

Why Do We Gather?

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Date: 24 October 2021

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[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! I want to intro Devin Coughlin to you. You know, one of the things, by way of introduction, people ask me is, what is Sovereign Grace?

They regularly ask that question. What exactly is our relationship with other churches? And how do we partner together? What's that look like? And rather than answer that question right now, which you'll find out if you hop online or you attend our membership class, in a lot of ways, Sovereign Grace, to me, is Devin Coughlin.

And what I mean by that is having the privilege of being in this ministry for 20-plus years, Sovereign Grace is not this kind of big organization or association, though it is that, even a denomination, actually.

Much more than that, it's the partnership with individuals and with churches that's intensely relational. And so Devin, I met him probably 20 years ago as a friend.

[1 : 12] But as you see all throughout the New Testament, it's much more than friendship when churches gather together. It's a partnership in the gospel that allows you to do things that you could not do alone.

And we love that. And we've benefited from that this weekend with Devin coming to speak to us. And, you know, Proverbs 18, 24, A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there's a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

You tend to think, who could be closer than a brother? Well, a friend is, because a brother is forced to love you, but a friend chooses to. And what I think that I love so much about Devin and his partnership with our church is he's chosen to be a friend to our church and a friend to me.

And you guys know what a friend is worth. And so that's what Devin is worth to me. And so he's kind of cheered us on from the sidelines for three years.

And we had him scheduled like 16 months ago or whatever, right when COVID began, basically. And we said, that's not a good idea. Let's pause on that. And so I'm so thankful we were able to reschedule him and have him in.

[2 : 34] So let me, a little bio. Devin is from Clarksburg, Maryland, serves Grace Church there. He and his wife, Christine, have four kids. All start with a K.

Corey, Kylene, Knox, and Caitlin. And we have enjoyed getting to know him even more this weekend. And I'm excited for him to serve you by the preaching of God's Word.

So let's welcome Devin. It really is a joy and honor to be among the Athenians this morning.

No, but in all sincerity, before I knew you, I prayed for you. And when I heard of Walt starting this church a few years back, our prayers have been with you.

And in a small way, we've been able to participate with you and support you all as this church has become established in Athens. And though you will never meet, or you might never meet, the people in my church, we do pray for you.

[3 : 39] And it's really a privilege to partner with you. And I'm grateful for Walt. I'm grateful to get to know many of the leaders and members of the church over this past weekend. And you guys are about the same things that we are about in the D.C. suburbs.

And just what an honor it is that God doesn't just save individuals and kind of leave them on their own, but he saves the people. And he joins them together in local places, but then he also joins them together on a broader level.

So, I'm grateful to be here, Walt. Thanks for the invitation, and thank you for just the warm welcome that I've experienced over this weekend. And I pray the Lord's continued blessing upon the ministry

here in Athens, Tennessee.

And I love your town. It's awesome to see what God is doing here. Please open your Bible to Hebrews 10. Hebrews 10. Now, have you ever had the experience of beginning a sentence and completely forgetting what you intended to say?

This happens to me a little far, far more often than I care to admit. And I begin speaking, and normally for me, it's often like I'm getting one of my children's attention. So, Corey, come here. Knox, come here.

[4 : 56] Caitlin, come here. And then I realize I have no idea what I wanted to say. The other day, my daughter, my youngest daughter, she's six and a half, Caitlin, she tells me, Dad, that happens to me a lot.

I forget what I'm saying. And so, normally, like, I'll say, Dad, Dad, I love you. Because when I forget what to say, I just say I love you. Like, I'm all right with that solution. That's okay with me. That's just fine.

Sometimes it's not just that we begin to speak and forget what we're saying. Again, sometimes we go somewhere and forget why we're there. This happens to me also more than I care to admit. And oftentimes, I work from home. I'm sitting in my study, and I get up and end up in the kitchen. And I'm wondering, like, what am I doing in here? So normally I, like, make my way over to the pantry and grab a handful of chocolate chips or something like that.

