

9. Church is far away.

As mentioned above, there are situations in which people must make large commutes to gather with a NT kind of church. I've known people who commute multiple hours one way. This is not always easy. But again, worship involves sacrifice (Rom. 12:1), in light of the great sacrifice our Lord made for us.

Consider speaking to your leadership team about suggestions and assistance. A move may be considered.

10. "I work during the church gatherings."

In a Genesis 3 world, putting a meal on the table is not without sweat and toil. And yet, God knew that when He commanded us both to work and gather. In fact, during Old Covenant days, He commanded Israel to worship even during "plowing time and harvest" (Exod. 34:21). That could make one nervous in an agrarian society. Why did God command this? He is that important. Worship is that essential. And, God is that *trustworthy*.

Gathering with our church for edification is simply a matter of trusting God. Do I trust Him to provide for me even if I make the necessary decision of prioritizing gatherings over working? Is God that loving and capable to take care of me?

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight" (Prov. 3:5-6).

"Well, I'm scheduled to work. There's nothing I can do." Have we prayed that God would change our schedule? Have we asked our leadership for advice? Have we sought God?

11. "I am traveling."

Time away for vacation and refreshment is necessary in life. However, sometimes we seem to always schedule that weekend trip, vacation, or camping getaway during a church gathering. The consideration here is more about the frequency and timing of travel.

Perhaps we could pray about being intentional with how and when we schedule our getaway. We could consider minimizing the amount of Sundays missed. Again, it comes down to the reality that Christ calls us to sacrifice and self-denial in light of His glory and love for us.

12. "Some hard things have happened and I need space."

Times exist when great tragedy will keep us from corporate worship. However, during hardship, let's recall that the Body of Christ is a great way in which God exercises His care for us. For the most part, it makes no more sense to forsake fellowship during hardship than it does to forsake recovering during illness. The church is God's channel of support and strength.

Interestingly, in Psalm 42, the discouraged and grieving psalmist recounts the joy of corporate worship (v. 4). His grief reminds him of the need and desire to gather with God's people.

13. "The church isn't a location or an event but people, so I don't need to be there."

Sigh.

14. "My spouse/significant other/roommate is staying home so I will too."

Unless the individual cannot physically survive a few hours without our presence, this is not the best reason to miss a church gathering. In fact, it's probably a loving gesture to attend if they cannot. In addition to showing the glory of Christ, we also can report to the Body on their needs and bring back what we learned for the other's edification.

15. "I know all of these reasons, but you just don't understand my situation."

There is no doubt that life is thorned and thistled. Tragedies invade. God knows. He sees. He loves. He gives grace. One's salvation will not be forfeited for missing church. Christ's finished work is what secures our salvation.

However, let us recall, that while our church leaders may not understand circumstances in our lives for which we miss church, our God certainly does. He knows. He is always with us for our good. And He has provided us with the gift of His Body and Bride. Therefore, since we are commanded to visibly plug in to a church, we can assume that this loving God, Who understands our circumstances will help in our unique circumstances.

At this point, it's possible that some might play the legalism card. But, this exhortation is not saying that prioritizing church is a means by which we merit righteousness before God. The Person and work of Christ alone is our righteousness. A church leadership who enthusiastically encourages Christians to attend gatherings is not being legalistic, but loving. It's an act of faithfulness for leaders to do so.

More reasons exist for why we miss church but may not need to. Whatever the case, worshipping Christ is going to often require sacrifice. But, we know that He Who sacrificed Himself for us is ever-present to strengthen us in our lesser sacrifices. And, we are to seek first the kingdom of God. We are to deny ourselves in obedience to Christ. Not always, but sometimes, the reasons we fail to gather are simply because we prioritize our kingdom over God's. If you've struggled like I have at times, our approach to church gatherings can show that we expect God to fit into our schedules. In other words, we worship God only if it's convenient, which is another way of saying we worship ourselves. But, when our hearts are enthusiastic about something, we will find practical ways to make that thing happen.

