

Why We Have Sunday Evening Services

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[0 : 00] Let me start by saying next Sunday evening we will not have Sunday evening church.

! It's Labor Day weekend. So I encourage you to spend that time that evening with your family and your friends. So keep that in mind and then when we come back we will begin what we're going to start doing on Sunday evenings which is dig deeper into that morning's message and then also spend a considerable amount of time in prayer in that service as well.

And so I thought tonight it would be fitting to talk about why we are going to continue to have Sunday night church and why I feel like Sunday night church is important and is part of that as I'll say and understanding why I think it's important is understanding why the church exists.

What is the purpose of the church? For what reason does the church exist? I don't know if ever that question was more important for the church in the United States of America to consider than right now.

What is the purpose of the church? Many have sought to answer that question in many different ways. Some people have posed the question, is the church for believers or unbelievers?

[1 : 30] Is the church to be involved with politics? Is the church to be involved with social justice? What is the church for? And what is the church supposed to do?

Many people are answering that question in many different ways and I'm sure that you've seen how many people have tried to pose that question or answer that question and right now it is sort of in vogue to criticize the church for what it is or what it isn't doing.

Have you noticed that? It seems like today it's a popular thing for not unbelievers but for believers or people who go to church to be critical and voice their criticism of the church, especially in regard to how it's responding, the church, how the church is responding to the present pandemic.

You know, we're wondering are we doing enough, not enough, or too much? And I honestly don't think that anyone can say because we are dealing with so many different people with so many different opinions and personalities and it can be exhausting to try to determine, okay, are we doing enough, not enough, do we need to be doing more?

And depending on who you ask, you know, it's always going to be never enough or it's always going to be too much. My father once asked me after I'd begun serving as a senior pastor, what was the hardest part?

[3 : 07] And this was soon after I had began and I told him at the time that it was making decisions that impact other people in the sense that what I had to say carried more weight than it ever had before.

And that's still hard but added to that difficulty is not only making those decisions still today but then having those decisions questioned and sometimes criticized. Now, I don't have a problem and I understand that as a pastor that, you know, you'll make decisions that people will question and I sometimes I welcome that as a matter of fact as long as we do it in a healthy way.

But it's still difficult to deal with those criticisms especially if you hear them from a third party. Now, please nobody break out your violins for me at this point.

This isn't a pity party that I'm trying to throw for myself. I love what I do. I'm thankful that God has called me to do it. I'm thankful for the elders of this church who don't leave these decisions up for only me to decide.

I'm thankful for their wisdom and their discernment in helping us collectively make decisions for the rest of this church. All this to say that I've learned the increasing importance of relying upon the Word of God at all times, especially in making those decisions.

[4 : 29] always thinking, what has God's Word said? And doing as best as I can, I know the elders are with me in that we want to do whatever God's Word instructs us to do.

What does the church exist for then? How should we respond to the things that are going on in our day? Well, look to God's Word. And I feel confident and ready to stand before the Lord today to give an account for these decisions because as best as I've been able to, I hope and I believe, I've made those decisions or been part of those decisions that were made based upon what we felt the Word of God was instructing us to do.

One blessing that has resulted from this time of pandemic and quarantine for me is time to reconsider the purpose of the church and why we do what we do and to think about why we have the ministries that we have here at Highland Park.

And this is something that I and the elders have discussed at length. And I'll tell you that my plan next year is to take a break from the Gospel of John and preach about this very thing.

Preach from the pulpit about the purpose of the church because I feel like, and our elders agree, it's not just, it's a problem within the church that so many people, they can't really define what the purpose of the church is.

[6 : 00] And if you asked different people on Sunday morning, I think that they would have different answers and they may be right, but they may not have all of the answer. And so what we've noticed is a lack of commitment from Christians in the United States of America.

The church has experienced that and what we desire is greater commitment from our people. And I think that we'll experience greater commitment from our people if they know what the church exists for and what God's expectation for them as one whom he's redeemed, as one whom he has brought into the body of Christ, what his expectation for them is regarding their involvement with his church.