But that's not why I got up in the first place. I just don't remember why. But, you know, what would be even crazier than that is to come into a room and not only know why you're there, but also not know how you got there.

[6 : 02] This has happened to me sometimes. If I'm driving later at night and I'm tired and I pull into the garage and I realize, like, I don't remember anything from that trip.

That's a little terrifying. Now, I bring all this up to make a cautionary point to us as the people of God, as the church of God. I think it's all too common for Christians to show up week after week for corporate worship and not really know why they're there or even how they got there.

We can forget what the purpose of all this is. Sure, we have some ideas, and some are good and some are not so good. Maybe we come at times out of guilt, and so we just feel this burden.

This is what I'm supposed to do. This is what I grew up doing. This is what I'm supposed to keep doing. Or we think, man, I've been really bad this week, and I just feel this need to be more holy, so I'm going to go to church on Sunday.

Or we think maybe I've got a lot to make up for God. You know, God deserves a lot more than what I'm giving Him right now, so I'm going to show up. Maybe at times we come out of just feelings of desperation.

[7 : 07] We think, look ahead. This week is going to be really hard. So I want to make sure I start on God's good side. You know, get the week off to a good start. Or maybe we think this is kind of our spiritual Red Bull or our spiritual cup of coffee, where we just come up to get charged up for the week and then move on.

There are all kinds of reasons we might be here. But are these the right reasons to gather with God's people? Is this why we come together? And this morning we're going to consider this question, why do we gather on Sunday?

And there are many, many places that I could go in Scripture, that we could go in Scripture, that give us answers to these questions. Many different places. Much that we could say that is right and good and true.

But this morning we're just going to consider one text that provides us three answers to our question. Why do we gather on Sunday? Three reasons for why we come together for corporate worship.

So we're going to read this text, Hebrews 10, verses 19 through 25. And as we read, I want you to be aware of one thing. We're going to come across these words, us and we, as we read.

[8 : 14] And this is not some accident. It's not that the writer of Hebrews just happened to be writing to two people. The writer of Hebrews is writing to a church. He's writing to a particular group of people.

And in God's kindness and his providence and his wisdom, his love and mercy, it's also written to us today. So as we read this, it's addressing us, this us and we.

We are addressed and included in what is said here. So we're going to read together. There's nothing more important that I'm going to say the rest of this time than what I'm going to say right now as we read from the inspired, inerrant, infallible, sufficient word of God.

So listen up and then you don't have to listen as much the rest of the time. But I would appreciate your attention. Listen to the word of God. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

[9 : 43] Would you pray with me? Father, thank you for your word which speaks to us. Thank you that you reveal yourself to us in your word and that you are a knowable God because you speak.

And Lord, would you, by your spirit, open our eyes that we may behold wondrous things out of your word. Lord, may you be more glorious in our eyes. Would you impress upon us just this mystery of grace that we've received in Jesus Christ.

We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. So why do we gather for corporate worship? I'm going to give three reasons, three ways to answer that question. First, because God has made a way we come to draw near.

Because God has made a way we come to draw near. I think at times we think that we deserve to be able to worship God. Like this is, of course.

Of course we come to God. It's as if we can almost feel functionally sorry for God. Like all he wants is some people to worship him.

[10 : 45] Poor God. So I'm going to come and be counted among the worshipers. I'll help him out this week. I'll fill up his love cup this week. But this reveals a whole lot more about our high view of ourselves and our low view of God than it reveals about what is actually true.

To think we deserve to come to God is simply a lie. Simply a lie. God is the creator of all. He is the sustainer of all.

He is the ruler of all. He is infinite. Eternal. Eternal. Unchanging. This is who God is. We create nothing.

We sustain nothing. We control nothing. We are finite. We will die. And we are constantly changing. Take a look in the mirror next year.

And you will have changed. On top of this, we are a sinful people. We're in bondage to the desires of our flesh. We might want to do what's right.

[11 : 47] But we find we can't. And often we don't even want to do what's right. We've got big problems. The Bible describes us as dead in our sin. Dead in our sin.

