

Time of Grace Ministry
Roots and Fruit: Gather Together
Psalm 92
September 15, 2019

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"So, Pastor, why do I still have to go to church," the 18 year old asked me.

A couple of weeks ago, a graduating senior from our ministry, a young man who had been raised in an incredible family, had the courage to call me up and ask that honest question: "Pastor, why would I still go to church?" And he gave me permission to share the conversation with you.

He said that he and a bunch of his classmates had attended a Christian school for years, if not a decade plus. Teenagers, who had been sitting in chairs like this in a church like this for not one or two years, but for many of them, 18 plus. "Why would we still go?" they asked each other. And he told me as they sat around the campfire and honestly wrestled with that question, "Why, our freshman year, throughout our college years, would we keep coming to a place like this?" He said not a single guy in that circle could come up with a compelling answer.

See, that young man had heard me talk many times in our church about this picture that we love to put up; that roots produce fruit. But if you want spiritual fruit in your life like love for people or joy in your connection to God or peace with your conscience of self-control against sin, where that fruit comes by God's economy is by having roots; by gather, group, grow, give, and go. But his honest question for me was the first one: "Does it really, Pastor? If I really want peace with God and joy in my life and self-control against temptation, do I have to gather?" He said, "Our classmates realize that we have been hearing this same stuff for years and our teachers told us we should keep going to church to grow in faith but we've heard everything. So why would I still go?"

You know, I give that young man an incredible amount of credit for being humble and honest enough to ask his pastor that question. And it's a good question because if you haven't had to wrestle with it, you will, or someone you care very much about will wrestle with it. I mean, if you're a teenager here, the time is coming when mom and dad won't be able to tell you what to do. When you get your own place or go off on campus and you'll have to decide is it still worth going to church? Maybe if you're here just to hear the kids sing or you're here stopping in with your boyfriend or girlfriend, you're going to have to wrestle with that question: "Well, why would I come back?" If by chance you're not even here today, you're just watching this on TV, you're listening to a podcast, you're going to have to wrestle with that question if God gives me the health and strength to attend a church next Sunday, why would I go?

And I know I'm a pastor and it shouldn't seem so obvious, but as I was thinking through that question, in modern times, it's actually a better question than ever. People are busy. I know how busy people were 100 years ago but if your profession is anything like mine, it's busier than ever before. About 50 years ago, the U.S. Government predicted that advances in technology would mean that the average U.S. citizen would work about 20 hours a week. And if you haven't

figured it out, they were dead wrong. We work and we work and we work and the 40 hour work week for many people is a thing of the past. Fifty hours in the office and then we bring our phones home and we return emails in bed on Saturdays and Sundays. And sometimes, in that block of time you have on the weekend is all you've got to unplug and relax and coming to church is hard.

It used to be a generation ago that Sunday was like a Sabbath day, a sacred day, an untouchable day, but no longer. Not if you want your kid to play varsity sports; he's got to start in club and club doesn't take Sundays off. And so there are tournaments and there are commitments. We scramble throughout the weekends and sometimes Sundays is the only time to get stuff done around the house. Sometimes we're just exhausted, our friends are in town, or we're having a good time and coming to a place like this is hard, we're busy. And not only that, perhaps now more than ever, it's easy to replace what happens here in the comfort of our own homes. You know, I think about those five roots and I realize that we can do almost all of that without being here. With the rise of social media, you don't need to come to church to find a spiritual community. You can connect, post Bible passages, pray for one another and encourage each other digitally without stepping foot in a place like this. And you can grow! I mean, you can listen to this very same message in the comfort of your own home. You could podcast me at double speed so it'd be over in half the time. You could do devotions, you could open the YouVersion Bible app, you could hear better preachers than me and better music than this without stepping foot in this place.

I'm glad he asked that question and it's a question I want to answer with you today. Before I share with you what I shared with that young man before he left for his freshman year, I want to dive into just one chapter of the Bible that gives us not one and not two, but three solid answers to that question - why gather? Or to travel back about 3,000 years to the ancient songbook of the Bible, the book of Psalms, to a time when God inspired an anonymous author to give us great reasons to gather together in a place like this. It's called Psalm 92; you can find it smack dab in the middle of your Bible. And it begins in a really, really interesting way. Let me show you the introduction of Psalm 92. It says, "A psalm. A song. For the Sabbath day."

