

Good morning to you! If you're a guest this morning, my name is Beau. I'm one of the pastors and elders of our church body. I know Jeremy already extended a welcome, but I want to do the same. I'm really glad you're here, especially if you're new. I realize some of you are new, and you're a Christian, and perhaps you're even looking into making our church body your local church that you're a part of. I hope you feel welcome. I hope we can answer any questions you might have and, as you're sort of here exploring a bit, you'd be encouraged in your faith.

Of course, I know some of you are here, and you're not a Christian. You're not looking to make us your local church as much as you're just looking to be here and to ask questions about your faith. I hope you as well find this a safe room to come into, a safe group of people to be among and explore what you believe about God and why you believe it. If we can help you, we'd love to serve you as well. We're really glad you're here.

Many of you may have shown up this morning expecting to hear from Matt Chandler, who is another one of our elders and pastors. He typically preaches every single week. There are about 10 to 12 times a year he doesn't preach, and this happens to be one of those times. He is out in, I want to say, Peru. I think that's where he is out. Is that where the Inca Trail is? Peru? He was doing some ministry endeavor, and then he was going to go on the Inca Trail. I don't know if he has already done that or if he is actually recovering. Either way, pray for him. Pray his time there was fruitful.

When he is gone, we get the time as a congregation here in Denton to read God's Word together, to study it, to think about it, to meditate on it and its practical outworkings within our community that lives and meets and does life together here in this great city. I'm glad you joined with us this morning. I'm primarily this morning going to be speaking to those in this room who are covenant members. I know maybe in this service that might be a minority of who is in the room.

So if you're not a covenant member, again, I'm so glad you're here. Like I've already said, I hope if you're a Christian, this will speak to you even perhaps about the importance of a local church, of being a part of a local church. If you're not a Christian, I hope that as you listen to what we talk about today, you will at least have a better framework for, *Man, why do Christians meet on Sunday? What's so important about that? Why do they do that? Why do they come every week? Why does it seem to be so essential in the life of a church?* Hopefully it is so anyway. That's what we're going to talk about this morning.

If you were here a few weeks ago, I preached on *Gospel-Centered Multiplication*. If you weren't here, basically I was encouraging our church body to be about God's glory through multiplying our lives, individually, personally, and collectively as home groups, as a church, on and on and on. One of the things I briefly touched on during that sermon toward the end was things that would potentially be setbacks to us multiplying in our lives personally, in our lives corporately. One of the things we talked about was this exaltation of community. We have, over the last really five, seven, 10 years as a church, preached, talked about, encouraged, promoted gospel-centered community, which is awesome.

We've done that to such an extent that you, church, have really seen God's wisdom in that, seen his command on your life to be a part of community, and you have run towards it. It's good, and it's healthy. We have about 80 groups now here at our campus that meet throughout the week as we scatter after the services every Sunday, and it's really beautiful. The large majority of those groups, as far as we can tell, are healthy groups where men and women are loving one another, as the Scriptures command us to do. All these texts in the Bible that have the phrases, "Do this to one another in love," we're seeing a lot of that worked out in these various groups, and it's really good. I just thank God for that.

Yet at the same time, one of the things we talked about was it's almost as if our group life here is so healthy, our mindset toward finding community away from Sunday is so healthy, that *that* part of our Christian faith, which is a necessary and good part of our Christian faith...indeed it is essential to what it means to be a Christian...that is so good and we're focusing on that so much, almost to the neglect and *to* the neglect, I think as your pastor, of other just as important, just as crucial parts of the Christian life.

So I kind of touched on that in that sermon. What I want to do is fully explore that this morning with you. In particular, I want to talk about really a pastoral thesis that has turned into a pastoral burden that I really do believe that many, not all, of us have found such good life and health and encouragement in our groups that we are actually enjoying our groups, being a part of our groups, while neglecting the Sunday gathering.

In our minds, we will never miss a home group, but we're rarely going to come to Sundays, because home group is where it is. Some people even take it a step further. *I'm going to go to group. I'm not going to come to Sundays. I'll just podcast Sundays.* Then some people even say, *I'm not going to even do either. I'm just going to podcast.* I want to explore this morning what that reveals. Then even more importantly, I want to explore with you why that is not okay in God's mind and why it shouldn't be okay in our hearts and why we should actually want to be here together.

