

“One Another” Passages in Scripture

Love one another: *John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17; Romans 12:10; 13:8; 14:13; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 3:22; 4:8; 23; 4:7, 11-12; 2 John 1: 5*

Serve one another: *Galatians 5:13; 21; Philippians 2:3; 1 Peter 4:9; 5:5*

Accept one another: *Romans 15:7, 14*

Strengthen one another: *Romans 14:19*

Help one another: *Hebrews 3:13; 10:24*

Encourage one another: *Romans 14:19; 15:14; Colossians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:13; 10:24-25*

Care for one another: *Galatians 6:2*

Forgive one another: *Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13*

Submit to one another: *Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5*

Commit to one another: *1 John 3:16*

Build trust with one another: *1 John 1:7*

Be devoted to one another: *Romans 12:10*

Be patient with one another: *Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13*

Be interested in one another: *Philippians 2:4*

Be accountable to one another: *Ephesians 5:21*

Confess to one another: *James 5:16*

Live in harmony with one another: *Romans 12:16*

Do not be conceited toward one another: *Romans 13:8*

Do not pass judgment on one another: *Romans 14:13; 15:7*

Do not slander one another: *James 4:11*

Instruct one another: *Romans 16:16*

Greet one another: *Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 13:12*

Admonish one another: *Romans 5:14; Colossians 3:16*

Spur one another on toward love and good deeds: *Hebrews 10:24*

Meet with one another: *Hebrews 10:25*

Agree with one another: *1 Corinthians 16:20*

Be concerned for one another: *Hebrews 10:24*

Be humble toward one another in love: *Ephesians 4:2*

Be compassionate toward one another: *Ephesians 4:32*

Do not be consumed by one another: *Galatians 5:14-15*

Do not anger one another: *Galatians 5:26*

Do not lie to one another: *Colossians 3:9*

Do not grumble toward one another: *James 5:9*

Give preference to one another: *Romans 12:10*

Be at peace with one another: *Romans 12:18*

Sing to one another: *Ephesians 5:19*

Be of the same mind to one another: *Romans 12:16; 15:5*

Comfort one another: *1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11*

Be kind to one another: *Ephesians 4:32*

Live in peace with one another: *1 Thessalonians 5:13*

Carry one another's burdens: *Galatians 6:2*

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The Table Podcast



Glenn R. Kreider



Michael J. Svingel



Kymberli Cook

Why Go To Church?

Why Go To Church? - Glenn R. Kreider, Michael J. Svingel, and Kymberli Cook



on **September 10th, 2019** in *Theology*

[MP3](#) [MP4](#) [HD](#)



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attendance.

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▼ Transcript

Kymerli Cook

Welcome to the table podcast where we discuss issues of God and culture. My name is Kymerli Cook, and I'm the senior administrator at The Hendricks Center. And today we're going to be talking about church attendance and why we should go to church.

And we're joined by Dr. Michael Svigel, the department chair and professor of theological studies, and Dr. Glenn Kreider, who is a professor of theological studies both here at DTS. So, we're thrilled to have you all. Thank you so much for joining us today.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

Thank you.

Dr. Michael Svigel

Thank you.

Kymerli Cook

So, we're just gonna jump into the topic of why should we go to church. And some people listening might think that that is the most elementary, ridiculous question to be asking, but

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And so, whereas old church regular church attendance might have been considered three or four Sundays a month, people who legitimately consider themselves regular church attenders may only attend once a month, once every six weeks, and they consider that regular attendance, which is just very different. It's a shift from what we have historically seen.

So, there's that dimension. And in a Pew Research study in 2014, it talked about how boomers are reducing their attendance and just essentially not coming anymore, especially after they retire, and they just kind of retire from church, too. And not to mention everything that we see online about Gen Z and Millennials.

In fact, we had a focus group with some Millennial women leaders who – we usually throw out this question; we say, “What is one podcast that you'd like to see? What's something that would be helpful, a question you'd like to be asked?”

And they said, “Please do one on why should we – why people should go to church, because we have that conversation all the time with the women we're trying to mentor and trying to convince them that they need to go to church and it's an important thing.”