One of the things that we reconsidered was our Sunday evening church service. Many churches don't have them anymore because, primarily because so few people attend.

And so I think for a lot of churches that have canceled the Sunday night service, they have done so because they've been of the mind that it doesn't seem to be able to meet a need that their church people feel like they have.

There's many reasons for, again, why other churches have ceased today to have Sunday evening services. And I won't cover them all, but for many, Sunday night worship is just not a priority.

[7 : 26] It's just not a priority in their lives. So Sunday morning, to them, seems to be sufficient. Seems to be sufficient. Honestly, Sunday morning is something that I've, or Sunday evening, excuse me, is something that I've struggled with.

And I confess for myself, there have been times that the Sunday evening service has felt burdensome throughout, you know, I don't know how many years I've been a pastor now, but close to 10 years, if not around that time.

And I've always had Sunday evening services, and there's been times where it's felt a little bit burdensome. Evening worship means delivering another sermon after already having preached a sermon that Sunday morning and teaching, in many cases, a Sunday school lesson that morning as well.

And I can tell that some of our people sometimes feel the same way. They feel the same way. They have to get their kids ready again. We're talking about young families ready again to come to church that evening, load everyone up in the car, and hope that when they're here that they'll pay attention to what's going on, that they'll stay alert when they do get here, and that they won't be such a disruption to what's going on, that people will, you know, look at them and shoot those glances to them.

It's easy enough to set aside an evening worship time once you realize that 10.30 a.m. worship and 6.30 p.m. worship is not a schedule arising out of any scriptural edict, right?

[8 : 55] The Bible doesn't specifically command that thou shalt have church at 10.30 on Sunday morning, and then thou shalt follow that service with an evening time of worship at 6.30 p.m.

There is no biblical edict for that. If we're going to have a Sunday evening worship service, it should be because evening worship service is a blessing to those who come, not a burden.

It should be a blessing to those who come. If they are unnecessarily burdensome to us, then we should cease to do them.

But we are still going to have Sunday evening service, and we do so because I have come to the belief that Sunday evening worship services actually are a blessing if we look at them in the right way, that we're not just doing this because we've always done this, but we're doing this, and we know why we're doing it.

So that's kind of what I want to talk about tonight as well. And so to best answer the question of why Sunday night church is important, I think we need to, again, first address the bigger question, which is why the church exists.

[10:11] And so in doing that, I'm going to use Wayne Grudem's three purposes for the church that he's listed in his systematic theology because I think that the purpose of the church has been, well, obviously is dictated by Scripture and that he does a good job of summarizing what Scripture says the purpose of the church is.

And so here's the main idea for tonight's sermon, talk, whatever you want to call it. The main idea is this, the purpose of the church is to exalt God.

The purpose of the church is to exalt God, that's your first fill-in. Edify believers and evangelize the lost. The purpose of the church is to exalt God, edify believers, and evangelize the lost.

And those are listed by me in what I think is order of importance from greatest to least, though the third one is still a very important thing for us to do.

I don't want to downplay it in any way. If our times together are not in worship of God, then everything else falls apart. That's why I think it's so important that the first purpose we have is that we exalt God.

[11:28] If we're not doing that first, if we're not about that first, then everything else about what we're trying to do will fall apart, or at least I don't think it will be biblical any longer.

The church that does not exalt God has members who then edify themselves, and evangelism becomes more about getting people to join our social club than sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with them.

And so here's how the church accomplishes its purposes through these three ministries. So first, exalting God means ministry to God, and we do that through worship, through worship.

Ministry to God, worship. The New Testament does not establish a set schedule for worship. As I've already said, the text of the New Testament explicitly precludes us from making one day particularly holy over any other day, but it also highlights the first day of the week, being the Lord's Day, the day on which Jesus was resurrected, as the day upon which you could expect to find Christians in church gathered to worship God.

