other signs and wonders. I was to come and redeem man to Myself." And on His to-do list was that He was to be baptized. He says, "I'm doing what I was told to do."

Let's stop for a moment and rediscover our relationship with Jesus Christ. Each person needs to bow the knee to Jesus Christ. What you're not going to hear me say is that you need to be baptized to be saved. You are saved. You bowed the knee to Jesus Christ. You confessed your sins, you trusted by faith, you repented and promised to live differently. As a result, you are saved. Then your first marching order is to be baptized.

Now, I'm speaking to those who are saved but not yet baptized. In your delay—whether knowingly or unknowingly—you are saying to God, "I hear Your first command, but it's not that important. I'm going to do something else." I want you to imagine you're on a job for the very first time. You're like, "Okay, boss, what do I need to do to make sure I have a long tenure at this place?" The boss says, "This is the one thing..." You say, "You know what? What's another thing?" Your boss isn't going to be very happy. I think, sadly, our heavenly Father is displeased with some of us because we've said, "The first thing You've laid out for me, I'm not going to do." Or, "I'm going to come up with an excuse." Or, "I'm not going to make that an important thing."

So we have, just as every evangelical church does, countless people who are not baptized but who profess to be believers. Now, this was not the practice of the apostles in the book of Acts. There you will see over and over again that a person would believe and then be baptized. Here's the thing you need to see. There seems to be no time between the two.

In fact, in Acts 2, we have the day of Pentecost—ten days after Jesus has proclaimed the Great Commission. The Spirit of almighty God falls upon the disciples, creates a commotion that the people in the street become aware of. Peter and the disciples go out into the street and what do they do? They do what they were told to do—they preached the gospel.

So Peter stands up and preaches the gospel. Look at verses 36-37: *"Let all the house of Israel of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. Now when they heard this,"* —that's the people on the street—*"they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'"* What are we supposed to do when we hear the gospel of Jesus Christ? What's our response?

Notice what Peter says to them in verse 38: *"Repent"*—that is, confess your sins and believe in Jesus— *"and be baptized every one of you."* Some of us don't like the connection that's being made here, but the next thing you need to do on your journey is that you believe and are baptized. It doesn't say, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you who is an extrovert. Every one of you who has a good testimony. Every one of you who brought some dry clothes. Every one of you whose families are going to be okay with this. Every one of you who feels you can speak well in public." It says, *"Repent and be baptized, every one of you."* It says this is how we go about fulfilling the forgiveness of our sins and the reception of the Holy Spirit. What saves you? Faith and trust in Jesus Christ. What is the first mile marker for every believer? It is baptism.

Now, what makes baptism so important? You can read through the book of Acts and see how important this is, and that it was done so quickly. In Acts 8, we've got an Ethiopian eunuch who believes in Christ, he sees some water and says, "I need to be baptized." They stop the chariot, go down to the water and he's baptized.

In Acts 16, we have two events that take place. Lydia is a woman who is cut to the heart after hearing Paul's message of the gospel and she believes. It says before she went home, she was baptized. She didn't have to think about it. She didn't have to assess a time that would be right for her. She didn't even have time to go and tell anybody about her salvation. She was baptized then and there.

A little later in Acts 16, we read about Paul and Silas in jail in Philippi. An earthquake takes place, the jailer believes everybody is gone. But Paul says, "We're all here." The jailer wonders why prisoners would stay when they could have left. Paul says, "We're believers in Christ," then he preaches the gospel. The Philippian jailer says in Acts 16:30, *"What must I do to be saved?"* How do I get what you have? Paul says, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."* Every one of you can receive this salvation. Then it says in the middle of the night they were baptized. They didn't wait for the next Lord's Day. They didn't wait for morning to come. They didn't wait to go get dry clothes. They did that baptism right then and there.

Why is baptism so important? It's symbolism and it's significant. Let's look at the symbolism.