So, while it seems very elementary to some people, it's a very real issue; it's a very real – I guess it's a reality, and the question is, is it even a problem? Is it okay? It's just a shift that we've seen in our culture, or is it indicative of something that is not good that we need to be aware of and address?

So, Dr. Svigel, let's start with you.

Dr. Michael Svigel

Okay.

Kymerli Cook

Is it even a problem?

Dr. Michael Svigel

Yeah, I think it's a problem. I think, first of all, we have to sort of set aside and sever out one of the main reasons people are not going to church is 'cause they just don't believe it. We are in an increasingly post-Christian society.

So, back in the day, going to church was just part of American culture oftentimes. They'd go to church because mommy and daddy went to church, 'cause grandma and grandpa went to church. And as the American Western identity is less and less Christian, you're going to see a decreasing number of people going to church regularly.

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significance or relevance of going to church regularly, as you say. And so, we're talking about those – that particular category.

So, I would say it is definitely a problem, and we'll discuss this a bit today, some of the biblical theological practical reasons for church attendance. But yeah, I want to make sure that we're talking about the same groups, yes, mm-hmm.

Kymerli Cook

No, thank you. Yeah, you're right.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

Yeah, and that is different. It doesn't necessarily mean it's a problem, but a lot of this connects to what the church actually is and the purpose of the church. But I think there's another factor to add to Dr. Svigel's list. Is it – there are all kinds of other options. In a day and time in the past where your social life really was connected to the church and those communities.

Today, with all kinds of other options, people are busy, and they sometimes kind of fall into a habit of not going and waking up sometime later and realizing, "You know, I haven't been to church in a long time."

Kymerli Cook

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Michael Svigel

There was a time when the church literally was the center of a community. It was the tallest steeple – right? – and that was –

Kymerli Cook

The square was all around it.

Dr. Michael Svigel

Exactly. And that was the center of a social – really the life of that community. And increasingly, you know, you have, with the advent of radio and the advent of television, various delivery methods for the message. Then those who take the message seriously have multiple options. And then also there are obviously numerous ways to have social connections besides just a church community.

So, we are definitely, if I can use this term, in competition with a number of things claiming to be relevant for a person's social dimension, relationships, as well as spiritual care and feeding. And so, there is that question, "Why would I need to actually go to a brick and mortar building," because that's how many people think of church. Even though we insist over and

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Kymerli Cook

You can essentially have a fellowship potluck on a test message string.

Dr. Michael Svigel

Right.

Kymerli Cook

You don't need to go there, supposedly.

Dr. Michael Svigel

Right. So, the 21st century you're dealing with all of these new complexities.

Kymerli Cook

Yes, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

So, you brought up what is the church. So, let's just jump into that conversation a little bit. Maybe part of why people aren't seeing it as important as it has been in the past, in addition to technological advances and just shift in culture and that kind of thing is because there's been a lack of education as to what –

Dr. Michael Svigel

What it is and what it does.

Kymerli Cook

– what the church is, what its purpose is, why my role in the purpose of the church is. Let's talk about that a little bit.

Dr. Kreider, why don't you jump in with what do we – what should we understand the church is.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

Yeah. And then there's also the question of the distinction between or the difference between the Church universal, the Church as a whole, and the local church. And those conversations get a bit confusing.

Kymerli Cook

Well, in here we're really talking probably more about the local church.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

The local church, that's right. It's only – and that's an important –

Dr. Michael Svigel

It is.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

– part of the context for this discussion, because that becomes an important –

Kymerli Cook

The people on my text string are all Christians. So, I am at church, yeah.

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[Laughs] I know.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

From the very beginning of the biblical story, God's people have always done life together. From "It's not good for the man to be alone," in [Genesis 2](#) to the call of Abraham and the constitution of the people of Israel. God's people have always done life together. So, I think that's kind of a given as we begin to read the biblical story.

You don't have to be a dispensationalist to think this...

But something happens, and as dispensationalists, we believe the Church is a new part of God's plan. It's a different way of uniting people together through the covenant that God instituted through the person and work of Christ and His death, burial, and resurrection.

