

Better Together
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Why church?

Why should we gather here every Sunday morning?

Why should we give our time, talents and money to the church?

Why should we get involved with people we do not even know?

What's the point?

Well – first of all – we gather together because God says to and we give because God says to. So – there's an element of obedience involved. But is that all there is? Do we just grit our teeth and tough it out or is there an element of church we may be missing?

We are going to examine that today. We are in a sermon series entitled Stronger Together. Today I'm preaching a message called Better Together.

I believe if we only see church as a place we go and a place we give, we're missing the true meaning of church. You see, God has purposes for each of us as individuals and all of us need to discover those. But let me give you a bigger idea: You were created for community.

You cannot be everything God wants you to be on your own.

You cannot totally fulfill God's purposes without being connected to Him. And you cannot totally fulfill God's purposes without being connected to His family.

Remember, the whole Bible is about loving God and loving people and you can't do that alone! You see, from the very beginning of time, it's been God's plan for us to be in relationship to each other. We were not created to go through life on our own, but to be in a community called God's family.

In Genesis, God said "It is not good for man to," what? "Be alone." God hates loneliness. And He doesn't want anybody to be alone. So, He created two institutions: Family and the church. Now, marriage is till death do us part, but the family of God goes on forever.

There are many names for the church in the Bible and they all speak of community. Individually we are sheep, but we are part of God's flock. Individually we are soldiers, but we are part of God's army. Individually we are children of God, but we are part of God's family.

The church is the body of Christ and 1 Corinthians 12:27 says:

All of you together are the one body of Christ, and each one of you is a separate and necessary part of it.

You see, I'm not the body of Christ. You're not the body of Christ. But together, we are the body of Christ. Because of that we cannot fulfill God's purposes for our lives alone. Romans 12:5 says:

Since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other and each needs all the others.

We belong together and we need each other. All the others. We can't pick and choose which parts of the body of Christ we need. We all need everyone else. We really do. We can't say, "I don't need people with certain gifts or people with certain personalities or people of certain colors." God created us to need each other in the family of God.

You cannot go through life saying, "I don't need anyone else." There's some things in life you'll never be able to do without other people in your life. That means we're better together than we are alone. How do I know we're better together? Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 says:

Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

When we are alone - we accomplish less
 We have no help when we fall
 We miss the warmth of friendship
 We are easily overpowered.

It is not good to be alone.

We are better together because- We accomplish more
 We have help when we fall
 We have the warmth of companionship
 We are not easily defeated.

We really are better together! Today, I want to look at five other reasons why we're better together.

The first reason is this: **We Fellowship Better Together**

We see this model in the very first church in Jerusalem. Acts 2:44 tells us about that church, it says,

All the believers continued together in close fellowship.

Now, what is fellowship? It's more than getting together for an occasional meal in the fellowship hall. The New Testament word for fellowship is koinonia which means to share in common.

It means joint participation, community and intimacy.

Fellowship is a group of people who share common interests, activities or beliefs. It's literally a group of people who share life together. Here's how the NIV translates Acts 2:44:

And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything with each other.

Now sadly, joining a church doesn't guarantee fellowship. You can be a member of a church your entire life and never experience meaningful relationships. In fact, churches are filled with lonely people. Why? Because fellowship does not come automatically. It is something you must learn.

You cannot fellowship with a crowd. You can't fellowship with hundreds of people because you don't even know them all and you can't spend time talking to them all. When I talk about fellowship, I'm talking about a group of six people or eight people. That's why Acts 2:46 tells us that the first church:

They worshiped together regularly at the Temple each day, met in small groups in homes.

Fellowship happens one on one and in small groups. We cannot fellowship alone and we cannot love alone. It's easy to say you love people from a distance. It's a different thing to get up close and personal. In our small groups, our goal is to learn how to really love because the Bible says: "Love one another."

Here's the second reason we need each other, why we need community:

We Worship Better Together

There are a number of benefits in corporate worship that you can never have in worship just by yourself. Some of us are radical praisers and some are quiet worshippers. We need each other's strengths in praise and worship.

You can worship God alone at home and you should. But there's a greater dimension of God's presence when we worship together.

When we were in the quarantine, we were only allowed to have ten people at church. So, on Sundays, the only ones here were the praise team, the media team, Pastor Joe and me. We worshipped and preached and everything was done in excellence and led by the Spirit. But it was not the same! Why? Because you were not here! We worship better together!

And many people have told us when they came back to church that they were glad to have our worship services online – but when they got back they realized how different and better it is to worship together. Why? We worship better together!

Jesus said this in Matthew 18:20

For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.

Do you want to know where is God in the world? I'll tell you. He's wherever people are worshiping. And right now, in the midst of a pandemic the world needs a church that is worshiping together. The world at its worst needs the church at its best. And we are better together.

That's why the Bible commands us to get together on a weekly basis. It's not optional. If you are a believer, God says, "I want you to get with other people in my family once a week and worship."

Look at Leviticus 23:3 - *You have six days to do your work...*

Did you hear that workaholics? Six days to do your work,

but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work.

Everyone needs a day every week where they don't work, but they worship. It's a day of rest. This principle is you work six days and every seventh day, you take a day off and you worship. And when we get together and worship, it recharges us spiritually and physically and emotionally in ways that would never happen on our own.

Even if we said, "Well, I'm going to go out and fish, or take a walk and I'm going to worship God in my own way." God says, "Well, that's fine, you do that too. But don't forsake getting together with my family once a week." You worship better together.

