

GATHER TIME

Showing Up for
What Matters Most!

THE
5G
LIFE

GATHER TIME

Showing Up for
What Matters Most!

By Brandon Beckman

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Chapter 1: What is Gather Time?

Those new to Hope Bible Church are likely unfamiliar with the language of the 5G Life. No, it doesn't have anything to do with the reception you get on your phone. The 5G Life is our attempt as a church to lay out a clear pathway for what it means to be a follower of Jesus. We believe that every Christ-follower must have the 5G's represented in their life. The G's are God Time, Gather Time, Group Time, Give Time, and Go Time. Each of these G's are vital aspects of the Christian life. We have a variety of resources on each of these G's if you'd like to learn more about them. The purpose of this little booklet is to help us understand with more clarity what *Gather Time* is.

There are many different groups of people gathering in the church throughout the week. If I meet a few friends for coffee at Starbucks, is this Gather Time? If I go for dinner at a friend's house and we sing a few worship songs, does that count? What if my family watches our favourite preacher at home on our couch? What does it mean to Gather? If you are like me, you appreciate defining terms as quickly as possible. *Gather Time refers to the local church coming together in a physical space, at a specific time, for the primary weekly meeting centred around the preaching of the Word and the worship of Christ.* This is a long way of saying Gather Time refers to going to your church on Sunday. So why don't I just say that? Each phrase in this definition is needed to articulate and defend the essential aspects of Gather Time - many of which are ignored and disregarded.

“GATHERING” IN THE BIBLE

What a church *is* and what a church *does* are intimately connected. Even the word “church” refers to a group of people who are brought together for a specific purpose. The essence of the church is togetherness, not separateness. From the church’s inception, gathering was at its core. Acts 2:46–47 says, “And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people.” Now this specific passage isn’t necessarily speaking to the Sunday morning gathering as we know it, but it is conveying the idea that if the church is a group of people who are defined by their togetherness, then gathering must be of the utmost priority.

HISTORY OF GATHERING

The history of the gathering or the “Sunday service” is a fascinating one, (to me at least). The worship of the Israelite people changed radically throughout their history. They were rescued out of Egypt to be led into the wilderness so that they might worship Yahweh (Exodus 7:16). They were then instructed by God to establish the Tabernacle in the wilderness as a place where God could dwell among His people. Once the Israelites were

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in the land promised to them, they built the temple under the rule of King Solomon. All of this was done so that the Israelites could meet together with their God. They would gather to perform their ceremonial purification and worship through the sacrificial system. When the Israelites were taken into exile their worship changed from the temple to the

Synagogue. They became a scattered people detached from their temple and the form and function of their gathered worship changed. Even after they were allowed to return to their homeland to rebuild the temple, the Synagogue worship remained the dominant expression of their gathering (Rausch, 2001).

These Jewish Synagogue gatherings would have been where Jesus went during His earthly ministry. And though the temple was still part of their worship for the sacrificial system, the Synagogue meetings were the primary expression of Jewish worship where they would read the Scriptures, pray, and worship Yahweh. Jesus' once and for all sacrifice put an end to the sacrificial system along with all the purification laws, and it opened up the door for worship to take place anywhere at any time (John 4:24). It wasn't until after Jesus' resurrection that the newly established church began to meet together on Sunday instead of Saturday to celebrate what became known as the Lord's Day. These gatherings weren't restricted to the Jewish people. The message of the gospel would now spread throughout the world so Jews and Gentiles (people of all nations) would come together on the Lord's Day to worship Jesus. These newly established "churches" would meet and practice the things they were instructed to from Scripture (1 Timothy 4:13). Even the earliest records of what these gatherings looked like resemble what we do today. There was prayer, communion, a sermon, singing, and fellowship (Allison, 2011). And the church has continued to gather ever since. The meetings have looked different over time, and have had different emphases, some of which needed to be corrected, but *the church has continued to gather*.

GATHER TIME REFERS TO THE LOCAL CHURCH...