Christ loves the church. He bought her with His blood. He is exclusively devoted to her because she is His Bride. Do we love what Christ loves? We cannot say that we have a heart of love for Christ while at the same time having a heart of apathy for His Bride. If we do not love what Christ loves, then we do not love Christ. He cherishes His church. So must we. Since Christ has loved us as much as He has, is as great as He is, has redeemed us from what He has, and has commanded us what He has, it only makes sense that the Christian would set local church gatherings as an immovable fixture in their weekly schedule. Christ really is that worthy.

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Reasons We Miss Church (...but may not need to)



"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He Who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

Hebrews 10:23-25

With each passing year it seems like life gets busier, making it harder to prioritize priorities. Even church can get crowded out of our schedule. While there are legitimate reasons why we cannot always gather for things like Sunday worship and home groups, we ought to be cautious here. Often times, we forsake gatherings for not-the-best reasons.

In no particular order, here are **a few reasons why we often miss church gatherings but probably do not need to.**

1. “There is no command that says I need to go to church every Sunday.”

I have never understood this one. It is either innocently ignorant or intentionally dishonest.

I wonder if we would say the same thing about our jobs. “There are no verses that say I need to show up at 7am, like my boss says, so I’m sleeping in.” And the same goes for verses about the Trinity.

We know that Scripture’s truth claims are deduced from explicit truth-principles, implicit truth-principles, inferred truth-principles, or illustrated truth-principles.

When it comes to prioritizing church gatherings, we could cite a few passages:

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He Who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near” (Heb. 10:23-25).

All 40 one anothers. One anothers require one another.

By application, we could also cite passages that command us to grow (e.g. Phi. 2:12; gathering for worship is a great way in which we do so), worship/love God (e.g. Ps. 95:6, Matt. 22:37; we gather for worship), use our gifts in the Body (e.g. 1 Pet. 4:10-11; gatherings are prime avenues for this), and submitting to a visible biblical leadership team (e.g. Heb. 13:17; gathering is a prime way to honor this command).

2. “There aren’t any good churches in my area.”

Tragically, this is a common reality for too many people. But, if it is true, does this mean that I can’t plug into a church? Probably not. But it will mean some effort and sacrifice.

I may need to simply pray for discernment, find the best church within a few hours, plug in, be patient, pray for the church, and humbly seek to benefit in every way possible.

Or I may need to move. People do this all of the time. Getting God’s kind of biblical care through a New Testament church is important enough to relocate. It will take prayer and sacrifice, but we can assume that our God is so loving that He will not forsake us should we make a decision to move with the motivation of plugging into a faithful church.

Or, with the help of seasoned biblical leadership, I may need to be involved in planting a new church.

Whatever the case, the absence of a good church is insufficient reason to not plug in.

3. Family/friends are in from out of town.

For many reasons, when family or friends are visiting, we will not gather with the church. Perhaps they are not Christians, thus we do not want to do something they dislike during their stay. But when we prioritize church so as to keep Christ central, that communicates a needed message to unregenerate friends and family. And their disapproval thereof does not mean it’s an unneeded message. In gentleness, these occasions can create discussions around the centrality and supremacy of Christ. This may mean our friends/family refuse to join us, but that’s ok. Jesus had much to say about that (e.g. Matt. 10:34-39). When it comes to friends/family or Christ, Christ is the obvious and loving choice.

Perhaps we have a short time with them, thus want to maximize our time. Our time with loved ones is often best spent by tangibly showing them the centrality of Christ in our lives. One main way to do that is not forsaking Sunday worship or Bible study. Plus, those times very well could be the most meaningful during their short stay. Conversations are started. Consciences are pricked. Christ is seen.

4. “The preacher/teacher I like is not preaching/teaching.”

This kind of thinking puts trust in men. It says, in effect, “So-and-so teacher/preacher doesn’t tickle my fancy as much as so-and-so, thus, God is incapable of working through them to edify me.”

Additionally, it makes obedience to, and worship of, God contingent upon what I like. But, aren’t we glad that Christ did not take that attitude with us? “Yeah, Father, I’m not excited about dying on the cross, so, I’ll sit this one out.”

And, it myopically reduces church gatherings to what I like during the teaching time. But what about my responsibility to welcome visitors? Hear announcements? Serve in a ministry? Sing? Give? Pray? Set up? Encourage the faint-hearted? Help the weak? Confront the confident? Obey my leadership?

