

Why do we gather?

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[0 : 00] Amen. We're going to think this morning about some of the, one of these actual practical topics! about the Christian life and about why we gather. We sang as we are gathered, Jesus is here.

So let's think about why do we gather and let's ask Jesus, the risen Christ, to come and speak to us as we do so. Let's pray. Lord, we have come together, we come to draw near to God and pray that you would draw near to us. We pray that you bless the speaker this morning and may he say things that are from you and in accordance with your will and your mind and your spirit. And we pray that the things that are from you will strike home to us and the things that aren't from you will drift away. We ask you will help the speaker and we pray that you'll help us as hearers. It's a bit cooler this morning but help us to be awake and help us to listen up and take to heart what you say in your word. And we ask this in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.

So the subjects that we're going to look, as I mentioned before, why do we gather, why do we sing, why do we pray, why do we give, why do we listen to sermons and men and women in the church? Those are things we're going to be looking at over the next few weeks. Certainly not going to tackle all of those this morning.

Why do we gather? That's what we're looking at. Why do we gather? And when I say gather, I'm meaning why do we gather in a regular way? And why do we gather often?

[1 : 52] If you think of what we mean by gather, I mean like what we're doing this morning, meeting together as the body of Christ. As we do on a Sunday morning, we meet as the body of Christ on a Sunday evening. We meet as a church to pray Wednesday midweek.

That's the timetable that we have. Different churches have different timetables. But that's the way we do it. And I did have a lovely picture there, but I couldn't get it to fit properly on the screen.

Anyway, so let's think why we might not gather. Everybody who's here has decided to gather, so maybe this is completely irrelevant, but people might have queries and objections.

And they might say, my personal relationship with God is all that matters. I can worship him at home by myself. That might be something that somebody might say.

And somebody might say, I don't need to gather in any physical sense. I can watch on the internet. And of course, there's lots of stuff to watch on the internet. And people might say, well, that's good enough, isn't it?

[2 : 58] That's God's will. And you might say, well, I'm too tired. I'm too ill. Of course, people who are ill, they're not going to come out.

It's just not possible. And for them, there's a blessing in watching on the internet, as some are probably doing this morning. I'm too busy. I do shift work. And of course, shift work.

You can't really get out of shift work, can you? Another thing. I don't know the people at church very much. And you might even say, I don't like the people at church very much, so I'm not going to come along.

It might say, it's boring. It's too long. It's uncomfortable. It is a bit uncomfortable this morning, isn't it?

Because it's quite cold. When he says meet regularly, well, regularly would be once or twice a year. Isn't that good enough?

[3 : 58] I'm going to try and go for meeting often, not just regularly. And of course, you might say, I'm not yet convinced about the way this church does it.

They do it twice on Sunday. I'm not used to that. And they have a midweek prayer meeting. And I'm not sure whether I'm up for that either. And I'd like to say something at least to make you consider that, to commend to you the fact that it's not such a bad idea to meet twice on Sunday.

And it's very important that we have a prayer meeting. I'd like to try and commend that to you. So there's lots of different situations there. And there'll be different answers to each one. And hopefully, as we go through, I can say something that might be of some relevance to at least some of those. So why do we gather? I'm going to give you, now then, boys and girls, if you're taking notes, this is it. There's going to be three reasons, three principles, three benefits, and four pieces of advice. You might be very hungry by the time we get to the end of this talk. Three reasons, three principles, three benefits, and four pieces of advice.

[5 : 14] Okay, so here we go. Let's kick off. Let's do an objection first. I want to meet God on my own. And I want to say, yes, God does tell us that being alone with him is very important.

So being a Christian is not really a matter of your genetics or your mom and dad or your ethnicity. Being a Christian is something that you become in a one-to-one dealings with Jesus Christ. You need to come to him personally, individually, confess your sins to him, ask him to be your savior.

You personally must trust in what he did on the cross. And that is a one-to-one relationship. And you can't do that in a group. You don't have a sort of group ticket for that.

So there's something true about this, of meeting God one-to-one. And if you think you're a Christian but you've never met God one-to-one, then you still have something to work through with him.

[6 : 22] The tax collector in the story that Jesus told said, God have mercy on me, a sinner.

So he dealt personally with God. It's me, my life, my soul, my sins, my heart, my everything in which I'm dealing with you.

