

## Six Benefits of Being a Part of a Church Family

You ever go to Google to search for something, and you start to type your query into the search bar, and then the autosuggest kicks in? It tries to guess the end of your question based on what other people have searched.

Sometimes, the results are funny. Like the kid doing research on dinosaurs who typed in “dinosaurs were...” and Google suggests “dinosaurs were made up by the CIA to discourage time travel.” Just think there are people out there who really believe this stuff.

Sometimes, the results are deeply disturbing like the person who typed in “How to raise your...” and Google suggests “How to raise your IQ by eating gifted children.” That’s where they all went.

And other times they lead you ponder the deeper questions in life. Someone started to type a question “Why is there a...” and Google suggests “Why is there a light in the fridge and not in the freezer.” It really does make you wonder.

I was looking for a particular article I had read about the scientifically proven benefits of going to church, so what I wanted to type was, “Going to church is good for you.” I got as far as “going to church is...” then Google suggested the following autocompletes:

- Going to church is a waste of time
- Going to church is important
- Going to church is a sin
- Going to church is not necessary
- Going to church is not enough
- Going to church is good
- Going to church is biblical

(Advance Slide) It’s obvious there are a many of opinions about going to church, and a lot of them aren’t very good. Church has gone from something that was a staple of American culture to something that is deeply divisive. We are quickly reaching the point where going to church is no longer something you do just because it’s what you do.

As Christians, we need to understand what the church is really all about and what it really means to be a church family and the more hostile our culture becomes to the Christian faith, the more important it will be to have a church that welcomes you home.

I did find that article on the proven benefits of church. Going to church regularly and being a part of a church family is actually good for you. Studies show that church attendance boosts the immune system and decreases blood pressure. You may think you don’t have time to spare in your week, but science has found that going to church may add two or three years to your life. Researchers though, a baffled, because they really don’t know why.

None of this would surprise our God. He created us. He saved us, and He's the one that made us a family.

## I. 6 Benefits of Being A Part of a Church Family

Things like better health, longer life, less stress, a greater sense of fulfillment are the primary benefits of church. They're secondary. They're not why we go. What I want to give you this morning six real spiritual benefits from having a church home, a church where you are a part of the family.

### 1. Church brings us together for worship.

The first benefit is that church brings us together for worship. You can worship by yourself. Who else here likes to sing at the top of your lungs when you're by yourself in the car? There's nothing wrong with that. You can praise God in your own home. But here's the thing – worship throughout the Bible is corporate. It is something the people of God do together. It's something we need to do together.

Consider this call to worship from Psalm 95, *"Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song."*

Let US sing. Let US shout. Let US come. Worship is an US thing - something we do together as a family. God loves to hear our voices lifted together as one whether in song, or in prayer, or in response to his word. We worship because God loves it and we love him.

God doesn't want our worship because he's insecure and he needs affirmation. He wants our worship because he wants us. Like so many other things, it's about relationship. When I tell my wife how beautiful she is, she loves to hear that, not because she's insecure or vain, but because it draws us together. It cements our love. When we praise God, it does the same thing.

But worship isn't just something we do for God. Worship together also changes us. In Ephesians 5, Paul tells the church in Ephesus that they needed to be wise in how they live.

*Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the LORD's will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the LORD,*

There is something very significant in that verse about the importance of worshipping together – We aren't just singing for God to hear. We are singing for each other. We aren't just lifting up God, we are building each other up. Our worship makes us wise in how we live. It guides us to God's will in our lives. It fills us with the Spirit.

When we lift our voices as one family to give glory to God, something very real happens. Worship together as a family is transformative. Worshipping together can literally change your

life. Not only does it draw us closer to God, but it draws us closer to each other. Worship makes Jesus greater, and makes our problems smaller. Church brings us together for worship.

## 2. Church allows us to practice forgiveness.

Moving on to #2. When I say that church is a blessing and benefit, I don't mean everything about it feels pleasant or easy. Church can be difficult. Some of the most important things in life are difficult, but they're worth it. This is certainly true of church, and the second benefit of the church is like that. It's a blessing even when it doesn't feel like it at the time. Here it is: Church gives us a place to practice forgiveness.

We are a forgiven people, and God calls us to be a forgiving people. Remember the Lord's prayer? Jesus taught us to pray this, *"Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us"* (Luke 11:4)."

Multiple choice question: (4 Slides) What are we supposed to do when someone in the church does something stupid, or they say something that offends us?

- A. Make a thinly veiled post on Facebook to let your grievance be known to all.
- B. Find a better church and let everyone there know how bad your last church was.
- C. Quit coming to church until the perp comes begging for forgiveness.
- D. *"Put on then, as God's chose ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and **patience 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.**"* – Colossians 3:12-13

Which one is the right answer? Do you really believe that?

(Advance Slide) Our experience of forgiveness is directly tied to our willingness to be forgiving. And people at church give us all sorts of opportunities to do just that. Show of hands. How many of us have ever been hurt, wronged, or offended by someone else at church? You too? Look at that. Wow. Praise God. Just think! It gives you a chance to do for someone else what Jesus did for you. I want you to look at church in a different way than maybe you have before. Jesus forgave us, then he calls us to be forgiving and to learn to do that he places us in a spiritual family where we're going to have to forgive one another to make it work. And that's not a reason to quit church. It's actually a benefit. Church is the practice field where we train become more like Jesus. So, if we quit church because it's full of people who require forgiveness, we've missed the point entirely.

So the next time I mess up and say something stupid, you're welcome. I'm just giving you an opportunity to be more like Jesus. Church allows us to practice forgiveness.

### 3. Church helps us not be so self-absorbed

The third benefit is that church helps us not be so self-absorbed. I'm not saying we can't be selfish if we go to church. We all know that's not true. But church gives us a family where we have plenty of opportunities to think about others. We all need church to remind us it's not all about me. Being a part of a church family helps us get over ourselves and become more focused on others.