And so, there's a transition from the people of God under the old covenant, Israel and the people connected to Israel and then this new part, this new people of God, this new – this – it's not a new people, but it's a new way of describing God's people – [clears throat] – excuse me – that's made up of not one ethnicity but made up of Jews and Gentiles, slave and free, male and female so that no longer is the constitution of the nation the thing that unites its faith in Christ.

The other way to get at the question, I think, is to see – it's easier to describe what the Church is than to define it. The Greek word *ekklesia*, which means assembly, many people argue is that's what the church means; it's people assembled together.

But it seems to me that in the New Testament, when, particularly in the epistles, when that word *ekklesia* is used, it's used of a people, not of a people gathered together. So, what is it that unites this people? It's they're people related to God through the new covenant.

And then the metaphors that the Bible uses, it's a body, it's a bride, it's a household, it's a family, it's a – what am I missing? – a field, all of which are pictures of a group of people together made up of various people, various ethnicities, et cetera, and different functions that are all united together in one common purpose.

So, my simple definition of the church, it's the new covenant community. And what marks them is faith in Christ and the indwelling work of the Spirit.

Kymerli Cook

M-kay. So, what is – Dr. Svigel, what do you think is the purpose of this new covenant community?

Dr. Michael Svigel

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in Christ; the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; certain basic fundamental doctrines and also certain lifestyle that kind of define us.

Then order

there is leadership established from the very beginning. There was ordained proper leadership. So, this would clearly rule out just any group – just we three sitting at this table – yes, two or three are gathered together, but it's not the church. He's not our bishop; I'm not the deacon. So, we're not –

Kymerli Cook

We haven't tried to establish an order – right? – in mobilizing that way.

And then the ordinances

from the very beginning biblically, all the way through; baptism was your right of initiation. We are called to make disciples, and you do that by baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that's how you become a disciple. And then we are to teach, to observe whatsoever Christ commanded.

And so, that is marked by the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, which is also a sign of the new covenant community gathering around an actual table with those elements, which cannot be done virtually – neither of those things.

So, if you look at it as the identity-forging marks as orthodoxy, order, and ordinances, you're already seeing that you're dealing with something more than just a gathering of a few believers.

Then those people are mobilized for certain things

edification – or “evangelism,” that is calling people into that community; “edification,” which is building up spiritual growth we may call it or sanctification which always, in the New Testament, is a corporate image. It is building up the pieces, working together, the idea of the priesthood of all believers, which I'm sure we'll get into. And then all of that for the purpose of the glory of God, which I say “exaltation” – so this worshiping community of disciples.

Dr. Kreider's right. It's easier to describe it than it is to define it. And so, that description of those three marks, three works I think at least kind of give us an idea of the contours of it. It's not the only way to look at it, but traditionally, those have been sort of the what it is and what it does.

And so, we begin to see this is a little bit more complicated than just a social media online group –

Kymerli Cook

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things, but they're not doing everything that an actual assembly of the Church would do.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

I argue what the church is must drive what she does. And what she does is not unique to her necessarily. There are organizations other than churches that are structured and organized, and there are – whether or not they should be –

Dr. Michael Svigel

Carrying out some of those things, yes.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

– carrying out the ordinance, et cetera. So, I summarize the function of the church in terms of the Great Commission and the great commandment. It's really hard – and you read through the New Testament, you see it everywhere – it's really hard to practice loving one another if you're not actually together with one another.

And that somehow the mission of God in this world, that God is worshiped by a variety of voices gathered together and worshipping Him, that brings glory to Him and reveals who He is, and carrying out the call to follow Jesus and to be part of this community to join with others in doing so is the focus and the function of the church. Those marks are not at all unimportant, and they contribute to the great commandment, loving God and loving others; and the Great Commission, making disciples.

Dr. Michael Svigel

Mm-hmm.

Kymerli Cook

So, if I'm listening to this, as a college student or a 27-year-old something who, you know, just is really questioning and wanting to know – genuinely wanting to do the right thing and follow the Lord, but just not sure that I feel like it's all that important – I'm hearing what you're saying, and I'm hearing what the church is, but what is my role in that?

