

The Significance of Gathering

Introduction: The strain of isolation.

“The increase in distress due to social distancing that many Americans are experiencing is a normal response. Given that humans are a social species, this is our biology signaling a need to reconnect socially, just like hunger signals us to eat, and thirst signals us to drink water. Proximity to others, particularly trusted others, signals safety. When we lack proximity to trusted others our brain and body may respond with a state of heightened alert. This can result in increases in blood pressure, stress hormones, and inflammatory responses—which if experienced on an ongoing basis can put us at increased risk for a variety of chronic illnesses.” — Julianne Holt-Lunstad, *Health Affairs*

- We have been made by our Creator to be relational beings and He has designed us to have our identities formed and shaped by our relationships and our habits. For believers, therefore, gathering regularly as a church for the purpose of worship is vital.

Key Point: The church is by its very nature an _____ and gathering is therefore central to Christian identity and practice.

The Gathered People of God

Why do we gather?

1. We _____ an assembly!

Matt. 16:15-18—¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

“church”—ἐκκλησία (ekklēsia)—Derived from two words: *ek* (out or from) and *kaleō* (to call). A gathering or an assembly. The term is used in the LXX of Israel as well as other gatherings; of Christians in the NT (a local assembly, those within a town or city, of all believers in heaven and earth).

⇒ *The church is comprised of those who have been _____ out from the world and unto Christ.*

John 15:19—If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

⇒ *The church is comprised therefore of those who have responded in _____ to the call of God.*

Acts 2:37-39—³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”³⁸ And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

2. We are _____ in Scripture to gather!

Matt. 18:20— “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

⇒ *The _____ of the early church shows us the importance of gathering.*

Acts 2:42, 46-47—⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers...⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

⇒ *The church is _____ against neglecting to gather together.*

Heb. 10:24-25—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.

Key Point: Regularly gathering together with other believers is the proper response to understanding our _____ as the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What do we do when we gather?

We _____ together!

1 Cor. 14:26—*What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.*

“building up”—οικοδομή (oikodomē)—The process of building or construction; that which results from this process.
Jesus’ promise to “build” His church (Matt. 16:18) employed the verbal form of this word (oikodomeō).

⇒ *The church is assembled regularly in order that the Lord Jesus might minister His _____ to us.*

Rev. 2:12—“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: ‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.’”

Heb. 4:12—*For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

(1) We _____ His Word.

1 Tim. 4:13—*Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.*

(2) We _____ His Word.

2 Tim. 4:2—*preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*

(3) We _____ His Word.

2 Tim. 2:1—*First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people*

(4) We _____ His Word.

Col. 3:16—*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.*

(5) We _____ His Word in the ordinances that He has given to us as His church.

1 Pet. 3:21—*Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*

1 Cor. 11:26—*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.*

Key Point: Regularly gathering together with other believers is central to our being _____ to the image of Christ through worship.

Concluding Thoughts

“*Ekklēsia* refers both to the act of congregating and to the community as a congregation. This community becomes *ekklēsia* by the repeated fact of its being summoned by the gospel, called to assemble to praise God. —Thomas Oden, Classic Christianity

1. Our gathering together is central to our collective _____.

2. Our gathering together testifies to the _____ of God in the world.