

A shepherd, seen from the side, stands on the left, holding a long staff. He is surrounded by a large flock of sheep. The background features rolling hills and mountains under a cloudy sky. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple and blue gradient.

WHY WE GATHER

Introduction

In our age of individualism, social media, and livestreamed church services, it can be easy to wonder whether gathering in person with God's people still matters.

At the same time, there are some unhelpful reasons people might feel compelled to attend church. Some may come out of a sense of obligation; ticking a box on their spiritual checklist. Others may be motivated by guilt, habit, or a quiet hope that their attendance might earn God's favour. While these reasons may get us through the door, they often leave our hearts untouched and our faith unengaged.

So why do we gather? Why has the church, for over 2,000 years, continued to meet together every Sunday, and often throughout the week as well? Why have believers, across centuries and cultures, made gathering a priority?

In this short booklet, we explore ten reasons for gathering. Whether you're just beginning to connect with church life or you've been faithfully attending for years, our hope is that these reflections will help you see gathering not as a burden, but as a beautiful, life-giving part of following Jesus. May they deepen your joy in coming together with God's people, and strengthen your understanding of why it truly matters.

It's Who We Are

1

The Greek word translated church in our Bibles is *ekklesia*. It comes from two words: *ek* (meaning "out of") and *kaleo* (meaning "to call"). A helpful way to understand it is: "a gathering of people called out from their homes to meet in a public place."

In other words: Gatherings gather. Assemblies assemble. A church can't really be the church without coming together. The very word implies community and connection.

In the New Testament, *ekklesia* doesn't always refer to Christians, it simply means a gathering. But when the Bible talks about the church of God, it's describing something deeper: a people God has called out of the world to belong to him and to one another. When we trusted in Christ, we became part of his *ekklesia*; his gathered people, his called-out assembly.

The New Testament gives us beautiful images to describe the church:

- A body – many different parts, brought together to function as one whole
- A temple – with each believer like a stone, building something beautiful
- A household – a loving family, gathering to share life and serve together

Each of these pictures points to togetherness. The church is never described as a building or a location, but as people in relationship, joined to Christ and to each other. That's why we often speak of "gathering as the church," rather than "going to church."

So the first reason we gather is simple, but profound:

We gather because that's who we are.

We are a gathering, a community called out by God to come together in His name.

It's What Christ Died For

2

Jesus once told his followers, "I will build my church." This was at the heart of his mission; to call out and form a new kind of gathering, a new humanity united in him.

A thousand years before Jesus' death, Psalm 22 gave a prophetic glimpse into the crucifixion. The first 21 verses vividly describe the agony of someone being crucified—from the perspective of the one suffering. Many have called it the "fifth Gospel account" because of how clearly it foreshadows Christ's death. But in verse 22, the tone shifts. The suffering one cries out in triumph:

I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you.

From suffering comes victory. From death comes a gathering; a people assembled to praise the Father. This is what Jesus came to accomplish: not only to rescue individuals, but to bring them together into a worshipping, redeemed community. He is the faithful head of a faithful house.

The New Testament echoes this theme again and again:

- "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." (Ephesians 5:25)
- "Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood." (Acts 20:28)

Yes, Jesus died for each of us personally. But he also died to bring us together, to make us one. He gave his life to create a new kind of community, one that reflects the unity and love of the kingdom of God.

In Ephesians 2:11–22, Paul writes that through the cross, Jews and Gentiles are made into one body, one family, one spiritual temple. And this isn't limited to ethnic background. Other passages tell us that slaves and free, men and women, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, strong and weak, all are brought together in Christ. As Ephesians 1:10 declares, God's ultimate plan is to bring everything together in unity under Christ.

So why do we gather?

Because Jesus gave his life to form a gathering, a people who bear his name.

When we meet together as his church, we are participating in something eternal, something global, something he died to create. And we get to be a part of it.

It's What God Commands

3

Gathering with our church family is an act of loving, joyful obedience to God. We don't gather because of guilt or fear, but because our hearts have been changed by grace. We respond to all that God is, and all that he's done for us in Jesus, with gratitude, trust, and a desire to walk in his ways.

