

I LOVE SUNDAYS

If you listen to UCB Canada, you will have probably heard the song by Toby Mac called A Lil Church. It says: "I could use a little church right now. Love to have a little family around. I've been feeling so overwhelmed I could use a little church right now." Isn't that so true? We all need a little church from time to time.

Formula One motor racing is the fastest sport in the world. Central to winning the race is the pit-stop. No driver, no matter how fast they drive, you cannot win a race without taking a pit-stop. In a pit-stop the drivers take refreshment, receive instructions, have engine repairs, refuel the tank and set off with fresh tires. A Formula One race is all about speed and strategy - and it is in the timing and management of the pit-stop that the race is often won or lost. That is what church is for us.

Today we are starting a new series called I Love Sundays. For the next 4 weeks we are going to be looking at why rest and corporate worship are such essential parts of the Christian life and why, because of this, Sunday is meant to be the best day of your week.

I want to confess something to you this morning, I love Sundays! I didn't always. I remember there was a time as a kid when I used to dread going to church. I did not get a lot out of it. Still, my parents made sure that I was in church every Sunday. I grew up in a home where church was a priority. If we as a family were not at church 30 min before the service started, we were late! That is because my parents understood the truth that church is not just about what happens in the service. It is greeting people and talking with them before and afterwards. Church is a family, and you don't spend time with family because you have to, but because you want to.

Unfortunately, things have changed a great deal since I was a kid. A few years ago, the Pew Research Center did a survey on thousands of people in North America. They asked Christians a simple question, what are the important aspects of being a Christian?

The top answers were; believing in God, being grateful for what you have, forgiving those who have wronged you, being honest at all times, praying regularly and helping the poor and needy. After this the results are very interesting;

- Spending time with family – 48%
- Reading the Bible/religious material – 42%
- Attending a church service – 35%
- Serving in your church – 28%
- Resting on the Sabbath – 18%

The researcher concluded the study saying "These statistics are evidence of an epidemic Christian leaders have recognized for some time: North American Christianity has been hijacked by the individual at the expense of the whole." When I was a kid, a regular church attender meant that they were in church every single week. Today, people think they are in regular attendance if they are in church once a month or less. Church attendance does not have the priority it used to have.

Once upon a time, things used to stop on Sundays. People went to church and worshipped God. Afterwards they ate together, hung out together, rested and had fun together in the afternoons. Sunday wasn't an extra day to get things done or a bonus day to put our kids in high-impact activities so they could get ahead. Sunday was a day of rest and worship.

Those are two important things – rest and worship. There are still shadows of that today. You have businesses like Chick-fil-A and Hobby Lobby in the states that are closed on Sundays. They do so because they believe that rest and worship are important.

On the Chick-fil-A website they have the reason they close, “Our founder, Truett Cathy, made the decision to close on Sundays in 1946 when he opened his first restaurant. This decision was as much practical as spiritual. He believes that all franchised Chick-fil-A Operators and their Restaurant employees should have an opportunity to **rest**, spend time with family and friends, and **worship** if they choose to do so. That's why all Chick-fil-A Restaurants are closed on Sundays. It's part of our recipe for success.”

It is also part of God’s recipe for success - rest and worship. God has a rhythm. The universe has a rhythm. The planets in our solar system have a rhythm. The earth has a rhythm. The seas have a rhythm. The four seasons have a rhythm. Our bodies have a rhythm. Our heart has a rhythm. Our lungs have a rhythm. Everything has a rhythm.

Genesis 2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 2 And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.

The Bible says that Sundays are God’s gift to us. God made Sunday for you!

Mark 2:27 Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

Sunday is God’s prescription for surviving a busy and hectic world. God created us with the need to rest. He created us to require one day in seven to recharge our batteries and re-center our lives. Next week I am going to be talking more about the rest aspect of Sundays, so today I want to talk about the importance of worship. Specifically, I am talking about corporate worship.

One pastor wrote, “There is something you can’t see, touch, taste, or smell about church attendance that makes it the most powerful investment of your week. Something about being in church makes us better and qualifies us for special blessings and provisions from God.”

Psalms 122:1-9 A song of ascents. Of David. I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD." 2 Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem. 3 Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together. 4 That is where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, to praise the name of the LORD according to the statute given to Israel. 5 There the thrones for judgment stand, the thrones of the house of David. 6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May those who love you be secure. 7 May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels." 8 For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, "Peace be within you." 9 For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your prosperity.

David got excited when he was invited to church. Why? Why was David fired up about the thing that so many people are turned off by today? Why was it that David couldn’t wait to get there? What did he know that maybe you don’t know about church? So why should you go to church? In this short little psalm David gives 5 great reasons;

1. The PRESENCE of Family

Verse 2 tells us why David was so happy to be going to the temple to worship. It says:

Psalms 122:2 Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem. 3 Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together. 4 That is where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD...

David was describing what it was like to go visit the temple. Jerusalem was a densely packed community. The temple was in the center of it. David grew up in Bethlehem, which was a small little village. He was a shepherd which meant he spent a lot of time out in the countryside by himself. It must have been an amazing experience for him when he came into the hustle and bustle of the city.

There is a dynamic that happens when we gather together for corporate worship. That does not mean that personal worship is not important. We need to have a daily quiet time with God and spend time with Him in private worship. However, corporate worship is also important.

In Kuwait we saw the very first Kuwaiti Muslims become Christians, and it was a blessing to see. We knew that it was too dangerous for them to come to the church so they would meet with tentmakers for discipleship. This was good, but we quickly found that there was a problem. There was something missing. What was missing was corporate worship. It was the experience of meeting together with other believers. We would often have people come from Saudi Arabia and Iran to attend the services. For them it was an oasis, a place to come and worship together with other Christians. It was a blessing. They missed their Christian family.

