

Daily Devotional, June 15, 2021 Gathering Together Again in True Fellowship

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:41-47 (NIV)

Gathering together was important to the early church. We find the words *gather* or *assemble* used 35 times in the Bible, and the word *together* used 32 times in the book of Acts alone. The author of Hebrews encourages us not to abandon gathering together. (Hebrews 10:25) Togetherness is a most important characteristic of the church. This togetherness or fellowship is God's plan for the church. The Apostle John wrote of this so expressively, "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:3) We are called to share the gospel with others so that they can fellowship or come together with us because our togetherness is with the Lord. We come together so others can come together with us, and we can all be together with God.

There is definitely something valuable and comforting about being with other believers - growing together, experiencing life together, sharing concerns, and aiding one another that is unique about the church. The church is not an exclusive country club designed just for members, nor is it a charity designed for non-members. It is something in between. It is family - family that lifts up those within it and that embraces new individuals with love, inviting them to be a part of it.

I love the church. I lived the greater part of my life in the church. I can't even imagine what my life would look like without it. If you're not faithfully attending church, you're missing the fellowship that is so valuable to your growth as a Christian, and as a member of a loving family. Books and e-mails are cheap imitations for the joys and strengths you'll find in real life fellowship. As we move back towards full capacity, live worship, I hope that you will assess what has been missing in your life these many days and months.

I'll leave you with an old illustration I've seen or heard a number of times before.

A churchgoer wrote a letter to the editor of the local newspaper and complained that it made no sense to go to church every Sunday. "I've gone for 30 years now," he wrote, "and in that time I have heard something like 3,000 sermons. But for the life of me, I can't remember a single one of them. So, I think I'm wasting my time and the pastors are wasting theirs by giving sermons at all."

This started a real controversy in the "Letters to the Editor" column, much to the delight of the editor. It went on for weeks until someone wrote this clincher:

"I've been married for 30 years now. In that time, my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals. But for the life of me, I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of those meals. But I do know this: They all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me these meals, I would be physically dead today. Likewise, if I had not gone to church for nourishment, I would be spiritually dead today!"

Hope to see you in church next week!

Prayer: God, many of us feel weary, but you are the one who refreshes souls. Protect our church family and renew our hearts. Within our body, people are of different minds about how to faithfully proceed. Grant us unity so that we might walk together in mind and thought. I pray that all of us would practice patience with one another. Preserve our physical and mental health as we seek to serve you faithfully and to once again grow in our Christian fellowship with one another. In Christ's name I pray, Amen.