And to be dead in sin does not mean we've got a little hope. As if we're only mostly dead. Right? No, to be dead in sin is to be dead dead.

It's to be all the way dead. Dead people don't talk. They don't walk. And they certainly don't come to God. We are dead in our sin. As the created, that's us, before the creator.

As sinners before the holy God, we have no way to be in relationship with him. We cannot come to him. And we have been cast out of his presence since the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, cast out of his presence.

We live east of Eden. But God. But God, in his mercy and grace, he has made a way for us to draw near to him.

[12 : 46] And when we think about answering this question, why do we come for corporate worship, it has to start here. God has made a way for us to draw near. And he has done that through the blood of sacrifice.

And this is how God established to be in relationship with his people from the beginning. And so, in Old Testament Israel, you have this sacrificial system where animals are sacrificed.

Blood is shed so that people can be in relationship with God. Hebrews talks about this in the sections before what we read just now.

Hebrews 9.22 makes this point crystal clear when it says, Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. So throughout the Old Testament into the New, we read about these sacrifices.

These sacrifices gave access. They made a way to God. And so, day after day and month after month and year after year, blood had to be shed. Sacrifices had to be made again and again for the people of God to be in relationship with God.

[13:52] But we have a problem, don't we? Because we keep on sinning. And so those animals keep having to be sacrificed. Even though blood has to be shed to forgive sins, those sacrifices have to keep being made.

So the writer goes on of Hebrews. He says in chapter 10, verse 11, And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

Never can our sins be ultimately taken away through these sacrifices. So after all of that sacrifice, after all of that shed blood, after all the stink of dead animals and bloody altars, the people of God still have this sin problem.

This problem of free access to God. But thanks be to God in Jesus Christ. Look at chapter 10, verse 12, just before we read. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

When I go and mow the lawn, I don't sit down until I'm done. And when Jesus made this sacrifice, he sat down because he was done. It was complete. Look at verse 14.

[15:08] For by a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. Because Jesus has shed his own blood. Through him, we are washed clean.

In his shed blood, we have this ever-sufficient sacrifice for our sins. And through him, we have access to God. And this is what we've been dwelling on all this morning. This is what we've been singing about. Jesus, your mercy is all my plea.

No longer are we dependent upon human priests and their regular sacrifices. Jesus is our great high priest. And he is our sacrifice once for all.

So in verse 19, we read, Therefore, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain that is through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God.

Let us draw near. Let us draw near. Christ's blood opens this door for us. But it's not just that it opens the door like God comes to the front door and unlocks it, so now we can walk in.

[16:17] It's not like that. We don't have to sneak into the holy places. We don't sneak into the presence of God. He has reserved us a seat. We have a place. We belong there when we are washed in his blood.

So we can enter with confidence. The writer of Hebrews is saying, Because of Jesus, we can just come right in. Thanks be to God. So let us draw near 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. So because of what Jesus has done, let us draw near. And this drawing near includes all that we do in the vertical aspect of our worship, but that includes what we do publicly, corporately in our worship.

So in all of life, both inward with our hearts sprinkled clean, and outward, our bodies washed with pure water, we are to draw near to God, to get close to him, to know him, to love him, to draw near, to warm our hearts by the fire of his love and mercy and grace.

And that's what we were doing this morning already, as we sang these songs, as we read these scriptures, as we prayed together. I hope your heart was warmed by who God is and what he has done for us in Jesus Christ, in this display of his love and mercy and grace.

[17:39] So we come together to draw near to him. And the writer specifies this condition that we are to draw near in. He says, with a true heart. God's concern does not center on how we look, or how we follow particular rituals or rules.

God's concern focuses on the sincerity of our heart. And this sincerity of heart, it finds its rest in full assurance of faith.

This assurance means that we completely trust that Jesus is all that we need. We sang, if you were with us on Friday night at the Finches, we sang the song, Jesus, There's No One Like You.

And in the bridge of that song, it talks about all we have, all we need, all we want is you. And in our sinfulness, we can be singing that and recognized, because we are fallen.