The Bible is not just ancient wisdom; it is the Spirit-inspired Word of God. That means when we read a command in Scripture, we're hearing God's heart for us, spoken through his Spirit. These commands aren't cold rules, they are life-giving guidance from a Father who knows and loves us deeply.

In Hebrews 10:25, we're encouraged:

"Do not neglect to meet together."

The word used for "meet" means to assemble or gather. The word "neglect" carries the idea of abandoning or leaving something behind. In other words, don't walk away from the beautiful thing God has given you; his gathered people.

John reminds us in 1 John 5:3:

This is the love of God: that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

God's commands aren't meant to weigh us down, they're meant to lead us into life. He knows what we need, and his instruction flows from his perfect love and wisdom.

- Because we trust God's love...
- Because the Spirit lives in us to help us do what God calls us to...
- Because our hearts are being shaped by his grace...

We choose to gather with his people, not out of pressure, but out of joyful obedience.

So we gather, not because we have to, but because we love the One who invites us.

It's the Early Church Model

4

The church was born on the day of Pentecost, around 2,000 years ago, and from the very beginning, it gathered. Acts 2:1 tells us that “they were all together in one place.” That day, 3,000 people trusted in Jesus, and what did they do next? They continued to meet together regularly:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers... Day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes... (Acts 2:42, 46)

From the start, the early Christians gathered. In public spaces for prayer and worship, and in homes for meals, learning, and mutual encouragement.

This pattern of regular gathering continued throughout the New Testament.

Acts 20:7 shows the church meeting on the first day of the week (Sunday), a rhythm Paul also assumes in 1 Corinthians 16:2. The New Testament points to believers being deeply involved in one another's lives, not just weekly, but often daily:

- And every day, in the temple and from house to house (Acts 5:42)
- Their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. (Acts 6:1)
- Reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. (Acts 19:9)
- Exhort one another every day. (Hebrews 3:13)

Even beyond the New Testament, we see this pattern continuing. Around AD 150, early Christian leader Justin Martyr wrote in his First Apology, 1:67:

And on the day called Sunday, all...gather together to one place... Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead.

From house churches in Jerusalem to small gatherings in Roman cities, from ancient catacombs to cathedrals to school halls and living rooms today, Christians have gathered. Across centuries and continents, this has remained a defining mark of the church.

So we gather with our brothers and sisters, not just because it's helpful, but because it's historic.

We're taking our place in a two-thousand-year-old tradition, joining hearts and voices with the people of God across generations. What a joy to be part of something so rich, so enduring, and so beautiful.

It's What We Need

5

Any honest reading of the New Testament shows that gathering isn't just something Christians do, it's something we need. God has designed the church not only as a place of worship, but as a community of support, encouragement, and growth.

In Colossians 2:2, Paul expresses his longing that believers would be:

...knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ.

In other words, there is a kind of spiritual depth, a fuller grasp of Christ, that only comes when we are united in love with other believers. Growth in Christ is not a solo project; it's something we experience together.

Hebrews 3:13 reminds us of how much we need each other day by day:

Exhort one another every day...that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Our hearts are prone to wander. We need the consistent, loving voice of others pointing us back to grace and truth.

Hebrews 10:24-25 adds:

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together...

God uses his people to wake, inspire, and keep us moving toward love and faithfulness. And in Ephesians 4:15-16, Paul paints a picture of the church as a living, growing body, every part needed, every part doing its part:

When each part is working properly, [it] makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

I need this. I need the gathering. I need the comfort and encouragement of my church family. I need their wisdom, perspective, reminders of what's true. I need the prayers. I need the hymns we sing not just to God, but to one another, as they retune my heart. I need the preaching of the Word. I need the conversations over coffee. I need to be reminded that I'm not alone.

So we gather because God has given us this gift.

And because we were never meant to walk this journey alone.

It Blesses Our Church Family

6

Last Sunday morning, I sat at the back of the gathering and looked around at my church family singing together. I saw:

- veterans of the faith, praising God for his lifelong goodness
- new believers, celebrating the mercy they had so recently received
- those struggling with sin, singing of victory and a future without it
- grievors and sufferers, lifting their voices to a wise and loving Father

Watching my brothers and sisters sing, not just words, but truth they had lived, moved my heart deeply. Their praise ministered to me in rich, beautiful ways.