And Jesus said, when you pray, go into your room, close the door, pray to your father who is unseen. Then your father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

And there's something true about our one-to-one life with the Lord. Our personal prayer, personal communion, talking to him, listening to what he says in his word.

Christians these days have a code word for that. They call it a quiet time. It's a funny sort of thing to say, isn't it? A quiet time. Anyway, what it means is a time where I set aside to read the Bible and pray.

[7 : 29] And if you're going to be a Christian and you're going to survive at all, that's what you need to work into your life somehow or another to have a time of personal listening to God and personally talking to God.

So, that's true. You do need to be on your own with God. But there's more to it than that. There's more blessing than just being on your own with God.

So, reasons. Number one. Reasons together. The example of Jesus. Luke chapter 4 verse 16 says, He went into the synagogue as his custom was.

Luke 4 verse 16 says, Jesus went into the synagogue. That would be like church, if you like.

In those days. As was his custom. As his custom was. In other words, he always did that. Every Shabbat, every Saturday, wherever he was, he would go to the synagogue.

[8 : 37] And the word that I think is habit. He had a habit of doing that. That's what he did. Every Saturday, he went to the synagogue.

You could set your watch by it, if you like, because that's what he always did. And in the synagogue, there would have been all sorts of people. Who knows what the preaching would have been like.

But it was his custom and his habit to go. And so, reason number one. Jesus' example. And I would like to commend this very old-fashioned virtue of the virtue of habit.

If you don't have a habit, as a Christian, of coming to church, then you're left at the mercy of, Oh, do I feel like it this morning?

Am I awake this morning? What sort of weather is it this morning? And that is a very vulnerable situation to be in. You're at the mercy of your feelings.

[9 : 34] You're at the mercy of the weather. I'll go if I feel like it. I'll go if I have a gap in my diary. That's not what Jesus did. He went, if I put it this way, he went to church.

It was his habit. And I think if it's good enough for Jesus, it ought to be good enough for us, shouldn't it? That's what he did. We always go, that's what we do.

There we go. Right. Reason number one. Reason number two, the apostles' example. You up with me? That was reason number one, Jesus' example. Reason number two, the apostles' example.

And I've just chosen this text. You can see it on the screen here. Where Luke says, We stayed seven days. On the first day of the week, we came together to break bread.

Paul spoke to the people. And because he intended to leave the next day, he kept talking until midnight. Do you remember what happened on that particular meeting?

[10:35] Anybody tell us something rather unusual? What happened, Steve? Somebody fell out of the window. Somebody fell out of the window. Presumably they were meeting upstairs, and they were so crowded. Somebody's sitting in the window. It was rather warm there.

And poor chap fell out the window. But in God's mercy, he was revived or resurrected, whatever happened to him. Yeah.

And actually, Paul kept talking until daybreak. But I've just noticed that they met on the first day of the week. That was the example of the apostles and the early Christians.

The first day of the week being Sunday, the resurrection day, rather than Shabbat, the Saturday. It's one of the many examples of the first Christians meeting together on the first day of the week.

Resurrection day, Sunday.

That's why we meet on a Sunday, because it's a resurrection day. We don't have to wait till Easter to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We celebrate his resurrection by meeting every first day of the week.

[11:39] Christ is risen. Christos Anesti. And you could say, he is risen indeed. Yeah, we can do that every Sunday.

They came to break bread. So that either meant they ate together, or it might be a reference to communion, eating the bread and the wine. And they certainly listened to Paul talking, because he talked and talked and talked all the way through the night.

I guess he made a priority of this meeting, because he says next day he was planning to leave. But he says, I'm not going to leave on the first day. It would be a little bit more convenient packing and passport and ticket and so on.

But I do want to be with the Christians on that first day of the week when they meet together. And presumably, in those days, that would have been a work day, so they could meet only after work in the evening.

So they just met that once, but they made the most of it, didn't they? Do you think what it would have been like to be there when the Apostle Paul was there? All the questions you've ever had.

[12:47] Paul, if you've already written Romans, what do you mean by chapter 6? Paul, if you haven't yet written Romans, what are you going to say in chapter 6? Could you explain to us what the prophet Micah's on about?

Tell us how Isaiah fits in. All those wonderful things you could ask him, and he would have said, well, just give me a moment. And he would have launched off. It would have been fantastic, wouldn't it?