Again, baptism doesn't save, but it symbolizes—it pictures—what happens in salvation. Let's just speak to this for a moment. In every reference to baptism in the Scriptures, there are a couple truths you need to know. Number one, they are all done by people who first profess salvation in Christ Jesus. Nowhere do we explicitly have an infant being baptized, who child who has not first professed faith and truth in Jesus Christ. That's a tradition that came about hundreds of years after Jesus, and it came for a variety of reasons, If you want to learn more about that, come to my "Equipping You" class tonight.

The second thing that we need to understand is in every example of baptism in the New Testament, people went down into a body of water, were placed under the water, then brought out from the water. There wasn't sprinkling. There wasn't just saying some words and having a dry baptism. It was the immersion of an individual into water; the coming in and out of water. Why? Because the water symbolizes a couple things.

First of all, it symbolizes us dying with Christ, going into the tomb with Christ (under water), then coming out, raised as Jesus was from the grave. It's such a powerful example of the way our church is set up, that we want to make sure we've got cameras for you to see that. We don't want to miss that. We don't want you to miss the expression of that here because it's hard to see. We want you to see they're going into the water as Christ went into the grave and they're coming out as Christ was resurrected from the grave.

Also, the submersing of an individual gives the idea or picture of total cleansing. We went into salvation dirty; we came out after salvation clean. So the water signifies the immersion of us into Christ, going in dirty and now coming out clean.

Some of you who are probably a bit offended by this, saying, “You’re getting too close to home. I am a professor of Christ Jesus; I’ve confessed Him as Lord. Why do I need to go through this? I don’t like being in front of people. I have anxiety. I am introverted. You know what? I just don’t think it’s all that important because the thief on the cross wasn’t baptized.” Listen, if you trusted Christ as your Savior while nailed to a cross next to Jesus, I’ll give you a pass on this sermon. But for all others, the practice is to be baptized. You ask why.

Well, a couple decades ago, Amanda and I stood right here and attested to our love for one another at our wedding. There were 300 people here when we made vows. Now, why did we need to make those vows in front of people? Couldn’t we have simply said, as we had numerous times before, “I love you and I’m committed to you”? But we didn’t. We made public vows, but we didn’t stop there. The preacher said, “Okay, you’ve done these vows, now are there rings to signify these vows?” Some of you think it’s a miracle I got this thing off my finger, amen?

Now, the ring isn’t all that significant. It is a physical expression of what has happened on the inside of Amanda and me. What would you have done if I said, “Listen, preacher, she’s just going to have to take my word for it. I’m not going to go the rest of my life carrying around a symbol of what I’ve done. She just needs to know this.” No. I need this for myself as a reminder and I need the world to know that I’m connected and committed to another individual.

What Jesus has said is the ring to our relationship with Him is baptism. If Jesus were sitting there, I wonder if He would be asking, “Why can’t you publicly tell the world you’re committed to Me? What’s keeping you from publicly doing that?”

The Bible tells us this is the first command He’s given to us, but right from the get-go we’re already saying, “You know what? I’ve got a different plan.” So can I lovingly—and as graciously and humbly as I can—admonish you to recognize that this is an important matter. It’s so important that Jesus did it. It’s so important that the apostles did it again and again and again. It’s so important that you and I should commit to being baptized as well. So as soon as possible after trusting Christ for salvation, we should be baptized.

Now, we have classes every month to explain these things, so they’re done in an orderly way. This is something we need to rediscover. I have no list of who’s baptized and who’s not in our church, other than the members because it’s a requirement. But I’ve seen studies that have said that in the evangelical church, more than 50% of the people who attend have never been baptized. So here’s a group of people who say, “I love Jesus. I want to do what He says. I want to follow His commands.” But at the first command He gives, you’re like, “Yeah, no. I’m not going to do it. I’m not even going to think about it, or I’m going to delay it.”

I want you to ask this question. If you’re a parent, this will help you even more. How do you feel when your children say, “Yeah, thanks, but no thanks”? Could we be doing the same thing to our Lord and Savior, the very One we say we are following?