In our membership covenant if you're a covenant member, this is what we've covenanted to do (one of the many things) based on the Bible. We have covenanted, "To regularly participate in the life of The Village Church by attending weekly services." So if you're a covenant member, we have covenanted as a community based on the Scriptures to be about that, that one of the many things we're going to do as we live out our Christian faith is gather together on Sunday, the Lord's Day, to remember and worship the Lord Jesus Christ together as a church.

What I want to talk about and attempt to do for us this morning is answer the question... *Why?* Why is that in there? Why is that important? I want to try to do it from the Word of God. Because I could give you some of my opinions and my thoughts, even logical, philosophical arguments about why it's so important...I think there are many valid ones...but based on the Word of God, I want to, as your pastor, try to put a foundation under your feet and in your minds so you'll know why we're here. Of course you should want to know that, I would think. Why do you come? Why should you come? What's the benefit of being here? Is it essential to the Christian life? If not, why not? If so, why?

It's really remarkable to think about that you could come to service every single week for your entire life... Some of you have. You've missed a couple here and there, but you come week in and week out. You can do that and never understand why, never understand why in God's mind and his design this is good and right and beneficial and necessary for the Christian life. Let me read this quote. This is from David Peterson, and much of what I'll talk about this morning I'm indebted to him and his insight as the Spirit of God has led him to study these things. I'm also indebted to Clint Crawford, who is the one who gave me the book and said, "If you're going to talk about that, you need to read this book."

So I read parts of it, and I'm going to quote him directly a couple of times. I'm going to quote him indirectly throughout. He and various other authors, church thinkers, have helped me in this. This is what he says. I agree. It kind of gives you maybe a little bit of insight into the aim of what I'm trying to do this morning. He says, "Vitality and meaning will not be restored to the Christian gathering until those who lead and those who participate can recover a biblical perspective on their meetings, seeing them in relation to God's total plan and purpose for his people."

In other words, until we get on the same page with God about why we're here, this meeting is going to become duty every week. It's going to lose its vitality. We're not going to understand why we have to come, why it's essential to come, and not even beyond that why we *get* to come, why it's good news that we get to gather together on Sunday, why it's good news that God hasn't just left us to podcasts or Internet church, and why that isn't really even church, because it's lost some essential elements of what it means to be a church and gather on Sundays.

This is a massive topic. I know that, so can I just encourage you, man, I know I'm not going to hit on every angle of this. There are going to be questions. I'm just trying to scratch the surface this morning. There have been whole books written about this. This could be a whole sermon series for the entire summer. I realize I'm just going to attempt to scratch the surface of this. Again, if you're a Christian, I hope to put a foundation under your feet. If you're a member of this church, I hope to remind you and exhort you to what we've already agreed to do as a body and why we've agreed to do it. Then if you're not a Christian, maybe you get a really good sense of why this is beautiful and why God has asked us, as his people, to be here.

If you have a Bible, turn to Hebrews 10. That's where we're going to walk through this morning. Simply put, what we take part in together when we come on Sundays is worship. Simply put, what we're doing here, why we're here, the purpose of us gathering together is worship. We're worshiping God for who he is and for what he has done for us through Jesus Christ. If you don't know who God is and what he has done, God is the creator of all things, the preeminent, preexistent God of the universe, the only true God. He created man and woman in his image, and man and woman rebelled against God's good creation and his design for us as his creatures.

We said *no* to God's authority on our lives, on God's will for our lives. We said *yes* to our own authority over our lives. We want to be our own gods. We have rebelled against God. That's what Christians believe, that at the very beginning, that's what happened. God created man and said, "This is how I want you to live so your joy will be full and so you could image me." Man said, "No, thank you," and man has been saying, "No, thank you," ever since. We've rebelled (all of us) against God. We've sinned against him. Because we have rebelled against God, what we deserve is punishment. What we deserve is God's wrath. What we deserve is eternal condemnation from God.

But God is a good and gracious God. He doesn't desire that any should perish but that all should come to him and know him and be made right with him. So in order to make a way for us to be made right with him, God became a man without ceasing to be God. Jesus the Christ was born of a virgin. He lived a perfect life, substituting his life for our lives. He went to the cross, and he died on the cross for our sins as a substitute, in our place. All the punishment we deserved for our sins, God put it upon Jesus Christ when he went to the cross.