Now, let me ask you: How committed are you to weekly worship? You say, "Well, I come whenever it's convenient. I come when there's nothing on TV." I come when the weather's good. No, God says, "You need it every week." You need rest and you need to worship with the family of God.

Here's the third reason we need each other: **We Grow Better Together.**

We grow in ways spiritually with other people that we will never grow on our own. Ephesians 4:16 says:

Under Christ's direction, the whole body, is fitted together and each part helps the other parts so that the whole body, is healthy and growing and full of love. God wants us to grow and God wants the church to grow.

But that only happens when we are joined together. In fact, this is going to shock you: we cannot really grow spiritually without being connected to a church family.

Oh, we may get Bible knowledge and doctrine. We may be able to say the right words, but we're not growing in the most important stuff, which is relationships. It's all about love.

And we cannot build relationships if we're not in community. There are many things we will never learn unless we're in community.

We don't learn patience on our own.

We don't learn unselfishness alone.

We don't learn forgiveness alone.

We don't learn love alone.

All these things are learned in relationship and in community.

It is through relationships that we learn and grow.

It is through relationships that God stretches and matures us.

Years ago, I went to Africa led by our friend Pastor Sandy Ward. During this time, I had many opportunities to preach. But unfortunately, I missed two opportunities that were very significant.

The first opportunity was at Celebration Church in Johannesburg, South Africa. The pastor's wife of Celebration Church heard me speak in London and she liked my style. So, she told her husband about me. He asked Pastor Sandy if she would ask me to do the offertory message. This was the first time these pastors had ever asked someone to do their offering. So, this was really an honor, but I declined. As honored as I was and as much as I wanted to take this opportunity, I did not feel prepared because I didn't bring any offering messages.

The second opportunity was in Zimbabwe at Celebration Center. During the service Sandy wanted me to give my testimony. Again, I declined. I was uncomfortable because I wasn't given prior notice. As I went back to my seat I knew I missed God. But I didn't know why.

Until a couple of days later when Sandy brought it up. She pointed out to me that I had missed two great opportunities. She mentioned the importance of being instant in and out of season. I didn't want her to know that she was right so I defended myself by pointing out that I would never get up unprepared. I would never waste people's valuable time. I would never stand in a pulpit and have nothing to say.

Sandy's reply exposed the hurt that was hindering me. She said, "Deborah, you never have nothing to say. You have something to say." Hearing those words touched a hurting place inside of me. The moment she said it, I realized that deep down inside of me I really believed that no one would want to hear what I had to say...without hours of preparation.

God used her words to speak life to me. I kept hearing her words. "Deborah, you have something to say." You see this is why we all need each other: we grow better together.

Here's the fourth reason why we need each other: **We Serve Better Together**

Philippians 2:1-2 says:

Do you have fellowship together in the spirit? Then, make me happy by loving each other and working together with one heart and mind and purpose.

You see, you're uniquely shaped to serve God and others. Here's the bigger idea: We were meant to serve together.

There are lots of benefits of serving together, rather than doing the lone ranger service on your own. It makes us more effective. We get more done. We compensate for each other's weaknesses. We support each other when we get tired or discouraged. That's why Jesus did not send His disciples out as individuals to serve. He sent them out as teams because we are better together.

Here's the fifth reason why we need each other: **We Reach Out Better Together**

None of us can do a whole lot on our own. But together, we can impact the world in a major way.

In Philippians 1:27, Paul says this about that church:

I know that you are working together side by side to get others to believe the good news.

Now, how do we do that? How can we as a church reach our community for Christ together? Well, there are lots of ways. But let me give you three real quick ones.

Number one, by using our small groups to bring people to Jesus. There are many people who would never come inside a church building, but they would go to a small group in a home or online.

A second way we can reach out to others together is by giving. Do you know that every time you give an offering in this church, it helps the church reach more people for Jesus Christ? That's why we give you the opportunity to do that on a regular basis: give to missions, give to benevolence, give to Angel Tree.

The third way we can help reach out is by praying for our city and praying for other churches. Every Sunday we pray for other churches in our community. We're not in competition with any church. There are plenty of people who need Jesus. Every church in America could be filled to capacity and we still wouldn't be reaching everybody. We're all on the same team. That's why we pray for other churches.

Let me ask you this: Do you think our country needs a revival?

A spiritual awakening? Yeah, it does. 2 Thessalonians 3:1 says to pray for this:

Pray that the Master's Word will simply take off and race through the country to a groundswell of response.

Wouldn't that be great? How is that possible? It's very simple. We've got to fellowship together and we've got to serve together and we've got to grow together and we've got to worship together and we've got to reach out together. As we fulfill God's purposes for us, it will happen.

Some of you have never even thought God could use you.
But He can use you in this church.
But you're never going to fulfill God's purposes on your own.
We need each other. You need me. I need you.

And so, I invite you to join the greatest movement in the world, the kingdom of God, which is going to outlast everything else. Governments come and go, but the church of God is going to last forever.

It's time for the church to start acting like the church that God planned and purposed. The amazing exponential power that is potential right here in this room is astounding. Because when believers get together and worship together and fellowship together and love together and serve and reach out together, it is unstoppable.

Would you like to be a part of a mighty movement of God? If you've never given your life to Jesus, today is the day to do it.

If you are not connected to a church, then I invite you to be a part of what God is doing in this church. Join us as we commit to build relationships with each other and reach out to our community.

As we love each other and love those around us, we will fulfill our vision to Touch Heaven and Change Earth. But that change must start with us. Community must start with us. Because we are better together.