No wonder they were prepared to give up their night's sleep to hear what the Apostle had to say to them. It was a long time, and it was very unusual.

I mean, they didn't spend all night every week, but this was so special, it was not to be missed. And I guess if we'd been there, even though we like our sleep, we would have thought, if the Apostle Paul's here, let's just give it another hour, and we would have done that all the way through until it was time to go home in the morning.

Reason number three. Okay, that was reason number two. The Apostle's example. Reason number three. There is a direct command about meeting, which is what we read.

[13:56] Hebrews 10, 24, 25. Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but on the contrary, encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day approaching.

So it's put negatively, isn't it? Not giving up meeting together. Not giving up meeting together. In other words, keep on meeting together.

And he says some people don't do this and have got into the habit of it and don't get into that habit. Not giving up meeting together.

But he says something very positive about what happens when we meet. He says we encourage one another. And he says we encourage one another because we can see that eternally this is important.

There's going to be a last day, a day of judgment and salvation. And we know that's coming. And in order to be prepared for that and ready for that, that's why we meet.

[15:07] That's why we need to encourage one another. Not giving up meeting. Spurring one another on. Considering one another. Encouraging one another.

To meet is to be active in one anothering. And we'll say a bit more about that later. To meet is to receive. It's to give.

Spurring on. Encouragement. And when we meet, we receive from other people. They think about us. They stimulate us. They encourage us. When we're together.

Does that make sense? That's what that text is saying, isn't it? And I'll just say who's up for that? And who thinks they can do without it? I certainly don't. I think we need that gathering together. That stirring one another up. We need people to think about us. And think how they can be a blessing to us. And how they can encourage us.

[16:10] And vice versa. We need to be thinking about people. How we can encourage them. I think that makes sense, doesn't it? That's a very powerful text. I learned that from Pastor Hill when I was a student in the 1970s.

And that stuck with me. I think that's been a very important part of my Christian life. So we had three reasons.

Anybody tell us what the first reason was? Jesus' example. Second reason. The Apostle's example. And the third reason. A direct command.

Great. Okay. So let's go and try and work out reasons for the reasons. A little bit. Three principles. Three reasons. Three principles. Principle number one.

Our saving God is a God of person-to-person connections. Our saving God is a God of person-to-person connections.

[17:18] I've been thinking about this quite a bit. And it seems to me that whereas science tells us that the main thing about the universe is stuff. The truth behind the universe is not matter and stuff.

The truth behind the universe is a personal God with a moral character. And he's made us as persons. And that is not an accident.

That is highly significant. We're made in his image. And God is a God of person-to-person connections. I think that's deeply important. So if you're thinking of person-to-person connections within the Godhead, we think of the triune God.

And God, the triune God is three persons. Anybody tell us what the three persons are? Yeah? Oh, we did all three. Father, Son, and Spirit. I think a little round of applause because that was several good answers.

Yeah. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And there are very subtle and wonderful relationships person-to-person within the Godhead.

[18:29] The Father loves the Son. He gives the Son. He gives the Son people. He gives the Son his word. He shows the Son.

The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he's doing. There's relationships person-to-person within the Godhead. The Father and the Spirit. The Spirit searches the deep things of God.

The Father sends the Spirit upon the Son. The Father, through the Son, sends the Spirit into the world. The Son and the Spirit. The Spirit abides on Jesus.

The Spirit, the Son breathes out the Spirit. The Spirit takes the things of the Son and glorifies him. There are person-to-person relationships within the Godhead.

And we, as people, are brought into relationships and connections.

[19:26] And this is one of the things about the Christian life. I mean, Ashwin was saying a little bit about that in his email. He's come from thousands of miles away, lands in a foreign, cold country, and in due course, finds himself connected to a group of Christians that he's never met before.

But there's very deep connections that God wants us to have and God produces within us as we belong to Jesus Christ.

Just as a little thought, when Paul writes his letters, there's massive theology in it. Nearly always, at the end, he's got a list of people.

And you might be tempted just to scoot over that. But actually, that's part of the essence of the letters. He says, thank so-and-so. Remember me to so-and-so.

I'm so grateful to so-and-so. These people risk their lives for me. I love so-and-so. Da-da-da-da. All these people with these deep connections.

[20 : 36] And Christianity produces connections between us and people that we would never have particularly chosen, never knew before, but through Jesus Christ, they become our friends and family.

