

## **Why We Need the Church (And Why the Church Needs You)**

A lot of attention in the media has been focused recently on people de-churching. These are people who are giving up on church. They might still consider themselves Christian. They might still engage in some spiritual practices, but they are quitting church.

But can I give you some good news? Each week over 110 million people go to church somewhere in America. Let me put that into perspective. If you take all the people who go to a NBA basketball game, an NFL football game, a Major League Baseball game, an NHL Hockey game or a NASCAR Race or any major league sporting event and you add all of their attendance up for the entire year, it would not equal the number of people who go to church on a single weekend. More people are in church this weekend than will go to all the major sporting events combined in America this year.

Granted, not all of them go to church for the right reasons. Some go out of guilt. Some go to keep their parents or their spouse from nagging them. Some go out of tradition, or because they think the connections will be good for their business. But many of them go because they truly love Jesus, because they love God's word, and because they love God's people.

How about you? Why are you here this morning? When you're not here. Why not?

There are times we all want to skip church. Maybe you heard about the mother who went to wake up her son for church. When she knocked on his door, he said, "I'm not going!"

"Why not?" asked his mother.

"I'll give you two reasons," he said. "One, they don't like me. Two, I don't like them."

His mother replied, "I'll give you two good reasons why YOU WILL go to church. One, you're 47 years old. Two, you're the pastor."

Yes, it's true. There are some Sunday mornings where even the pastor would rather skip church.

We can think of a lot of reasons to skip. It's my only day to sleep in. I have too much stuff to get done. It's the only day I have with my family. I don't need the church to pray or read my Bible, or as we've heard a lot after Covid, and the lockdown, and streaming, I just watch online.

This is our last Sunday in the Rooted series – how to make sure your life is really rooted in Jesus, and one of the essential things we need if we are going to be rooted in him is the church. We need the church, and the church needs you. So many today look at the church as an optional extra. It's nice if you can do it, but you don't really need to. Others look at it as something that only gets in the way. It's hindrance, not a help. Others see it as antiquated and out of date. Church was just fine for great-grandma, but we've kind of outgrown that. The church is filled with outdated ideas for a different time.

Nothing could be further from the truth, and we're going to talk about why you need the church and the church needs you.

## I. For Your Own Good

First, you need church for your own good. Did you know that attending church is literally good for you – scientifically good for you? Studies at Harvard and Vanderbilt and others have found that attending church is linked with a **increased happiness and decreased emotional stress. It boosts the immune system and decreases blood pressure. You will also live longer.** Regular participation in worship services reduces your risk for mortality by 55%.<sup>1</sup>

**(Advance Slide)** But those aren't the kinds of reasons I'm talking about. You need church for your spiritual health. Church is essential to your faith and your relationship with God. You need church to be rooted in Jesus. Without church, your roots will be shallow, they won't reach all the nutrients they need and you can be easily uprooted.

We need people who will listen to and pray for us. We need the encouragement of others. We need not to only worship ourselves, but we need to be lifted up by the worship of others. We need people who will call us when we are sick. We need people who will bring us food when we're down and out for a few days. We need others who pour their lives, their love, their insights from Scripture, their spiritual gifts into us. We need the church.

We could do a whole series on this, but let me share one key reason we need church. **We all need spiritual leadership.** We need people who can speak truth into our lives, even uncomfortable truths; truths that we don't want to hear, but we need to hear them.

Here's one of those uncomfortable truths. We aren't very good at being our own spiritual leaders. Left to our own devices, we will mess it up almost every time. We all need people to provide spiritual leadership in our lives. Dare I say it we need authority.