So let's get back to our definition of Gather Time. *Gather Time refers to the local church coming together in a physical space, at a specific time*. The first part of this definition stipulates that we are referring to a local church.

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The word “church” has a few aspects to its meaning in the New Testament. The first is the *universal* Church, which includes all believers, in all places, for all time (Ephesians 5:25). The second aspect is the *local* church. This refers to a specific group of people, in a specific area who are committed to Christ and meet regularly to hear the Word preached, worship God, and practice the ordinances of Lord’s Supper and Baptism. When the New Testament uses the word “church”, the dominant use case is this local expression – by a lot (Dever, 2021). This booklet is not intended to be a biblical defense of church membership, but the clear picture in Scripture is a group of people belonging to one church. The pastors knew who was in their care and who wasn’t (1 Peter 5:1-5). This means that you ought to be committed to a local church. In this cultural moment we are inundated with options, we are non-committal, and we often are so driven by convenience. All of these factors lead to a reluctance to belong to a church in a meaningful way. Meaningful membership means that I am committed to this specific family of God so that if I don’t show up –people will notice. Not because of legalism but because your contribution is so meaningful that people would miss you and you would miss them! Gather Time means you belong to a local church.

COMING TOGETHER IN A PHYSICAL SPACE AT A SPECIFIC TIME...

The next part of the definition is the “...coming together in a physical space at a specific time”. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, *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.” This is one of the primary verses used to demonstrate the priority of gathering together in the church. The first century audience of the book of Hebrews were gathering as the church in a time when it was not popular. Many were bearing reproach for claiming the name of Christ and yet the instructions were clear. They were to stir

up their brothers and sisters in the Lord, to encourage one another, and remind one another that Jesus' return is coming. All of this happened when they would meet together. When we neglect to meet together, as some of them were doing, we forfeit blessings for ourselves, and others. It didn't matter that church was inconvenient, that they were being persecuted for being a Jesus-follower, or any other reason they might have had. The command is to not neglect the meeting. Or to say it positively, the command is to show up.

In the definition we also see *coming together in a physical space, at a specific time*. The priority of physically gathering isn't simply a preference, it's a biblical conviction. Obviously, the book of Hebrews was written before computers, internet, and church livestreams, and there is no way the author could have seen the tools that we have at our disposal today. But the age-old question must be asked, "Does the fact that we *can* do something mean that we *should* do something?" Now

just to be clear, I am not against church's using livestream as a tool, and that is certainly a case to be made. What we are against as a church, is people believing their relationship with the church can be one that exists primarily online. We are going to dive into the livestream conversation a bit later, but we must be clear that the physical gathering of the

Meaningful membership means that I am committed to this specific family of God so that if I don't show up, people will notice.

church is essential. Humans are *embodied* souls. Our physical body is part of what makes us human, made in the image of God. Ironically, something uniquely *spiritual* happens when people *physically* gather (Leeman, 2021).

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And that is because it is part of God's design. If Covid-19 taught us anything, it reminded us the blessing of human contact. Facetime is great but nothing beats seeing our family and loved ones and physically embracing them as we were intended to. Church is the same way. The gathering is designed by God to be a physical experience. We gather together and look each other in the eye. We hear the voices of brothers and sisters crying out in song. We observe our church family taking the elements of the Lord's Supper. We witness people going under the waters of Baptism to be raised to walk in newness of life. These physical realities are of the utmost importance. If you are someone who chooses to "watch church" online, when you could otherwise attend, I implore you to reconsider. See the beauty and importance of showing up in the flesh!

FOR THE PRIMARY WEEKLY MEETING CENTRED AROUND THE PREACHING OF THE WORD AND THE WORSHIP OF CHRIST...