Signpost #2 – Communion: I publicly commune with other Christians.

What does this signpost say? This signpost says, “I publicly commune with other Christians.” The next thing Jesus commands His disciples to do is to proclaim His death until comes. It’s something we will do at the end of this service, but let’s understand a couple things about it.

First of all, what does it mean? What is its real meaning? It is an ordinance, just like baptism, which means it’s a command of Jesus. Jesus said, “Until I come, I want you to often eat bread and drink juice, doing so remembering Me.” So if we don’t do it, we are not fulfilling the command—the obligation—that He’s given us.

Now, we need to be careful not to elevate both baptism and communion. Baptism is us getting into water. We do that every day. We get under water all the time. We get into swimming pools. We get into bathtubs. This isn’t something that’s altogether crazy different; something we’ve never experienced before.

Eating bread and drinking juice—it was wine then—was a staple in first-century Palestine. Us eating bread and drinking juice is nothing crazy which can make it all the more routine and rote. If it was something we only eat and drink at this event, it would change things. I think the reason God uses water, bread, juice or wine is because He didn’t want us to elevate them, making them something they’re not. In some religious traditions, the priest says some things, does some things. These things taste like bread and wine, but priest tells you, “No, they’re no longer bread or wine. Because of my word, they have become

the actual body and blood of Jesus. I've transformed them. While the external elements have not changed, what they've really become is something altogether different."

Brothers and sisters, understand this. The Bible makes it clear that these things are not the big deal. It's what these things symbolize. We altogether miss it when we make communion about the bread and the juice, instead of making it about the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. This is a tool. This is something that helps us remember Jesus. So He says, "I want you to take bread, I want you to take juice, and here's what I want you to do. I want you to remember Me. Do this in remembrance of Me. Do this so you don't forget Me." Why? Because Jesus knew His disciples would be prone to forget His sacrifice. We would be prone to forget His grace and sacrifice for us.

So He says, "I want you to do this often." He doesn't dictate how often, but He does say, "Often enough that it's a common occurrence and you dedicate it to My remembrance, so you don't forget Me."

Let's face it—this past week we forgot Jesus. We forgot Him at work. We forgot Him at play. We forgot Him at school. We forgot Him in our comings and goings. Jesus says, "When the people gather, from time to time, I want you to pick up these symbols. I want you to take some real time and real energy, devoting it to remembering what I did."

Okay who gets to take it? Who's invited to take it? The Bible makes it clear that these things have requirements, so let's talk about these requirements. There's an insert in your bulletin that talks about the requirements of communion. These are there every time we celebrate. We don't want someone to just come in and be a part of this, thinking, "Okay, they're offering snacks. This plate has snacks. This is nice. I think we could do a little better than this though." No, this isn't a snack. This is a tool to remember what Jesus has done, and it's for a certain person.

Requirement number one, you must be a follower of Jesus Christ. You're like, "Well, why wouldn't Jesus just invite anybody?" Because He says the purpose of this is not for everybody. In some ways, it would be disingenuous for anybody just to take these things. Here's why. Incumbent with receiving this is the realization that Jesus is more than anybody else in this world. Jesus is Who He says He is and did what He said He did on our behalf. In us taking communion, we are pledging allegiance to that truth. So let's talk about the pledge of allegiance.

When we stand as Americans and pledge our allegiance to the flag, will we expect other people from other lands to do the same thing? No. Why would we do that? Why would we force them to pledge allegiance to a foreign flag? The reason is because we would not want to be put in that place where we would be pledging allegiance to a flag that's not our own.

Brothers and sisters, never forget that when we take communion, it's somewhat similar to us as Americans our pledging allegiance, but this is allegiance to Jesus. If Jesus isn't our Lord, what we would ask people to do is to respectfully observe, but not participate. It's not your pledge. He's not your Lord, so we're not expecting you to do this. We're not expecting you to believe the way we do. So if you are not a believer here, during this time of communion, we ask you to just observe, ask questions and be respectful as we pledge our allegiance to our Lord.