If you're not a Christian, that's why the cross is so important. That's why the blood of Jesus Christ is so important, because his blood washes away the sins of those who trust his blood was sufficient to make up for what they were lacking in terms of obedience to God. Jesus was buried. Three days later, he rose from the dead. Now he is in heaven at the right hand of God ruling and reigning. One day he is going to come back.

In light of this news that Jesus is Lord, that there is no other, that we can be made right with God and enjoy him forever by putting our faith in Jesus Christ alone, in light of this, we come together to worship. Simply put, we're coming together to worship and remember this. Of course, we know from the Bible that worship is not meant to be something we just do when we gather on Sundays. Worship is actually a total life response to God. In other words, for the Christian, all of life is worship, every single bit of it: what we're doing here, what you'll do when you get in your car and leave, what you'll do over lunch, what you'll do at the office tomorrow, what you'll do in that relationship tonight, all of life, it's a total life response.

So in one sense, what we're doing here this morning is simply an extension of what we're called to do and be about in our entire lives, which then again begs the question...*So what's important about this morning? Can't I just worship in my car? Can't I just worship wherever I am? Why do I have to come to this room and be with these people and worship that way?* That's a great question. Because the Bible teaches the worship we offer when we gather together like this, when we assemble as a local church, is unique. That's why.

It's a type of worship... What we're going to do, what we've already done this morning together, is a type of worship that doesn't and can't happen in your car while you're listening to a sermon or in your bedroom while you're listening to some music, or while you're on your iPod or your iPad. It's a type of worship that only happens when we, as God's people, as a local church, gather together in person to remember and rejoice in the finished work of Christ. That's why.

So yes, all of life is worship, but at the very same time, there's a type of worship, there's a shape to our worship when we come together on Sunday that happens that God has commanded and that God has designed us for as his people. As one author put it, God presences himself in a distinctive way in the Christian meeting through his Word and through the operation of his Spirit. My thesis is simply this, that there is a distinct shape to our corporate worship on Sundays. Yes, all of life is worship, but there's a type of worship God commands in us coming together because he knows we need it to keep us faithful until the day of redemption.

That still begs the question...*But how is it different? Why does God command it? What's the shape of it? What makes it so incredibly essential to the Christian life?* I'm glad you asked. Let's look at Hebrews 10 and let it help us this morning as we begin to think about these things. I wish I had time to walk through verses 1 through 18. If you've never read the letter to the Hebrews, in chapter 10 (and really the entire letter), verses 1 through 18, what the writer has been clarifying for the congregation he was writing to is that Jesus Christ is the sacrifice once and for all for our sins.

If you don't know anything about the Old Testament, in the Old Testament, the people of God would be constantly making sacrifices to make up for their wrongdoings. They would constantly, every day, be

having to appease God and atone for their sins by making sacrifices at the altar. What he argues in verses 1 through 18 is with the coming of Jesus Christ, that's over. He is the greater sacrifice. He is the one and only and final sacrifice, which is great news. Brothers and sisters, you don't have to continue to make sacrifices for your sin. That's why penance doesn't really exist for those who are Christians. It's been paid in full by the Lord Jesus Christ.

He has been arguing this, and he has been really casting a vision for the beauty of this. Then in verses 19 through 25, he is going to talk about some implications of this. In other words, he says Jesus Christ came. He died once and for all. All who put their faith in him are saved. Their sins are washed clean. Therefore, live like this together as a church. This is what he says in verse 19.

**"Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence now 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 to 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."**

Let's pray, and then we'll think about these things together.

Father, we thank you for your Word. I pray this morning that you, by your Spirit, would be gracious to speak to our hearts through it. We invite you to minister to us personally, collectively. We ask you to confront us where we need to be confronted, but even beyond that, we ask you, Father, to encourage us where we need to be encouraged, to comfort us where we need comfort, to bolster our faith where we're vulnerable. So come now and do these things we pray and ask in Jesus' name, amen.

If you are a "Type A" person, and you like an outline, let me try to give you my best outline here. Simply put, a few of the things we learn from these verses is the worship we ascribe to the Lord on Sundays when we gather is uniquely corporate, it's uniquely vertical, and it's uniquely horizontal. It's uniquely corporate, uniquely vertical, and uniquely horizontal. That is what gives what we do on Sundays as worship its distinct shape and, of course, also what makes it essential for the well-being of our faith.

