



Worship Again: Connect with Church

Psalm 67 (NIV)

First in a 3-part series titled: *Start Again*

Pastor Matt Friend – August 19 & 22, 2021

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– OUTLINE –

Today's Big Idea:

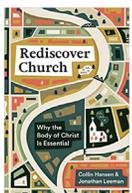
Coming to church is a bigger deal than you may think.

Why is Coming to Church Such a Big Deal?

- #1 – Church is where we experience the presence of God together. [\(v. 1\)](#)
- #2 – Church is where we praise God together. [\(vv. 3, 5\)](#)
- #3 – Church is how we carry out the plan of God together. [\(vv. 2, 4\)](#)
- #4 – Church where we practice for eternity together. [\(vv. 6-7\)](#)

Today's Take-Away:

Connect with church again!



Resource Recommendation

[*Rediscover Church: Why the Body of Christ Is Essential*](#)

By Collin Hansen and Jonathan Leeman



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– NOTES –

Introduction:

Today we begin our 3-week series titled “Start Again.”

Start again. Think with me about those two words. Children are back to school *again*. College students are moving into dormitories and making friends *again*. Evening bonfires are being kindled *again*. Lovers are dating *again*. Restaurants are busy *again*. Adventurers are traveling *again*.

Google Search is eager to predict the rest of your sentence: How to start... a business in WV, a podcast, a blog, a conversation, a YouTube channel, a dead lawnmower, a family, or an IRA. In this series, we’ll explore how to *Start Again* as a church family, a band of spiritual friends eager to become more like Jesus and fulfill our mission to make disciples of Jesus!

Today, as is the case with most of my messages, this sermon speaks primarily to Jesus-followers. If you’re not yet a Jesus-follower, we’re so glad you’re here, and I pray God uses something we do or say today to enable you to the next step in your spiritual journey.

Today’s Big Idea:

Coming to church is a bigger deal than you may think.

- According to the title (superscription) of Psalm 67, it was to be sung and prayed when they assembled for corporate



- worship; when they “came to church.”
- All the Psalms were given for Israel’s liturgy; however, this one established the philosophy of gathering for worship—why coming to church is such a big deal.

Why is Coming to Church Such a Big Deal?

#1 – Church is where we experience the presence of God together.
[\(v. 1\)](#)

We see this in verse 1. “May God be gracious to us and make his face shine on us.”

If you’ve grown up in church, verses 1-2 may sound familiar to you. The writer quotes and splices two of the most important Scriptures in the OT:

- Aaron, Moses’ brother, gave a beautiful benediction in Numbers 6:24-26, “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”
- God delivered an important promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2-3, “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

“Us” = This was something they prayed when they gathered together. It wasn’t a **me** prayer. It was an **us** prayer that the assembly prayed when they came together.

“God,” “Gracious,” “Face” = What did they long for above all else? The presence of God in their worship gatherings! For them, receiving grace was synonymous with receiving God.

Grace = God’s self-giving.

Yes, grace is a gift, but what’s the gift? The gift is God Himself—His



presence and His life. Does grace involve forgiveness? Sure, but it's much more. Does grace involve mercy? Sure, but it's much more. Grace is receiving the very presence and life of God.

- This is why the OT writers called it grace when God showed up in the tabernacle/temple.
- This is why the NT writers called it grace when God showed up in a manger.
- This is why the apostles called it grace when the Spirit of God came at Pentecost.
- This is how Paul defined grace in Ephesians 2: access to God the Father.

So, for the writer of this Psalm, church was a place where they could—together—experience God's presence. Church is where we experience the presence of God together.

Think with me: On the individual level, do we live in the spiritual presence of Jesus every day? Absolutely. In the Great Commission (Matthew 28:20), Jesus said, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." The Latin expression is *Coram Deo* or *Coram Christo*, we live before the presence of God and Christ. He is always "just beyond the veil" as Christian mystics like to remind us.

However, according to the Bible, we enter into the presence of Christ at a deeper level when we gather for corporate worship.

For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them (Matthew 18:20 NIV).

You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns



us from heaven?... Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:22-29 NIV).

“I don’t know and can’t imagine what the disciples understood our Lord to mean when, His body still unbroken and His blood unshed, He handed them the bread and wine, saying they were His body and blood... Yet I find no difficulty in believing that the veil between the worlds is nowhere else so thin and permeable to divine operation. Here a hand from the hidden country touches not only my soul but my body. Here is big medicine and strong magic... The command, after all, was ‘Take and eat,’ not ‘Take and understand.’”
C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*

We don’t celebrate communion weekly because we love communion. We celebrate communion weekly because we love the gospel. Church is where we experience the presence of God together.

