

Why bother with church?

(Notes and reflection questions from Dan's sermon of 5/5/24)
which can be accessed at www.stjamesbythepark.org/talks

What makes you decide whether or not to go to church / cell group in any given week?

Read Acts 2.42-47 and 4.32-37

Would you want to be part of a church like that?

Dan outlined 9 reasons why gathering as church (defined as God's people intentionally gathered around God's word in the power of God's Spirit – whether on Sundays or midweek, in public or private) **is vital to our growth in discipleship:**

1. Ephesians 5.25 “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” If Christ loves the church (not just individual Christians) – so should we. We can't ‘love Jesus and hate the church’.
2. John 13.20-23 I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you ... so that they may be brought to complete unity.” When we grow in unity, we're an answer to Jesus' prayer! (And when we keep others at arm's length, we're a hindrance to Jesus' prayer being answered!)
3. 1 Corinthians 12.27 - ²⁷ Now you [plural] are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” An amputated finger isn't any use. We connect to Christ (the head) through being part of the body. In fact, all the NT pictures for church emphasise our unity (one flock with many sheep; one building made up of many bricks; one vine with many branches; one family with many siblings; one bride united to one husband). The NT can't picture a disciple who isn't part of a regular church fellowship.
4. Acts 20.7 “On the first day of the week we came together to break bread.” Weekly church was the assumption, based on a weekly Sabbath. God in his loving wisdom provided Sabbath as a 1 in 7 day for rest and gathered worship. We're not wiser than God – so when we think we can get away with rest and gathered worship 1 in 14 or 1 in 28 etc – ultimately we damage ourselves.
5. Matthew 18.15 If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you.” Church helps us become more holy. When person A sins, person B has to practice patience and forgiveness and gets to check if there's a plank in their own eye before taking the speck out of person A's eye. Person A gets to practice repentance and turning away from sin. So both grow in holiness.
6. John 13.35 “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” I need you to help my friends become Christians – because the most effective evangelism isn't by arguments but by the quality of our relationships.
7. 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 encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” I need you to encourage me to keep my eyes on Jesus in the face of life's struggles.

8. Revelation 2.1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand [Jesus] and walks among the seven golden lampstands [the churches].” Jesus can speak to individual Christians and reassure them of his presence. But in the NT, we more often see him speaking to whole churches and walking with the church. So to maximise our opportunity to hear from and experience Jesus’ presence, gather with other Christians!

9. The more the children come, the more likely they are to keep going in faith as they grow up.

Summary: *I need you. You need me. We need us.*

Which 3 of those verses and statements surprised you most? Discuss them together. Where do you agree or disagree? Why?

Was there anything else Dan said on Sunday which particularly resonated with you?

Dan then outlined some ways we can grow closer to each other by investing in fellowship:

1. Show up – make regular gathering with other Christians a priority, not an option.
2. Open up – be honest with a few other people about your struggles and difficulties – and if you don’t know anyone well enough to do that, invest in relationship until you are confident to do that.
3. Share life – real community is built by sharing everyday life with others, not merely sitting next to them in a small group or on Sunday. And by sharing possessions (as in Acts 2 and 4)
4. Encourage others – explain to others why church is so important and ask others what you can do to help them join in more.
5. Cross over – build community with those who are different to you (eg a different generation or different background).

What else do you think would help us build community?

Spend some time praying and asking God which of these things he wants you to work on at the moment? How does he want you to go about it? Who can you tell – so they can help to keep you accountable for it?

Then spend some time praying for us as a church – that we would grow closer to each other.