

1. Why does the local church gather together week after week?


Three reasons:

1. It's what Jesus **created** the church to do.
2. It's what Jesus **commands** the church to do.
3. It's what Jesus **causes** the church to do.

2. Why do we do what we do every Sunday morning?

- A. Because we see it in the Bible. If Jesus *designs* the church, then **He** *defines* its worship, and so we are looking to His Word to see what He has to say about our worship together.

And in His Word, we see at least seven essential elements that are to take place in the regular gathering of God's people:

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1. Worship through reading the Word together
 2. Worship through the preaching the Word
 3. Worship through singing the Word together
 4. Worship through praying the Word together
 5. Worship through celebrating the ordinances together
 6. Worship through fellowshipping together.
 7. Worship through giving our offerings together

6. Worship through fellowshipping together

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine ***and fellowship,***
in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”
~ Acts 2:42

In the NT, the word for fellowship (**κοινωνία**) means: *partnership; participation; sharing in something; communion.*

Chuck Swindoll: Fellowship: *two fellows in a ship!*

- With each other in hardships, storms, sunshine, progress, direction...

It's the idea of linking arms with somebody and walking with them through all the ups and downs of life.¹ It's this idea of so fully identifying with someone that you own their sufferings and you rejoice in their victories. Their victory is *your* victory, and their sufferings are *your* sufferings.

This is what Paul meant when he said,

Please keep verse 10 on the screen!

8. "Yet indeed I also count all things loss
for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord...
10. That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection,
and the fellowship of His sufferings,
being conformed to His death."
~ Phil 3:8-10

Paul didn't want a relationship with Jesus that only included the fun and easy stuff...because everybody knows that's not a real relationship.

- Yes, he wanted to know what it was like to have a relationship with Jesus in "*the power of His resurrection.*" Everybody wants relationships that include life and power.
- But he also wanted to know Jesus by partnering with Him in "*His sufferings.*"

This doesn't make Paul masochistic (*somebody who enjoys pain*); it makes him a Christian.

- He wanted to know all of Christ.
- He wanted to walk with Him through the joys and through the sorrows. He wanted to identify with Jesus both in His power and in His sufferings.

That's fellowship!

In our **wedding vows** we tell one another that regardless of the extremes that we go through in life, by God's grace we are going to be together:

- Richer – poorer
- Sickness – health
- Better – worse

And this seems to be the kind of relationship that the early church had with each other as part of their regular gatherings. They didn't just share meals together on a regular basis; they were sharing life together. They were with each other in the power of Christ's resurrection, and they were with each other in the fellowship of His sufferings.

In the NT, it seems that the regular gathering of God's people was an opportunity for them to lean into each other's lives in this way. "*They continued steadfastly...in fellowship*" (**Acts 2:42**).

Not only did they gather to connect with God, but they gathered to connect with each other.

¹ The NT calls us to have fellowship with the poor (Rom 15:26), with Jesus (1 Cor 1:9), with light (2 Cor 6:14), with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14), with other believers (1 John 1:3) – including those who are different than us (Gal 2:9), and in the Gospel (Phil 1:5).

There are many professing Christians in this country who tend to think of “church” as a Sunday morning service where we show up, sit down, listen, and then leave.

Like a movie theater...

- Find your seat
- Watch the show
- Quickly leave when the show is over
 - My family never left when the show was over 😊

Here in the NT, “church” wasn’t anything like going to a movie or attending a theater production. It was way more *personal* than that. More *connected*. More *relational*. It was about *doing life together*. It was about knowing and being known by one another.²

When you read through Paul’s letters to the churches in NT, have you ever noticed how often to talks about people by name? Listen to the relationships in these letters...

2. “I implore **Euodia** and I implore **Syntyche** to be of the same mind in the Lord.
3. And I urge you also, true companion, help **these women** who labored with me in the gospel, with **Clement** also, and the rest of **my fellow workers**, whose names are in the Book of Life...
18. Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from **Epaphroditus** the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God...
21. “Greet **every saint** in Christ Jesus. The **brethren** who are with me greet you.
22. **All the saints** greet you, but especially those who are of **Caesar’s** household.”
~ Phil 4:2–3, 18, 21–22

7. “**Tychicus**, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord...
9. with **Onesimus**, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you...
10. **Aristarchus** my fellow prisoner greets you, with **Mark** the cousin of **Barnabas**...
11. And **Justus**...
12. **Epaphras**, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you...
14. **Luke** the beloved physician and **Demas** greet you.
15. Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and **Nymphas** and the church that is in his house.
17. And say to **Archippus**, ‘Take heed to the ministry...’”
~ Col 4:7–17

² “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all... For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ... that there should be no schism in the body, but the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; Or if another member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually” (1 Cor 12:4-7, 12, 25-27).