That sounds like really big, grandiose pictures that, in some ways, I can see is me getting together with my friends on a Saturday at Starbucks. In some ways I can see your point, you know, that there are – there's order and ordinances – you know, communion and baptism aren't necessarily happening there, that kind of thing. Okay, I can see you, but what is my specific role in this community that you're talking about and what makes it important for me to show up?

Dr. Glenn Kreider

Throughout history, normatively the church has been – the community has been made up of a diversity of people, and I really do believe this is true. It's not about what you give or what

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And I know this again pretty theoretical and difficult to help people feel what that's like, but that historically that diversity is a really important function that that 20-something or college student actually needs to be involved in a community with people younger and older, people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences.

And it's not simply that you glean something from or learn something from, although that's an important test, too. But you're mentored by, and you're actually – something actually happens when people who have a common goal, a common focus and a common identity in the person and work of Christ do life together.

Dr. Michael Svigel

Yeah, and at this point, I want to – I said I would come back to it. I want to bring in the concept of the priesthood of all believers. And Ephesians chapter 4 says that Christ ascending on high turns around and sends to the Church, the apostles and the prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers our church leadership, those who are gifts to the church in that sense.

But for the purpose of equipping the saints – that is the members of that community who have come together from every walk of life – to do the work of the ministry. And that work of the ministry is for the building up of the body of Christ. That is the encouraging and exhorting of one another to love God and love one another.

And so, a lot of times the idea of the priesthood of all believers has been really misunderstood in a very individualistic sense in the idea that I'm my own priest when, in fact, the New Testament indicates that it's really we're each other's priests, and we are showing up not so I can get fed or what can I benefit, which does happen, but really how can I minister to others? How can I be a Spirit-filled gift to the church in my exercising of that – whatever that may be

encouraging, exhorting, confronting, sharing a hymn, sharing a psalm, preaching, moving chairs around, whatever that may be.

And I also love the idea of diversity as well. It challenges you when you're rubbing shoulders and just doing life with people who are older than you, from a different generation; people who are from a different ethnicity, different language, different culture. It makes things not just more interesting; it actually spurs us to a depth of love and concern and understanding that we couldn't have in any other way.

And so, that just bringing together – of course, if it's real community and fellowship – just sitting next to somebody's who's different, watching, and then leaving as part of a common

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Dr. Glenn Kreider

Yeah, and that's another really important factor here is that, in a lot of ways, the way church is practiced today, is difficult to see how my contribution is actually needed and important. Because much of many churches is performance driven and watching.

But I would also – I mean I think somewhere in this conversation it's important – and I'll be that guy – that the writer of Hebrews, in chapter 10, actually does instruct followers of Jesus not to forsake the assembly together. And for those who take the Scripture seriously, I think that voice needs to be heard, too. I mean that's not the only answer to the question –

Kymerli Cook

Yeah.

Dr. Michael Svigel

There's a reason Scripture says that.

Kymerli Cook

Yeah.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

Right.

Dr. Michael Svigel

Because it is essential for our spiritual growth.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

And it's always been – I mean God's people have always done life together. You can't read the Old Testament and not see those times that are set aside regularly for festivals that last a long period of time, and people do life together. And maybe if we'd start doing that, we'd have people much more likely to get up on Sunday morning and go to church.

Dr. Michael Svigel

Yes. If you reduce church to just lining up or sitting in rows and listening to a message, pretty soon people are going to realize, "Well, I can just log in" or –

Kymerli Cook

I can just online –

Dr. Michael Svigel

– listen to a message. If it's merely receiving a content which – that's part of it, but it's not the only thing.

And so, I would say, at this point, though, as you do it, and many listeners will know this, that as you do though, start to get tangled up in community, and you're doing your life together, that can lead to a little bit of discomfort and even pain, maybe even some suffering because we're all – not one of us is a –

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There's a lot of messiness in true community, just like there is a messiness in a true family kind of community.

Kymerli Cook

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Michael Svigel

So, on the one hand that's a good sign, when you're a little uncomfortable, because you realize you're going beyond that superficial level. On the other hand, people can get hurt. And as they do in real natural families. So, that's – that's something else we'll have to address as well.