And so that day is important. Sunday is important. I want to look at Acts 2, 41 through 47. It says there, So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about 3,000 souls, talking about the early church.

[13:01] And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need.

And this is what I really want us to see, verse 46. And day by day, day by day, attending their temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people, and the Lord added to their number day by day, those who were being saved.

If the New Testament does not specify a pattern of two worship services to be held weekly on Sunday, it was because they were actually meeting for worship a great deal more than that.

All the time, day by day, they were gathering together as a church to worship. If 21st century American Christians are moving away from a pattern of two worship services held weekly on Sunday, it is because we're trying to meet for worship a good deal less than that.

[14:23] That's an enormous difference. The pattern indicated in Acts 2 is one of daily teaching, daily corporate study, daily corporate prayer, daily evangelism, daily fellowship.

Sunday corporate worship sometimes lingered into the wee hours of the night, as we see in Acts 20, verse 7. Remember, Paul was preaching, and the kid fell asleep in the window and fell out, and he died, and they all rushed out there and brought him back to life, and they went back up, and Paul kept preaching, right?

So I guess be thankful that there's not any windows in here that you could fall out of, but we see that this was important to them. The early church worshipped a lot, a lot.

And although worship was the occupation of the church on every day, the first day of the week clearly had special significance for them from the very beginning of the church.

The Lord's Day was an important day for them to gather, especially for worship. Now, there are 168 hours in a week, 168 hours.

[15:33] 63 of those hours are used typically for sleep, if you sleep normally. 40 hours, again, usually are reserved for work.

So that right there is 103 hours, which gives a person 65 hours to work with. If you come to church Sunday for Sunday school and morning worship and came for Sunday night and Wednesday night service, that would be around 6 1/2 hours, around 6 1/2 hours, which would be about 10% of that remaining time, of that 65 hours after you've slept and gone to work.

And so the question, as I was thinking about that, is this. Are we more willing to tithe 10% of our money to the church than we are willing to tithe 10% of our time in corporate worship?

You know? I've often heard people talk about how they've been called by God to give above their tithe.

Not bragging, but just encouragement, that when you tithe, you learn the principle in God's Word that it is better to give than receive.

[16:50] And I've heard people talk about how, in fact, I remember when Danny and I were going through our premarital counseling with a pastor who I grew up with. He encouraged us to tithe and that we would be blessed for tithing, not a health and wealth prosperity thing, but just saying it is good and the Lord will teach you things about not having a tight fist on your money.

And so again, and maybe you, I see some heads nodding that you've experienced that to be true. But I wonder if we think that the same isn't true if we aren't tithing our time.

Do we think that that time will be wasted? I think that it would be true, and I think that those who do give that 10% of their time to the church would confess that when they've been generous with their time to the church and worship to the Lord, that God has blessed that as well.

The purpose of the church is to worship God. We are to worship God. That's what Paul directs the church to do in Colossae, Colossians 3.16.

He says, Likewise to the Ephesians, Ephesians 1.11-12.

[18:11] In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory, the praise of His glory.

God has destined us and appointed us to live for the praise of His glory. Worship in the church is not merely a preparation for something else.

It is in itself fulfilling the major purpose of the church with reverence to its Lord and Savior.

That is why Paul can follow an exhortation that we are to be making the most of our time with a command to be filled with the Spirit, and then he says, We are to worship God.

That's part of the main reason, I believe, the existence for our church. And God, we know, is zealous for His glory.

[19:20] Isaiah 48.9-11. There he says, For my name's sake, I defer my anger. For the sake of my praise, I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off.

Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver. I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own name, for my own sake, for my own sake I do it.

For how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another. I will say to the north, give up. And to the south, do not withhold. Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth.

Everyone who is called by my name. Whom I created for my glory. Whom I created for my glory. Whom I formed and made.

We as God's people should likewise be consumed with a desire to worship and exalt our Creator, our Redeemer, our Savior.

[20:24] 1 Corinthians 10.11. Paul says, A faithful church, a church that God uses, is one that is God-centered, not man-centered.