This next reason may come as a shock to some of you. The second requirement is that you've been baptized as a believer. You might be asking, "Why?" Well, this was the second command Jesus gave, so shouldn't we start with the first command before we do the second one?

Here's the next reason. The third reason is that we are to examine our hearts to make sure there's not any known unconfessed sin in our lives. So we don't just come to this ordinance and say, "Yeah, I can do it. I'm good. I'm just going to approach this casually." The Bible says a man ought to examine himself, because what we are participating in is something altogether holy. So we should make sure we're coming in with clean hands and a clean heart, fully recognizing we'll never approach communion perfectly, but we do need to confess any known sins.

Listen, if we can't get baptized as an act of obedience—because Jesus has said, "I'm commanding you to be baptized" —but then we say, "No, I'm going to hang out with Jesus and commune with Him," that doesn't work. So while the Bible doesn't say you must be baptized to celebrate communion, our elders have determined it is clear through the writings of Scripture that God intended baptism as the rite of initiation so that you might participate in the full communion of Who God is and what He's all about.

Finally, the fourth requirement is that we have to examine our horizontal relationships and ask, "Is anybody offended with me? Have I offended them in any way?" Matthew 5 says that if I'm worshiping and know that I've offended my brother, I'm to

leave my gift at the altar, go make things right, then come back and worship. So every time we gather together there's always a moment of examination. These are the moments when we should be asking, "Am I a follower of Jesus Christ? Have I obeyed Jesus in the initial act of obedience by way of baptism? Am I right with God? Is there any known sin that I need to confess? And is there any sin I have between me and another brother or sister? If so, I'm going to address that."

Then the Bible says, "If that's all been examined, we should come and commune." Now, it doesn't mean we just sit there and think, "Well, every time I come, I've got an issue, so I can never participate." We want to participate. We want to be part of it, so we're doing everything in our power to do it right.

Now, here's why we've got to do this. First Corinthians 11 says there were people who were sick and dying because they had treated communion as an unholy thing. We need to realize this is serious business. We need to rediscover the great spiritual element that comes with communion, not making this an altogether casual thing. What does communion do? There's a reward for it.

First of all, it should encourage us. Every time we remember Jesus, we remember His grace and mercy toward us. At the end of this service we're going to sing, "My sins they are many; Your mercies are more." We remember that when we remember the cross. It should also excite us. The Bible says, "*As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes*" (1 Corinthians 11:26). He's coming back. He's coming to take us to a place He has prepared for us. That should be exciting. So we remember not only what Christ did on the cross, but also His promise that He will never leave us or forsake us, that He's coming back to take us to be with Him forever. What a sweet time for us to do this as the people of God.

Signpost #3 – Membership: I publicly connect with a church.

Membership is where we publicly connect with a church. We spent a lot of time a couple weeks ago in a sermon about why we should gather, why we should be connected. Have you said the following things about this church in a public way, in a significant way, at some point in your life, in the company of other people?

- I want to be counted among you.
- I want to identify with you.
- I want to identify with your pursuits and your purposes.
- I'm in agreement with your teaching.
- I'm in agreement with your leaders.
- I'm in agreement with your mission.
- I am with you.
- We are fighting in the same army.
- We are playing the same team.

Is that how you view your relationship here? Or are you just here to take in a program? God says throughout His Word that membership is critically important. Now, you might say, "The Bible never says 'Thou shalt join and be a member of a church.'" You're absolutely right. The Bible also doesn't use the word Trinity, but we believe Jesus, God the Father and the Holy Spirit are three in one. The Bible never talks about Sunday School, but we do that. The Bible doesn't talk about missions, but we do that. Why? Because we cannot fulfill what the Bible says without building structures to maintain and achieve these things.