So uniquely corporate. Let's just start there. Sunday is the time (this is self-evident) and the primary time each week when we as a church as covenant members who have covenanted together, when we gather corporately, when we all come together. This is the primary place that happens. It's the primary time it happens. That alone makes what we do here each Sunday different than what you do in your home group. It makes it different than what you do in your recovery group. It makes it different than what you do in your friendship group. It makes it different than what you do in your middle school group or your high school group. It's when we all come together as one church, during this time each week.

In fact, this is really what sets this apart (Sunday, that is) from those other groups. Those other groups are great. They're healthy. We should continue to have those. We should strive toward those ends and do that, as we've already talked about, but what's different about this is we're all coming together as a church. All of us. Brothers and sisters, this is no small thing. It would be easy for me to say that, make a good point, and then kind of move past it without really stopping to ponder the significance of that. This is no small thing, and it's not something we should take for granted, because even as we prayed last week, there are many Christians in the world who do not have the opportunity to do this.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a book called *Life Together* on community. He said this, and I think we'd do well to heed it. He says, "It's not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians." In the West, we take this for granted. There is no persecution. Persecution for us is somebody calling us a bad name or laughing at us because we try to articulate our faith. That's not persecution. It's a *form* of persecution, but it's not one that takes us away from each other. Nobody is worried the cops are going to storm in right now and tell us we can't be here together in fellowship.

Because of that, we take it for granted. Now I'm not wishing we were persecuted, okay? I'm not saying that, but at some level (I think this is what Bonhoeffer is getting at), those who are have a richer understanding of the things we're talking about this morning. He says, "It's easily forgotten that the fellowship of Christian brethren is a gift of grace, a gift of the kingdom of God that any day may be taken from us. Not all Christians," he says, "receive this blessing. The imprisoned, the sick, the scattered lonely, the proclaimers of the gospel in heathen lands where there are no other Christians stand alone. They know because they do then that visible fellowship is a blessing." We being able to come together corporately is a blessing.

Man, I'll never forget this. Some of you have traveled. You've been to places that are unreached. You've seen this where on Sunday, you couldn't gather with a body of believers. I'll never forget a group of us went to Darfur in Africa. Matt was actually there with me. We went, and it was a great trip. Of course, Christianity is not allowed there. The people we were working with were a part of a NGO, a non-government organization there, doing water wells and such. There were three or four of them. They were the only three or four Christians they knew of in the whole town.

Of course, there was no service on Sunday. There was nowhere to gather. One of the things we got to do with them while we were there was somebody had a guitar, or maybe they had a guitar, and one of the guys who went with us was a music leader from one of our other campuses. We got to read the Bible together. We got to sing songs together. I will never forget... We were just singing songs. It could have been the song we just sung or one of the three we're going to sing here in a little bit.

We were just singing songs, and the leader of that team absolutely had a meltdown emotionally. He just broke and started crying. Through his brokenness, he said, "I had no idea how much my soul has needed this and how much my soul has missed it because I've not been able to do it, because there is no local church to gather with." For that brother, just to sing some songs together with other Christians on a Sunday (I think it was a Sunday) was big news. That was a big deal.

That's what Bonhoeffer is talking about. The fact that what we do here is uniquely corporate is not something we should just steamroll past. It's a big deal that we get to gather together with one another and worship the Lord in the ways we do. In these verses, we see this uniquely corporate nature of the gathering as the writer wrote. He said this: "**Let us... Let us... Let us...**" Verses 22, 23, 24. This refrain that's in these verses. "In light of the gospel, let us do these things. Let us be about this." There's this corporate idea about what we do on Sunday.

Of course it's found elsewhere in the New Testament. It's not just in the book of Hebrews. The apostle Paul, probably most notably and maybe even most strongly (as most things are by the apostle Paul, standing on the shoulders of Jesus), talks about this over and over and over again. In fact, some of the imagery Paul uses in his letters, if you're familiar with his letters, doesn't even make sense without the corporate nature of worshiping together as a church. Imagery like the temple of God. Imagery like the body of Christ. These images don't make sense with individual Christians just wandering about and never coming together as one. These images make the most sense as a corporate imagery.

In fact, the temple of God, if you think about that, one writer said, "The expression *temple of God* actually marks out the church, marks out the covenant community, as the divine sanctuary where God's Spirit dwells." If you think back to the Old Testament, the temple was where God's Spirit dwelt. Now in the New Testament when the Bible says we're the temple of God, what does that mean? Well, it means the Spirit of God, his presence, is with us in a unique way.