The church has been redeemed so that believers might glorify Him both by serving one another and proclaiming, as Peter said in chapter 2, verse 9 of his first letter, the excellences of Him who called them out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

For all eternity, the redeemed will praise the name of Jesus Christ. And I hope that that doesn't sound boring to you. It will not be boring at all. For all of eternity, we will gather and we will be in worship of our Redeemer, praising the name of Jesus Christ.

And so, if we're going to spend all our eternity doing that then, then why shouldn't we make the most of the lives that we have been given right now to do that very same thing here today? Okay. I've been concerned in the past that my children might get burnt out from being in church too much. You know, you hear enough pastors talking.

[21 : 53] You've known enough PKs. Mike's a good PK. But you know enough PKs that a lot of times they turn out great, like Mike, and then other times they are wild.

And like some others. Yeah. But I've heard all those stories. Being in seminary, going to pastors' conferences, and you know, the warnings that those who have gone through difficult things have experienced with their children as pastors.

And it's made me concerned that when they come to church, they have to look a certain way, they have to act a certain way, and that that might be too much pressure on them that they would resent the church.

But God has revealed to me otherwise through especially these past couple of weeks. We've watched this American Gospel film.

Jack's been in the back watching those, though, you know, we've brought things for him to keep him entertained. I don't like saying that word, but, you know, to keep him busy because we think that maybe the things that they're talking about here, I mean, listen, they're pretty deep theological things.

[23 : 07] But what we've found out is that he's been watching. And he's been watching, and he's been coming home, and he's been asking questions. And he especially has been asking questions of Danny.

And what that has done is that has led to conversations in our household that we otherwise might not have had without Sunday evening service.

And so what pleases me is that I see him searching for understanding. And I've been more pleased to have those conversations than to see him succeed on the sporting field or in the classroom.

Sorry. My son is working out his salvation that I believe that he has. And that thrills me.

And that touches my heart more than anything else. And it's because of Sunday evening service.

And I thank you, too, those who teach my kids in Sunday school in Awana.

[24 : 12] And I know I speak the same for other parents who are involved here as well. We were created for worship, and you will worship something. We are created for worship, and we will all worship something.

And so one thing I want to have you think about is what do you give that 10% of your free time to? Video games for some people.

I don't know if any of you struggle with that, gamers. Scrolling through social media. Those kinds of things can be okay things, right?

But oftentimes they become addictions that take us away from our pursuit of the Lord, what he's called us to do and to be, and worshiping him.

And so in thinking about Sunday evening church, this is the realization, again, that the Lord through prayer has led me to see that Sunday is the first day of the week.

[25 : 19] What better way to start my week, my first part of the day, and my last part of the night than in worship and prayer and preparation for the week ahead and to do so with my family.

What better way could I hope to start the week? We exist as a church to exalt our Creator, our Redeemer, our Lord and Savior.

Second, ministry to believers. Why do we exist? To minister to one another. To minister to believers and nurture is the key term there, nurture.

According to Scripture, the church has an obligation to nurture those who are already believers and build them up to maturity in the faith.

Paul said that his own goal was not simply to bring people to initial saving faith, but to present every man mature in Christ. And he told the church at Ephesus that God gave the church gifted persons to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of fullness in Christ.

[26 : 38] In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul described a typical meeting in the early church with these words. What did it look like when they first met for worship in these early churches?

He says so in chapter 14, verse 26. What then, brothers, when you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation.

Let all things be done for building up. And as we worship God together, we have that opportunity to equip and build one another up.

Likewise, he encouraged the Thessalonian believers to encourage one another and build one another up just as you are doing. They are doing it, and he's encouraging them, keep doing it. Doing it more.

Excel still more. Such edification takes place through the preaching of God's Word, the mentoring of godly leaders, discipling, the selfless exercise of spiritual giftedness by each member, and the practice of the one another commands in the New Testament.

