

SEPTEMBER 12, 2021 • LIFE GROUP STUDY GUIDE •

# *Why Church?*

Rediscovering the  
Meaning and Mission  
of God's People





## **Why Church? Part One: Gathered**

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### **The Church as God's Dream**

The Church: God dreamed it. God loves it. God is building it. It is God's.

"The church precedes creation in that it is what God has in view from all eternity and creation is the means by which God fulfills his eternal purpose in time. The church does not exist in order to fix a broken creation; rather, Creation exists to realize the church.... God made the world in order to make the church, not vice versa." – Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshipping Community*

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing. For he chose us –in him **before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.**" – Ephesians 1:3-4.



Implications:

**1. We love what God loves. We delight in God's dream**

1 Peter 1:22: "Love each other deeply, from the heart."

"...Debates over masks, vaccines, and much else divided church members trapped in their homes and glued to Facebook feeds filled with dire warnings and conspiracy theories. Christians liked each other a lot more before social media. Take away the unifying experience of weekly worship together under the same roof, and the bonds of affection have frayed." – Hansen and Leeman

Romans 12:5 "...in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

If we 'belong' to Christ, if we are "in Christ", then through him we also 'belong to each other' – are knit together into this 'body' of 'different-s' – of others who are not like us.

[Y]our church is where Christ says he's present in a unique way. We would even dare to say that your church and ours is where heaven touches down on earth—where our prayers begin to be answered: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." – Hansen and Leeman





## 2. We Participate in Worship Together Three “Spheres” of Worship

### A. **Everyone worships, all the time.**

We all ‘love’ someone or something that captivates us. Everyone does. The question is: what or whom do I worship?

### B. **Christian “whole-life” worship.**

This is our response to God to live for him with our whole-life; in our work and in our play; in our homemaking and neighbor; in our volunteering in the community, cleaning up the park, advocating for the marginalized, and serving those in need, praying for our coworkers. It’s all of life caught up in love for God.

### C. **Gathered Worship.** This is the repeated, weekly event of meeting together to worship God, through Christ, in the power of the Spirit, with other believers.

It includes prayer, and singing, and preaching, and giving, and acknowledging each other, and then being sent out again into the world with hope-filled hearts.

The breathing life of the church, the great ‘inhale-breath’ that brings refreshing and life through ‘together’ worship. Then the great ‘exhale’ of the church ‘dispersed’ to be agents of God’s life in and for the world, to God’s glory.

“[S]peaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit...” - Ephesians 5:19. When we are struggling, we hear, in the voices of our sisters and brothers the words of these songs to call our hearts to believe again, to trust God again.

## 3. We Do “Life Together”

“As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35)

“What is a church? It’s a group of people who know they’ve been loved by Christ and have begun to love one another like that.” – Hansen and Leeman

### Life Groups in Focus

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few are needed – or indeed only one. **Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken from her.**” – Luke 10:38-42

“One of God’s greatest gifts is the ability to see and appreciate the world from points of view foreign to your own, points of view that exceed your personal experience. That is what it means to me to grow in Christ – to exceed myself as I stretch to Him.” – Rosaria Champagne Butterfield

### Life Group Study Questions

#### Open Up:

1. We have being “doing life” in a pandemic era for over 18 months at this point, and that has had an

impact on the regular life of the church. What are some of the most significant ways this season has been both challenging for the Church? Why?

2. In what ways was God working through this season?

#### Dig In:

3. As we see in the Gospels, Jesus sought out times to be with his Father in prayer and solitude (Lk 4:42; 5:16), was engaged with his disciples in significant ministry throughout the week (Lk 4:40-44), and had a weekly practice of meeting together with God’s people in the synagogue for gathered worship (Lk 4:16). This pattern continues in the life of the early church.

#### Read Hebrews 10:23-25.

a. What is the writer of Hebrews instructing?







- b. How does weekly, gathered worship influence each of these elements the writer mentions in 10:23-25?
  - c. In what ways do you think being physically involved in weekly, gathered worship matters: To God? To our own development and growth as disciples of Jesus? To our ongoing witness to the world? To our Church family?
4. Zac Hicks, in his book *The Worship Pastor*, invites us to ask ourselves a significant question. Take time as a group to discuss each, and give your reasons for your answers.

Question: *Is gathered worship able to be replaced or substituted?* For example:

- a. Can a church engage in worship by a corporate deed of mercy (like a community service day) and does that substitute for what corporate worship is and does? (I.e. gathering for worship in songs, giving, hearing God's word in the sermon, taking the Lord's Supper together). Why or why not?
- b. Can individuals just as easily and rightly worship God on their own – on an individual retreat, in the wilderness, in nature, in a solitary place, in their own private devotional life – instead of attending and participating in gathered worship? Why or why not?

## Take Home

Missionary and theologian, Lesslie Newbigin, says it like this: “the weekly gathering for worship is by far the most important thing we do.” (The Good Shepherd) It’s interesting that a missionary would say weekly, gathered worship is the most important thing we do in the Christian life. We might expect a missionary to say that “mission” or “telling others about Jesus” is the most significant thing we do! In agreement with Newbigin, theologian Michael Goheen goes on to state:

- Worship is the central calling of the church partially because it gives the people of God their focus and direction in the whole of their lives; from worship the whole life of the church flows, and in worship the whole life of the church finds its true end [what it is made for]. Getting our worship right, therefore, must be our top priority (*A Light to the Nations*).

Do you tend to think of weekly worship as a priority to the same extent as these writers? Why or why not? What shifts might you need to make in your thinking or practice as a result of the message or study?

## Prayer

Take time to share things you are praising God for as well your concerns or needs. Take this time to thank God for his work of bringing us into relationship with him and each other. Bring these requests to God together.