Is that right? Is that right? Yes. Yes, I thought it was. Yeah. So that was principle number one. Our saving God is a God of person-to-person connections.

And that is what is generated in the fellowship of Christ's church. Principle number two. Just waiting for the writing to catch up.

Principle number two. Our saviour Jesus aims to be the Messiah of a community, not just individuals.

I've put that in a rather funny way, but let me just say it again. Our saviour Jesus aims to be the Messiah of a community, not just individuals.

[21 : 43] So I'm going to take us down a little drive. Would you like to come with me to Psalm 22, please? Please turn it up in your Bible.

So we're going to go for a little ride around scripture. And you might not have noticed this before. Or if you noticed it, you might not have realised how significant it was. It's easy to overlook, but it is significant. So Psalm 22. Have you found Psalm 22? Now then.

The first verse says, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?

Now then. Have a think. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Somebody in the New Testament quoted that.

[22 : 42] Who was it and where were they? Somebody in the New Testament quoted and said it out loud. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Who was it and where were they? Maria has got an idea. Let's, just the first one. Who do you think it was? You think it was Jesus.

Who do you think it was? Okay, that's two answers. So, Jesus. And where do you think he was? What was he doing at the time?

Well done. He was dying on the cross. I think well done to those. Yes, please. So this is, this psalm is about Messiah.

It's looking forward to what Jesus did. Jesus could take this and say, this is me. This applies to my situation. Now then, it's a very poignant psalm.

[23 : 44] Because the singer of the psalm, who turns out to be Jesus, says in verse 6, I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people.

He's describing his suffering because Messiah is portrayed, the Messiah to come is portrayed as a one who suffers indescribably.

He says he's surrounded by enemies. He puts it pictorially, like in verse 16, dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me.

In verse 14, he says, I'm poured out like water, all my bones are out of joint. And the New Testament writers say, that is perfectly applicable because that's what crucifixion does to you.

So the psalm is a psalm of Jesus. It's a psalm of Messiah. But please notice it doesn't end up in the suffering.

[24 : 46] The singer of the psalm looks forward to a rescue. Rescue me from the mouth of the lions.

And in verse 22, what does Messiah do? Somebody tell us in verse 22. Somebody read us verse 22. What does Messiah do subsequent to his death on the cross?

Yeah. I will declare your name to my people. In this name I will praise you. Thank you very much. I will declare your name to my people.

In the assembly I will praise you. That is a significant text. There are others like it. When you put them all together, you can see that what Messiah is going to do is to die and suffer.

But he's looking forward to getting a whole group of his people together. And in the midst of the assembly, he tells what God has done for him.

[25 : 50] And the assembly presumably says amen and rejoices in the achievements of the Messiah. Messiah. So, that idea of Messiah gathering a group of people.

I will declare your name to my people. I will praise you. I will praise you. Messiah's aim is to convene a great assembly and declare the praises of God in the midst.

So, just... Let's try and get our heads around this. The aim of Messiah, the program of Messiah, the manifesto of Messiah is not just to save one person, one person, one person, one person, one person, one person.

But to bring them all together into a great throng, a great assembly, a great gathering. And, of course, that's the picture that we have in the book of Revelation of the countless number of all tongues and nations and...

And, what does it say? And, what does it say? Tribes and tongues and nations all together praising their saviour. So, togetherness is part of the plan of Messiah.

[27 : 08] So, that was principle number two. And that's a great gathering of which ours is a miniature foretaste. That's right, isn't it?

I mean, I know church has got very human aspects. Sometimes the electrics don't work. Sometimes the heating is a little bit slow. Sometimes people...

Well, never have anybody actually fall off the stage. But you can imagine things can go a bit wrong. But there's something about heaven, isn't there? About the assembling of God's people.

There's a little foretaste of that great gathering to come. Principle number three. By creation and by redemption, we are embodied people.

By creation and by redemption, we are embodied people. That is a very significant principle.

[28 : 10] Creation. God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Spelt incorrectly.

And the man became a living being. When we were created, when God created humankind, he took the same chemicals that are in the earth, the dust of the earth.

We're made of the same sort of stuff. And breathed into us the breath of life. That we become living creatures. And we are made in the image of God.

But we're made in the image of God through this stuff. Skin. Skin. Bones. Blood. Lymphatic system. All this wonderful way that we've been made.

