Theological Equipping Class
The Gathering

October 4, 2026

A changing culture

Statistics: 45-48 weeks/year vs. 35 weeks/year

"imperfect as it is, it is the dearest place on earth to us." (Spurgeon)

Why has Church Attendance Declined?

1. Work
2. Kids sports
3. Greater affluence
4. Online options
5. The rise of megachurch culture
6. The increasing rise of individualism and subjective Christian experience
7. The cultural disappearance of guilt and shame as motivators toward righteousness
8. A weak ecclesiology.

- *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 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 favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.* (Acts 2:42–47)

- *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 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.* (Hebrews 10:19–25)

Attendance begins with affections

Questions to consider:

- What is the Gathering?
- Why is it Important?
- What are the Costs Associated with Neglecting It?
- How can you Prioritize the Gathering in your own Life and Home?

What is The Gathering?

Ecclesiology: the study of the ekklesia

- The word ekklesia is used in the NT just over 100 times & in about 90% of those uses it is just translated as church. But, its also translated as assembly or congregation in other contexts.

- *Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together.* (Acts 19:32)

- Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament)

    - *how on the day that you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, the Lord said to me, 'Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so.'* (Deuteronomy 4:10)
    - *Then David said to all the assembly, "Bless the Lord your God." And all the assembly blessed the Lord, the God of their fathers, and bowed their heads and paid homage to the Lord and to the king.* (1 Chronicles 29:20)
    - *And many people came together in Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month, a very great assembly.* (2 Chronicles 30:13)
    - *Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the godly!* (Psalm 149:1)

- Any assembly or gathering of a group of people for a shared purpose is an ekklesia. When that gathering is composed of Christians who are gathered for the purpose of worship, we call that the church.

- The gathering is the assembly of believers gathered together for the purpose of vertical worship and horizontal discipleship, through edification and encouragement.

- There is no command that specifies when and where a church gathers, but there is a command THAT they gather.

- *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.* (Hebrews 10:25)

- When do we gather?

- So what is unique about that time?

- Means of grace

    - "The means of grace are any activities within the fellowship of the church that God uses to give more grace to Christians." (Wayne Grudem)
    - “those means which God has ordained for the end of communicating the life-giving and sanctifying influences of the Spirit to the souls of men…" (Charles Hodge)
    - "external, humanly perceptible actions and signs that Christ has given his church and with which he has linked the communication of his grace." (Herman Bavinck)

- How many are there?

    - "Strictly speaking, the Word and the sacraments alone can be viewed as means of grace." (Bavinck)

- Word, sacraments (communion and baptism), and prayer

    - "The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word; by which also, and by the administration of baptism and the Lord's supper, prayer, and other means appointed of God, it is increased and strengthened." (London Baptist Confession of 1689)

    - What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption? Answer: The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation. (Westminster Shorter Catechism)

- Where do those three things: word, sacrament, and prayer combine?

Why is the Gathering Important?

- "The gathering of a church is both an “embassy” of Christ’s kingdom and the temporary “geography” of that kingdom. We gather in order to represent heaven’s rule and judgments, establish a visible outpost of Christ’s kingdom, testify to the King, identify citizens of the kingdom, form a people, mobilize a people, and exalt the King. A church becomes a church in the gathering. It exemplifies the universal church in the gathering. It is where we as believers show what we are, learn what we are, become what we are, rejoice and give praise to God for what we are. We are God’s people, Christ’s body, the Spirit’s temple, the shepherd’s flock, the vine’s branch, the kingdom’s citizens, the demonstration of God’s wisdom and grace. And the assembly enacts and illustrates all of this. It’s not surprising, therefore, that the principalities and powers of this world should practice their opposition to Christianity by targeting church gatherings." (Jonathan Leeman)

1. The Bible expects and even commands it.

2. We need the gathering for nourishment.

3. Provides a context for you to nourish others.

4. Provides an opportunity to have your own inherent self-centeredness crucified.

5. Provides a context to serve the body.

6. Provides a context for fighting division and disunity.

7. Provides an opportunity to partake of the ordinances or sacraments of the church.

- Church membership vs. gym membership and the ideal "member"

What are the Costs or Consequences of Neglecting the Gathering?

- There is no statute or rule in Scripture that declares how many weekly worship services one must attend. Therefore, we are dealing with principles rather than prescriptions!

1. You will miss out on the “spurring-on effect” of regular interaction with other believers.

2. You will have gaps in your understanding of systematic teaching and/or exposition of books of the Bible.

3. You aren't serving the body.

4. You are discipling your kids to devalue the church as well.

How Can You Prioritize the Gathering?

1. Study theology.

2. Learn to love the church.

3. Invite others in to your life to keep you accountable to regularly gathering with the church.

4. Make sacrifices to be here.

5. Embody this to your kids.