Of course, where is that best expressed? When we come together. We're the temple of God, most beautifully, most purely, when we're together as a church. That's a corporate image. That doesn't mean when we scatter about after the services we cease being this Spirit-filled community of God's people, but

our identity as the temple of God finds particular expression when we're together, gathering in Jesus' name to experience his presence and his power in our midst. The same thing with the body of Christ.

Again, it doesn't mean we're not the body of Christ or we cease to be the body of Christ when we're not together, but the imagery is most fully and beautifully experienced and shown forth and obeyed... *when?* Together... *together*. So there is a uniquely corporate aspect to what we do. It's part of what makes our worship here different than our worship in our home groups, in our recovery groups, and, of course, when you're driving in a car by yourself. It's beautiful, but it's not just that we all come together that makes what happens here unique.

It's actually what we do and what God does when we're all together that makes it even more beautiful and more important. It's not just uniquely corporate. We learn from these verses, it's also uniquely vertical. What we're doing here is uniquely vertical. So look at verse 22 with me. We'll read this. **"Let us..."** Do what? **"Let us draw near to God with a true heart and full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us..."** What? **"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful."**

So it's not just that we're coming together in person; it's we're coming together in person to do something specific. One of the things we're doing specifically is drawing near to God. We're holding fast to the confession of our hope. How do we do this? Well, we do this in all the ways we do when we gather. We do it by listening to God's Word, by responding to God's Word, by singing together, as we're commanded to do in Ephesians (I think), by celebrating the Lord's Supper, by interacting before and after service. All these things we're doing (celebrating the Lord's Supper, baptism), all these elements that go into these services, this is how we together draw near to God.

This is what God has left us as we gather to draw near to him by, these different elements. The church has been doing this for thousands of years. In fact, the Didache, which is really the earliest Christian manual for worshipping together says, "Every Lord's Day, every Sunday..." I just love that there has never been a time since Jesus Christ rose from the dead that the church didn't think of Sunday as the Lord's Day. Now every day of the week is the Lord's, right? Of course, but in the church's mind, all throughout the ages, Sunday has been the Lord's Day because it's the day he got up from the dead. Sunday is the day they met together and remember that fact.

He says, "Every Lord's Day, church, gather yourselves together. Break bread. Give thanksgiving, having confessed your transgressions that your sacrifice may be pure." Justin Martyr, in the same way, in the second century said this. He said, "On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country..." All of you. Anybody who lives here in Denton, you live in the city, you live in the country, he says, "...gather

together in one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits. Then when the reading is ceased, the president, the leader, verbally instructs and exhorts to the invitation of these good things."

Coming together through the Word of God, the reading of the Word of God, the preaching of the Word of God, singing of songs, celebrating of the Lord's Supper and baptism, praying, prayers of confession, prayers of repentance, prayers of thanksgiving, the church has been doing this and drawing near to God and holding fast to their hope, both personally and corporately, for thousands of years. This is the best understood distinction of what we're doing here, but we're all together vertically coming to the Lord and being ministered to by him simultaneously as we are ascribing worth to him in all these various ways, personally and collectively.

Again, I think this is best understood. So it's uniquely corporate. It's uniquely vertical. Then, it's uniquely horizontal. This, I think, is the least understood and what leads people to say things such as I mentioned earlier. So let's walk through this together. It's not just that we come together. It's not even that we all come together to glorify God and be ministered to and strengthened by his Spirit as we draw near to him. It's that we all come together with the aim to glorify God and be ministered to him, and at the same time, to build one another up as we're doing so.

That is an integral, essential piece to what it means to be a part of a church and to what it means to worship. It's a piece and a form of worship that only gets expressed here as we all come together and are worshiping God, drawing near to him with a mind toward how we might build one another up. Look in verses 24 and 25 with me. The writer says, "**And let us consider...**" The word *consider* there means thoughtful reflection. "Let us give thoughtful reflection. Let's ponder this and meditate on this." "**...how...**" What? "**...how to stir one another up to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together.**"

Listen, just as a side note. If you're a Christian and for one reason or another you don't gather with your church...you're not part of a church first of all, but then you don't gather with your church consistently, and you just don't think it's a big deal...and even this morning as I've kind of been going through this, you're kind of maybe tempted to shrug your shoulders and say, *Who is this guy? It sounds like legalism.* I just would encourage you to meditate on that part of that verse, not neglecting to meet with each other, as some are in the habit of doing.