Physically. That is not an accident. That's part of God's design. In creation, we're made in physical beings.

[29 : 08] God designed us that way. And that's how he's planned it. He loves us to be physical beings. We interact with a physical environment.

We sit on chairs. We breathe air. We jump up and down if we're feeling energetic. We're located in space and time.

We can't be in two places at once. We're capable of presence. Waving our arms around.

Expressing ourselves through gestures.

We're capable of breathing so as to produce speech. We're capable of touch. We're capable of motion. We're capable of action.

We're physical creatures. That's how God has made us. So that's why Paul can say, greet each other with a holy kiss.

[30 : 08] All the churches of God send greetings. Now, do you notice what there is there? There's a localized thing and there's a remote working thing. Sending greetings you could do on the internet.

He does it by a piece of papyrus or a piece of paper. But you can't send a holy kiss by the internet. I mean, we probably wouldn't do holy kisses.

We might do hugs. We might do handshakes. We might, yeah. But some physical greeting, he says, that's a thing for you to do and you have to be there to do it.

Does that make sense? By creation. And by redemption. Now, I'm open to correction on this. But in Eastern religions, the future, the future hope, is being amalgamated into impersonal oneness.

You escape the, what's it called? Karma? Karma. The wheel. The wheel, yeah.

[31 : 17] Going round and round. You escape that and you escape into sort of, I mean, I'm open to correction on this, but I think it's a sort of impersonal soup of oneness. But the Christian hope, I can tell you, definitely the Christian hope, the future for Christians is resurrection with new bodies in a new heaven and a new earth.

A holy city made of people connected together. And the body is not an accident. The body is not a hindrance.

The physical body is not a passing phase, but it is our future destiny. We will, what we look forward to is to the resurrection, that our bodies will be made like unto his glorious body and a physicality of

the future.

So bodily presence is not an indifference. It's highly important. And here we all are.

You've all brought your bodies with you and we are physically present together. That was principle, was that principle number three?

[32 : 28] What was principle number two? Did I count it properly? Yeah. Yeah, that's right. So what was principle number one? God is a God of person-to-person connections.

And principle number two? Jesus asked. Go on. Yeah, our Savior Jesus aims to be the Messiah of a community, not just individuals and principle number three.

Grown up. Anybody grown up remember it? Yeah. By creation and redemption, we're embodied creatures. Okay. Benefits.

Ready? Ready? How many benefits were there going to be? Three. Three. Okay, let's see if he's counted it correctly. Three reasons, three principles, three benefits. When I was thinking about this, I found that there's something actually quite indefinable about the benefits of being together.

Something that is beyond the power of human tongue or mind to capture. And we've actually already seen something of this, but let's take this further.

[33 : 45] Benefit number one. The Trinitarian Christ. Christ is present in a definite way. As we are gathered, Jesus is here. Not in his physical presence, but by his spirit.

There is a truth that when Christians gather together, Christ is in the midst. There's a text in Matthew 18, which actually involves church discipline and it involves prayer, but it says, where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am with them.

There's at least two or three here. When we're gathered together in the name of Jesus, so that's not just standing accidentally at the bus stop together, but when we're gathered in his name, Christ is here.

That is both a huge encouragement and an enormous solemnity, that the risen Christ is here in the assembly of his people.

In Revelation chapter 2, he walks among the golden lampstands. And the golden lampstands are what? The churches. Yes, he walks. You could almost imagine him walking around and tapping you on the shoulder or whispering in your ear because he knows each of us individually and he deals with each of us individually as we gather together like this.

[35 : 06] In 1 Corinthians 14, it talks about the visitor who comes in, who isn't a Christian, who doesn't have faith, and he says, if you're doing it the way God wants you to do it, there's a sense in which that person cannot but notice that God is amongst you.

And they will say, and fall down and worship saying, God is really among you. The Father, the Spirit, the Son, the Trinitarian Christ is present in a definite way.

If we want to meet Christ, we will want to be at the assembling of his people. Do we want to meet with Christ? Do we want to draw near to him? Well, amen.

Well, let's come together as church because Christ is to be found in the midst of his people. Benefit number two, there is a spiritual power to correct, reset, be stirred, and encouraged.

We've already seen the text for this, but let's look at another one. Will you turn with me to Psalm 73, verse 16? Psalm 73, Psalm 73, Psalm 73, if you're a reading person, you might have read, you might like to read, there's a book that Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones wrote on this psalm, which is a really, really helpful book.