We saw this during COVID. I am so thankful for the amazing video feed we have of our services and the guys who make that happen every week. It is there for people who cannot make it to church. It is not there as an alternative to church. It is not the same. Something is missing just watching a service online as opposed to physically attending.

The bible says that we as believers need one another. We were created to live the Christian life in community. Being a Christian is more than just reading your bible and praying and maybe watching a church service on the TV.

For David, it wasn't just the fact that there was a crowd. The important thing is that these people were the tribes of Israel. In other words, they were family. Perhaps the only time they would see each other was at the temple. Have you ever met another Christian and felt immediately that you knew them, that it was like they were family?

I remember years ago I was flying back to Kuwait from a conference I had been at. I had a 5-hour layover in Frankfurt airport. I was just sitting there bored when I noticed a guy sitting near me. There was something about this person. He smiled at people as they passed by. There was kindness in his eyes. Eventually I went over and spoke to him and found out that he was a missionary heading back to Africa. It was as if I was reuniting with an old friend. We talked and laughed and when I said goodbye to get on my flight, I felt I was saying goodbye to a lifelong friend. The presence of family.

2. The PRAISE of God

Verse 4 of Psalm 122 goes on to say, "That is where the tribes go... to praise the name of the Lord."

David goes on to say it was not just who was there but what was happening that was important. This was more than just a family reunion.

The people were there for a reason, and that reason was to worship God. Many had come from a great distance in order to be there. The focus was to give God glory.

Again, there is a difference between individual worship and corporate worship. There is a just a different dynamic. I remember the first time I went to Urbana, going from a small church to a gathering with over 10,000 young people gathered together in worship. Walking in to that stadium was so loud! There was a different energy and power that was present. It blew me away. That change in dynamic helped draw me into a deeper sense of worship. The presence of family and praise of God.

3. The PRECEPTS of God

The end of verse 4 says, "That is where the tribes go... according to the statute given to Israel."

Why did the people have to go to Jerusalem? Most had traveled a great distance in order to be there. Why was the temple so important? Why didn't they just stay at home and worship God from the comfort of their own home? Because God had told them to do it. David says they had come 'according to the statute given to Israel.' In other words, they were there because God had told them to gather there. God wanted them to gather as a community and as a nation. God wanted them to come and be together in that place. It is important that we gather together like this as family.

Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another -- and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Why should we not give up meeting together? Because God calls us to spur one another on to love and service. Because there is encouragement in community. God knows we need each other.

I have one brother and one sister. Neither of them goes to church. They grew up going to church. They say that they believe in Jesus, but their lives do not reflect that truth. I know that if they went to church it would change them. I know that if they had the support and encouragement of a Christian community around them it would make a huge difference in their lives. The presence of family, praise of God and precepts of God.

4. The PEACE of God for His People

Psalms 122:6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May those who love you be secure. 7 May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels." 8 For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, "Peace be within you."

Why does David pray for the peace of Jerusalem? So that the people of God would be secure. He prays for peace for the sake of his brothers and friends. In other words, he wanted his family, the nation of Israel, to be safe and blessed. He was seeking the good of his family.

One of the reasons going to church is important is because it gives us the opportunity to serve, to bless the family of God. It allows us to use the gifts we have been given.

I once heard a pastor from a large church in the states speak about the importance of serving in their church. He was talking about the fact that serving allows people to use the gifts that God has given, and when we use the gifts, we are given in service in leads to satisfaction.

That church was busting at the seams and needed to build. The pastor was praying for someone who could help lead the church in a building project to expand the building. One Sunday a man spoke to him and said that he wanted to help serve, but he did not think that he had anything to offer – he did not feel that he could sing in the choir or lead a bible study. When asked what he did, the pastor found out he was the head architect for a firm that designed huge projects. He was the answer to the church's prayer. That man went on to design several new buildings as the church continued to grow.

The presence of family, praise of God, precepts of God and peace of God. Lastly;

5. The PROMINENCE of God for All People

The Psalms ends saying 'For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your prosperity.'

Genesis 18:18 Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.

David's focus here in this Psalm was not simply that his family or nation would be blessed but that all nations would be blessed through his family. He prays for God's prosperity for the sake of the nations.

God has made His glory known to all people through His creation, but when God wanted to communicate His love and plan of salvation to the world, He did it through a person. He chose Abraham and told him that He would bless him and that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. It was a simple plan, that God would bless Israel and when others saw this blessing they would be drawn to God as well. David seeks the peace and prosperity of Jerusalem because he understands it is a witness to the love and mercy of God.

Likewise, corporate worship is important because it is a witness and has an impact on the community.

"The church is God's primary vehicle for the proclamation of the gospel. The abundant life is found most abundantly in the community of the local church." – Albert Winseman (Gallup group)

Over the next few weeks, we will be looking at ways in which Sundays can change your life and the lives of people around you. I want to challenge you to make church a priority. Come weekly, make the decision to make it a commitment.

Take your next step, whatever that is. Years ago, a church sociologist did a study of satisfied church members and discovered that they have six things in common.

- (1) They attend regularly.
- (2) They develop at least six friendships with other members of the church.
- (3) They have a place they serve somewhere in the church.
- (4) They call the church "my church."
- (5) They give consistently to the church.
- (6) They invite others to their church.

If you're new, pick number one and start coming regularly. If you're already doing that, pick one of the other actions you're not doing and start doing that. Take your next step, whatever that is.

J.I. Packer, author of "Knowing God," once wrote "Individuality is not correct, according to biblical standards. The church is central in God's plan. God uses the church to set up His kingdom – the corporate relational reality where people respond to Christ as King. We can't dismiss the structure God has established."