Just know that's not me saying that; that's God saying that. So to be a Christian, for your profession to line up with your life necessarily means that what we're doing here and being a part of this with all of your heart for the good of others and the glory of God is a part of your Christian life. It wouldn't even have made

sense to the New Testament writers for you to say, "I'm a Christian," but for you to not be able to answer, "What church are you a part of?" or "When do you gather with your church?" It wouldn't have made sense.

I'm not telling you you're not a Christian, you've not put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but I am telling you you need to at least wrestle through this and respond to the Lord. If we can help you, we'd love to. I just want to encourage you, professing Christian, to think about this, to think about the weightiness of the writer said here. We're to come together considering how we might stir one another up to love and good works.

Again, it's not just in the book of Hebrews. I just had to choose one text because of time this morning. This is over and over and over again. Paul talks about this reality again and again and again. In fact, Paul regularly uses the terminology for upbuilding or edification rather than the language of worship to indicate the purpose and function of Christian gatherings. That's amazing.

Now when we're ministering and upbuilding one another, building one another up, we're worshiping God and doing that. I'm not trying to create a false dichotomy, but it is very interesting the apostle Paul, much more than the uses the language of worship for what happens when the church comes together, he uses the terminology about building one another up, encouraging one another. He uses this six times in 1 Corinthians 14. He mentions it again in 1 Thessalonians and also in Ephesians.

In fact, Paul is so strong about this part of our worship together on Sundays that one theologian actually said this: "Paul would urge us to meet in dependency on one another as the vehicles of God's grace and to view the well-being and strengthening of the whole church as the primary aim of the gathering." Now whether you think it's that strong or not, it's there. In Paul's mind, one of the primary, if not *the* primary, aim of what we're doing here is to glorify and worship God by thinking about how we can strengthen one another. It's unbelievably beautiful!

Perhaps this is why Jesus was just so wise to say, "Non-Christians are going to know you're my disciples by the way you..." Do what? You "...love one another." It's great that we're doing that in home groups and of course we should continue to do that, but how much more beautiful and full and comprehensive is that expression when we do it all together when we come into this room on Sundays? Covenant members, Paul actually expected the members of the church to be prepared to come into this gathering each Sunday with some contribution prepared for the occasion or at least to be prepared for the spontaneous thing that was going to come up in the service and be ready to meet those needs as we see them.

He actually thought that's part of what we're supposed to do as Christians as a part of a church. Not just show up on Sunday and to have our spiritual goods and services dispensed to us like we do in a drive-thru,

but to come here already having thought through how we're going to give, how we're going to build others up. Do you know what? That's why you see people parking cars, setting up cones. It's why, if you have kids, you brought them in, and somebody checked in your kid. It's why somebody welcomed them into the classroom. It's why somebody might be changing your kid's diaper right now. It's nasty! I wouldn't serve... Well, if the Lord led me and we needed it, I'd just trust him for it.

It's why people greeted you when you came in. If you didn't get greeted well, I'm sorry. Go back out. Next week try it again. If they don't greet you, say, "Hey, I'm going to greet you." Okay? It's why you see artwork on the walls. If you haven't seen the new artwork, go look at it. It's why you'll see people serving the Lord's Supper here in a minute. It's why you see people holding their instruments. It's why you see me up here preaching.

Honestly, it's why you're never going to get to see the thousands of different conversations that happen before and after service, the people who are coming just waiting to pray with people, waiting to bring a word of encouragement, who stay after the service and go into Connection Central not because they're working Connection Central with a nametag. Because they're members of this church who know that's where guests go, and they want to go build them up. Because these are brothers and sisters within our church who, by God's grace, have been convinced of the mindset that we're supposed to have when we come together. The mindset is uniquely horizontal. We are to be thinking about one another's needs.

So the teachers are to come ready to teach. The hospitable are to come ready to be hospitable. Even those of you who have the gift of discernment, you're to come and just listen well. That may seem very passive, but it's a gift! Some people can't do that. Even right now, you're not listening to me. Some people have a gift to be able to do that. We're to come ready and eager. Again, brothers and sisters, this is not something that can be done while you're driving your car to work and listening to a podcast. You can't do it! You can't do it while you're watching a service online. It's unique to the gathering.