[36 : 42] He takes it, sort of a chapter per word almost. But his point is that the chap in Psalm 73 is in immense emotional and spiritual trouble.

He says in verse two, as for me, my feet had almost slipped. I nearly lost my foothold. He was saying, do you know, I'd lost the plot really spiritually.

I began to think it's hardly worth being a Christian. Why don't I go and just do all the things that the people around me do? I envied the arrogant and saw the prosperity of the wicked.

They just seem to have no problems. They have no struggles. Their bodies are healthy and strong. They're free from common human burdens. They just have a wonderful life. And I began to envy them. I began to think, why am I bothering being a Christian?

Why am I bothering with all this? And he was losing the plot. And it says in verse 16, when I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply.

[37 : 42] And then in verse 17, what does verse 17 say? Thank you. Till I entered the sanctuary of God, then I understood their final destiny.

So he says, I was all over the place. I was beginning to think, I don't think I'll bother being a Christian anymore. You understand I'm paraphrasing this. He said, until I came to the sanctuary of God, till I came to the holy place, and let's just sort of translate that, until I came back to church, and I sat there, and listened to the singing, and listened to the praying, and listening to the reading of the Bible, and everything clicked back into place.

I just remembered the reality of spiritual things, and I realised what I was being, were being deceived and taken in.

And coming to church was the thing that really set me right. There is a spiritual power to correct, to reset, to stir, to encourage.

and there is a spiritual power in the assembly of God's people. And we pray that that would be so.

And, in my experience, God answers that prayer.

[39 : 07] There are times when we don't feel like coming along. Oh, I don't think I'll come to church this morning. Don't feel like it.

Nah. Those are the times when we most need to come. And there's a sense in which, you don't go with your feelings.

You go with what you know you ought to do. I don't feel like it. Well, even if you don't feel like it, get on the bus, get your coat on, get your shoes on, go through that door, and sit down there, because that's what you need to do.

And there is power in being in the assembly. I was in deep trouble until I entered the sanctuary of God and then I understood. Benefit number three.

Benefit number three. Are we ready? Benefit number three. This is where one anothering is at its most effective. It's not the only place. It doesn't end there, but it certainly you could say begins there.

[40 : 16] One anothering. Why? Why has he invented this strange phrase, one anothering? One another. There's lots of bits of the Bible that talk about what we do to one another.

That's what I mean by one anothering. We're not meant to live the Christian life as lone rangers. That's the lone ranger.

I realise that this is no longer a contemporary media reference since about 1967. I need to explain this to you.

This is the lone ranger and he goes through the American West righting wrongs and he has his Native American, who would you say, his Indian companion, Tonto.

He did it all by himself. It's called the lone ranger. and he fired silver bullets and there was one little piece of music at the beginning of it. I remember watching it when I was about seven or eight.

[41 : 16] That's just to give you the context of this. We're not meant to be lone rangers. We're not meant to live the Christian life just on our own, perhaps with just one helper, riding around, sorting everything out.

It's a team sport. It's not something you do on your own. So that's why we've already seen texts which say encourage one another.

Pray for one another. Confess your sins to one another. I don't think that's saying you have to go around revealing your deepest, darkest secrets but we can be honest with one another.

We are sinners, aren't we? When we sit at the communion table we're all acknowledging that. We wouldn't be there if we didn't need the forgiveness of our sins.

It's a very humiliating place to be. Love one another. Jesus' fundamental command. Love one another. You can't do that if you don't know people, can you?

[42 : 17] You can't do that if you never meet people. Serve one another. Lots of one another's. I've just got a selection there. Being together. This is where the one anothering is at its most effective.

But of course it's not the only place. That was benefit number three. And it is indispensable. We can't live the Christian life on our own. It just doesn't work that way.

It wasn't designed to be that way. We're meant to support one another. Did I do three benefits?

Yes. Oh, good.

Right. Four pieces of advice. Are we ready for four pieces of advice? Right. Number one. Get yourself to church and make it a habit. Advice is not a direct command from the Bible.

It's what I think would be a good idea. That's what advice is. So here's some advice. Get yourself to church and make it a habit. So that's what I always do.

[43 : 18] No question about it. Like Jesus made it his habit, I'm going to make it my habit. Spare yourself all the indecision, hesitation, embarrassment. Will we, won't we? Oh, I don't know.