[27 : 40] The New Testament tells us, gives us a lot of instruction about how we are to interact with one another. This is part of our purpose, existence as a church.

I want to list them all, and there's 20, okay? One, we are commanded to love one another. And a ton of scriptures that I have there that to save time I won't go through, but obviously we are commanded to love one another.

Secondly, we are to live in harmony with one another. Third, we are to welcome one another.

Fourth, we are to admonish one another.

Fifth, we are to care for one another. Six, we are to serve one another. Seven, we are to bear one another's burdens. Eight, we are to be patient with one another.

Nine, we are to be kind to one another. Ten, we are to forgive one another. Eleven, we are to sing praises with one another.

[28 : 49] Twelve, we are to regard one another as more important than ourselves. Thirteen, we are supposed to speak the truth to one another.

Fourteen, we are to encourage one another. Fifteen, we are to seek good for one another. Sixteen, we are to stir up one another to love and good deeds.

Seventeen, we are to confess our sins to one another. Eighteen, we are to pray for one another.

Nineteen, we are to be hospitable to one another.

Twenty, we are to be humble towards one another. And so, in thinking of all those things, right, the question becomes, do we in our church treat one another like that?

How well are we doing it? And what ways can we do even better? It is contrary to the New Testament pattern to think that our only goal with people is to bring them into initial saving faith.

[29 : 57] Our goal as a church must be to present to God every Christian mature in Christ. We have an obligation, a purpose for one another.

To serve and love one another. To help one another and be used by God to help one another grow up in Christ. The first commandment is to love God above all.

The second is to love our neighbors as ourself. When the church does this, we will exemplify the love of Christ to a watching world. This makes the gospel transformation visible and verifiable so that the message that we preach is proved by the conduct in which we are living together.

One another as the church of Jesus Christ. So, that's important. We do exist for one another, right? But thirdly, ministry to the world.

And the key word there is evangelism. Why else does the church exist? Ministry to the world in evangelism. Jesus told His disciples that they should go make disciples of all nations.

[31 : 09] This is the primary ministry that the church has towards the world. Towards the world. The great commission involves making disciples and not merely convincing unbelievers to make decisions.

As sinners respond in saving faith to the gospel message, they are to be initiated in the church through baptism. And disciplined by the church through sound teaching.

As we evangelize and we bring them in and we nurture them, right? We do all those one another's with them. And in so doing, we follow the example of Jesus who made disciples.

And who then equipped those disciples to carry on and carry out His mission. Evangelism is the only thing that the church will not be doing in heaven. There's no need for evangelism in heaven.

But again, in all of my service to the poor, in all my attempts to be on the side of justice, my purpose as a Christian, our purpose as Christians is to point people to Jesus Christ.

[32 : 15] That's our purpose in going. That's our purpose in sharing the gospel. That's our purpose in getting involved if God calls us to do that in different ways and different things in the world. Not to

try to create heaven on earth.

That's impossible. That's impossible. Why is it impossible? Because human beings are fallen sinners. We're sinful. It's impossible for human beings, apart from saving faith in Jesus Christ, to live in perfect harmony with one another.

And we know, even as believers, that the sin nature still remains. And we struggle with that from time to time. Thank God that we have the Bible, right? So that we can have that as our guide and that reminder from God of how we are to act and the Holy Spirit who enables us to do so and do better at that.

So, yes, we are called, I believe, to be peacemakers. But the peace that we seek primarily is to be used by God to bring peace between man and God, not man and man.

Because in my mind, if a man or a woman, if a person does not have peace with God through Jesus Christ, that will affect all the rest of their relationships.

[33 : 35] You know what I'm saying? But if they have that peace with God, then it will transform all of those other relationships. And so, if we are to get involved with these things, then our purpose in getting involved with them is to be used by God to point people to Jesus Christ and to let them know that they are not in peace with God, but that they can be through Jesus Christ, His life, His death, and His resurrection.

Because if that relationship isn't right, none of the others will be. So, I think, if you want to bring change to this world, then the best place to begin is in prayer and in God's Word.