Like, Lord, we're confessing, like, you are all we need, but sometimes I don't live that way, but I want to live that way. You are all I should want, but sometimes I don't live that way, but I want to live that way.

[18 : 44] You are all we have. And that is just true. We got nothing else. So on Sunday, as we gather together, we don't come to God flippantly or fearfully.

We can come to Him with confidence, with joy and hope, resting in Christ as our priest, as our righteousness, as our access giver. And brothers and sisters, this is so freeing.

We don't have to come burdened by the need to perform. And that's just, and all that we do is we don't have to look a certain way. We don't have to act in just this way or use just this language.

We are invited to draw near to Him, covered in the blood of Jesus Christ. Now, for some of us, I think we can face this temptation to come in, as we gather together in corporate worship, with our hearts, with our heads down low, as if we have to sneak in.

We come in late, or we sit in the back, or we're, and if you're sitting in the back, I'm not talking about you. But we might be aware of ways that we've failed, or we think about how we got angry at our kids this morning, or the conflict we're having with our spouse, or we're aware of these thoughts of bitterness and lust and malice that we've been harboring.

[19 : 58] And so we just kind of come in sheepishly, kind of under the robe of condemnation. But if you have put your trust in Jesus Christ, you can come to God with confidence.

Every week, you can come in here with confidence, or not just here, anywhere you guys meet, because I know you meet in several locations, at different points, the Lord knows. But this is the only way we can come.

We don't gather together each week because we're just a bunch of good people with common interests. We gather together because of what Jesus Christ has done. And this is why the gospel is so important in our gatherings.

Remembering the gospel, proclaiming the gospel, rejoicing in what has been done for us in Jesus, because He is our hope. He is all we have. We need Him and nothing else. And so, as a church, we gather to draw near to the God of this life-changing truth, who has revealed this life-changing truth in His Word.

We draw near confidently to God Himself. The one who dwells in unapproachable light can now be approached through the blood of Jesus Christ as we come washed in the blood of the Lamb.

[21 : 07] We have a place. We have belonging because we stand as those covered in the blood of Jesus. Thanks be to God. It's a marvelous truth. So why do we gather for corporate worship?

First, we gather because God has made a way. We come to draw near. Second, second reason, why do we gather for corporate worship? Because God is faithful. We come to hold fast to our hope.

We come to hold fast to our hope. Verse 23, chapter 10. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

Now, what does it mean to hold fast? It doesn't mean to grab onto something quickly. It's not what holding fast is. No, it means to hold tight to, to grab onto and not let go.

And what are we to hold fast to? What are we to grab tightly to? The writer tells us right here, we are to hold fast to our hope.

[22 : 09] Hold fast to the confession of our hope, which includes all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ. So challenges will come in our life. Persecution will be faced.

Adversity and hardship will seek to knock you off this hope. But we are called to hold fast to Him. All week long, whether it be on the internet, or in the newspaper, or talking to your neighbors, or in your own mind, or scrolling through social media, or whatever it is, there are all these things clamoring for you to hold fast to them, as if they are what matters most.

But we hold fast to our hope. That's one of the reasons we gather together. And it's important to recognize that this holding fast isn't something that's dependent on our effort.

As if we just need to hold on strong enough. And you'll hear people say, like, just keep the faith, brother. Well-intentioned, maybe a little misguided.

It's not dependent on us doing this, putting forth enough effort. It's dependent on God. And so the writer says, which I love that the writer says this, that God says this to us, for He who promised is faithful.

[23 : 28] And it's where we started this morning. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His mercy is forever sure. His faithfulness at all times stood and shall from age to age endure.

He who promised is faithful. Our God is the faithful God. Which means His Word always does what He intends for it to do. It's not like my words when I ask my six-year-old to set the table.

It doesn't always have the intended effect that I plan on it having, but God's Word always has that intended effect. So when He makes promises in His Word, they never fail.