So what might people say about membership? Some might be reluctant to accept the idea. Why would that be? First, it could be because you're brand new to the church. You should be reluctant to join a church too quickly. Those who have only been here a handful of weeks, maybe a month or two, should take some time to get to know us and understand who we are and what we're all about. We're welcoming you. We're glad you're here. But what we would ask is at some point, dig in deeper to find out who we are, then ask yourself, "Can I join them? Can I lock arms with them?"

Number two, you might be uninformed about the idea of membership. "I didn't know there was church membership. I thought I was a member." Well, you're not, in the truest sense of the word. Again, we're glad you're here, but we want you to learn more about this. It's time to rediscover church. So every fourth Sunday of the month, during the second service, we have classes that talk about what it means to be a member. We want you to join that.

Number three might be critical. You might say, "It's not mentioned in the Bible." You may come up and say, "My faith is private." Here's my response to you. The Bible gives biblical reasons for church membership. Let's go through them very quickly.

- One, we have the example of the early church that seemed to have church membership. How so? They "added to their number." Again and again we see that phrase. Well, whose number? The church's number. They had a roll. They had a membership. They had something that said, "These people are with us; those people are not." Who is that? Was it that they just hung around? Do you think it was only the 3,000 people who got baptized who were there on the day of Pentecost? No, there were lots of people there. But there were 3,000 who got "added to their number." We also see in all the New Testament letters, "The church that met here." There was a specified church.
- How about the existence of church government? The Bible says the church should have pastors, elders and deacons. How do you get them? Who determines who those people are? How do you go about putting those people into their offices? You've got to have something that determines it. So if you're critical of church membership, then I want you to go appoint elders and deacons at the local Jewel over here. I want you to stand in Jewel after church and say, "All right, we need to appoint some elders and deacons. So let's get together. Who would like to serve here at Jewel as an elder or deacon?" See how that works for you. Church membership says, "Here are the people, this is the process, and this is how you get pastors, elders and deacons."
- How about for the pastors, elders and deacons—who's in their flock? So what if you call me one day and say, "Hey, come quickly Pastor. We've got a critical issue here." But I say, "You know what? Call Pastor Jim Nicodem from Christ Community Church. He will take care of you." "But he's not my pastor." Aha. You do believe in church membership. The second you say, "Tim, you're my pastor," you believe in church membership. "Well, what gives you the right?" Can everybody say that? Can I go into everybody's life and everybody's place and say, "I'm your pastor"? No. Why? Because at heart you believe in church membership. You're just not acting it out. You're not being thoughtful in how you live it out.
- How about church discipline? Can we just willy-nilly start putting people under church discipline? "All right, let's go to the Yellow Pages. Who can we discipline today? Ted Johnson, come on down. We're going to discipline you." That doesn't work. The Bible says there are times when we are to remove believers from us. How do you do that if you don't have church membership?
- Finally, the exhortation of mutual care—how do you live out the one-another commands? Who are you to do that with? Is Jesus holding you accountable to love everyone, to bear with everyone, to serve everyone? When you get to heaven, you're looking forward to, "Well done, good and faithful servant," and Jesus says, "But hey, you didn't take care of that person over there in Indiana. That's who I was talking about. You didn't care for them. You didn't minister to them." Church membership says, "I'm committing, before You and before men, that I'm going to minister to this group of people whom You've told me to assemble with, to whom I'm not give up the assembling together with."

So you who are critical of church membership, when you say it's not in the Bible—it's all over the Bible. So we invite you to connect with a church. If you can't do that here for any reason, that's okay. Connect somewhere. The signpost God has laid out is that there's baptism, communion and church membership. It is altogether time for us to rediscover that. Here's why. God has commanded it. for this reason: we would be lost without it. We wouldn't know if we were doing what God wanted us to. We wouldn't know if we were heading in the right direction. We wouldn't know if we were any closer to our destination. So God has put on our journey—on the interstate between here and heaven—specific signposts and has said, "You're doing the right thing. You're heading in the right direction. With every one of these steps, you're a little closer to being with Me in heaven through all eternity."