That's interesting. There are 150 songs in the book of Psalms but that is the only one that begins with that specific title "For the Sabbath day." And if you know much about the first pages of the Bible, you might remember that Sabbath is a Hebrew word that means rest. And when God gave the 10 Commandments to his people, when he rescued them from their slavery in Egypt, he commanded them to remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. He didn't suggest; he ordered them to take one day, Saturday, every week to rest.

But the question remains: Why? Why did God command it? And why was it the custom of Jesus to do it and why did Peter and Paul and all the people who came to follow Jesus follow in those footsteps? Well, that's what the rest of this psalm is going to answer for us. Let's jump into Psalm 92 and we'll start with the first five verses. The psalmist says, "It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High. Proclaiming your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night, to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp. For you make me glad by your deeds, Lord; I sing for joy at what your hands had done. How great are your works, Lord, how profound your thoughts." The psalmist says, "It is good," and then he

gives us a theme, right? To make music. It is good, he says, to make music to the music of the ten-stringed lyre. He talks about the melody of the harp and he sings for joy. This first compelling reason that he gives is not what I'm doing now but what we've just done in worship to sing. Because there's something powerful about music, isn't there? Five hundred years ago, Martin Luther said that the second best gift that God has given to humankind after the Bible is music; is the way that we're wired to enjoy music. Your genre and your style might vary, your radio station might not be the same as mine, but there's something powerful about music. And it's true not just out there in the world, it's true here for the people of God. In fact, what happens is fruit.

I wonder if some of you Bible Yoda experts in church today noticed that? We've been talking about the fruit of the spirit today. Did anyone notice about the passage behind me? I'll give you a clue; look one more time: "Love, faithfulness, and joy." Three of the nine fruits of the spirit. Galatians 5 says, "The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control." What happens when we make music together? What happens when we sing? It's that the Holy Spirit produces fruit.

But hold up, one sec. If you're a more logical thinker here today, you might realize that I haven't exactly answered my original question because the question was why church? And the power of music and singing the praises of God is something you could do at home, couldn't you? I mean, you could take the same song from tonight's service, you could find the playlist online, you could YouTube it, you could worship, you could like find lessons to learn how to play the ten-stringed lyre and you could do verses one through five in the comfort of your own home, couldn't you? And the answer's "yes" and I hope you do if ten-stringed lyres are still cheap? I don't know; I haven't bought one in a while. We call that the "grow root" but there's still something powerful about being here and singing together and you know it. In fact, let me show you one picture to prove that you know it. This picture. Why is it that some of you would battle the crowds and wait in line and pay \$40 or \$60 or \$100 for good tickets to your favorite band? Are they going to play some shocking new music that you've never heard before? Nope. For free, you could listen to all the favorite songs, you wouldn't have to leave the comfort of your couch, so why do we do it? Why here, in this city, Appleton, Wisconsin, every August do tens of thousands of people pack downtown for a festival called Mile of Music? And you know the answer: Because part of music's power is what happens when we sing it together. When it's not just you in the car, it's not just you in the shower. When there are dozens, if not hundreds, if not thousands of voices joined together, there is power in song.

In fact, in the 1960's, there was this famous preacher and some people asked him if they could record his messages for the radio and do you know what he said? He said, "Only if you record the songs along with it." Because he knew that the message was only half the battle. And yeah, we love podcasts and we support media ministry, but there's something extra - when we can combine the songs and the prayers, the confession, the creed and the message that focuses us on the love of God. So if you're taking notes, here's the psalmist's first argument: Why would we gather? Because gather is music - produces love, faithfulness, and joy; three of the nine fruits of the spirit.

The psalmist continues in the second stanza with these words. He says, "Senseless people do not know, fools do not understand, that though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish, they will be destroyed forever. But you, Lord, are forever exalted. For surely your enemies, Lord, surely your enemies will perish; all evildoers will be scattered. You have exalted my horn like that of a wild ox; fine oils have been poured on me." I hate that that's in the Bible; my wife spends too much money on essential oils but there it is, people, fine oils have been poured on me. "My eyes have seen the defeat of my adversaries; my ears have heard the rout of my wicked foes." You've sensed that too, haven't you? That there are people who do not support the name of Jesus and they don't live out the love of Jesus and sometimes, as he said in verse six, they seem to spring up and they flourish. Go to your job, walk the average high school hallway, look at those who are popular and powerful and it's not always the people who love love or the God of love. Sometimes, you do the right thing and you don't win. Sometimes, nice guys don't finish first.