He is always dependable. He is always on time. He never lies. He never changes His mind. So when we gather together for corporate worship, this is what we come together to do, to remember together the promises of God and His faithfulness to those promises.

Corporate worship, from the singing to the prayers to the preaching to celebrating the Lord's Supper, it's about holding fast to our hope without wavering. And this is why the Bible plays such an important role in our gatherings.

[24 : 42] Because in the Bible, God reveals Himself to us. He reveals those promises to us. So we come together just to remember. That's how we hold fast to our hope.

We remember God's faithfulness. The church comes together to recount the faithfulness of God. So we are a remembering people. And it's sad to see, I think, how often the church forgets this.

We're supposed to be remembering people, but we are forgetful people, right? And so we sing.

Taylor quoted earlier from Come Thou Fount. There's another line in there that says, prone to wander, Lord, I feel it.

Prone to leave the God I love. We often forget. That's why we need to raise these Ebenezers. And that's also why we need to gather together. But if we forget that we come to remember, then we start to feel like we've got to be doing something new all the time.

So we're constantly trying to invent ways to keep people engaged or keep people interested. Or we come expecting that there's going to be something new. Something that's going to kind of strike my fancy a little bit and make me excited for the week.

[25 : 46] But as ministers of the Word of God, as people of the Word of God, we've got nothing than what has already been said. And so we're going to tell that same old story again and again and again because there's not a better story in the world.

And this is just what God has called His people together to do all throughout its history. God's people that we've always been prone to wander. And so we read, as we read the Old Testament, it's remarkable to see how much, what a significant place God puts on just remembering.

I was thinking about Psalm 78, verses 1 through 7. And if you want to, you're welcome to turn there if you want to hold your place in Hebrews.

I'm turning there, so you've got a couple seconds. Psalm 78, towards the middle of your Bible.

Listen to what the psalmist says. This is all throughout the Psalms as well, but Psalm 78 is a great place to look as we are called to remember.

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching. Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable. I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known that our fathers have told us.

[26 : 59] We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord and His might and the wonders that He has done. We're going to tell them.

He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments.

So we come together to remember, to tell what God has done, His promises, to hold fast to our hope without wavering, so that not only that we don't forget that we're able to hold fast, but so that the coming generations do not forget.

And I think that it's, just as a side note, I think this is something that I love about being here and seeing all the children that were here during our time of singing and even now, where it's, this is their church as well, and we want to bring them into hearing the promises of God and knowing what it looks like to be a part of the people of God.

I heard somebody once say, we're a lot better at raising fans than we are at raising Christians. And I talked to my next door neighbor, Mark, he's not a believer, and he has a four-year-old son, Ellis, and they go to University of Maryland football games, which University of Maryland football games are not like UT football games or any other SEC football games.

[28 : 35] This is University of Maryland, and we're just trying to get like maybe 10,000 people there kind of thing. It's not an exciting event, but they are committed to it. And so Mark, he takes his four-year-old to these football games when they're at home on Saturdays.

And I'll talk to him about it afterwards, and it's kind of miserable as he describes the experience. And I mean, his four-year-old's distracting from him watching the game, his four-year-old's asking for stuff, but he loves to do it.

And Mark loves to take his son to these games because he's got this vision. And that vision is that one day, this is going to be just part of the fabric of their relationship.

And they're going to enjoy going to these games together and with this common cause of cheering for the Terps, who maybe one day will have a good football team. It's probably not going to happen anytime soon.

But we can hold out hope. And so he's got this vision, and so he's willing to bring Ellis along and telling him about the history of Maryland football and explaining the game that's going on in front of us and making sure that he's having a good time.

[29 : 38] And so he's buying him the popcorn and the pretzels and all with this vision in mind. And what I love about this picture is that he'll go, Mark, my neighbor, will go with his mom and dad.

They'll go to the game. And his mom and dad are a part of inspiring Ellis, teaching Ellis about what's going on. And the people that are around them that they don't even know, that they're only going to see on these, whatever, six, eight Saturdays every fall, they're excited that Ellis is there.

