

I Love Sundays

Genesis 2:1, Mark 2:27, Psalm 122

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There is a song by Toby Mac called *A Lil Church*. It says:

*"I could use a little church right now.
Love to have a little family around.
I've been feeling so overwhelmed
I could use a little church right now."*

Isn't that so true? We all need a little church from time to time. Now, if you're into Formula One racing, you know it's the fastest sport in the world.

Central to winning the race is the pit-stop. No driver, no matter how fast they drive, can't win a race without taking a pit-stop.

Yes, a Formula One race is mainly about speed and strategy, but it's in the timing and management of the pit-stop that the race is often won or lost. That's what church is for us.

Today we're starting a new series called *I Love Sundays*. For the next few weeks we're going to be looking at why rest and corporate worship are an essential part of the Christian life and why, because of this, Sunday is meant to be the best day of your week.

I remember, as a kid, that my parents made sure that I was in church every Sunday. I grew up in a home where church was a priority.

My parents understood the truth that church isn't just about what happens in the worship service. It's about greeting people and talking with them before and afterwards.

Church is a family, and you don't spend time with family because you have to, but because you want to. Unfortunately, things have changed a great deal since I was a kid.

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A few years ago, the *Pew Research Center* did a survey of Christians in North America. He asked them a simple question, "*What are the important aspects of being a Christian?*"

The top six answers were:

- Believing in God
- Being grateful for what you have
- Forgiving those who have wronged you
- Always being honest
- Praying regularly and,
- Helping the poor and needy

After those six, the results get interesting. Out of all the people questioned, the following show some interesting percentages.

48% thought spending time with family was an important aspect of being a Christian while 42% thought Reading the Bible was.

35% thought attending church was, 28% thought serving in the church was, while only 18% thought resting on the Sabbath was important.

The researcher concluded the study saying, "*These statistics are evidence of an epidemic Christian leaders have recognized for some time: North American Christianity has been hijacked by the individual at the expense of the whole.*"

When I was a kid, a regular church attender meant that they were in church every single week.

Today, people think they are in regular attendance if they are in church once a month or less. Church attendance does not have the priority it used to have.

Once upon a time, things used to stop on Sundays. People went to church and worshipped God. Afterwards they ate together, hung out together, rested and had fun together in the afternoons.

Sunday wasn't an extra day to get things done or a bonus day to put our kids in high-impact activities so they could get ahead. Sunday was a day of rest and worship.

Those are two important things – rest and worship. Only shadows of that remain today. Businesses like Chick-fil-A and Hobby Lobby are closed on Sundays. They do so because they believe that rest and worship are important.

On the Chick-fil-A website they explain: *“Our founder, Truett Cathy, made the decision to close on Sundays in 1946 when he opened his first restaurant. This decision was as much practical as spiritual. He believes that all franchised Chick-fil-A Operators and their Restaurant employees should have an opportunity to rest, spend time with family and friends, and worship if they choose to do so. That's why all Chick-fil-A Restaurants are closed on Sundays. It's part of our recipe for success.”*

It's also part of God's recipe for success - rest and worship. God has a rhythm. The universe has a rhythm. The planets in our solar system have a rhythm. The four seasons have a rhythm. Our bodies have a rhythm. Everything has a rhythm.

Genesis 2:1-2, *“Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.”*

The Bible says that Sundays are God's gift to us. God made Sunday for us! Mark 2:27, *"Then he said to them, The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."*

Sunday is God's prescription for surviving a busy and hectic world. God created us with the need to rest. He created us to require one day in seven to recharge our batteries and re-center our lives.

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So today I want to talk about the importance of worship. Specifically, I am talking about corporate worship.

One pastor wrote, *"There is something you can't see, touch, taste, or smell about church attendance that makes it the most powerful investment of your week. Something about being in church makes us better and qualifies us for special blessings and provisions from God."*

In the beginning of Psalm 122 we see that David got excited when he was invited to church.

Psalms 122:1, *"I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'"*

Why was David so fired up about the thing that many people are turned off by today? Why was it that David couldn't wait to get there?

What did he know that we don't church? In this short little psalm David gave several reasons as to why we should go to church.

The first reason is found in verses 2-4 where it tells us why David was so happy to be going to the temple to worship.

Psalms 122:2-4a, *"Our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem. Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together. That is where the tribes go up—the tribes of the Lord...."*

David was describing what it was like to go visit the temple. Jerusalem was a densely packed community. The temple was in the center of it.

Growing up in Bethlehem, which was a small little village, David was a shepherd which meant he spent a lot of time out in the countryside by himself.

It must have been an amazing experience for him when he came into the hustle and bustle of the city.

There's a dynamic that happens when we gather together for corporate worship. Now, that doesn't mean that personal worship isn't important.

We need to have a daily quiet time with God and spend time with Him in private worship. However, corporate worship is also important.