“I commend to you **Phoebe** our sister, who is a servant of the church in **Cenchrea**,
² that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints,
 and assist her in whatever business she has need of you;
 for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.
³ Greet **Priscilla** and **Aquila**, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,
⁴ who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks,
 but also all the churches of the Gentiles.
⁵ Likewise greet **the church** that is in their house.
 Greet my beloved **Epaenetus**, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ.
⁶ Greet **Mary**, who labored much for us.
⁷ Greet **Andronicus** and **Junia**, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners,
 who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.
⁸ Greet **Amplias**, my beloved in the Lord.
⁹ Greet **Urbanus**, our fellow worker in Christ, and **Stachys**, my beloved.
¹⁰ Greet **Apelles**, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of **Aristobulus**.
¹¹ Greet **Herodion**, my countryman.
 Greet those who are of the household of **Narcissus** who are in the Lord.
¹² Greet **Tryphena** and **Tryphosa**, who have labored in the Lord.
 Greet the beloved **Persis**, who labored much in the Lord.
¹³ Greet **Rufus**, chosen in the Lord, and **his mother** and **mine**.
¹⁴ Greet **Asyncritus**, **Phlegon**, **Hermas**, **Patrobas**, **Hermes**,
 and **the brethren** who are with them.
¹⁵ Greet **Philologus** and **Julia**, **Nereus** and **his sister**, and **Olympas**,
 and **all the saints** who are with them.
¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.”
 ~ **Romans 16:1–16**

Ideas for baby
 names...??? 😊

Notice that last verse: “Greet one another with a holy kiss!”

- Now, that’s a cultural practice that the American church hasn’t embraced... 😊
- I shake hands with a lot of people after the morning worship service, but nobody ever kisses me! That’s fine...

Because I don’t think corporate kissing is Paul’s point here anyway. I think his point is this... God has designed the local church to be a people who are known by one another and are close with one another. His point is fellowship.

You know the word **anonymous**. It’s the idea of being unknown. One of the lessons we learn from reading Paul’s letters is that...

“Anonymity doesn’t work in the church.”

“And they continued steadfastly in...fellowship...”
 ~ **Acts 2:42**

In other words, the first church was devoted to knowing one another and caring for one another.

Q. How well do you know your church family?

- *If you were to write a letter to North Center, how many people could you greet by name at the end of the letter?*
- *Do you know their struggles? Have you asked?*
- *Are you praying for them? Do you know what they are praying for?*
- *Do you know where they live? Have they been in your home?*

Church, **Christianity is invasive!**

- Christ has complete access to your heart.
- And His people have access to your life.

Q. Does that mean you will have the same relationship with everybody in your church?

A. No.

But it ought to be our desire to really know one another and to share our lives and our hearts and our homes and our time and our energy and our resources with one another.

Application: How do I pursue “fellowship” with my church family?

1. Maybe join a Sunday School class
2. Maybe try to adjust your Sunday schedule so that you can linger for a while after the corporate worship service is over.
3. Consider making it your goal to get to know somebody’s name that you don’t know.
4. Maybe try to spend a few minutes talking to somebody that you don’t know well.
5. Maybe ask somebody how you can pray for them and then do it right then! *This isn’t a privilege reserved for the pastor!*
6. Maybe consider inviting somebody over for a meal.
7. Look for ways that you might be able to serve somebody this week.

7. Finally, let me close with just a few sentences regarding one final aspect of our corporate worship together, and that is “**worship through the giving of our offerings.**”

One of the tangible ways we enter into fellowship with one another (*sharing life together, pursuing the Great Commission together, partnering in the ministry of our local church together*) is through regularly, generously, and joyfully giving financially to the church.

Like it or not, finances are a critical part of the world that we live in.

- They were a critical part of the world that Jesus lived in,
- And they were a critical part of the world that the early church lived in.

We use finances to help meet the needs of those around us.

- In order for **missionaries** to give up their livelihood for the sake of the taking the gospel overseas, they need financial support (*Phil. 4:14–17*).
- In order for a local church to **maintain a building** for the regular gathering and to provide **various resources** for its congregation (e.g., **livestream**), it needs finances.

- In order for a church to have individuals who are available to devote a significant part of their time to leading and shepherding and caring for the congregation, the church needs to support them financially (*1 Tim. 5:18*).

So, one of the ways that we can link arms with each other and worship God together is by joyfully partnering in the financial responsibilities of the local church. There are numerous reasons (*from both the OT and the NT*) why churches make this a regular part of their weekly gathering. I want to simply highlight two reasons **from the NT**:

1. We hear Jesus praising those who brought their financial gifts as a joyful and sacrificial act of worship (*Luke 21:1–4*). Instead of telling people not to make finances a part of their regular worship, Jesus praises those who give with a heart of sacrificial joy. Jesus took pleasure in seeing people give liberally as an act of worship.
2. We see the early church bringing their financial gifts as a joyful and sacrificial act of worship (*Acts 4:32–35*).

32. “Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; Neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, But they had all things in common...”

34. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold,

35. And laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.”

~ *Acts 4:32–35*

When it came to fellowship & worship, the early church was so captivated by the gospel and the Great Commission, it was as if they put their heart and their homes and their financial resources on the table and said, “We’re all in!”

May God give us grace to say the same:

“As a people united together in Christ, we hear the call of the Great Commission, and by the grace of God, **we’re all in...together.**”

PRAY