

“Faithfully Attend Church” by Rev. Dr. Peter Thompson

Hebrews 10: 19-25

James 5:13-16

Acts 2:37-47

For the last several weeks we have unofficially been talking about what it means and what it looks like to be faithful children of God. We began with leaning on God (that is a must). We then discussed leaning on one another too. Both being someone for others to lean on and trusting others when we need support. With our next stop we crowned Jesus as the true champion and understand that through our faith in Christ we wear the champion title belt alongside Jesus. Our primary purpose as a champion of Jesus is to be a champion of God’s cause. Last week then we sang and played and made a joyful noise of praise to God. Today, we encounter another important calling for us from God to be faithful children of God and that is to **faithfully attend church**.

Read Hebrews 10:19-25.

When we partner the call to meet together as we just read, with James 5:16 which tells us we are to “confess our sins to each other,” and Acts 2:42 which tells us to “devote ourselves to the teaching and fellowship of Jesus,” what we get is a divine call to **faithfully attend church**.

Something happens between what I will call presence and participation opportunities in ministries we would refer to as “church”. Primarily I think of worship, but it could also be an education class, outreach opportunity, or other support ministry too. When we are engaged in the life and ministries of the church, I believe the church to be fulfilled and whole. Like the church has a smile and glow about it. However, when we fall away from engagement in the life and ministries of the church, I believe the church moans and groans and aches for our return. I believe the church, the building and the body of people, itch with anticipation of the next time we can come together and experience the good news and goodness of God. Here is the thing. The church needs us to be attentive. Here is the other thing. The church wants us to be attentive. And not only the church, but God. God wants us to be engaged and invested in the life and ministries of the church.

Here is an important disclaimer. Being in church (worship, education, outreach, or support ministry) does not make us Christian or faithful children of God any more than being in a garage would make us a car. There is much more to our identity as God’s children than our presence in this space during this time. For example, our heart and our attitude. However, being present and participating in “church” does enrich and support our journey in being faithful children of God. Some might even claim they can’t be faithful to God without the church.

In an article *Do Christians Really Need to Attend Church?*, Ericka Andersen begins by sharing that one of the most common statements you'll hear regarding church attendance is "I don't need church to have a relationship with God." To get at this statement a little more, it is important to ask "What's at the heart of this contentious remark? While one can certainly "have a relationship" of some kind with God without attending a church, will they ever fully experience His presence here on earth without the local church body God has provided? Will they be able to glorify God as He calls without it?" Andersen argues that the answer to these questions is no.

She continues, "As Christians, maintaining close relational and community connections with brothers and sisters is a vital part of our membership in the family of God. How do we know this is true? Scripture is the guiding light of Christians. And while the Bible doesn't explicitly say, "Go to church," it would be impossible to live out much of what is written in scripture without attending church."

In addition to being obedient to scripture, Andersen adds, "Statistically speaking, those who attend church are happier, healthier, more generous, and more satisfied with their lives. We were created to live and thrive with fellow believers. Thus, a faith community is a necessary tool for living out our Christian lives, strengthening our faith, and developing a deeper relationship with God."

To **faithfully attend church** is about being present and participating in the life and ministries of what we refer to as "church"- worship, education, outreach, support ministries.

AND ...

To **faithfully attend church** is attending to church, to the body of Christ, to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. Let's dig into this a bit deeper.

A little boy said, "Dad, did Grandpa make you go to Sunday school when you were my age?" His father said, "He sure did. We went every Sunday." The boy said sadly, "Well, I bet it won't do me any good either." The moral? It is not enough to just go to church. We must apply the Bible to our everyday lives.

When we consider the definition of "attend" we learn in addition to presence at an event it means tending to, caring for, supplying, fulfilling, or meeting.

Andersen offers reflection on this. She says, "Attending church is not just showing up on Sundays for an hour. It is an intentional commitment to a group of Christians throughout the week, whereby you meet together, pray for one another, provide for each other, and become sanctified by the Holy Spirit through those relationships. If "going to church" is just an obligatory act of legalism, you will not experience what God

intends when God calls you there. When you understand the history of the local church, the purpose of engaging in biblical community, and the responsibility you have to others as a member, going to church is no longer about you. It's about God, others, and living out God's call and will to the best of our abilities here on earth."

Another article about attending church begins, "When we get down to it, if you understand the importance of why we gather together each week, attending church should be your excuse for missing everything else."

Sam Allberry writes, "the local church is the "embodiment" of the universal Church, functioning like "sovereign territory in a foreign land—a small part of heavenly territory in this world." To this I say if we want to be closer to God, know God's will and God's way, and be faithful children of God, the best place we can be (and people we can be with) is church.

There was a man who once said, "I am quitting church. I don't know why I go anymore. I have heard everything from Genesis to Revelation and now the Preacher is starting to repeat himself. On top of that, I can't seem to hear much or remember what is said during the sermon or any other part of the worship. There is no point in me attending church anymore. I am done." In response, the man was encouraged to reconsider. "You know, I don't remember much of what I ate last week. I know I am still hungry this week though. It doesn't matter whether you remember everything that is said. I think of being in church and worshipping like eating a meal. I don't always remember what I ate at each meal, but I know that what I ate fed me for that time and carried me through to the next meal. What I think is important is that I keep eating. And going to church is like that. The important thing is that we keep going."

To faithfully attend church is to remain connected to and tapped into God as the vine and source of true life. I have shared the illustration before of God as the pitcher, we as the cup, and the world as the font. To remain faithful to God and God's call upon our lives, whatever that is, we must remain connected and tapped in to God. We fall victim to thinking once we are full it makes sense to disconnect and then come back when we need more. However, with God, our lives operate with much more grace and fulfillment when we stay connected and allow God to fill us and overflow from us. To help us remain connected and tapped in, we need to **faithfully attend church**- be present and participate in the life and ministries (worship, education, outreach, etc.) and tend to and care for one another and our neighbors.

As faithful children of God we meet together, confess our sins to each other, devote ourselves to the teachings and fellowship of Jesus. As faithful children of God we celebrate God's grace and inspire the next generation for Christ. As faithful children of God we **faithfully attend church**.