We've already seen some of the "one another" commands in the Bible. Did you know that there are 59 or so specific commands about how we are and are not to treat one another? Church combats our natural selfishness.

Being a part of a church family requires humility, patience, sympathy, and compassion – all things that help us identify with others. One other thing is necessary. It's a word that sounds old fashioned and unpopular in our modern, woke world. That is submission. Paul writes in Ephesians 5:21 *"Submit to one another out of reverence to Christ."* Submission is the ability to voluntarily put others first. Philippians 2:3-4 says,

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

**(Advance Slide)** When you are in a family, everyone has to submit to someone. Children must submit to their parents. Husbands and wives learn to submit to each other, and put each other's needs first. There are even times when the parents must put the children's needs first.

Church family is no different. We learn to humble ourselves and put each other's needs first.

When we practice a highly individualized, private, personal faith, it can make us more selfish. We become more self-absorbed. It's all about me, what I want, what I feel. What are you doing for me? This is one of the reasons God calls us to a church home, a spiritual family – to help us not be so self-absorbed.

### 4. Church enlightens us with the spiritual insights of others

A fourth blessing in being a part of a church family is that church enlightens us with the spiritual insights of others. It is a place to learn and grow. Not only does a church family grow your heart; It stretches your mind and imparts wisdom.

Paul writes to a younger minister in 2 Timothy 2:2 about the importance of teaching in church, *"The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."* Let me sum this up. "Be taught and teach others so they can teach too."

**(Advance Slide)** Sure, you can read book or listen to a podcast. These days we have the power of Google at our fingertips. We have more information than the largest theological seminary

library in just few touches of the screen.

But church exposes us to multiple insights and experiences at once, and it also gives us a chance to share our wisdom and insight with others. We all learn from each other. It is a multiplied wisdom. I teach Sunday School, but almost every week I'm also a student. Hardly a week goes by where someone doesn't have an insight that I didn't think of. There's an observation not included in the lesson. There's a probing question that causes me to search more deeply.

And the more that come and the more that participate, the more that collective wisdom of the church family rises exponentially.

The other thing that happens with teaching in the church is that it gives us an immediate opportunity to put it into practice. Most matters of morality, ethics and holiness involve our relationships with other people. Kindness, gentleness, patience, humility, forgiveness, love mean very little by myself in my house, but they mean everything when I'm with others. Church isn't just book learning; it is applied learning. Church enlightens us with the spiritual insight of others.

#### **5. Church gives opportunities to serve.**

The next benefit is that church gives us opportunities to serve. Every Christian is given a spiritual gift – an ability or endowment by the Spirit meant to build up others in the body. 1 Corinthians 12:7 says, *"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."* You are gifted for the good of everybody. That doesn't work sitting on your couch. That doesn't work just watching an online stream, or watching a church service on TV. There are no opportunities to use your gifts listening to a podcast while you work out. Discovering, using, and developing your spiritual gift requires church together as a family. It means you have to serve others.

Church gives us a place to stretch our spiritual muscles and use them. We need to do it, and others need us to do it. Every member of the church has something to contribute to the family. Galatians 5:13 says, *"Serve one another in love."* I can't serve you, if I don't ever see you.

Something crucial is lost when you don't come. When you stay home, your spiritual gift atrophies just a little bit. Someone misses out on what you could uniquely offer them. Church gives us opportunities to serve.

#### **6. Church reminds us we are not alone.**

Number six: church reminds us we are not alone. Let's be honest – life is tough and the world is hard. We face trials. We suffer setbacks, and like Alexander, we all have terrible, horrible, no good very bad days.

When you've had weeks like that, that's when you need church family. My week last week went sideways in a big way on Monday. Alyssa had come home for a visit on Easter, and at lunchtime

on Monday we were headed to Springfield to have lunch with Teresa. We drove separately, so Alyssa could head straight back to Kansas City after lunch.

We were driving on I-44. I was in front and Alyssa was following, and traffic was heavy. Just the other side of Strafford I saw everyone swerving out of the of this huge piece of metal sitting in the middle of the road. You couldn't see it until you were almost on it. I moved over and mostly missed it, but I did nick it, but Alyssa didn't have a chance.

I don't know if she swerved or the metal got wrapped up around her wheel, but all I saw was her car dart left in my rearview mirror and head straight across the median. I was like, "Oh, crap, oh crap, oh, crap." Let me tell you that was probably the worst feeling I've ever had as a father in that moment.

Then just as suddenly. I see her car shooting back across the other way. I actually felt some relief, because she didn't hit any cars head on, but then I wondered what she might still hit. Praise God, she made back across, through ditch and across the frontage road and came to rest in a field, shaken up, car destroyed, but she was okay.

Now we've got to get Alyssa back to Kansas City because she has to finish school and she has work. My parents live there, so I thought she could stay with them a couple days as she recovers, and they could help her with transportation, so while Alyssa was at the doctor, I called my mom.

Before I have a chance to tell her what happened she downloads a whole bunch of stuff on me. They're trying to sell their house, but their basement flooded. My 8 year old nephew smashed his finger in a car door, and my 28 year old niece has just received a diagnosis that gives her anywhere from a few weeks to a few years to live, and my sister has a cancerous tumor in her back. This is just more than I can process at once.

I get back to the house that evening, and I check the mail. There is only one thing in the box, and it's a sweet card from Morris and Jennifer and there's a little money in there, with these instructions. "Enjoy some take out on us." They had no idea how much that gesture meant to me in that moment. That was like God tapping me on the shoulder and reminding me, "You're not alone. You have family." We need each other. We were made in love for love to love.