Kymerli Cook

Mm-hmm. So, I'm hearing the obligatory and necessary we are straight up commanded to not forsake the gathering of the believers.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

And he says more and more as you see the day approaching. So, it's, I think, ironic that churches, particularly in the West, tended to meet together less and less.

Kymerli Cook

Yes, yeah. And it's also an opportunity for us to be sharpened by other believers, to be the sharpening agent for other believers. And I'll never forget something Dr. Kreider said to me or in class – I'm not sure where it was, so I clearly have forgotten –

Kymerli Cook

I'll never forget the statement that sometimes even for those who are struggling with doubt, not even sure if they believe, one of the beauties of the church – and this is the sharpening element – is that you can go, and sometimes people just have to believe for you, and they believe for you.

So, there is a beauty to showing up and that's something – particularly the younger generations are well-known for being noncommittal in that kind of thing, but even for the older ones who are starting to not come, there's – there is – there's something about – and we've talked about this on other podcasts, there's something about the physical presence, and we believe that the physical body matters; that's a very Christian belief. And so, when I physically choose to show up and to take the time, which is one of our greatest commodities nowadays is time – that when I do that, I'm – it's an act of worship in and of itself; it's an act of love and service to other believers, and it's an act of obedience is what I'm hearing.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

Yeah, and that's a factor – and this could be another whole conversation, but it's a – it helps us to understand why there must be a diversity of experiences and a diversity of human experiences in the church gatherings, too. We do a lot of instruction. We do a lot of celebration in the churches, which I'm aware – not a great deal of lament and honesty and vulnerability

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Suffering together.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

We suffer together. We don't just celebrate together: we long together; we hope together; we suffer together; we carry one another's burdens. And that ought to be the – one of the goals of the church I think.

Dr. Michael Svigel

And I like how you brought up the fact that we are bodies; we're not just spirits who happen to be trapped in bodies – a healthy Christian worldview, incarnational worldview. I think that's very important because I encounter a lot of people who will say, "Well, I'm a member of the spiritual body of Christ.

Kymerli Cook

The invisible body, yeah.

Dr. Michael Svigel

And I say, "Are you listening to yourself? The 'spiritual body.' It is the body of Christ. This is the image that He's chosen to emphasize here. And again, what Dr. Kreider said earlier, there's sometimes a failure to understand what we mean by local vs. universal Church. You really – if you properly understand those terms, you can't be a member of the universal or the Church Catholic in the traditional sense without being a member of a church local. The Church Catholic or the Church universal is all of the local churches throughout the world thought of as a whole.

And then the spiritual – especially in the Augustinian and Protestant tradition, the distinction between visible and invisible church is the invisible church is really the true believers, the true believers known to God in the visible church. And the idea is any local church would be a mixed group. Not everybody is necessarily a genuine Christian; that's the understanding.

So, in a proper understanding of these terms, there really isn't a lot of room for the –

Kymerli Cook

Individual.

Dr. Michael Svigel

– the individual, "I'm a member of some sort of mystical, invisible, universal, spiritual church without some connection to the physical body of Christ and the local expression of that.

Kymerli Cook

What you were getting to earlier is often the priesthood of all believers is often the justification for that type of action –

Dr. Michael Svigel

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priesthood of all believers. And what I'm hearing you say is that's actually not the way to understand that. That one you've already unpacked. But that it's a – the Church universal, the invisible Church, all of that is the gathering of the smaller, local, visible ones.

Dr. Michael Svigel

Correct, and if you're –

Kymerli Cook

And if you're trying to be a part of the big one, you have to be part of the little one.

Dr. Michael Svigel

We're each other's priests, and that's where you start looking closely at all of those one anothers, those excruciating one anothers of the New Testament. That's the priesthood of all believers. We are coming together, doing life together as the family of God over a long period of time.

And so, that if you just shift a few of these ideas of what the church is and what it's supposed to do – and how do I grow spiritually is another dimension of this. We've taught – been taught and taught others that the key to spiritual growth is read your Bible, pray every day, and "You'll Grow, Grow, Grow" is the old children's song. Well, it's really hard to defend that biblically, ironically.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

Not that there's anything wrong with reading your Bible or praying.