To be a part of His church. To keep your children, your grandchildren, your family, your friends involved in the church. And especially in talking about our children and our teens, they are the next generation.

And so, the question that we should ask as Christian parents, as Christian grandparents, is what are we doing now to prepare them for the world that they will one day inherit?

And the church that we hope that they will lead during that time, that will probably be increasingly difficult than it is so right now. And I'll tell you that growing up, there were many Sundays, almost every Sunday, as a matter of fact, I would say, where I did not want to go to church.

[35 : 18] But my dad made sure that I went to church. And forced me on occasions to go to church.

But I'll tell you what, standing here today, and this has been the case since becoming a father myself, I do not resent Him at all for ever having done that.

Not at all. In fact, I thank God that He saw how important it was for me and my sisters to be in the church. That He made sure that He did what was necessary to get us there because He knew how important and essential it was for us to be in the house of God.

And what breaks my heart is what I've seen is people who will cancel plans and make extra effort to make sure that they get their kids to whatever extracurricular activity that they have them involved with, but then act as if church is optional.

You know, and what are we telling our kids when that is the case? Well, the church isn't that important, right? We go occasionally, but it's just not that important.

[36 : 46] But it is incredibly important. It's incredibly important that we be the church that God has called us to be, that whenever we're here, we are worshiping Him, that we are seeking to nurture one another.

And the better that we do those first two, the better we will be in our evangelism and our effectiveness to go and to make disciples of Jesus Christ. And so, I'll conclude by saying that I'm going to commit more of my time to Christ and to His church, and I encourage you to do the same. And it's going to be a blessing to be here on Sunday evening, and I hope that you understand why. Again, what greater way to begin your week than to be in the house of God, worshiping your Lord and Savior, gathered with your brothers and sisters in Christ, digging into His Word, and lifting up one another and our world in prayer as we prepare for the rest of the week and hope that our light would shine brightly and that we would be the city on the hill that our Lord has called us to be.

Let's pray. Lord God, thank you for this time that we have to be together. Thank you for the privilege that we have to gather together in this sanctuary to worship you, to be in conversation about your Word, your commands for us, what you expect for us to be as your church.

Lord, we know that right now, our world needs the church to be the church. too often we, having not spent much time in your Word, think that we know what the church exists for when either we're getting the priorities out of whack or it's what we think the church should be in existence for instead

of consulting and knowing what your Word says that you've put your church in this world to do.
[38 : 39] God, we want to be the kind of church that your Word calls us, commands us to be, that we would be a church that exists to worship and to exalt the name of Jesus Christ, that that would be the greatest thing on each one of our hearts when we gather in this building or wherever you have us to gather, that our greatest concern would, that we would worship and praise the author and the perfecter of our salvation.

And God, we pray that in that we would also seek to nurture one another. We know that you have put us together in the body of Christ, that you have brought us together, and you have expectations for how we are to conduct ourselves within your church, that we are to love one another, serve one another, be patient, forgiving towards one another, that we are to be humble, Lord, with one another.

And so, God, I pray that for each of us here that we would strive for that, that we would strive for that, that this would be a church, it is, that it would continue and excel still more, be a place where people can come in and know that they will be loved by the people of God when they're here. Lord, we pray that we would also be a church on mission, that having focused on the importance of worshiping you, and knowing that our times of gathering for worship aren't meant primarily for us, but to exalt you, and we'll be blessed by that.

But God, that as we do that, and as we nurture and love one another, our witness will be more powerful, more potent, our light will shine more brightly, and people will look and see, and we pray that in doing so, they would give praise and glory to you, and that you would give us more and increasing opportunities to share the gospel of Jesus Christ as a result of that.

[40 : 30] Lord, we pray for our Sunday evening times of worship moving forward. We ask that they would be a blessing to you. We pray that you would use them. God, we pray that it would be a time of great worship, a time of great growth, and that you would, again, Lord, bless all that comes from it.

We love you, and we thank you, and we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.