The last part of the definition focuses on what Gather Time prioritizes. My church happens to have a group of people who meet Sunday evening to play sports outside our church building. It's on a Sunday, consisting of people in the church, who gather in a physical space, at a specific time, but it's not the primary gathering. It's good to gather with brothers and sisters to play sports and build community, but it's not essential to what the church is. The gathered church is intended to do certain things when it comes together. 1 Timothy 4:13 says, "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching". John Calvin in his "Institutes of Christian Religion" said, "Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists" (Calvin, 2011). These acts (along with a few key other things) are what

makes something a church and not just another group or organization. That's why we believe so strongly in the proclamation of the Word at our Sunday gathering. We must gather together to hear the Word and respond in worship to Christ!

CONCLUSION

We end this chapter with how we began. *Gather Time refers to the local church coming together in a physical space, at a specific time, for the primary weekly meeting centered around the preaching of the Word and the worship of Christ.* I hope you have tremendous clarity around what we mean by Gather Time. This is not an optional add-on to our week. Sunday is the most important day of our week because of the gathering that takes place and the essential role it plays in the spiritual formation of the Christian life. If you aren't showing up – you really are missing out!

Chapter 2: Why Should We Gather?

The first chapter of this booklet was dedicated to explaining what we mean by Gather Time and where we see it in Scripture. Even now that we have done that, you might be saying, “I get that we are supposed to go to church but I don’t know why you are making such a big deal about it?” Why is gathering not just biblical, but a big deal? I am going to provide seven reasons why gathering is a big deal.

TO WORSHIP GOD

This one seems obvious to begin with. One of the reasons we gather as the people of God is to worship God the way He desires to be worshipped. In Colossians 3:16 it says, “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.” Notice how the gathered worship of the church is oriented toward God. Wayne Grudem helpfully says this, “Worship in the church is not merely a preparation for something else: it is in itself fulfilling the major purpose of the church with reference to its Lord” (Grudem, 2020). God loves when His bride comes together for the purpose of His praises. All of the other reasons listed fall under this banner of worship to God.

TO WITNESS TO THE WORLD

The church is a collection of believers and the gathering’s primary intent

is for the worship of God and the edification of believers. However, there is something very special that happens when the outside world stumbles into the church and witnesses what is taking place during the gathering. When unbelievers come, they are able to see people passionately living out their love for Jesus. They are able to hear the gospel preached and the Word applied to their life. They are able to experience the love and hospitality of strangers who are welcoming them. It is an amazing opportunity to witness to the world as we come together. 1 Corinthians 14:23–25 describe this beautiful picture of what can happen when the Word takes root in an unbeliever’s heart when they come to church and they sense that “God is truly here among us.”

TO GIVE

Every believer in Jesus has a spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:7). That means that you and I have something to offer that is literally empowered by the Holy Spirit to bless people. The first question I have for you is do you know what that gift is? Do you know what the Lord gave you to be your contribution to the body? The second question I have for you is where do we see these gifts utilized in our lives? I believe that the gathering is often the primary place we see people using these gifts to bless one another. Now it certainly isn’t the only place they are used – nor should it be! But what an opportunity we have when everyone comes together to engage with our brothers and sisters in a meaningful way. I know for me on a Sunday morning, even more than my contributions in worship, I am engaging with so many people through normal conversations that allow me to pray with people who are discouraged, rejoice with people who are seeing the Lord at work, and give counsel to those looking for help. The other amazing part is that I am not an exception, that is the norm. So many godly people come with a posture of service to give of themselves. We gather to give!

TO RECEIVE

In the same way we gather to give, we gather to receive. To reference Colossians 3:16 again, we let the word of Christ dwell in us richly, as we teach and admonish one another in all wisdom. The “one another” aspect of the gathering is part of what makes it so beautiful. We gather to receive the Word of God as its preached. We gather to hear the singing of our brothers and sisters as we lift up psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. We gather to receive prayers for healing when we are sick (James 5:14). There is only a very small aspect of receiving that can be done while observing church from a distance. But when I come hungry to receive, those weekly interactions and prayers from others are a powerful gift from God. So even our posture to receive with gratitude is worship to the Lord.