Dr. Michael Svigel

Read your Bible and pray, right, that's fine, but the idea of –

Kymerli Cook

And that's definitely part of sanctification.

Dr. Michael Svigel

Right. But the idea that that is the key and you reduce spiritual growth to that – well, in the New Testament, whenever spiritual growth is talked about, it's always in a corporate context, gathering together and growing together and even growing into the image of Christ is a corporate concept.

So, when we make that shift, that adjustment, now the question is should be – not should I go to church, but what does that involvement in church look like?

Kymerli Cook

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

Because that reading the Bible has to be done in community –

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– and praying – if you're not involved in the lives of people, you're praying for just yourself.

Dr. Michael Svigel

Just yourself, yeah. Praying for one another – and how do you pray for one another if you don't know anyone?

Dr. Glenn Kreider

That's right. I like to parallel to the family. All of our families have strengths and weaknesses, function and dysfunction. But we say there's something really odd about a member of the family who never participates in family gatherings.

Kymerli Cook

They don't show up.

Dr. Michael Svigel

Yep.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

Yeah.

Kymerli Cook

Yeah, you're right. That's a very good –

Dr. Michael Svigel

That's a problem.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

Mm-hmm.

Kymerli Cook

So, shifting the conversation a little bit, but – and kind of taking a lot of these theological concepts that we've been talking about and some – and their ramifications, I thought we could just chat through a few people's common reasons. When I say "I," I am not speaking as Kymerli Cook; I'm speaking as a person who might hold this opinion.

But there are several common things that seem to come up as – I don't want to say as arguments for not attending church, but as reasons, as justifications that people bring up. And I think some of the things we've talked about, and other biblical and theological concepts will arise as we kind of work through them. So, I'm just gonna start throwing them out, and we can discuss however many we get to and how we need to think through these particular things that we really, if you are a regular church attender, that you may hear another person say, or that you may personally be holding to, and it's kind of affecting whether or not you show up.

Dr. Michael Svigel

Mm-hmm.

Kymerli Cook

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Dr. Michael Svigel

Mm-hmm.

Kymerli Cook

Dr. Kreider, do you want to take that one?

Dr. Glenn Kreider

I say great.

Dr. Michael Svigel

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

But you need more than your small group – diversity. We tend – in small groups, we tend to surround ourselves with people who are kind of in the same life – stage of life, same experiences. You need the diversity. And small groups are an incredibly important part of the process, and Bible study an important part of the process.

But I mean, historically, God's people have always done life together, and there has always been this worship experience that is lacking in a small group setting like that the diversity. That's my word for the day – "diversity."

Dr. Michael Svigel

No, I like it – and I like it.

Kymerli Cook

Corporate worship itself is significant.

Dr. Michael Svigel

Yeah, and one person, by themselves, cannot be male and female, Jew and Gentile, free and slave. It's impossible to experience the kind of community and diversity that God has in mind in the body of Christ.

So, I would say, again, bring them back to the definition of the church. A lot of groups – small groups, parachurch ministries – do accomplish one or two of these things, these works of the church, but an authentic, bona fide body of Christ is going to be accomplishing all of those things.

And it's – it's the same reason you don't just eat sugar candy all day, or why you don't just eat wheat, or you don't just eat meat. We are designed to have a balanced diet of various nutrients. And the same thing is true – you don't just read your Bible; you don't just pray; you don't just – but you are doing all of these things together in community to the end of the transformation of one another in the glory of God.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

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Dr. Michael Svigel

And a lot of churches have small groups.

Kymerli Cook

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

And churches have some groups. And there are a lot of small churches that – but I think we have this – we have an intuitive understanding of the difference between those two that I think actually implies something important about how deeply embedded the community is in our understanding of the church.

Kymerli Cook

Okay. So, what would we say to a person who said, “I’m just not gonna be legalistic about it. There are other holy things that I can do on the weekend, including rest; my kids play sports, and we use that as an evangelism opportunity –

Dr. Michael Svigel

Camping.

