

## *Introduction*

I grew up as a “PK.” This does *not* stand for “Potential Kid” which was the best guess of a friend in elementary school. I was a pastor’s kid, and this status resulted in some interesting conversations through the years. When I was young, I asked a friend if she wanted to come over and play after church, and her response left an imprint: “Well, I want to, but how long do you guys actually pray before lunch? Like an hour?” It was an honest question. A child’s fear of leaving church only to have to go home and pray for an hour before consuming food was a legitimate concern.

I remember considering my answer. *How long do we actually pray? Is it an hour?* I didn’t think it was, though some prayers over meals certainly felt longer than others, but to secure the play date, I told her we did super quick prayers. So, she agreed to come over for the afternoon. As we walked out to the car, I remember asking God to help my dad keep his lunch prayer super quick.

Along with having dad as our pastor, our mom was the children’s choir director, so we sat under her tutelage in the church as well. I remember my first Sunday night in her kid’s choir rehearsal because I had a significant revelation: my mom put actual time and effort into her choir preparations. I just figured she showed up, told the kids to sing, and they sang. This was not exactly the case. It turns out that kids need structure, which takes planning, and kids also need incentives, which my mom took care of with candy. There was ample candy, and so we sang. Mom would unabashedly wave her arms producing more volume and more energy from her choirs, and

when we sang out to her liking, the candy followed. I loved children's choir.

As a child, I was often asked, "*What is it like to have a dad as a pastor?*" I thought it was great. Despite the peculiar conversations related to being a "PK," my two sisters and I had fun with all the "perks" that came with having a dad as a pastor, including free reign of the church building. We spent a lot of time in our church, which was across the street from our childhood home. Only a quaint bridge separated the two properties. Church was such a welcoming place that we even asked dad if we could go with him on Saturdays when he walked over to work on his Sunday sermon. He'd usually agree, and then give us access to most of the church building, a dream for mischievous kids with vivid imaginations.

The three of us were like little church mice while growing up, scampering from room to room; we were there when the doors opened and there when they closed. We were as comfortable in the building as we were in our own home, and for many years, my sisters and I watched as our parents labored faithfully and joyfully within its walls. Over time, my love for the church transformed from a liking of the actual church building, and all the space that allowed my imagination to soar, to a genuine love for the elements of worship and the people of God, and my parents' view of the local church played a huge part in my growing affection for the body of Christ. They regarded church ministry enthusiastically: they loved the people, they loved the various ministries, and they loved worship. Their passion for the local church was infectious, and even at a young age, I caught it. My appreciation for the church has continued to grow in deep and unique ways through the years, and I'm grateful to the Lord for that.

I'm also very aware that my experience is not necessarily common; in fact, it is an increasingly unusual experience. Along with being a pastor's wife, I currently work as the

music director at our church, and one Sunday I had off from leading, so I decided to sit in the back row to gain a different perspective. It had been a while since I'd sat toward the back, and as I took in the experience from this viewpoint, I had the thought: *church is strange*. If I was new, observing the rituals and beliefs that step out of societal norms, I would wonder about this place and question its sometimes perplexing doctrines and practices. I suddenly realized I didn't know the people sitting on my right and left and was acutely grateful that my back seat was near the exit. I thought about how many people, without a proper understanding of the beauty, necessity, and purpose of the church, dwell on its peculiarity and in turn wonder, *why commit?*

It's a legitimate question. As much as this book is for those former church mice, like me, who need a refreshed perspective on why to stay invested in the local church, this book is also for the "back rowers" who wonder what the point of church really is, or who have been hurt by it in the past and so come skeptically and reservedly. I've had many conversations with churchgoers from all differing perspectives throughout this writing process, and while the varying levels of involvement in, and love for, the church runs the gamut, the pendulum seems to be increasingly swinging toward the side of distrust and skepticism of the local church.

When I was a child, family involvement in a church was somewhat typical amongst neighbors, but over the years, church attendance has dropped drastically, even amongst Bible-believing Christians. According to various surveys, both church frequency and overall church attendance among Christians is on the decline. Twenty years ago, roughly 42 per cent of U.S. adults attended religious services every week, but now this figure is down to just about 30 per cent.<sup>1</sup> Many pastors

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1. The Decline of Christianity in the US, Conducted 2021-2023  
<https://www.statista.com/chart/31992/us-christians-who-attend-religious->

and other church leaders predict the downward trend of church attendance will continue, perhaps even more drastically in the next generation. This is not a book that explores *why* this is the case; rather, my attempt is to encourage people of all ages, and in all different stages of life, to *reconsider the importance of the local church in their own lives and in the lives of the next generation so that we might have a deep and abiding faith in Jesus*. The purpose of our involvement is not really about the institution of the church in and of itself, but it's about Christ, and our faith in Him. Our commitment to His church, His bride, is one of the greatest ways we can grow in our relationship with Jesus.

When we talk about the commitment to the church in the next generation, ensuring that children remain devoted to a local church body is not a simple math equation. Parents can't do a little of "this" and add a little of "that" and simply produce active, God-fearing church members. Not at all. In fact, the Bible makes clear that this kind of result is the work of the Holy Spirit in an individual's heart. Jesus alone saves our children and draws them to Him, and their stories are written by Jesus, not by us.

But we do have a responsibility as parents, spiritual-parents, and believers in Christ to consider how we view the significance of the church in our own lives and how we can cultivate a love for the church in the next generation. The Lord has worked on my heart in distinct ways to enrich my understanding of the importance of His church, but I have no doubt that even in their imperfection, the Lord used my parent's example to plant a desire to embrace, love, and serve the body of Christ.