We saw this during COVID. I'm so thankful for the videos of our weekly services and for Oscar, who makes that happen every week, but it's mainly there for people who can't make it to church.

It's not there as an alternative to church. It's not the same. Something is missing when you watch a service online as opposed to physically attending.

The Bible says that we, as believers, need one another. We were created to live the Christian life in community.

Being a Christian is more than just reading our Bible, praying and maybe watching a church service on the television.

For David, it wasn't just the fact that there was a crowd. The important thing was that these people were the tribes of Israel. In other words, they were family. Perhaps the only time they would see each other was at the temple.

Have you ever met another Christian and felt that you knew them, that it was like they were family?

A minister relates the story of flying from an overseas conference. He had a 5-hour layover in Frankfurt airport and was just sitting there bored when he noticed a man sitting near him.

There was something about this person. He smiled at people as they passed by. There was kindness in his eyes.

Eventually the minister went over and spoke to him and found out that he was a missionary heading back to Africa.

He said it was as if he was reuniting with an old friend. They talked and laughed and when he said goodbye to get on his flight, he felt he was saying goodbye to a lifelong friend. That's the presence of family.

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The second reason that we need to go to church is also found in verse 4.

Psalm 122:4b, *"To praise the name of the Lord..."*

David's saying that it wasn't just who was there, but what was happening that was important.

This was more than just a family reunion. The people were there for a reason, and that reason was to worship God. Many had come from a great distance in order to be there. The focus was to give God glory.

Again, there's a difference between individual worship and corporate worship. There's a different dynamic. There's a different energy and power that's present.

That change in dynamics, the presence of family and praise of God, helps draw us into a deeper sense of worship.

So, why did the people have to go to Jerusalem? Why was the temple so important? Why didn't they just stay at home and worship God from the comfort of their own home?

The end of verse 4 says, “...*according to the statute given to Israel.*”

The people went to Jerusalem because God told them to do it. David said they had come “*according to the statute given to Israel.*” In other words, they were there because God told them to gather there.

God wanted them to gather as a community and as a nation. God wanted them to come and be together in that place. It's important that we gather together like this, as family.

Hebrews 10:24-25, “*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*”

We're not to give up meeting together, because God calls us to spur one another on to love and service. There's encouragement in community. God knows we need each other.

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Another reason we should go to church is found in verses 6-8.

Psalms 122:6-8, “*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: “May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels.” For the sake of my family and friends, I will say, “Peace be within you.”*”

Why did David pray for the peace of Jerusalem? So that the people of God would be secure. He prayed for peace for the sake of his brothers and friends.

In other words, he wanted his family, the nation of Israel, to be safe and blessed. He was seeking the good of his family.

Going to church is important is because it gives us the opportunity to serve, to bless the family of God. It allows us to use the gifts we've been given.

A pastor from a large church spoke about the importance of serving in their church. He was talking about the fact that serving allows people to use the gifts that God had given, and when we use the gifts we've been given in service to God, it leads to satisfaction.

That church was busting at the seams and needed to build. The pastor was praying for someone who could help lead the church in a building project.

One Sunday a man spoke to him and said that he wanted to serve, but he didn't think that he had anything to offer. He didn't feel he could sing in the choir or lead a Bible study.

When asked what he did, the pastor found out he was the head architect for a firm that designed huge projects.

He was the answer to the church's prayer. That man went on to design several new buildings as the church continued to grow.

Psalm 122 ends saying, *'For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your prosperity.'*

David's focus in this Psalm wasn't simply that his family or nation would be blessed but that all nations would be blessed through his family. He prayed for God's prosperity for the sake of the nations.

God made His glory known to all people through His creation, but when God wanted to communicate His love and plan of salvation to the world, He did it through a person.

Genesis 18:18, *"Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him."*

He chose Abraham and told him that He would bless him and that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

It was a simple plan. God would bless Israel and when others saw this blessing they would be drawn to God as well.

David sought the peace and prosperity of Jerusalem because he understood it was a witness to the love and mercy of God.

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Conclusion

Likewise, corporate worship is important because it's a witness. It has an impact on the community.

The church is God's primary vehicle for the proclamation of the Gospel. The abundant life is found in the community of the local church.

Over the next couple of weeks, we'll be looking at ways in which Sundays can change our lives and the lives of people around us.

Today, I want to challenge you to make church a priority. Come weekly, make the decision to make it a commitment. Take your next step, whatever that may be.

Years ago, a church sociologist did a study of satisfied church members and discovered that they have six things in common.

- (1) They attend consistently.
- (2) They develop at least six friendships with other members of the church.
- (3) They have a place where they serve somewhere in the church.
- (4) They call the church “my church.”
- (5) They give steadily to the church.
- (6) They invite others to their church.

If you’re new, pick number one and start coming consistently. If you’re already doing that, pick one of the other actions you’re not doing and start doing that. Just take your next step, whatever that is.

“I rejoiced with those who said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord.”