I’ve heard well-meaning Christian leaders urge their followers, “Don’t come to church to receive,” they say, “Come to church to give.” I believe I understand their heart, but I don’t agree with their challenge. The Elders and I do want you to come to church here seeking something, craving something, looking for something: the deeper, corporate presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. I want you to come starved for God. “As the deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you O God” (Psalm 42:1).

Church is where we experience the presence of God together.

#2 – Church is where we praise God together. ([vv. 3, 5](#))

The writer says in verses 3 and 5, “May the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you.”

Church is where we praise God together. Can we praise God individually, alone? You may sing in your car. Many of us enjoy special time with God on our deer stand each fall.



However, something supernatural happens when we come together to praise God, lifting up all our voices as one. In so doing we give worship (*worth-ship*) to God.

As a side note, the Bible never gives us any instruction on the style of our music when we gather together. It has been my experience that anytime someone wants to legislate a particular style of music as the only godly form of worship music, it's usually because that style is either their preferred taste or they stand to make money off the sale of their particular style of worship music. (Money was always at the heart of the worship wars, by the way. It always was and it always will be.)

Our most fruitful missionaries tell us that praise and worship often looks different in different cultures and countries around the world. When people come to know Jesus, they often praise the Lord in forms congruent with their own culture. It's a beautiful thing to witness!

Here at Bible Center Church, we offer two worship service styles (modern and multigenerational). I recognize there are other preferred styles not represented here. There are some who would much prefer a hymn only, high church style, or Christian rap. Thankfully, though, you lay your preferences aside and praise Jesus because you love Jesus more than you love your preferences. It's a sign that you are a mature Christian ([Romans 14-15](#)).

Someone once complained to pastor and author Francis Chan, confessing they didn't think that the worship service was very good. He replied, "That that's okay because we weren't worshipping you."

Church is where we praise God together.

#3 – Church is how we carry out the plan of God together. ([vv. 2, 4](#))

Why was the worship gathering so important to the writer of Psalm 67 and to the people of God? Verses 2 and 4 answer the question...



- *So that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations (Psalm 67:2 NIV).*
- *May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples with equity and guide the nations of the earth (Psalm 67:4 NIV).*

There was a worship component to the gathered assembly, there was a discipleship component to the gathered assembly, AND there was a missional component to the gathered assembly. The people of God were very aware that they didn't exist for themselves. They existed for God, primarily, and for the people who were far from God—those who were not yet the people of God.

What's most important: worship or mission? Obviously, worship is more important; however, mission exists because there are places in the world where worship doesn't. Since there are people in our own backyard and around the world who don't yet know the joy of worshipping God, Jesus gave us the great commission to spread the gospel across the street and across the world. Reaching those far from God is the one of the only things we'll do better on earth than we'll do in heaven.

Missions is not a program in the church. Rather, missions is the program of the church. When you come to church—when you worship, belong, service, give, and join—you are saying, “I'm committed to this cause! I'm committed with this church family to take the gospel to people who are far from God! I'm committed with this church family to help rob hell and fill heaven!”

This is why we:

- Invest so much in supporting our global missionary efforts.
- Invest so much in supporting our local missionary efforts: UMM, Charleston Mountain Mission, Cross Roads Pregnancy Care Center, FCA.
- Invest so much in The Maker's Center.



- Focus so much on becoming everyday missionaries in our D-groups.

Church is how we carry out the plan of God together.

#4 – Church where we practice for eternity together. ([vv. 6-7](#))

The writer ends this Psalm by looking far into the future. Most scholars see verses 6-7 as a prophecy, a vision of the future when God makes all things new: “The land yields its harvest; God, our God, blesses us. May God bless us still, so that all the ends of the earth will fear him.”

Commentator J. Vernon McGee reminds us that this Psalm points to the day when we “will see a converted world, a renovated world, a world in which God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him. The curse will be removed and we will be able to sing songs of praise.”

This is God’s heart behind Hebrews 10:23-25, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 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.”

Church is where we practice for eternity together. Church is not ritual; it’s rehearsal. When we’re faithful to the gathered church, we form habits that shape our lives and will go with us into eternity. You could say that it’s “heaven practice.” To be even more theologically accurate, in light of my sermon last week on resurrection, it’s also “practice for the new heavens and the new earth.” One theologian (Jeremy Begbie) calls the worship gathering an “echo from the future.” It’s a foretaste of something we’ll see come to fruition when Christ returns and all things are made new.

Church is where we practice for eternity together.



Today's Take-Away:

Connect with church again!

- If your health puts you in *vulnerable* category, please continue online or on TV without guilt. If you're still forced to join us only online or on TV, start developing a plan for the day you can return.
- If you can come back, come back! Be faithful! Jump into a group! Serve! Give! Join!
- If Bible Center isn't the church for you, then let us help you find what you're looking for in our community. We want what's best for you.

Why is God inviting us to connect with church again? Because...

Coming to church is a bigger deal than you may think.