



Dear Friends,

Last Saturday, a friend sent me a text. He has lived away from home for the past few months. During this period, he has been unable to attend his own local church. His message said something like, "I will attend a local church tomorrow morning ... I need to attend church." When I read his text, I thought, "If only all Christians felt the way my friend does."

A week or so before I received his message, another friend sent me a meme stating the old church model is dead. It included an autopsy listing the "systemic failures proving the 'Sunday Service' is obsolete." One of those failures is sporadic church attendance.

During our time in Canberra, the elders gave me the Sunday so that Kathryn and I could enjoy a weekend away in Sydney. We stayed at a hotel in the CBD and played tourist for the weekend. Having been given the Sunday off, we didn't go to church that Sunday. As we walked around Sydney Harbour, I caught myself thinking, "This is the life. I reckon I could get used to this."

That was a helpful experience. God used it to give me an insight into how Christians can sometimes feel about church. Church is not an optional extra if you're a pastor. I guess I could choose to take Sunday off for a sleep in or to go to the beach or to do brunch at a local café. However, I suspect that wouldn't go down too well with the elders or congregation.

Being at church to gather for worship and fellowship on Sundays is a choice for every Christian. But none of us ought to regard it as an optional extra. Sunday worship is integral to life as a Christian. You and I have been saved by Jesus to belong to God's family. Being at worship expresses that reality. Being with Christian brothers and sisters in the flesh also enables us to "love one another deeply from the heart" (1 Pt 1:22). How can we "bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another" unless we meet regularly and spend time with our church family (Col 3:13)?

The temptation to treat Sunday worship as an optional extra isn't anything new. It's been around since the early church. The writer of the book of Hebrews says:

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward 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. (Heb 10:24-25)

This says, we need each other to persevere to follow Jesus. It's not just fellow Christians that we need. We need to meet with them. Like my friend said, "I need to attend church."

Sunday worship provides us with the weekly recalibration that we need to refocus our hearts, minds, and lives on Jesus. We gather to worship God. To look up. To recognize he is our Maker. To adore him as our Redeemer. To submit to him as Lord.

We also gather to look around us. When we look across the room, we see brothers and sisters in Christ to whom we owe a responsibility to spur on to love and good deeds. God also uses them to spur us on to love and good deeds. We need one another.

You and I need to attend church. Just as family is integral to maturing as a person, church is integral to maturing as a Christian. Eugene Peterson says:

Maturity develops in worship as we develop in friendship with the friends of God, not just our preferred friends. Worship shapes us not only individually, but as a community, a church. If we are going to grow up into Christ we have to do it in the company of everyone who is responding to the call of God. Whether we happen to like them or not has nothing to do with it.

God Bless,
Mark Adams