TO DISPLAY GOD'S DESIGN FOR THE CHURCH

There are many different metaphors used to describe the church in the New Testament, but most of them convey togetherness. In the New Testament, the church refers to the flock of God, the body of Christ, temples made up of living stones, and the family of God (Luke 12:32, 1 Corinthians 12:12–27, 1 Peter 2:5, Mark 3:31–35). These are just a few of the metaphors used but they are creative images that display people coming together. I love the example of the church being a new temple made up of living stones. That would have been a significant statement considering what the temple meant to the people in the Old Covenant. But now Peter is saying when we gather, it is like a bunch of individual stones coming together to make this beautiful temple. That’s amazing! We cannot display God’s design for the church when we are isolating ourselves from His body. We must be present.

TO PRACTICE THE ORDINANCES

Jesus gave us two meaningful symbols that communicate the New Covenant that we are now a part of. He gave us Baptism which is the entrance into the

church. And He gave us the Lord's Supper which reminds us who is part of the church. Baptism is a symbolic act in which believers publicly profess their saving faith in Jesus. They are immersed under water as a symbol of Christ's death, and they are brought out of it as a symbol of being raised to walk in the newness of life (Romans 6:2–4). The act of baptism is a beautiful picture of the gospel, and it's a visible and public demonstration. The church is present to observe and rejoice with these new believers as they take this step of obedience. Similarly, the Lord's Supper is a symbolic act where believers receive the elements of bread and wine (or juice) to remember the body and blood of Jesus that was given for our salvation. (1 Corinthians

Part of the reason we gather is to be obedient in our participation with these ordinances.

11:23–26). These two acts are sacred. They are not intended to be done outside of the church. Part of the reason we gather is to be obedient in our participation with these ordinances. 1 Corinthians 10:17 says, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." The Lord's Supper is a physical demonstration of unity as we gather together to take the elements. It reminds us of what is our source of unity, namely Jesus Christ. You cannot take these elements in your home or merely watch on a screen as it happens. If we do, we are forfeiting blessing and are disobedient to the Lord's command for us to practice these things together.

TO REFLECT HEAVEN

Did you know the gathered church is a picture of something even more beautiful that is ahead of us? In Revelation 5, we have this picture into the throne room of Heaven. So much of what we read in Revelation is lofty,

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majestic, otherworldly, and difficult to understand frankly. But we do see something that sounds familiar. We see a picture of thousands and thousands of people saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!” We see all true believers of all time worshipping Jesus Christ. Jonathan Leeman uses a helpful image for us as he describes the church as an embassy of Heaven. “What’s a gathered church? It’s an embassy of heaven. Step inside your church or ours, and what should you find? A whole different nation—sojourners, exiles, citizens of Christ’s kingdom... Not only that, you should experience the beginning of Heaven’s culture” (Leeman, 2021). The culture of Heaven resides in our churches. And as we gather together and worship Christ, we anticipate Heaven. We remind ourselves of why we are still here on earth. We are here to see the kingdom of God advance so it would be on earth as it is in Heaven – until Heaven comes.

CONCLUSION

I hope as you finish reading this, there will be an inclination in your heart to say, “I can’t wait till Sunday!” I hope you see not only that gathering is biblical but that it’s a big deal. We gather to worship, witness, give, receive, display God’s design, practice the ordinances, and ultimately reflect Heaven. Gathering is an amazing gift to believers from God to help shape us into the image of Christ. I hope you are seeing that and can’t wait to show up!

Chapter 3: Excuses for *Not* Gathering

I think about how low the bar is for people giving up on coming to church these days, and I have to admit, it is comical. I have heard people say to me that there isn't a time that is ideal for their family because of children's nap schedules, or sports commitments, or because they stayed up too late watching a movie the night before. And my church has three different service times to choose from on a typical Sunday morning. My goal isn't to beat people up with the "law", or to be the church police, but it is to highlight the clear command in Scripture, that even in a time where there were consequences for following Christ, the command to the church was to show up. What is happening in our hearts that leads to this type of thinking which devalues the gathering? While there could be many answers to that question, I want to highlight four excuses we believe that lead to this faulty thinking.