Kymerli Cook

I’m working on the weekends. You know, that’s a little bit more of a practical thing, but, you know, how do we handle – obviously we do not want to be legalistic about it, but where is the line there between being legalistic and also valuing what we’ve been asked by Scripture to value?

Dr. Michael Svigel

Let me first just say that it – obeying God or obeying Christ is not being legalistic. So, a definition of legalism, first of all, has to be worked out. When Christ tells you to do something, you don’t say, “Well, I’m not gonna do that.” If He tells you to do something regularly, doing that is not being legalistic. Legalism would be usually defined as manmade rules, doing things for the motive of justifying oneself, these kinds of things rather than obeying Christ’s command which is what we as Christians are supposed to be doing.

So, if what Dr. Kreider says is true – and it is – that Hebrews says, “Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together,” doing that is not being legalistic; it’s being obedient.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

Yet I know what it’s like to have been raised in a legalistic community where Hebrews was used as an argument for, “You need to be there every –”

Dr. Michael Svigel

Wednesday night, Sunday night, Sunday –

Dr. Glenn Kreider

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often in a plane on Sunday, which makes it impossible for me to be in church on Sunday morning.

But here's what happens. The missing one Sunday turns into missing two Sundays turns into missing – you know it's not that big a deal. And I think somewhere in that tension between we're free to – we have freedom, but we also have responsibilities –

Dr. Michael Svigel

Yes.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

– and recognizing those.

So, I often hear people talk about the problem with sporting events being scheduled on Sundays. And that is a problem, but it doesn't – we don't need a law that requires you to do it. You know, people's response to – that keep the law because it's a law is almost always innate rebellion against it.

So, I would just say that if you have a pattern of never attending, that's a problem. If you're making more excuses than not – because we actually do need – we're back to the family. How many family reunions do you miss before you miss being a part of your family?

Dr. Michael Svigel

Or family meals, or even in our careers in our work. I mean it is acceptable – it is allowable to miss work on occasion. But it should be the exception not the rule. We should be occasional church missers rather than occasional church attenders. That should be the – and I totally agree that – yeah, I miss church sometimes – I'm out of town or things are going on. But it's a high priority for me. I have to really plan around that and think through it.

So – but I think if people understand what the church is, understand what it does and how important their attendance in that community, involvement in the community is for them and for others –

Dr. Michael Svigel

– then – and you're actually living life, you'll look forward to that. You'll want that; you won't want to miss.

Kymerli Cook

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

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it's not a matter of you roll out of bed on Sunday morning and say, "I have to go to church."

Dr. Michael Svigel

Yeah.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

But, "I get to go to church again." There's something happens when we're together.

Dr. Michael Svigel

On the other hand – oh, yeah –

Kymerli Cook

No, go ahead.

Dr. Michael Svigel

On the other hand, when those mornings do come – oh, I don't know; there's sometimes a struggle at church or it's uncomfortable, or you or the church are going through something, you want to have that personal relationship with those people in that community, think about – you're not leaving a church; you're not avoiding a church; you're avoiding these people – you're leaving these people.

And when you start to view that over the long term as a family, that sense of responsibility will kick in, even when you don't want to. And that itself is transformative.

Kymerli Cook

Mm-hmm. So, the pendulum for people maybe giving reasons why they're not regularly attending or attending church at all, the pendulum swing from what you were talking about of, you know, finding somewhere that you want to go, that is a good church, is a good experience – like I look forward to, even on the harder days, I'm committed to those people.

The pendulum is, "Well, I can't find a church that I like, or I can't find a church that has solid biblical teaching, that has solid teaching in my area; so, it just hasn't happened." So, what would you say to those people?

Dr. Glenn Kreider

Pick one.

Kymerli Cook

[Laughs]

Dr. Michael Svigel

Yeah, there really is this tension of agonizing about making the right decision vs. making a decision and then making it right. And there is a sense in which – listen, I tell my students if you're going to be involved in church life, in church ministry, you really have to develop a high tolerance for imperfection because there's no perfect churches.

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have to deal with imperfect people.

So, ideally, I'm more of a kind of a communitarian in the sense of would rather shop locally; I'd rather go to church locally. And so, you pick a church that's basically within your general tradition, and you go with it, and you contribute to that community.