I know that sounds un-American, but it is biblical. We need shepherds to guide and guard us. This is why God has provided elders and pastor-teachers and those that can provide spiritual authority in our lives. I need guys like Shawn and Terry as much as anyone else. As a pastor-teacher myself, I need to submit myself to spiritual authority. Sometimes it comes from the elders who are also my spiritual brothers. Sometimes, it comes from my dad or father-in-law who bring decades of ministry experience and spiritual maturity. Sometimes, it comes from the other preachers I meet with every Wednesday. These are guys who will hear my problems. They will understand. They encourage me, but they also look me in the eye, and say, "Dan, you need to grow up. You know this, this, and this, so you need to stop whining about it, and do something." If I quit showing up for our Connect gatherings on Wednesday mornings, I would never have that spiritual leadership speaking into my life when I need it.

Sometimes, that spiritual leadership comes from you. You say something that speaks truth into

my own heart. It might cause me to wriggle uncomfortably at first, but I need it. There are weeks you really need to hear what God says through me, or what God says through Shawn or Sara in Sunday School, even if you don't want to hear it. Did you know that the Bible says these spiritual leaders are gifts from God? In Ephesians 4, Paul talks about the various gifts that Jesus has given to the body of Christ. In Ephesians 4:11-13, He writes this:

*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds[c] and teachers,[d] 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood,[e] to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,*

Some of those gifts are apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. These gifts aren't just those who have the gift of speaking prophetically, or have the gift of evangelism, or the gift of shepherding, or the gift of teaching. The people themselves are gifts. Those that fill those roles of spiritual leadership are a grace from God. God gave them to us for our own good, and we avoid them, ignore them, and cut them out of our lives to our own detriment.

No, we're not perfect. I say and do stupid things sometimes. Just ask Teresa. She'll tell you. Shawn says and does stupid things sometimes, and Terry, well, Terry is Terry. For our own good we need godly leaders and godly shepherds. Men and Women that God has called to a high and holy role in our lives, and through his grace and strength they enable, equip and empower you.

In Hebrews 13, the author of the letter gives some final instructions to the church, and he says a couple of powerful things about church leaders. In verse 17, he writes,

*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.*

Picture your church leaders this way, and leaders this is how we need to see ourselves. Your church leaders, your elders, your pastor, your teachers, they stand guard around the walls of the church. They are on the lookout for dangerous threats. They sound the warning. They provide covering fire that protects you. They organize our defense. As this verse says, they keep watch over your souls. They are a gift from God. You need them for your own good.

## **II. For the Good of One Another**

Not only do we need church for our own good, but we need the church for the good of one another.

It isn't just the leaders in the church you need. We all need each other. There are 59 separate one another commands in the New Testament that describe everything we do for one another. We are to love one another, accept one another, teach one another, serve one another, be kind and compassionate toward one another, and spur one another toward love and good deeds, and the list goes on.

If we skip out on church, these things simply cannot happen. No matter how much you pray on your own, read the Bible on your own, or worship on your own, there is a part of your spiritual life that cannot grow. Spiritual growth requires one-anothering. Yes, that's a real term, because I just made it up.

This is something the Bible speaks openly about. Hebrews 10:25 says, *"Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another."* In this verse, encouraging one another and not meeting together are mutually exclusive. They cannot both happen at the same time.

Without ongoing, consistent one-anothering, we begin to fall back and fall apart. We spiritually weaken and the muscles of our faith atrophy. As we saw a couple weeks ago, we all have spiritual gifts to help one another and to build up the body. We cannot grow and mature in our faith without one-anothering with one another. You need the church and the church needs you.

**(Advance Slide)** This is what old timers in the church called backsliding. It's a word they got from the Old Testament prophets who confronted God's people about backsliding when they quit following God's laws, and started doing their own thing and following the ways of the nations around them. You see, when you quit actively following after God, you will follow something else.

The Christian life is one of growth or decline; advancement or retreat. You're either going forward or backward. You don't maintain a status quo. You don't reach a spiritual plateau and stay there. You start sliding backwards.

**I read an article about a personal trainer named Drew Manning.** Drew had always been a fitness junkie. He was a gym rat and staying in shape came naturally for Drew. However, he was failing as a trainer. He didn't understand his heavier, out of shape clients. He would alienate them and they would give up and go back to their burgers and shakes.