EXCUSE #1 - GOD DOESN'T CARE WHERE I WORSHIP HIM

This is something that is both true and untrue. There is a beautiful piece of this that reflects the heart of John 4:24, where Jesus is making clear, worship isn't about geography it's about the heart. It says the Father is longing for people who will worship Him in spirit and truth. So yes, we can worship God anywhere at any time! The counterbalancing truth that is needed here

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is that Jesus cares about His church. When we read the New Testament as a whole, we see that God is most honoured when we are tethered to a local body, where we can participate with brothers and sisters in worship to God the way He wants us to (1 Corinthians 12:12). Jesus is the head of the church, and gave His life for the church, so it is safe to say that our commitment to the church is part of our worship to Him. There are things that the church does in its gathered worship, which we will look at in the next chapter, that are not intended to be done outside the gathering. When we don't show up, we fail to worship God through the ordinary biblical means that He has set forth for the church. Therefore, God deeply cares that we worship Him in the flesh, gathered with the saints.

EXCUSE #2 - NO ONE WILL NOTICE IF I'M NOT THERE

This statement is said in many different ways but the crux of the argument is that the value proposition of the church can be attained without being there in-person. The thought is that if I watch the livestream or if I listen to the podcast, "I'm good". We don't have time to do a section on consumerism in the church, but one thing we know for sure, we don't simply gather to receive information. We gather to give of ourselves to others. If you catch yourself feeling like no one will notice if you aren't there on a Sunday (which may actually be true), that isn't an argument for less church attendance but for more! Every believer in Jesus has a spiritual gift that they must use to bless others in the church (1 Corinthians 12:7). Here is the amazing part, when we use the gifts that God gave us, not only are others blessed but we are too! I have felt this in my own life countless times. My prayer is that many more would experience the blessing of serving the body when they gather. Having a proper theology of the church will lead us to conclude that every member of the body has a role to play, and when you don't show up the body feels it. And in many ways, it must compensate for your absence. So maybe you are

at a place where people literally don't know you are attending the church. You must recognize the spiritual gifts you have and the duty of service to the church that leads to the delight of others and yourself. Show up with a desire to bless others.

EXCUSE #3 - I LOVE JESUS BUT I DON'T LOVE THE CHURCH

How many people have you heard say something like, "I love Jesus, but the church is so broken and full of hypocrites, so I practice my faith on my own". Let me begin by saying, I have my own stories of brokenness in the church and am deeply sympathetic to those who have experienced hardship as a result of sin in the church. It is disorienting and heartbreaking when the church fails us. There is also something deeply broken about the conclusions

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that many come to from this, like thinking that they can practice their faith on their own. We were never meant to follow Jesus on our own. There is even a subtle arrogance in assuming we can succeed in this life without others. The church was God's design for a community of followers to help each other not lose heart in this world, and to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus and

His imminent return (Hebrews 10:25). I have heard my pastor say that when we say we don't like the church it is like someone saying, "I want to have a relationship with you but I don't like your wife." That isn't going to go very well. The church is the bride of Christ (Revelation 21:2). He loves His church and died for His church. We do not have the option to be a follower

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of Christ that exists apart from the church. Another biblical image of the church is the body. In the same way my finger needs to be attached to my hand and the rest of my body for it to be functional let alone alive, believers must exist in relationship to the church. We need pastors who are looking out for our souls. We need people to love and support us when trials come. The church is filled with people warring against their sin which at times rears its ugly head in real ways. But guess what, that's your story too! And the same grace you need from others, is the same grace we must show to those in the church.