Each person has a different story when it comes to their background with the church. Some have been significantly hurt by it, and so have kept this community at bay; others

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have struggled to find the right “fit” for their family, spending years hopping from one church to the next, and there are some who used to be committed to a church but have lost sight of its significance because they’ve become jaded by difficult members or unending hypocrisy. And many families today have simply embraced the convenience of online worship, making the return to their local church less essential, at least in their own eyes.

No matter what your experience, whether you are a faithful attender or an infrequent backseat warmer, the Bible makes the importance of the local church utterly clear, and if it has significant value to Jesus, *it must hold a place of significance in our own lives*. Ask the Lord to refocus your vision to see His church the way He does. Doing so will help us better understand how to embrace and love the bride of Christ. The local church is one of the most profound communities a person can be a part of and, because of this, we should actively pursue ways we can better love and appreciate the church in our own lives and understand how we can better teach its beauty and significance to the next generation.

PART ONE:  
**Why the Church?**

*...That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

Ephesians 3:17b-21

# 1

## *The Purpose of the Local Church*

I know a couple who picked a Bible verse when they were married that they felt represented a vision for their newly-formed family. Many years later, the father died unexpectedly, leaving behind a widow and three adult children. At his funeral, I was struck by how much their family's verse surfaced as a central theme. And then, when our Bible study group came across the verse one week, I listened as the dear widow became emotional and shared the significance of these words, not just for her but for her children and grandchildren. I know this family well, and each individual member is so different from each other in personality and giftedness, and yet, they are united under one single, biblical purpose.

For many reasons, this is a beautiful image of the local church. In one sense there is only one church: "There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Eph. 4:4-6). There is **one** body and **one** Spirit, which means that as children of God we are one family, unified in Christ. This verse reminds us that in Jesus, our commonality is far greater than any of our differences. Each believer in Jesus represents this Universal church, and there will be a day when we will all worship together in eternity as one, singing praises to our God and Father, Jesus Christ. The diversity will be seen, and the commonality of our faith evident above all: every tribe, every tongue, and every language will be represented,

all uniting as one body under Christ (Rev. 7:9-10). What a day that will be!

There is a single Greek word that we translate as “church” in the New Testament, and it is *ekklesia*. This word is made up of two Greek words: *ek*, which means “out from and to,” and *kaleo*, which means “to call.” Seeing this translation, the word literally means, “the called-out ones.” The universal church is called to Jesus and called out to the work of His Kingdom.

While we are a part of the larger family of God, we have been given the gift of the local church which we find established in the New Testament. Many of Paul’s letters are written to encourage and exhort individual churches toward this goal, and it’s significant to note that each church he writes to has unique challenges and responsibilities within their time and place. But even within the differing make-up of personalities and callings, we can still find common, biblical goals for all “called out ones” who are a part of the local church.

### **The Local Church Exists to Bring Glory to God**

The local church is not just about the people in it; in fact, it’s not even about the pastors or elders who are called to lead. The church is about Jesus. In Ephesians 3, Paul offers a prayer of spiritual strength for the body of believers in Ephesus. Verses 17-21 are some of my favorite verses, and they pointedly remind believers about the power and purpose of church: “...That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”



Prior to these verses, Paul prays that the church in Ephesus would know the never-ending love of God. What follows naturally is the reminder that they can *really know* this love in and through the strength of Christ who is able to do for us far beyond what we can imagine. Just relish these words for a moment. Consider the greatest experience you have ever had. God is able to provide exceedingly far more. Now imagine the greatest scenario that could ever be. God is able to do more than that. Charles Spurgeon points out that the phrase “far more abundantly” is really a Greek expression made up by Paul. In other words, the apostle could not find language superlative enough to describe God’s abilities, and so he simply made up a phrase that in his mind best encapsulated the goodness of God. This is the amazing God we serve, and He deserves glory in all things, including work done in the local church. And, in God’s perfect providence, His love and goodness is *experienced* within the church. John Stott says of these verses:

We shall have power to comprehend these dimensions of Christ’s love...only with all the saints. The isolated Christian can indeed know something of the love of Jesus. But his grasp is bound to be limited by his limited experience. It needs the whole people of God to understand the whole love of God, all the saints together, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, young and old, black and white, with all their varied backgrounds and experiences.<sup>2</sup>

What a magnificent picture. We need each other, and through each other, we bring praise to our God who is able, that He may be glorified and that others may know of His great love. This applies to making the coffee on a Sunday morning as much as it does to those leading in worship. You bring glory to God as you serve the littlest in the congregation by loving on them in the

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2. John Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*. (InterVarsity, 1979), p. 137.

nursery or teaching them during Sunday School, and you bring God glory when you fulfill the call to love the widows in your congregation (James 1:27). You can even bring glory to God when cleaning up the bathrooms or the kitchen or resetting the chairs.

Every deed of ministry in the local church can proclaim Christ, and if that is our focus, if that is our goal, then we are glorifying our Creator in great ways as we serve His church. 2 Corinthians 4:5 reminds us that “what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.” We come together in these groups of believers each with different backgrounds, varying baggage, and unique personalities all to proclaim Christ and give glory to God. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the power at work in each person who claims Jesus as their Lord. Imagine how great that power is when we come together and collectively work and serve to the glory of God.

### **The Local Church Exists to Show God’s Love to Others**

Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” As we meet in local communities, one of the purposes is to offer the love of God to our brother and sister in Christ, encouraging one another, and stirring up one another to love and to do good work. This idea of stirring up suggests that there is work involved in the process. I think about the plastic pool my dad would set up in the backyard when we were little. It was just big enough that we could stand, and the water would come up to our waist. One of our favorite things was to create a kind of whirlpool in the water by circling around the pool in the same direction, over and over, and as we picked up speed, the water would start carrying us along. This is the image of stirring up. It takes