Before and after the service, I saw even more of the grace of God in our life together:

- mature believers gently restoring those who were repenting
- sufferers praying for one another through tears
- guests being warmly welcomed, embraced, and pointed to Jesus
- people who, outside of Christ, might have had nothing in common, laughing, praying, and sharing life together

If it's true that I need the gathering of God's people, then it's also true that they need it too. If it's true that I grow as we gather in loving unity, then it's true that they grow through the same shared life. If I'm exhorted and stirred up toward love and good works in the gathering, then so are they.

And I get to be part of that.

As part of the body, simply by showing up and joining in, by reading, praying, singing, hearing, serving, embracing, sharing, giving, welcoming, breaking bread, and drinking wine, I get to participate in the building up of others.

So I gather not only for what I need, but for what others need too. I gather to receive the blessings of the body, and I gather to be part of those blessings in the lives of my brothers and sisters.

We gather, because our brothers and sisters in Christ need the gathering. And in love, we want to be there, not just for ourselves, but for them too.

It Allows Pastors to Shepherd

7

In Ephesians 4:7–12, Paul tells us that Jesus, having risen from the dead, not only accomplished the glorious gospel truths of Ephesians 1–3 and enabled us to live transformed lives (Ephesians 4–6), but also gave gifts to his bride, the church. Among these gifts are leaders, especially pastor-teachers, who are given to the church for its good.

- Pastors to equip the body of Christ so that all believers can do the work of ministry: building one another up in love and truth (Ephesians 4:7–16).
- They are charged with watching over the souls of their church family, a weighty and loving responsibility (Hebrews 13:17).
- They are called to shepherd the flock, to serve and oversee it, and to be examples to it (1 Peter 5:1–5).

Pastors shepherd in many ways, by praying, guiding, encouraging, and setting an example, but one of their most essential tasks is to teach and preach the Word of God in the gathered church. This public ministry of the Word is both a command from God and a gracious gift to his people (2 Timothy 4:2).

When we gather, we give space for our pastors to do what God has called them to do: to teach, to equip, and to apply the Word of God to real areas of our lives. Through this, we grow in our faith, are encouraged in our struggles, and are equipped to love and serve others.

As those who belong to Christ, we're part of his universal church. But we're also invited to commit ourselves to a local church, to be known, cared for, and shepherded by those Jesus has called to lead. When we gather regularly, we're saying:

"Yes, I want to be led. Yes, I want to be shepherded. Yes, I want the good gift Jesus has given me in my pastors."

So we gather, to be shepherded by those Jesus has lovingly placed in our lives to teach us, care for us, and help us grow into maturity.

It Encourages Pastors

8

As well as teaching us about the responsibility of pastors, Hebrews 13:17 also highlights the responsibility of the church family toward its leaders:

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

The words obey and submit here don't mean blind or mindless submission. They carry the sense of being persuaded by, having confidence in, entrusting yourself to, and placing yourself under someone. In other words, it means to lovingly trust, listen to, and follow the leadership of faithful brothers in Christ.

Why is this important? First, because of the serious responsibility pastors carry: to keep watch over the souls of their church family, knowing that they will give an account before God. And second, because when the church responds in loving trust and cooperation, pastors can carry out this weighty task with joy, and that joy blesses and strengthens the whole church.

This verse reminds us that pastoral ministry is often heavy and challenging. It can involve discouragement, sorrow, and loneliness. But it also shows us that it can be deeply joyful. And when pastors serve with joy, the whole church is healthier for it.

One of the ways we bring joy to our pastors is by showing up. When we gather, we encourage their hearts. When they prepare sermons, plan, pray, and pour out their lives to teach and equip the church, it means so much when their church family is there to receive that ministry with open hearts.

On the other hand, it can be disheartening when they spend hours studying a passage and preparing a message, only to find that many in the church family aren't present. Of course, there are always valid and unavoidable reasons to miss a gathering. But when absence becomes a pattern for reasons that aren't weighty or necessary, it can leave pastors, as the verse says, groaning.