And so they're not bothered by the perceived distraction that he might be because they also have this vision that, hey, he's going to be part of this community one day. So we do all of that for sports. May we do the same and much, much more when it comes to becoming a part of the people of God. Tell it to the coming generation. The works of God.

Tell them to set their hope in God so that they do not forget what he has done. So we gather together as the people of God to hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering.

[30 : 46] And God has given us a lot of different ways to be reminded every week. I mean, so preaching is an act of remembering. Singing is an act of remembering as we teach and admonish one another through the songs we sing.

Our fellowship can be an act of remembering the faithfulness of God. As you hear what's going on as someone in this congregation is suffering, speak God's word to them.

Isaiah 26, you keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you because he trusts in you. Or we can tell those who are struggling with doubts, Philippians 1, 6. And I'm sure of this that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Or we encourage those who are persecuted, which I think as time goes on, we're going to face more and more of. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

No, this is not just a you on your own remembering. This is an us together remembering. An us together holding fast to the confession of our faith without wavering for he who promised is faithful.

[31 : 53] In response to the sufficient, complete work of Christ, when we gather together, we hold fast to our hope by remembering his faithfulness, remembering who he is and what he's done and what he's called us to do.

And again, I just love the idea of bringing our kids along in this. I know for us as a family with our youngest being six, we've adopted a family on Sundays and this is something we have encouraged people in the church to do.

We adopted a family that's got a five and a three and a one-year-old and so every Sunday we sit with them. As a pastor, normally, I would sit down front, but it's like, no, we're in this together. We're ordinary people and our kids do very ordinary things, sometimes extraordinary things.

But I mean, they're going to maybe cry sometimes or I might not be able to pay as much attention as I want to or whatever it is, but we're in this with this other family. And one thing I'll tell our church is when I hear a baby crying at some point or when we were meeting on a farm over the summer, we had chickens out there, we had some cows and sheep in the background, but once in a while, like, or once in a while, every week, at some point, some kid would go darting across the field in front of us.

And what a wonderful reminder that this church has a future. I mean, we should remember that.

That's what these children are a sign of. This church has a future. What we are gathered together to do as we remember goes beyond just us and my needs and what I'm going through right now.

[33 : 21] So may God give us grace as we hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering. Why do we gather for corporate worship? Third reason, because Jesus will return, we encourage one another.

Look at verses 24 and 25. 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 all the more as you see the day drawing near.

All of time is headed toward a certain future, a certain point. And the Bible speaks of that future right here as the day. It's the day of Christ's return, his second coming when he will judge the living and the dead, when he will finally rescue all those who are his own.

And the church on earth exists in a world that's marked by pain and evil and sin. We exist in this overlap of two ages, the present evil age and the age to come.

Jesus in his first coming has ushered in the era of his kingdom. And we see that. I think you guys are going through Mark right now. And you see that kingdom breaking forth again and again and again through the work and teaching of Jesus.

[34 : 39] But we still live in this present evil age. So the blessings that we have already been, that we've received in Christ, they're real and they're tangible by the Spirit. They really make a difference in our lives now, but they're not yet fully realized as evidenced in what we face in ourselves and our sin and in the wickedness that we see in the world and the suffering in our world.

And so Paul writes of this day the church longs for. He says this in Colossians 3, when Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. So it's with this eager expectation that the church gathers together.

This is what we do as we gather. Among the many other things that are going on, one of the things that we're doing, and I think a far more primary thing that we're doing, is encouraging one another as we long for Christ's return, as we look ahead.

Our gatherings, I'll often, at my church, I'll often talk about how our gatherings are a reorientation to reality. A reorientation to reality. We come together to be, this is a really good English phrase, reminded of what's really real.

That's what we're doing. God is ultimate reality. And we want to remember what's really real. I mean, we think that what's really real is the physical stuff that we see or the experiences that we have.

[36 : 02] And they are real, but they're not ultimately real. The definer of reality is God himself. And so we come to be, as we remember, be reoriented to that reality.