I'll just say this, and you're probably feeling it right now (some of you). This horizontal understanding of the nature of our worship on Sundays grates against everything within us that is individualistic and consumeristic. This air we breathe that, of course, we bring into the church grates against it because part of the primary focus is not me. Listen, some of you come in. It's like, *Man, I have my seat, and I have my song. That's my song they're playing. It's even my band who is playing my song. Matt is my guy.* If that's not enough, we're going to turn off the lights so it's all about you and your personal relationship and your personal experience with the Lord.

By the way, be careful if you're in the balcony when we turn the lights out, okay? *I have my seat. It's my sermon. It's my verse. It's what I want!* You come in with that mindset. Listen, of course Paul is not saying

we're not be ministered to personally when we come together. Of course that happens. Of course we want that to happen. Some of you, I was praying for you by name this morning for that to happen. I want that to happen, but if that's all that's happening and that's all that's in your mind, you're missing it. You're missing it! You're not really worshiping in the way God intends for you to worship, at least not fully.

It's not that God is mad at you, he is going to slap you on the hand. It's that you're missing out and I'm missing out when we do that. It just grates against it. Our worship on Sundays, if it's to be the type of worship God has commanded, is to be focused on ministering to one another as we draw near to God and ascribe worth to him and as he ministers to us. So listen. There are all of these things happening (or supposed to be happening) when we gather.

It's beautiful. It's not one-dimensional. It's comprehensive. We're in here. We're singing. God is ministering to us personally. We're thinking about how we can minister to each other individually, collectively. All these things are going on, and it's beautiful and wonderful, and it glorifies God, and it draws people who don't know God in. It's supposed to. That's the way God designed it to be. So it's corporate, it's vertical, and it's horizontal.

The first question my wife asked me when I was telling her about some of what I was talking about Sunday was, "What am I supposed to do? We have a 3-week old." We now have three kids under 3 years old. We're not sad about that at all. We love it. Praise God! It's awesome. People are like, "How are you making it?" I'm like, "We're not just making it; we're loving it. We actually chose to do this, and God was gracious to bless us in this way."

We're thankful, but her question was, "Okay, I have a zoo now I carry with me everywhere I go." It's no longer fun to be around the Hughes clan. Like, it's cool. Mike Turner would say, "It's cute when you have one. When you have three, people leave exhausted. They just leave tired, except those special people who are just naturally inclined toward that by God's grace for whatever reason." Her question was, "So what does that mean for me? I'm just going to show up on Sunday? What am I going to do? When I was single, I could come early. I could pray with people undistracted. I could do a lot of different things, and I did, but now I'm struggling to find my footing."

I don't know what it means for you. I'll tell you, you should be asking that same question. I trust the Spirit of God to minister to you in that and lead you. I told my wife, "Perhaps it just means you come Sunday morning prepared to bless and encourage those workers in the preschool who are going to take your children. Maybe you've even prepared them a note. Maybe you're just coming, and you don't have an official or a formal role. You're just coming, and you're in your seat, and you're looking for people you can encourage."

Some of you come in, and you have your seat. Probably other people around you have their seat too. You know they're going to be there next week, so maybe you come prepared to offer them a word of encouragement about something you've observed about their life or heard or overheard as you've been eavesdropping even though you act like you're not. Okay? Whatever it is, though, we're to come prepared.

Our worship is distinct because it's corporate, it's vertical, and it's horizontal. You cannot separate these. It's not either/or. It's yes and/yes and. As we come together on Sundays, God is simultaneously ministering to us as we glorify him and we minister to one another. How beautiful is that? Whenever a church or a member of a church begins to exalt one of these dimensions to the neglect of the other or the *others*, the shape of one's personal and corporate worship begins to be deformed.

As I've already said, I think we have the vertical down pretty well by God's grace. You're here. By the way, it's kind of awkward to preach a sermon to people who are actually here, okay? You're here. Corporately we're here, but I think church, for our members... Again, if you're a guest, I'm not talking to you. I may be, but I'm not *purposefully* talking to you. The horizontal we are very I think tempted to go astray in that direction. I think many of us are actually neglecting this. I think it's why you see such things like people who consistently get up after the sermon and slip out of the service before the service is over.

*I don't need to stay and sing. I don't need to stay and celebrate the Lord's Supper. I don't need to stay and greet people afterwards, because after all, primarily what's happening here is I'm getting a spiritual good delivered to me by Matt.* That's why you see that. It's because it's a misunderstanding or just outright rebellion and sin. It's why you see people who will never miss a home group, but they will rarely attend a service on Sunday. Rarely! It's why you hear over and over again people say, "Well, I just had a busy week or a busy month. So I'm just going to podcast."