You just do it. Fit everything around that rather than saying if there's room in my timetable I'll go to church. You'll say I'll go to church and everything else fits around that.

So there's things like getting to bed on Saturday at a sensible time. If you've got kids, I know it's really difficult because they always lose their shoes.

Actually, I lose my shoes as well and I'm a lot older than that. But rounding up the children, getting them into the car or whatever, we can usually manage it on the school day.

So, we're going to have to manage it on the school day. So, rounding up the children, saying we're going to church because that's what we always do. No ifs, no buts. Find your Bible, find your shoes and your coat and get out of the door and go to church.

[44 : 18] That's advice number one. Advice number two. To the limit of your ability, get involved. And I'd say particularly if you can, so I say the limit of your ability because we've all got different limits and different abilities, but to the limit of your ability, be involved in the prayer life of the church.

We can't do all the things that church does on a Sunday morning. We can't do all the things that church does just on a Sunday morning.

And in particular, prayer time, we do that at a separate meeting. So I want to commend that to you to get involved in the prayer life of the church.

It's the spiritual lifeblood of the community. I hope you don't find this an offensive illustration, but when you're a teenager, you never did the washing up. I thought mum and dad enjoyed doing the washing up.

I thought I was doing them a favour. When I'd gone to college, I realised you do have to do washing up. And it's sort of one of the things you have to do to make a house run.

[45 : 30] That's a lesson you learn when you're a student, isn't it? If you're a student, it's a lesson you learn at some point. Prayer is one of the things that we do as a church.

Somebody's got to do it because if there's no prayer, then the church doesn't function. You can't expect God's blessing in a prayerless church. So I want to commend to you, to all of us really, the value of getting involved in the prayer life of the church.

And there's going to be a talk on that in future weeks. Advice number three, be proactive about church. So not only to be blessed, but to be a blessing.

There's something proactive about that. So, you know, you think, I'll go along and nobody comes and speaks to me. And I stand in the corner and nobody comes and speaks to me.

I actually hope that's not true. I think we're reasonably good at noticing if people are standing in the corner and nobody's speaking to them. I hope that's not true.

[46 : 33] But even if it was, the Bible doesn't say it's your job to make sure somebody speaks to you and loves you. The Bible says it's your job to think about other people and speak to them.

Yeah? It lays the onus that we're to, it doesn't say make sure you're loved. It says you love one another. You go out of your way to love your brethren.

So, there's a, the onus is on each of us to take the initiative to care about other people, to step out, perhaps if we're particularly shy, to step out of our comfort zone, but to be more interested about how we can bless other people than worried about whether people are blessing us.

Do you see what I mean? If you look out for other people to take an interest in them and ask after them and then think, rather than, how can I be served, but how can I serve?

What can I do? What can I get involved with? How can I, what can I contribute? And, I can't remember, there's loads of examples, aren't there?

[47 : 44] There's loads of things that need doing in the church and, I'm sure, if you want to contribute, there'll be a space for you to contribute if you're able to do so.

Advice number four. It's a new year, it's worth thinking things through, isn't it? Do an audit on your time and commitments. If gathering together is such a fruitful and blessed activity, am I making the most of it or am I letting some of this slip through my fingers?

So, to put it very bluntly, could I come more? If I don't come very often, could I actually come more? Could I get involved more? Specifically, we meet twice on a Sunday.

Could I come in the evening? I'm not in the habit of doing that, but is there a good reason why not? Perhaps I could. If it's a blessing to be together, it's two blessings to be together twice. If it's a blessing to pray, maybe I could get involved in praying.

Could I commit to the prayer meeting? So, it's just saying, think about that again. Work out what you can and can't do.

[48 : 57] And maybe, I don't know what conclusion you'll come to, but my piece of advice is just do an audit on that and think it through. And just to conclude before we sing our final song, I think Ruth had the spirit of this in this quote from the book of Ruth when she talks about the affinity she feels to her mother-in-law, Naomi, and how closely she feels involved with her.

And I think this is at the heart of what we feel for one another as church. So Ruth says, don't urge me to leave you or turn back from you.

Where you go, I will go. Where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people. Your God will be my God.

Where you die, I will die. And there will I be buried. May the Lord deal with me be it ever so severely if even death separates me and you.

Amen. Let's sing together about the blessing.