And that includes this historical dimension where we anticipate the day of his return. One theologian has said this, he said, the church, the body of Christ, is the place where God invites us to renew our loves, to reorient our desires and retrain our appetites.

Christian worship is a feast where we acquire new hungers for God and for what God desires and are then sent into his creation to act accordingly. So we come together to be reoriented, to be trained.

And that's exactly what's taking place here in Hebrews where he talks about, as you see this day drawing near, encourage one another. Consider how to stir up one another. I think this phrase, I think, is one that's often neglected, especially the word consider.

Consider speaks to the need for some preparation to serve others. One commentator says it implies thoughtful reflection on the needs of other believers.

[37 : 17] Now, does that describe how you think about coming to corporate worship? Are you considering the needs of other believers? Before arriving this morning, did you thoughtfully reflect on how you might serve those around you or how you could stir them up to love and good works?

But the writer is saying that in response to the access that God has given us by Jesus Christ, we are called to encourage one another by considering them and their needs. And we often have a tendency to think of serving in terms of what we want to do.

So, sure, I want to serve others. I want to serve the church, but I really only want to serve in the ways that I actually want to do it. So you want me to greet people? Sure, I'm happy to do that.

You want me to sing? Yeah, of course. I'm happy to serve in that way. Lay down my life. I will sing for you. But you want me to reach out to so-and-so who's going through this challenging season? I'm kind of busy. Like, I'm not sure if I can really serve in that way. I've seen this tendency in myself in how I think about serving my wife. I can gravitate towards serving her in the ways that I want to serve her or those ways that are most convenient for me.

[38 : 35] This isn't really laying down my life for her. My wife doesn't really drink coffee and I could think, like, well, I'll go out and get you a cup of coffee this morning and bring it to you.

Like, that does nothing for her. But it's easy for me to do. It's more self-serving. And it typically points to my poor motivation in serving her in order to get something from her. I want her praise. Our call in the church and our relationship is to consider one another. Consider their needs. Consider how to stir them up to love and good works. But we don't just consider what they might want, which is taught in Philippians 2.4, consider the interests of others more important than our own. But we also want to consider how to build them up into Christ. Give them what God wants them to have. We encourage one another and we edify one another through our language. And corporate worship is a huge part of that. as we sing. This is why corporate singing is so much better than performance. [39 : 40] Because we are telling one another these things. We are encouraging one another. There is, recently I had this opportunity to lead at a large conference, lead the singing at a large conference.

Thousands of people there. And I couldn't wait to get back to my church on the farm with the 130 people that were gathered together. Because there, we edified one another in this large context. But in that small context, I know these people's stories. I know what they're going through. When I see Mike and Patty, and Mike, he's a Vietnam vet and he's got Parkinson's disease, but I see him coming and engaging others and caring for others. I see him come and sing of the faithfulness and the goodness of God. Man, like that is way better than singing with a couple thousand people. Way better. And we get to participate in that every week as we encourage one another and edify one another and build one another up into Christ. And this call to encourage one another really necessitates presence. It's kind of an obvious implication. Like, if we are going to encourage one another and stir one another up, you've got to be here.

[40 : 54] Just saying. And you all are here, which is great, because if you weren't here, you wouldn't hear me right now. Brilliant. Brilliant insights. But it does highlight the fact that we don't come to church just for our own spiritual growth and benefit, which is how oftentimes we just, we come thinking.

We come for us. I come for what I need. What am I getting out of this? What do I want to learn? But we also show, and it's good, we do want to learn things about God as we gather together. And God does want to stir our hearts and encourage us as we gather together.

So he does want to do all that, but we also show up for others. We want to stir one another up with the hope that we have in Jesus in this certain future that we have. In corporate worship, we are really learning to live like citizens of the heavenly kingdom.

So we gather as a church all the more eagerly because we are preparing for and anticipating that day when Christ returns for his bride. And so then the church is like the gym where we train our bodies.

And literally, it's the gym here because we're at the Y where we train, we might do pull-ups later, where we train our bodies for eternity. That's what we're doing. We're learning to think kingdom thoughts and develop kingdom habits.