You may be thinking, *So what's wrong with that statement? What's wrong with saying that and doing that?* Listen, of course there is nothing wrong with... I mean, we sympathize with people who have busy and hard weeks. We have them all the time. What's wrong with it is not even necessarily that from time to time because you're not feeling well, you're not able to get here on a Sunday. But what's wrong with most of those statements that happen that come out of our mouths is that just right below the surface is this thought process that's *not* there.

The thought process that's *not* there that *should* be there is, *You know, although I'm tired and my flesh would want nothing more than just to stay at home today and relax, because that's what seems relaxing to me, the church will actually benefit from me being there. My gifts I will bring, my word of encouragement, my word of exhortation, my prayer will benefit my brothers and sisters. Those who know I'm tired and I*

*want to be at home, do you know what? They'll probably be encouraged when they see me come despite the fact I don't really in my flesh want to be there.*

There is no thought given to that. Thought is only given to, *This is what I want to do. This is what my flesh wants to do. This is what feels good.* Nobody considers the horizontal. Last week we had a couple of members who found out they had cancer, and they were here. Would it have been sin if they weren't here? No! That's not what I'm saying. But the fact they had a brutal week and they were here, my soul was edified just by them being here. I don't care if they sang. They were just here, and I was so built up in my faith just by seeing them three days later after they found the news.

So when a heart truly grasps the true nature of what we gather on Sunday to do and the distinct way our worship to God is expressed both vertically and horizontally, those kind of statements, those kind of individualistic and consumeristic statements, cease to make sense. They even become saddening to hear them. Now we must not become condescending and self-righteous with other people about these things, but it really does become sad because it reveals a misunderstanding about what we're doing and the shape of our worship on Sundays.

In conclusion, brothers and sisters, I want to encourage you to continue to gather with your home groups and with your recovery groups and with your friend groups and on the corner with your brothers and sisters as you see them. I want to encourage you to continue to do that. Continue to listen to podcasts and read blogs and do all these things and utilize all these tools God has provided for the benefit of your soul. Yet do these things, as the writer said in verse 24, while continuing to consider. Purposefully think about how to stir one another up to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.

Look at the last part. **"...and do this all the more as you see the day drawing near."** Do you know what else is beautiful about Sundays? We're actually going to get to partake in celebrating it here in a minute. It's that another part of what we do when we come all together in person to worship the Lord is we are practicing for heaven. We, right now as we gather as God's people, are a reflection on earth of what's happening in heaven around the throne. God's people are crying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord." We get to, in an imperfect (of course) way dimly do the very same thing and see God's kingdom, God's people, worshiping on earth as it is in heaven.

So in a very real way, another aspect of what happens here and what we're doing here every Sunday is that you and I are preparing one another for heaven. We are practicing for heaven. Even as we come to the Lord's Table like we're going to do now and we take the bread that represents Christ's body that he gave on the cross and we dip the bread in the juice that represents and symbolizes his blood that was shed on

the cross, we're practicing for heaven, because in the new heavens and the new earth, what the Bible says is there is going to be a big feast. It's going to be the wedding supper of the Lamb. We're going to feast together with the Lord.

The meal that sent things awry in Genesis 3 when man and woman took and ate is going to be made right through the Bread of Life who came and gave himself. Until the day he comes and makes all things new, we get to practice and look forward to the meal that is to come through this meal. That's wonderful. So even now as we get up out of our seats, as we stand shoulder to shoulder, we're coming to ascribe worth to Jesus Christ as the head of the body, the one who laid down his life for his friends and for his sheep.

At the same time, as we're glorifying God and being ministered to by the Spirit, we even get to rub shoulders with one another and perhaps pray for one another, offer words of encouragement for one another, and look forward together to the day that's to come when we will be with the Lord face to face together as a community around his table celebrating. Let's pray.

Father, we love you, and we bless you, and we thank you for this privilege now to come together as your church and to worship you through these elements, through remembering the Lord. So, God, I pray as we come to the head of the church and as we look and remember his sacrifice, that you would build us, your body, up in love and that you would strengthen us to build one another up in love so we might function and continue to worship in a way that brings you great glory and us great joy and our neighbors great good. So come now by your Spirit. Minister to us as we celebrate this meal and sing these songs I pray. In Jesus' name, amen.