After losing one more client, he decided he would put himself in their shoes, so he could better understand their struggles and identify with them. He quit the gym and quit working out. He started consuming junk food and fast food.

At first, Drew said, the experience was euphoric. He got all this time from not going to the gym. He had the freedom to do fun stuff he couldn't do before. And he loved eating all the junk food. It felt so good. Give me some more of that. And, at first, his physique didn't change. He didn't have the time and effort and pain of working out, and he had the rush of all those empty calories. It was awesome.

But then things started changing. He began to crave the burgers and shakes. He could never get enough. He became lethargic. He quit helping around the house, and didn't want to play with his 2 year old daughter. In six months, he gained 70 pounds.

But the effects of his weight gain were far more than physical. He became insecure. His self-image plummeted. It altered his relationships and self-confidence. The mental and emotional toll were greater than he ever imagined.

**(Advance Slide)** This is a physical image of what happens to us spiritually when we give up on church. At first, it feels great. I can sleep in. I've got all this extra time. Nobody's stepping on my toes. Nobody is pressuring me to put something else on my calendar, and at first, nothing seems to change spiritually. We have the same attitude, the same values.

But then our attitude shifts. Our expectations change. Our priorities begin rearranging, and sin and selfishness begin to creep in. We are no longer feeding on spiritually nutritious food, and we binge on spiritual junk food. We crave things that aren't good for us. Our spiritual growth slows, then stalls, then begins to slip. We become lethargic in doing good.

This is not healthy. We need the church and the church needs us, not just for our own good, but for the good of one another.

Hear me on this church, regularly skipping out on church is one of the most spiritually selfish things you can do. It says, "God, I don't need you. I can get by without you. I know you say I need it, but I know better." It says, "Brother and sister in Christ, I don't need you. There's nothing you contribute to my life. I'm better off without you." And it says, "Brother and sister in Christ, you don't need me. Even if you do, I don't care."

But you need the church and the church needs you.

### **III. For the Good of the World**

Thirdly we need the church for the good of the world. The church is not a little club that exists only for the benefit of its members. Jesus has put us in his church for the good of the world.

Jesus' strategy is very simple really. Listen to John 13:34-35, *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another (there's one of those one anothers), even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

Here's God's strategy for changing the world: Christians loving each other in local churches all over the world, telling others the good news both by word and in relationship with other believers." Jesus' love spreads when we get together and love one another.

**(Advance Slide)** The love of Jesus as demonstrated through the love of the church has changed the world we know, and has rewritten the most basic assumptions of what it means to be human. The pagan world before Jesus was a most cruel and heartless place. The world of Assyria, Babylon, Alexander the Great and the Roman Empire was a ruthless uncaring world, that none of us would want to live in. There were no concepts of equality or human rights. It was the oppressed's role to be oppressed. It was the oppressor's right to oppress. The mighty

crushed the weak. The rich consumed the poor. Men raped and abused women.

The gods of the ancients scorned the weak and the downtrodden. The starving deserved no pity, the alien no sympathy; beggars were rounded up and discarded. The sick confined and excluded. This is how it always was. This is how it would always be.

Jesus and the church changed all of that. In dying the death of a criminal slave and returning from the grave, Jesus raised up the low and despised of the world. He made the first last, and the last first. He had chosen the foolish things to shame the wise, and the weak to shame the strong. In Jesus, God seemed closer to the weak than to the mighty, to the poor than to the rich. In any beggar, and in any criminal, you might just be staring into the face of Jesus.

It was the church displaying the love of Christ that founded hospitals to care for the sick, established orphanages to provide homes for the fatherless. It was the church that created universities to educate the masses and pass on knowledge of the truth. The Ivy League colleges such as Harvard and Yale began as Christian institutions dedicated to the training of ministers. It was the church that built and hosted shelters and pantries and soup kitchens.

