

Why are you here? That may be a funny question, but I want you to consider it. Why did you make the decision to come to this worship gathering this morning? When I was growing up, my faith tradition had what are called *holy days of obligation*. These were days where you were expected to go to a mass that commemorated certain events found in the Bible, while some others focused on the saints. And the reaction from a lot of people all fell on one of two sides. There was one side that simply said it's a day of "obligation" and I don't want God mad at me or the priest mad at me so I'm going. We are going to church because that's what you do. And then there was the other side that said "I don't care who's mad at me. No one is going to force me to go to church, and I don't see the point anyway." Attendance seemed infinitely more important than what their presence might mean. (There were also a few in the middle who went for more holy reasons!)

We don't have holy days of obligation, but we do have regular and routine times where we come together as a church body to worship the Lord together, but I wonder if some of our motivations are similar. Some of us may have grown up with the expectation that Sunday is church day and you are going whether you like it or not. There wasn't much thought put into it. It's just what you do. Others, and this is a growing reality in the evangelical church that I am reading more and more about, are attending church less and less. The reasons are prolific: There are more and more other things to do on Sunday mornings, especially youth sports, there are an abundance of online options (including ours!), and someone has suggested the cultural guilt of not going to church has disappeared. All of those suggest the belief that **my presence isn't important, and I won't benefit from being there myself**. If that's true, then why does the New Testament make it clear the church gathered regularly to worship?

**[Acts 20:7] <sup>7</sup> 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.**

**[1 Corinthians 16:2a] <sup>2</sup> On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up.**

**[Hebrews 10:25a] <sup>25</sup> not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some.**

Why? If some of us are here because it's just something we've always done, and others of us are here, but are not convinced it's all that worthwhile, what are we doing here?

I've told you before, and will continue to do so, that if our Sunday services are no more than a short Christian concert and a motivational speech by a fairly handsome guy, let's not bother. Stay home and sing along to your favorite Christian music on Spotify and find a Tim Keller podcast, because he's really good, and have your own individual worship service.

But if it's something more, maybe we should think about that. That's ultimately the big question: What difference, if any, does it make when God's church comes together to worship him? If we were all at home right now worshiping God on our own instead of gathering here to worship God together, would anything be lost? My guess is you think yes, at least a little, and that's why you're here. But I also think it's something we can lose sight of, and many in the American church have, and that's what I want to talk about this morning.

**[Colossians 3:12-17] <sup>12</sup> Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup> And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**

Over the course of this series I've defined worship as the awed response to the character and works of God, and all of what is laid out in this passage is a response to those very things. Because of his deep love for us, God chose us who have trusted in Christ and set us apart for his purposes and to be with him for all eternity. This is the Gospel. This is the character of God and his mighty works, and he is worthy of worship because of it. But that worship goes beyond our personal devotions. It is something we are called to collectively, and I want us to see what difference it makes.

**Our worship gathering glorifies God in a way we can't on our own.**

I said in the first week we were created to be, first and foremost, worshipers. That our God-given purpose began with the worship of him. And up to this point, we have talked about that mostly as an individual awed response to the character and works of God. This passage, though, makes it clear he has saved us individually and collectively as a body.

From the beginning God has always gathered a people to worship him. He started with Adam and Eve, who walked with him in the Garden. He saved the righteous Noah and his family from the flood to start a new people who would worship him. He later established the nation of Israel, and when Jesus came, he gathered a group of twelve disciples to himself.

V15 tells us once again that God has gathered a people, and this time it's his Church. We are a people who are to be ruled by the peace of Christ, a peace between God and man and a peace between each other. Because of that peace, we have been called into one body, his body, which is the Church.

**Titus 2:14 - <sup>14</sup> (Jesus) gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.**

He didn't redeem and purify a bunch of individuals only. He redeemed and purified a bunch of individuals with the intent of unifying them by his Spirit into His Body with the purpose they could only achieve together.

My friend Todd Barton, who's way smarter than me, told me last Sunday that corporate worship reflects the properties of something in nature called *emergence*. He told me this like I should know what it means! My blank stare communicated otherwise. The idea is that when groups of things come together, they can take on properties together that the individual things themselves

don't possess. A snowflake is a collection of ice crystals, which are beautiful on their own, but when they come together and respond to the right conditions, forces, etc., they make stunning symmetrical shapes that none of them individually contain. They become and reflect something together that they simply can't on their own.

That is, to a great extent, the church. We have been saved individually and can worship individually. But we have also been saved as one part of a whole, a single crystal that makes up part of the stunning and beautiful church of Jesus. **God didn't just save us individually, he saved us collectively. We were not just saved from something. We were saved for something; the body of Christ.** If we were to worship only on our own, we would be living out only part of our God-given purpose. **But when we worship God as a body, we are living out our identity by experiencing his presence and declaring his glory together, just as he intended.** And we are getting warmed up for eternity!!

