

God Redeems: Redemption
God Sends: Mission
God Reigns: Kingdom
God Gathers: Church
God Returns: New Creation

Big Question: Why Do God's People Gather

Acts 2:42-47 says,

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

What's your favourite flavour? When you go into Spilt Milk, and you survey all the different flavours of ice cream, do you have a flavour that you are drawn back to again and again? My favourite is a scoop of pistachio with a scoop of milk chocolate. But everyone is different. Some strange people prefer a really tangy lemon sorbet. Ice cream is good, and we all have different flavours we love.

When we look around at different churches, they have different flavours too. The music, the seating, the teaching, the architecture, the language, are all different. Does it matter? Are they all just different flavours of something that is good – church?

In Acts 2, we see Jesus' followers grow rapidly from a small group, to over 3000 believers who start to meet together as the early church. The Bible urges Christians to meet together, but today we ask the question "How should God's people gather?" Are there essential features of how we meet, or is it all just a question of, "What's your favourite flavour?"

Acts 2:42-47 gives us a snapshot of the early church. These verses tell us a few important things that are essential as God's people meet together. Firstly, it tells us they were devoted. Church was not a half-hearted gathering they attended when they had nothing better to do. It went in the diary before anything else. But what exactly were they devoted to? Verse 42 tells us four things. They were devoted to: the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. Their devotion to the Apostles' teaching and to prayer show us that the focus of their gathering was God and his word. Church is never a social club, or a self-help group. It is a gathering to hear the word of God – in the first century that was directly from the apostles, for us now, the words of God recorded in the words of the Bible. God's truth must be at the centre when God's people gather together.

The early church would have been an amazing place to be a part of. Acts 2 tells us that God was at work through signs and wonders, and people were constantly being saved. The sovereign God of the universe was at work through his people to save many, so they prayed. As church meets, it needs to be shaped by devotion to prayer.

Finally, the early church were devoted to one another. Gathering for church was not about coming together, having their own spiritual tank refilled and going out again for the week. Instead, they deeply cared for the spiritual growth and health of other believers. They fellowshiped together, shared a common identity and purpose with one another. They joyfully met together in one another's homes to share in meals together and they met one another's physical and financial needs as they were able to. Following Jesus is not an individual activity. It is a team sport.

There is a lot of freedom for us to wisely and prayerfully decide how we do church, here in Orange in our particular context and time. However, Acts 2 shows us there are some non-negotiables that are more than a matter of choosing your favourite flavour. As we meet together, our church is to be shaped by our devotion to God and his word, to prayer, and to building up one another.

LIVING AND ACTIVE PRAYER

Gracious Father,

You have saved us with a wonderful and powerful salvation.

Your Word is living and active. Today, we have heard you speak,

So help us to not harden our hearts but to live it out.

Forgive our failures, renew our wills, awaken our joy, and transform our lives.

Make our faith living and active.

In the name of your Son and by your Spirit, Amen

Reflection Questions:

What does your diary show that you are most devoted to?

What habit could you start this week to grow in your devotion to God's word and to prayer?

What would it look like for you to be devoted to the growth of other believers at church?

RESOURCES FOR THE WEEK

Think about someone at church that you appreciate. Write a letter to them and give it to them at church.

Everything A Child Should Know About God: Part 10

The-ology: Chapters 59-65

PTC Course: Worship

Tuesday

Exodus 19:3-6

In the Old Testament, God's people were rescued from Egypt, gathered at mount Sinai, and heard God speak. What similarities, do we see to church today, and how does this help you to understand the gathering of God's people in God's eternal plan?

Wednesday

1 Peter 2:9-10

What is our new identity in Jesus, and how does it give us a new purpose?

Thursday

Hebrews 10:24-25

What is 'the Day', and why should it motivate us to gather with other Christians?

Friday

Revelation 7:9-10

What similarities do you see between God's throne room in heaven, and our church gatherings? How does this end goal change the way we think about church today?