EXCUSE #4 - I ATTEND CHURCH ONLINE

“Online church” has become a popular topic in our digital age. Ever since the development of the TV and the broadcasting of preachers and televangelists, there have been discussions around the value of these things. Many faithful churches over the years were struggling to decide what to do with the latest livestream technology. Do we see this as a helpful tool to reach our people who are shut in and sick, or are we enabling people to stay home when they could otherwise attend in-person? The pandemic forced the hand of many churches to adapt some type of online infrastructure to broadcast their services. Many of those same churches are left asking the question, “What do we do now?” The good news is I believe most people see the biblical rationale and personal benefit of attending church in-person. They gather for all of the reasons that have been discussed and more! But there are some who claim they can meaningfully belong to a church through their online participation or worse believe that their casual online viewing habits are sufficient for Christian spiritual formation. It is the people in that category that I want to respond to.

In his book “Analog Church”, author Jay Kim helpfully observes that the church has always been called to display the values of the kingdom of God which are consistently upside-down from the ways of the world.

He goes on to say in this ever-increasing digital age “one of the most upside-down things the church can offer is the invitation to be analog, to come out of hiding from behind our digital walls... and to be human with one another in the truest sense – gathering together to be changed and transformed in real time,

We do not have the option to be a follower of Christ that exists apart from the church.

and in real space” (Kim and McKnight, 2020). I find the phrase “to be *human* with one another” compelling. We know humans are *embodied* souls. A body isn’t something we have; a body is part of who we are. For all of eternity we will have resurrected bodies. The theology of the body reinforces that we were meant to have human relationships with one another as God intended – body and soul. The “online church” is a bodiless representation of the church that falls short of God’s design. It is like someone looking through a window at their family’s Thanksgiving dinner. You can see it, but you can’t smell it, eat it, touch it, or meaningfully participate in it. Viewing a church service online and gathering as the church to belong are simply not the same thing.

If that is the case, why does my church have a livestream? We (and many other churches) would still conclude that livestreaming the service can be a helpful tool for those who cannot be in person but would love to be. When we think about those who are shut in, sick, travelling abroad on missions or business, we believe the benefit of being able to observe their home church is significant and therefore believe that the pros outweigh the cons. That being said, we would never want to see the livestream become someone’s primary method of “doing church” because we believe that it falls short of the biblical ideal.

CONCLUSION

My hope is that these excuses have been dismantled. I hope you see with tremendous clarity the importance of showing up to be part of the body of Christ. We don't want to be found with a spirit of legalism regarding church attendance, however there is honour in understanding Christian duty. It is our responsibility to show up even when it is inconvenient, when we don't feel like it, and when we feel life is too busy. God loves His church, and we must too!

Chapter 4: Get Ready to Gather

I want to end this booklet by providing some practical ways you can prepare yourself to gather. These things may sound simple but, in my experience, they are ignored by many. As you seek to apply these principles, I believe that you will experience the impact of what a blessing the Sunday gathering was intended to be.

TREAT SUNDAYS DIFFERENTLY

Do you feel the burden of how busy life can be? I think there is a subtle virtue signalling that takes place in our day with how busy we are. “The busier I am, the more important I am” – the thinking goes. We cram more and more things into our schedules and it leaves us feeling stressed, tired, and anxious. If only there was a day that was intentionally set aside for rest! The purpose of the Sabbath in the Old Testament was to have a day set aside as holy. God knew in His infinite wisdom that we would need a rhythm of work and rest in this life. He modelled this for us when He created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. And while we are not under the Mosaic law with its Sabbath requirements, there is wisdom in preserving a day of rest and treating it as unto the Lord. When we take a day of rest, it is another way of saying God is God, and I am not. It also communicates that I am able to accomplish more with the Lord in six days than I can on my own in seven.

I believe we would be tremendously impacted if we simply viewed Sundays as a different type of day in our week. Sundays are not meant to be

a duty for us but a delight! It is a day to gather with your church family to worship God. It is a day to truly rest from your work obligations. It is a day to get outside and enjoy creation. It is a day to slow down and make memories as a family. The more we lean into this thinking, the more our gathering will bless us because we are not crippled by maintaining a busy schedule that clutters our mind.