[42 : 11] Or the church is spring training for heaven might be another way to look at it. Or the church is that place where we get to look at that catalog of that place that we've always wanted to go or we're looking forward to going.

We're planning that vacation so we get that book about whatever, the south coast of Italy and I just love looking through it. That's like what church is. We have this glorious day coming that we are anticipating together.

And this is the training room for that. This is looking through that catalog, flipping through those pages. Man, it's going to be amazing when we're there. It's going to be awesome and we get a taste of that right here, right now.

So we want to be ready for that day. That is Revelation 22, 3, that day when no longer will there be anything accursed. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it and His servants will worship Him.

That is the day that is destined to come. And we are just practicing for that day. Every week as we gather together. And that's how we encourage one another. We look ahead.

[43 : 15] You know, I know this week was hard. I know about this suffering. I know about this challenge you're facing. But thanks be to God. We can look back and see His mercy and grace to

us in what Jesus Christ has done.

We can look at today and know that He who promised is faithful. And we can look ahead to what one day will be. Though we are still sojourning in this life, God through the church gives us a taste of the fellowship and joy of that heavenly assembly yet to come.

One theologian says, what we experience now in our relationship with God in the company of His people is in anticipation of the ultimate reality. And the whole of life is to be lived with reference to that unshakable kingdom and the prospect of living in God's presence forever.

So as we gather, we have our eyes on the future. Looking ahead to the coming reality of heaven. We have our eyes on the past, rooted in what Jesus has done.

Because of Him, we can have confidence to enter the holy places. And we have our eyes on the present, encouraging one another, loving one another, walking in grace towards one another.

[44 : 27] Sundays are this wonderful gift and opportunity for us. We come to church to be shaped into God's people. We come to be reoriented to the ultimate reality that we are sons and daughters of the living God.

The one who created all things out of nothing, who reigns sovereignly on His throne yesterday, today, and forever. We have a relationship with Him in Jesus Christ. And our gather worship is just one more way we can counteract the pressure to be shaped into consumeristic and narcissistic and self-centered individuals.

each week. We participate in this gathering that looks ahead to what one day will be to this marriage supper of the Lamb.

And on that day, there will be no more need for lamenting the pain of this world. Because He will wipe away every tear from our eyes and death shall be no more.

No more crying, no more pain for the former things will have passed away. And on that day, this growing building, as the Bible calls the church, this holy, living temple, won't be needed anymore.

[45 : 40] For the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb will be its temple. And the city will have no need for sun or moon to shine on it for the glory of God gives its light and its lamp is the Lamb.

So as we look forward to that day, as we long for that day, our hope is not in better production or better performance or our own building or a great reputation or massive influence.

It's not in any of those things. Our hope is in Jesus and what He has done for us. He is our life and light. He is the cornerstone. He is that home that we are made for, the place where we belong.

He is the one who alone is worthy to receive all blessing and honor and glory and power. There are countless places you could be this morning. You could be sleeping in.

You could be on a hike. You could be playing golf. You could be out to eat. You could be shopping. You could be tailgating. You could be getting some house projects done. You could be traveling.

There are countless ways you could be pursuing the satisfaction of your own desires right now outside of this gymnasium and this YMCA.

[46 : 51] But you are here. And the fact that you will be here next Sunday and the Sunday after that and after that and on and on. Maybe not here. Maybe somewhere else. I don't know. Makes a profound statement about what we are living for.

About where our hope lies. This practice shapes us to be people for God's glory and for His glory alone. So, would God give us grace to do that?

Would you pray with me? Father, thank you for Jesus. For Jesus who does give us access to you through His blood.

And thank you for giving us this foretaste of what one day will be as we train our minds and our hearts, our affections for life in your heavenly kingdom.

Lord, would you strengthen Trinity Grace Church here in Athens and would you continue to build them up into this beautiful outpost of your heavenly kingdom.

[47 : 55] I pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen. You've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.