

## **Living a Fruitful Life How to Get More Out of Assembling with the Saints**

**Intro: In my recent lessons I've been speaking with you about the importance of getting rooted in the word of God in order to live a fruitful life. We can do this two ways: 1) By assembling with the saints where we hear God's word together; 2) by daily Bible reading and study where we hear God's word personally. Both are important; but often we don't get the most from these experiences. So I want to talk a little bit about that. Let's talk today about how to get more out of assembling with the saints.**

**Maybe it goes without saying that the goal of assembling is more than getting our "tee" in the peg board. And without a doubt, you can be here physically and not be here mentally or spiritually. Maybe God may credit you for making the effort; but is this the best way to use the opportunity? Of course not! So let's talk about how to make the most of our time together.**

### **The parable of the football game**

#### ***Joe and Mary go to the Friday night football game:***

Joe is a true football fan. Remember "fan" is short for "fanatic"; he has a passion for football. He really gets excited about the team and the chance to see them play. His mind is filled with anticipation. He remembers the other games and how exciting they were. The newspaper has been talking all week about the importance of this week's contest. He shares with others his thoughts on the outcome of the game. He may even invite a fellow-fan and his wife to go with them to the game and sit with them, so they can share it together. As the game starts he focuses in on what's happening on the field. He doesn't want to miss a play. As the game unfolds he is constantly evaluating what that play means to the outcome. He wants his team to win. He is caught up in the excitement and begins to stand and cheer the team on. When a touchdown is scored, he jumps from his seat in excitement, because he knows this is what it's all about. This is what he came to see--his team win! He leaves exuberant, having witnessed another victory.

The second person is Mary, the football fan's wife. She approaches the game in a completely different way. She knows really very little about football and has attended few if any games. She reluctantly agrees to go rather than sit alone that night for four hours at home. If she thinks about the game at all ahead of time it may be only to think of how hard those benches will be after three hours, not to mention the cigarette smoke, and the cold. As the game starts, she strikes up a conversation with the wife of the couple sitting nearby, paying little attention to the action on the field. All while the game is going on, they are exchanging thoughts about other things going on in their lives in which they have more interest. When everyone else is jumping up and

down and shouting, they may be calmly sitting in their seats continuing the conversation or explaining the excitement with something like, "I think Jones just kicked a touchdown in the fourth inning". Clearly they are not "into" the game. So after it's all over, the fan's wife may think, "Boy, I'm glad John's wife came. If not, I'd had nothing to do for the whole game. What a relief to know that this is the last game of the season. Now maybe we can do something else on Friday nights."

***Now what's the difference between these two people? Both went to the same game; but came away with completely different attitudes. One left energized and other relieved it was over. In a similar way it occurs to me that many people may approach worship exactly the same way with similar results.***

### **The importance of preparation**

***This involves what we do before we go to worship, how we prepare ourselves for the experience of worship itself.***

We need to be physically prepared.

Often we come to services, after working hard on Saturday and staying up inordinately late. We are tired and sleepy. Some of us are sitting still for the first time all week, and we are overcome by the stillness. We would not be the first to succumb to sleep when staying awake was important.

*And He \*came to the disciples and \*found them sleeping, and \*said to Peter, "So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? (Mt. 26:40)*

Or most of us remember Eutychus who fell asleep during a sermon of Paul's (Ac. 16).

So give yourself a fair chance to benefit from worship. Come as rested as you can.

We need to be mentally prepared.

Since a good part of our time is spent in discussing the word of God, it would be helpful to be mentally prepared to hear God's word taught.

Take time to work on your Bible class lesson. This gives you an opportunity to get familiar with the text being discussed so that you are not "lost" out of the gate. Second it starts you thinking about the topic so that class discussion can be more meaningful. You already have some impressions about the meaning of the text. You'll also already know what your questions are—what you need clarified or explained more fully.

Take time to read if possible the text for the sermon (if you know it) for the same reasons. Since our Sunday p.m. lessons have been taking us through various books, we can get a jump start on the lesson and get more out of the discussion.

We need to be spiritually prepared.

Much of what makes worship meaningful is what is going on in our lives Monday-Saturday. We should ask ourselves, "How much has God been in my thoughts in anticipation of worship?"

If we have been counting our blessings, then we will have reasons to praise and thank Him.

If we are daily praying and studying, then we may come with a desire to know about Him and His word.

Spend time each week reflecting upon God's blessings in your life!

Enter the worship period with the intention of growing closer to God.

*I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord."*

*(Psalm 122:1)*

### **The importance of concentration**

***This has to do with the involvement of our minds in worship, truly thinking about what we are doing as we worship. It's about having a proper focus and concentration.***

When the Corinthians lost focus on the real meaning of the Lord's Supper as a memorial to Christ's death, they were doing something really serious. Paul warned:

*Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. (1 Cor. 11:27-29)*

And they greatly suffered for it spiritually.

*For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. (1 Cor. 11:30)*

***Avoid physical circumstances that hinder concentration in worship.***

A while back a visitor offered a number of criticisms about what people were doing in the assembly that left the wrong impression with him or were simply distractions. He was sitting on the back row!

Sit in a location where there will be few distractions, and where you can both see and hear what is going on!

***Concentration is primarily a matter of awareness of the importance of what is happening and the need to be attentive to get the benefit.***

The key to concentration is involvement. Worship is not a spectator sport. It is not a "show" that we watch and rate. It is a personal activity done in fellowship with others.

We are all called to be participants in worship. In fact, it is one of the things that makes NT worship a truly amazing experience. We are the priests in God's temple, serving Him there!

Stay involved in the worship, knowing the privilege of being God's priests.

*Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (Heb. 13:15-16)*

**Conclusion: When we worship with these principles working, worship will truly become a thing of great power to us. Proper worship gives us a renewed vision of God, a renewed sense of purpose, a renewed feeling of partnership. But it also makes available to us the power of God's word to make us more fruitful!**