So, I would really strongly urge people to not get in the cycle of what they call church shopping – you know? – spending a little time, then getting bored and moving on to the next thing, but to really stick through it through the long haul.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

Because as many people smarter than us have said, there is no such thing as a perfect church.

Dr. Michael Svigel

That's right.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

And you – there are levels of frustration and levels of dissonance in every – you have to pick one. If the church is important, if family is important, if doing life together is important, you make a commitment to it. And sometimes it requires building relationships; it requires some stick-to-itiveness; it requires persistence in order to fall in love with something you wouldn't necessarily like at first glance.

Dr. Michael Svigel

Mm-hmm.

Kymerli Cook

Yeah. And thinking of it, though not a direct parallel, but somewhat thinking of it like a marriage in that you commit to somewhere, and you eventually do – you know, to people who do get married, they commit to one person, and that's the person you picked, and whatever it becomes is what it becomes and you stick with it just as long as you're able, and not just able in the sense that you're having a good time and it's feeding you, but as long as it's there or it really seems like – and that's where it obviously falls apart.

But there is an element of that commitment to –

Dr. Glenn Kreider

To someone else.

Kymerli Cook

Yeah. And to – and not looking anywhere else.

Dr. Michael Svigel

And the fact that the New Testament – some people they don't – people don't realize that the dominant picture of the Church in the New Testament is a family; the idea that calling each

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new covenant community of the Spirit. It is just as serious a covenant – and more serious a covenant than even the covenant we make in marriage. And if people start taking their membership involvement then in that community as serious as they would a covenant commitment, it would lead to, yes, “Okay, I don’t feel like doing this, but this is my – these are my people, and I have an obligation to them.”

So, I think changing just the perception of what does church membership really mean and what does it entail – even if your church doesn’t have official membership, or even if they don’t articulate it that way, you can, as an individual, commit to, “I’m gonna treat this like a covenant commitment until someone breaks that covenant,” which does happen, of course.

Kymerli Cook

Okay. We have time for one more quick question, and it’s – when I ask it, you’re going to say, “That’s not quick,” but so just, you know, try to address it in the most succinct way possible.

Dr. Michael Svigel

Sure.

Kymerli Cook

What would your advice to pastors in churches be who find themselves in conversations about this issue? Because it seems self-serving that they’re trying to convince you to come; they’re justifying their own precedence, that kind of thing, but it genuinely is spiritual instruction.

Dr. Michael Svigel

Sure.

Kymerli Cook

So, what can pastors do – what can they say and how can they talk about it, and what can churches do to just kind of make themselves a little bit accessible and address kind of some of the things we’ve talked about, the people, the reasons why people don’t come?

Dr. Glenn Kreider

On the one hand, it’s easy to criticize the seeker approach.

Dr. Michael Svigel

Mm-hmm.

Dr. Glenn Kreider

It’s easy to criticize marketing approaches. But I think one of the really important things is to listen to the people. “So, what would it take for you to come? Why haven’t you been going? What can we do in order to fulfill what we think you need and to help you understand how the church will contribute to you?”

‘Cause it is – we don’t want to – we don’t want to – I wouldn’t want to encourage pastors just to simply say, “You need to be here.” ‘Cause there are all kinds of ways, in the midst of the

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Kymerli Cook

Dr. Svigel?

Dr. Michael Svigel

I would urge pastors, leaders early on to educate members of the church of what the church is, what it does, what its function is first of all. If there's a new visitors'/new members' class or something like that, to give them a basic ecclesiology doctrine of the church.

I would also encourage them to very quickly get people involved and actually live out the priesthood of all believers that equipping the saints for the work of ministry. Let people know



Glenn R. Kreider

Dr. Glenn R. Kreider identifies his motivations as his passion for the triune God and his desire to help others respond to divine revelation in spirit and truth. Prior to coming to DTS he directed Christian education and pastored a church in Cedar Hill, Texas. Dr. Kreider's research interests include Jonathan Edwards, theological method, and our eschatological hope. He is married to Janice and they have two children. Dr. Kreider enjoys his adorable black lab named Chloe, two pugs, bold coffee, and good music.



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