**Our worship gathering builds us up in a way we can't on our own.**

I read the results of a fascinating Lifeway survey this week. They were looking at a number of variables and results in how people grew in their relationship with Jesus. The survey included a shocking statistic: nearly two-thirds of churchgoers (65%) agreed with the statement, "I can walk with God without other believers."

This passage suggests otherwise. Paul describes the attitude and activity that should be evident among this gathered people. In V14, he tells them to prioritize, above all else, love. When we do that as the church, everyone experiences the two things we are all in great need of: belonging and significance. **Your presence communicates to someone they are a welcome part of something larger than themselves and that they matter.**

It's why we have prayer rooms right outside of worship center. This is why we are making the changes Kelly talked about earlier. Yes, we believe they will help with efficient processes, but infinitely more important is that we want to make it easy for someone to be invited to belong to our family and worship with us. And we can have more space dedicated to just hanging out. If you're going to call yourself Fellowship, you should probably have some space to fellowship!

V16 shows us what Paul called the church to when they gathered to worship together in spirit and truth. It is more than the components of a service. They are the very means by which you and I grow in our relationship with Jesus. He focuses on God's Word and the singing of worship songs, but he does so by making clear everyone is involved. We are to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly, in abundance, because it reveals his character and works. But this goes beyond self-study. We are to teach one another in God's Word and, as it travels from our head to our heart, we are to sing songs with thankful hearts to God. As we do that, we also sing to each other. While I believe there are some gifted to lead out in these areas, all of us have the capacity to impact one another through word and song.

I believe we've all been given the spiritual gift of reminding. You won't find it on any of the lists in the New Testament, but you see it displayed throughout. You see, when we speak of God's Word, we are retelling the story of his character and works. And when we worship God with each other through singing, it is the expression of what awes us about those character and works.

That means we pray and sing songs not just to God, but to each other, and when we do so, we remind one another who he is.

Imagine worshipping next to someone who has their arms raised and is looking up and is smiling and singing at the top of their lungs. In that moment they are a reminder that God is good and a God of joy. Or what about the person who has their head bowed or has maybe fallen to their knees and their eyes are closed. They are a reminder that God is holy and he is to be feared. And what about the person who is too emotional to sing, but the tears flowing from their face remind you that God is loving and forgiving.

**What we offer to God in worship, we also offer to each other.** And as we remind, we infect. Not a nice word, but what I mean is worship is contagious. When we come together to worship the Lord, we all have the holy opportunity to both move, and be moved, to worship. (worship night on 9/15).

That survey I told you about? It included another statistic that wasn't so shocking. Those who had deep ties and involvement in their church community showed greater progress in their discipleship than those who decided to go it alone. The members of this family need you, and you need us. When we worship together, we will know God more deeply than we ever could if we worship him alone.

**Our worship gathering testifies to the world in a way we can't on our own.**

Paul doesn't necessarily get to this point in the passage, but I want us to consider the impact our gathering of worship could have on an unbelieving world. In V14, Paul says that the community who loves each other will be bound together in perfect harmony. It can also be translated as unity. That we would be a people of love, unity, and peace. And if we love like that, the world will take notice.

I don't need to tell you how dark and divided the world is. It is full of strife and animosity and hate, and everyone is picking sides, and if you are not on my side, you are my enemy. And then I look at this motley crew that God has assembled at Fellowship Dallas, and I think that, in a lot of ways, we have no business being in the same room. Yet here we are; black, brown and white, people with a whole lot and people with very little, liberals and conservatives, young and old and in between, citizens and immigrants and refugees, and a whole lot of church backgrounds. The world would tell us we shouldn't get along, much less be with each other every week. We have so many differences that could tear and keep us apart, but there is that one thing we all have in common: Jesus Christ.

Jesus said the world would know we are his by our love for one another. Love is like mortar that holds together two bricks. Our love for one another is the most immediately observable aspect of our church. I'm confident that, every week, we have at least one person in our midst who is not a Christian, but they are here to figure out if they want to be. And yes, they'll check out the building and listen to my words, but the most compelling part of being here is you: a people who love worshipping a God who loves them and who love each other despite our differences. The easiest way to show Jesus is to show the difference he makes in our lives together. They can see Jesus long before we ever say his name. And when we do, our God will be irresistible.

**[Acts 2:46-47] <sup>46</sup> And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.**

By worshiping together in unity, the world was drawn in. We declare the Gospel when you worship together, and in so doing, we invite others to become part of it.

And so I ask you again: Why are you here? If it was because it's what you always do, or if you didn't think it really mattered, I pray you were challenged this morning. And I pray that you see we come to church to **be** the Church. Your presence and participation make a difference; to the glory of God, to the growth of each other, and to a world desperate for hope.

I'm going to ask you to bow your heads as I pray a benediction over us, and then I want to invite you to live out that prayer as Noah comes to lead us in a closing song of worship.

**Romans 15:5-6** <sup>5</sup> May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.