5. “I can watch the/another gathering online, or listen to a message online.”

“Well, at the time it was written, Scripture did not anticipate all of the technology we’d have today. I can get what I need online.” When God inspired the commands to gather and one-another, being omniscient, He knew of the technological advances which He would ordain in His providence. His commands have not changed. We are to be present bodily and physically when possible.

I wonder if we’d use this same reasoning about, say, taking a vacation or attending our child’s graduation. “I can see the warm, Hawaiian waters from YouTube.” “I can just have someone record my kid’s graduation and watch it later.”

6. Recent birth of a child.

The joy of adding a family member can be a tad tricky logistically. Labor, hospital stays, and medical attention can prevent us from gathering. However, we need not prolong absence from gathering once those things conclude. It certainly will be more difficult to attend with an infant, but, as we trust, and seek the help of, our powerful God, we can be sure that He will help us stay plugged in.

If we are uncertain about logistics in attending, we can approach our elders for assistance. Perhaps our church has a nursery/cry room. If not, we can ask if it’d be possible to create one. If we are concerned about our child crying, and there is no cry room, perhaps we could stand in the back of the gathering area. If we need help getting the family together to attend, we could ask individuals in our small group for assistance.

7. Gatherings are too long.

And they might be. But in our culture, this seems rare.

During Israel’s day (before refrigerators, freezers, grocery stores, washing machines, and cars), there were times when they gathered for several hours (e.g. Neh. 8:3, 9:3). And, during more recent times, three hours was the norm for a Sunday gathering. In a commentary where he reproves those who thought their three-hour gatherings were too long, Matthew Henry writes, “We think three hours too much to attend upon public ordinances…” (*Commentary on the Whole Bible, Vol. 5, p. 180*).

Considering the greatness of God, the command for preaching, the need for our souls to be replenished each week as we are drained, the joy of worship, and the one another commands, longer than shorter Sunday gatherings is realistic. One and a half to two hours is entirely reasonable. And, weekly gatherings for home/small groups is no less needed.

8. It conflicts with the kids’/family’s schedule/sleep/sports/stuff.

Faithfulness to our family requires time. Shopping, laundry, bed-time routines, family devotions, diapers, dishes, discipline, meals, yardwork, sports, homework, driving, etc., eats up the schedule. And God knew that when He asked us to keep Himself central in our lives. Again, I think back to Israel (and the church) in their days before washing machines and freezers. How did they do it? God.

We could not possibly address all of the unique sports/sleep/schedule situations here. But a few suggestions. First, God will not prevent us from obedience to Him. Whether we have a family of two or twenty, His grace is sufficient. When it comes to gathering, it’s about allowing God to care for us in the way in which He has determined. This side of Heaven, that involves consistent and candid commitment to a NT local church.

Second, we may need to sit down as a family and make some adjustments so as to put God at the center. These are rich times, spiritually. We can pray as a family, recognizing that it does require some not-always-easy adjustments. And we could pray as a family for God to strengthen us in the adjustments, asking for help to get to bed, sleep well, and endure any potential inconveniences therefrom, knowing that Christ is so good that He is willing to help us in the adjustments we make for His glory.

Third, we can discuss with our family how it takes a measure of sacrifice to follow Christ (Matt 16:24). Perhaps not going to bed at the ideal time is one of those sacrifices. As we discuss Christ’s sacrifice for us, we can gain strength and perspective to, then, continue in sacrifice for Him by adjusting our schedules at times. On the front end, such adjustments and sacrifices (e.g. later nights, earlier mornings, less sports events) may seem impossible. But with God, all things are possible. And not everything that the culture says is a need is a need. Again, these are wonderful times to show our kids that life is not about making and morphing a god into our image/schedule/sports, but morphing ourselves into His will. That is what it means to seek first His kingdom (Matt. 6:33) and, “...as for me and my house” to “serve the Lord” (Jos. 24:15). It’s doubtful that our God will decide to withhold blessing from our family for living with Him as central and supreme.

Also, these can provide great opportunities to involve other members of the Body to help us out. And, as God’s people, we mustn’t be too proud to request help.