PRACTICAL QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. What are the things that I must get done at work in my week in order for me to enjoy Sunday?
2. What chores around the home can I do ahead of time in order to enjoy Sunday?
3. What enjoyable routines can I add to Sunday to make it special?
4. What are some things I should consider giving up on Sunday in order to make it special?

Some of us should consider adding a family breakfast or brunch after church. Maybe some of us could benefit from fasting from all social media. I know for me, choosing to prepare our home ahead of time serves us well to enjoy the rest that we feel we have earned from the previous days. These are simple – but they have great impact when we view Sunday as a day that is unto the Lord.

BE EARLY

It is rare for me to attend church at a normal time on Sunday because of my role on Sunday mornings but when I do, I am always blown away at the wonderful chaos that the church parking lot and lobby bring. When you factor in all the effort that goes into getting to church on a Sunday morning, it can be quite an event especially for those families getting a bunch of young kids out the door and checked into their classes! One

of the best ways you can prepare your heart to receive is to simply give yourself time. When I am leading worship, I am often witnessing the frantic late-comers arriving during our first or second song looking for a seat. I often think what a different experience it could be for them if they simply could show up a bit early to the service. In our church we happen to have three options for services. I am confident that there is a service time that could allow most people to get there early to enter into His presence with *thanksgiving* rather than frustration. Discipline yourselves to show up 15-30 minutes early to church, find a seat, and ask the Lord to minister to your heart.

LEAVE LATE

One of my favourite aspects of gathering is the post-service conversations. I love being able to see all of my friends and their families. This is one of the wonderful blessings of the church! Romans 15:7 says, “Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” After the service is done, slow down if you can. Turn around and introduce yourself to the people behind you. People are longing for connection all around you, and we have the beautiful responsibility to welcome one another. Try to create margin around the gathering to allow for these important human connections that are part of our worship unto the Lord.

COME READY TO GIVE

I love in Psalm 96:8 when David says, “Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; *bring an offering*, and come into his courts!” When we come to church, we are to come ready to bring an offering to the Lord. That offering consists of many things but all of them are connected to the posture of our heart. In all that we give, we are to do so cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7). We give our worship to the Lord through our songs and prayers. We give to the Lord through our tithes. We give to the Lord and to others by serving

the body using our spiritual gifts. We give the Lord our mind in how we pay attention and listen to His Word. We come to give. One of the best ways to combat consumerism in the church is to resolve in your

heart when you walk through the doors of your church, that you are there to give of yourself to the Lord.

Sundays are not meant to be a duty for us but a delight.

COME READY TO RECEIVE

Just as we gather to give, we gather to receive. The church in Thessalonica was commended for their example to the world in how they “received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit,” (1 Thessalonians 1:6). There is such a difference between merely showing up to church, and showing up ready to receive. The heart that is ready to receive is one that is in tune with the leading of the Holy Spirit. How many of us have been quenching and grieving the Holy Spirit by how we live day to day? We show up on Sunday after a week of no time with the Lord and wonder why we struggle to hear or feel anything. The truth is, we are not in a posture to receive. Instead, let us come with a heart of repentance and humility. Let us come with a sincere prayer in our heart that the Word of God would be made clear by the Holy Spirit and specifically applied to our lives. Let us come ready to receive words of correction and encouragement from those around us who know and love us. Our posture of receiving ought not to begin on Sunday morning. We should be walking with the Lord receiving daily nourishment from Him so that we come ready for the main meal of the week.

I pray that these simple steps will serve you as we desire to make the most of the Sunday gathering. The Lord’s Day is a gift to believers that is meant to give rest, reinvigorate our love for God and neighbour, and remind us of the beauty and power of the gospel in our lives. I pray you would be

inspired to press into God's design for the church as you show up seeking to meaningfully belong to the body of Christ. The church needs you and you need the church.

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