

LOVE YOUR CHURCH

WEEK 2 – GATHERING: VALUING THE CORPORATE MEETING

If you grew up in a Christian home what did your Sundays look like?

“The church is more than a building you visit and more than an event you attend. However, this doesn’t mean that gathering together for corporate worship is unimportant. The gathering is a big deal for as you meet together...” - Merida

(Hebrews 12 v 22-24, 28-29) *“you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant ... let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”*

Hebrews 10:24–25 (ESV) *“24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”*

Reflection: When was the last time you stirred up or encouraged someone?

THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK

Acts 2:42–46 (ESV) *“42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts”*

Acts 20:7 (ESV) *“On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.” (in Troas)*

Scholar F.F. Bruce comments, “The reference to meeting for the breaking of bread on ‘the first day of the week’ is the earliest text we have from which it may be inferred with reasonable certainty that Christians regularly came together for worship on that day” (*The Book of Acts*, p 384).

1 Corinthians 16:1–2 (ESV) “16 Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. 2 On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.”

“Notice that you have a role: encouraging one another. Rather than sitting and soaking, come ready to bless your brothers and sisters with meaningful words of encouragement. Come ready to study the Scriptures, to seek the Lord’s presence, to confess sin and repent, to renew your commitment to follow Jesus, and to welcome those who are guests.” – Merida

“I sometimes meet a Christian who gathers weekly and is not thriving in their faith, but I have yet to meet a Christian who does not join the gathering and who is.” – Merida

How have you experienced the effects of neglecting the gathering?

CHALLENGE: Pray for and encourage a believer close to you to come to church, or join a small group, or even read the Bible together.

LISTENING TO GOD’S WORD

Acts 2:42 (ESV) “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

2 Timothy 4:2 (ESV) “*preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*”

1 Timothy 4:13 (ESV) “*Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.*”

2 Timothy 3:16 (ESV) *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,"*

What's the authoritative source of Timothy's teaching?

"Why listen to the sermon? Because if the preacher is truly saying what God has said in his word, and declaring what God has done in his Son, then the preacher is bringing you an authoritative word, and a life-changing word of good news. The authority of the preacher doesn't come from his age or experience but from the fact that he is the one teaching from the Bible! And the life-changing power of the message doesn't emanate from the skill or charisma of the preacher ultimately, but from the Spirit applying the word to people's hearts: lives are changed through the 'living and abiding word of God" (1 Peter 1 v 23)." – Merida

Who's the real preacher of the word? So who do we come to hear on Sunday mornings?

Sunday morning listening tips

1. **Listen** _____.
2. **Listen** _____.
3. **Listen** _____.
4. **Listen** _____.
5. **Listen** _____.
6. **Listen** _____.
7. **Listen** _____.
8. **Listen** _____.

What practical things do you do to be attentive on the Sunday mornings?

SHARING THE FAMILY MEAL

"Luke mentions the Lord's Supper –'we gathered together to break bread' –as another common event in the life of the church (Acts 20:7,11; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 'when you come together'). It was probably shared in the context of a meal."

“Following his redemptive work, he left the church with a meal by which to remember his sacrifice and his kingdom. ... When we gather at the Lord’s Table, we get a foretaste of home. We get to see the gospel in the Lord’s Supper, to ponder God’s provision, to taste Jesus’ forgiveness, and to look forward to the day in which sin and sorrow are no more.”
(p64) – Merida

“For years we had toiled and prayed and taught for this. At the moment when I put the bread and wine into those dark hands, once stained with the blood of cannibalism but now stretched out to receive and partake the emblems and seals of the Redeemer’s love, I had a foretaste of the joy of glory that well-nigh broke my heart to pieces. I shall never taste a deeper bliss till I gaze on the glorified face of Jesus himself.” (The Story of John G. Paton, Ch. LXXIII)

The book mentions three ways that the Lord’s Supper is powerful.

1. ***It’s Powerful in*** _____.
2. ***It’s Powerful in*** _____.
3. ***It’s Powerful in*** _____.

SINGING AND SPEAKING TO GOD

Ephesians 5:18b–20 (ESV) *“18 ... be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,”*

Colossians 3:16 (ESV) *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”*

What directives does Paul give the church regarding music in the church?

“Our singing should be word-centered, Christ-exalting, and community-focused. ... The importance of community needs to be underscored in our day because it has become very common to have a ‘me and Jesus’ feel in corporate singing.” – Merida

How do you respond to Merida's comment regarding a "me and Jesus feel in corporate singing"?

"Our prayers show our dependency on God. Our prayers glorify God, who is the source of all our blessings. One of the great joys of meeting together is praying together." – Merida

Reflection: Is praying with others a priority?

Why don't we pray?

"I remember hearing John Stott give a striking illustration. He was visiting another church and during the prayer time there was no mention of the needs around the world. Basic local needs were noted, but nothing that expressed the church's mission around the globe. Stott warned about having a village church with a village God. We need to be a local church that has a global reach, for we have a global God who hears us and responds to his people." – Merida

What do you think about Stott's assessment?

ACTION STEPS

How to "make Sundays sweet"

1. **Recognize that you need your church and your Church needs you.** Hit-or-miss attendance impacts you spiritually and affects your brothers and sisters.
2. **Sanctify Saturday nights.** Get good rest. Pray with your family. Perhaps read the text after dinner with the family. Be ready.
3. **Have some special traditions on the day of corporate worship.** Do something that you reserve for Sundays. Have a particular meal, long nap, meals with others, afternoon tea, long walk, or a drive. Make it enjoyable for the kids.