To picture this, imagine cooking a special meal for a group of friends and family. You put in the time, the effort, the love. Then the day comes, and the table fills with laughter, conversation, and shared joy. That fills your heart. Now imagine preparing that same meal, and most of the seats are empty, without warning or reason. The joy fades, and you're left discouraged.

So we gather, not just for ourselves, but for our pastors. We gather to strengthen their hearts and fill them with joy as they do what Christ has called them to do: to keep watch over our souls and help us grow in faith.

It Proclaims Christ

9

God's people gather because Jesus is risen from the dead.

We sing the praises of God together because, through his death and resurrection, we have been made his people.

We pray together because Jesus, by his death and resurrection, has opened the way into the very throne room of God.

We break bread and drink wine together as a symbol of Jesus' death and as a celebration that he is the Bread of Life, who has brought us into the New Covenant by his blood.

We baptise new believers in our gatherings as a symbol that they have entered into new life through trusting in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

We greet one another with warmth and affection because we have been warmly welcomed into the family of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

We open God's word together, reading it, hearing it preached, submitting to it, because we believe that the God of this book is our God, revealed fully and finally in Jesus, through his death and resurrection.

Our gatherings proclaim Christ. They proclaim his death and resurrection. They proclaim his character, his kindness, wisdom, power, patience, love. They proclaim the promises that are ours in him. They proclaim the grace we have received through him. They proclaim our hope: that he is coming again to make all things new.

And our gatherings proclaim this not just to each other, but to the world. For 2,000 years, in cities, villages, jungles and deserts, God's people have been gathering in the name of a Galilean carpenter. And as the watching world looks on, some are drawn in. Some come to see that this carpenter is more than a man; he is God in the flesh, who died for their sins and rose again to offer them new life.

So we gather. We gather because Jesus is risen. We gather because he is coming again. We gather because, by gathering, we proclaim this glorious gospel, week after week, to each other and to the world.

Every time we gather with the people of God, we are looking forward.

Our gatherings now are a glimpse of the great and final gathering still to come. A day is coming when Jesus will return, and gather all his people, past, present, and future, into one eternal assembly, never to be scattered again.

This is the great hope of the church, that one day, all who belong to Christ will be gathered around him, face to face, in the joy of his eternal kingdom.

Revelation 7v9-10 gives us a breathtaking vision of this final gathering:

A great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb... crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'

This is where the story is heading. This is the destination of every Sunday morning gathering; the gathered people of God, in the presence of the risen Lamb, praising him forever.

When we gather now, in imperfect buildings with imperfect people, we are rehearsing for glory. We are participating in something eternal. Every hymn we sing, every prayer we pray, every sermon we hear, every meal we share, every welcome we extend, it all points forward.

We gather now, looking forward to the day when our faith will be sight, when every tear will be wiped away, when sin and death will be no more, and we will gather together with Jesus, forever.

So we gather, because one day, he will gather us. And that gathering will never end.

CONCLUSION

Church isn't just something we go to. It's who we are, what Christ died for, and what God lovingly calls us into. Throughout this booklet, we've seen that gathering as the church is not about checking a box, earning points with God, or preserving tradition for tradition's sake. It's about participating in something profound:

- a family formed by grace
- a people knit together in love
- a temple built to proclaim Christ
- a preview of the glory still to come.

To gather is to remember who we are, to receive what we need, to bless others, to be shepherded and to proclaim the risen Jesus. It's a gift God has given us, and one we get to give to each other.

In a world that often pulls us apart, gathering pulls us together. In a culture of isolation, it re-orientes us toward community. In an age of distraction, it re-focuses us on what truly matters: Christ, his people, and his mission.

Let's press in, with joy, with love, and with faith, as we follow Jesus side by side, until we gather around him forever.

WHY WE GATHER

1. We gather because we are a gathering.
2. We gather because Jesus died to make us a gathering.
3. We gather because God commands us to gather.
4. We gather because we have been gathering for 2000 years.
5. We gather because we need the gathering.
6. We gather because our brothers and sisters need the gathering.
7. We gather because it enables our pastors to shepherd us.
8. We gather because it encourages our pastors, which benefits us all.
9. We gather because it proclaims that Christ is risen, alive and coming again.
10. We gather because it points forward to the eternal gathering.



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