The very concept of charity and volunteerism is inseparably rooted in the church displaying the love of Jesus Christ. Did you know the word charity originally meant “Christian love of one’s fellows”? Only in modern times did its meaning evolve into providing for those in need. These are concepts that simply did not exist before our Savior walked this earth and established his church.

The late Malcolm Muggeridge wrote: “I’ve spent a number of years in India and Africa where I found much righteous endeavour undertaken by Christians of all denominations; but I never, as it happens, came across an orphanage run by the Fabian society (British socialist organization) or a Humanist leper colony.”

Medical advancements were driven by devout doctors who believed that every person is created in the image of God. The scientific revolution was launched not by atheists or evolutionists, but by devout scholars who believed since God created the world, it was a world of order that could be studied and understood, not a world of chaos.

George Washington Carver, the great scientist of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century who got his start just down the road. He’s most famous for coming up more than 300 products and uses for peanuts. Carver said, “I love to think of nature as an unlimited broadcasting station, through which God speaks to us every hour, if we will only tune in.”

This is to say nothing of forgiveness, hope, and eternal life. We need the church for the good of the world. But it goes beyond just the earthly realm that we experience with our five senses.

There is another world we are a part of too. We live not only in a physical universe, but we are residents of and deed holders to a future in the spiritual realm.

One of my favorite biblical purpose statements of the church is found in Ephesians 3:10 the apostle Paul declares, *"His purpose was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms."*

This verse is loaded with goodies. God's desire was to put his manifold wisdom on display. *Manifold* is like a diamond. There many layers or facets of God's supreme and beautiful wisdom. It doesn't just make sense from a certain point of view. It's beautiful from every angle. And when we come together, we are like a pedestal to show it all off. The church is a display case for the all-knowing intelligence and the perfect application of the knowledge of God.

**(Advance Slide)** And just who is God using the church to show his wisdom to? The rulers and authorities in the spiritual realms. This refers to Satan and demons and spiritual forces of darkness that wage war against your souls and who have dark, demented schemes to destroy your life.

There is an amazing thing that happens every time the church gathers to worship, to pray, to learn, and to love. Every time we assemble as the church, we kick Satan in the teeth. Every time we worship together, we throw a wrench in his works. Every time we pray together, we mess up his plans somewhere someway. Every time we proclaim and learn from God's word, we advance God's kingdom and send the enemy in retreat. Every time we love together, we tick him off. Far more happens on a Sunday morning than you will ever see with your eyes.

The greatest power on earth today isn't a virus. It isn't climate change. It isn't any political force or idea. The greatest power on earth isn't nuclear power, solar power, wind power, or hydro power. It isn't quantum computing. The greatest power on earth today isn't the United States, or China or Russia or any block of nations. The greatest power on earth today is when the people of God come together as the body of Christ. The church is the greatest power in the world. Jesus said, *"I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."*

I remember at the beginning of the Pandemic all these church growth experts declaring, "Online church is the future of church." Well known preachers were claiming, "We just have to get used to the fact that online church is just as much church as regular church."

That lasted about a month. In late April 2020, online streams and virtual attendance was through the roof. Some people were doing online church at 3 or 4 churches. I had preachers in my Wednesday Zoom preacher's meeting gushing about record attendance online.

Do you know what happened? By May the numbers bottomed out. There was this huge drop almost every night. And for those that tried to hang on, they quickly discovered it just wasn't the same. Something was missing. Something wasn't right.

Within months those same experts and preachers that were declaring the future of the church was online were issuing mea culpas. We were wrong. This will never replace real fellowship. We

need in person worship. We need each other. The price is just too high without it. You need the church and the church needs you.

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<sup>1</sup> [Worship is good for your health: Vanderbilt study | News | Vanderbilt University](#) See also: [Harvard Study: Going to Church Boosts Health \(instituteformaturalhealing.com\)](#)