But what does this psalmist know? That even though evildoers might flourish, in the end only God will be exalted. In the end, all the wicked will be scattered and God and his faithful people will triumph in the end. God knows that lies will not win and racism will not win and bigotry and hate will not win and injustice will not win. When everything is done, when the score is finally settled, only Jesus and his people will win. Which is one of the many reasons why these people gathered. You might know one of the ugliest parts of America's history is when evildoers flourished by breaking the backs of God's black sons and daughters. But what happened after the work on the plantation was done is miraculous, if nothing else. Read the history and you would find white plantation owners who said they were Christian, would open Bibles and force their slaves to come and worship. They would take passages, twist them out of context, and wicked preachers would tell them that kidnapping, racism, torture, abuse and oppression was actually the will of God. But do you know what happened after the sermon was over? Many of those slaves would gather. When the master wasn't there to twist the Scripture, they would gather and they would remember the stories they heard about the God of this book. The God who once saved his enslaved people in Egypt. The God who said that justice would roll like a river. The God of Dr. King and so many like him who lifted up people who were oppressed and victims of injustice and told them that judgment is coming. Evildoers might spring up but in the end, only God will be exalted. And there in broken down old cabins, they sang Negro spirituals. They gathered together and what they might have forgotten out in the field by themselves, they reminded each other that evil will not win. Be faithful and endure to the end because he who stands firm will be saved. He would say that we gather together because gatherers message produces patience and peace.

Which brings us to our final stanza. In the last words of the psalm, the psalmist breaks into perhaps his best words of all. He says, "The righteous will flourish like a palm tree. They will grow like a cedar of Lebanon planted in the house of the Lord. They will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, "The Lord is upright; he is my Rock and there is no wickedness in him."

I almost don't have to preach it, right? What happens? We flourish and we grow and we flourish again and we bear fruit and we stay fresh and we stay green and we find that we have this rock. We become like a cedar of Lebanon. Do you know what that means? My friend Mohammad is

from Lebanon and even still today like in biblical times, the cedar trees grow tall and they last a long time. A hundred feet tall, some of them over a thousand years old, the very cedars that built the temple in Jerusalem in the days of Solomon, that's what you become when you gather.

And do you notice where it happens? In the house of the Lord; a place like this. In the courts of our God; a gathering like this. There's an old hymn that says "On Christ the solid rock I stand because all other ground is shifting sand." You ever notice that when you leave church everything is like shifting sand? You thought you were going to do this this week and then it shifts on you. You thought your boss was going to tell you this and then she shifted on you. You thought your health was like this and it shifted on you. There are so many what ifs and what abouts, we can never be certain; we can never have that fruit of peace in our life - until we remember that God is our rock. That Christ alone is our cornerstone. That Jesus made a promise to us that he would live a perfect life in our place and he did. That he would die on the cross so that you wouldn't have to live with a scarlet letter on your chest and he did. That he would conquer death so that if you're this close to death you wouldn't have to be afraid of it and he did. That he would ascend to the right hand of God and he would rule your city, your block, your street, your zip code and your home for the good of his church and he is. Out there, there's nothing that's certain and no wonder we live with anxiety and fear but here we remind each other there is a Messiah, a Christ, named Jesus and he is faithful to every promise he has made.

And so what do we learn from the final verses? We learn this, our third and final points: That gatherers' Messiah, Jesus Christ, produces fruit. The fruit of peace and joy and love and faithfulness and that - that, brothers and sisters - is why we're here. That's why I hope you come back. That's why I hope if you're listening to the sound of my voice as you drive down the highway, you come for the first time.

That's what Leticia told me. Leticia is one of the many incredible people that serves on my sermon research team. Do you know that I have that? So every time I preach, I send questions and bounce ideas off about 10 people from our church. They give me new things to think about, new perspectives, and I asked our sermon research team about this: Why do you do this? And let me show you what Leticia said. She said, "Not being at church feels empty and wrong. Not in a guilt-type sense, but in that the most important part of the week is missing in a kind of way." I love that! Not some preacher twisting your arm, beating you over the head with a Bible, but how could I miss a chance to remember how incredible God is?

Actually, I didn't finish Leticia's quote; here's what she said next. She said, "I like to be like a squirrel in church. I'll bite and hoard all of the fruit inside my cheeks for a later date." That is an incredible quote. You know, sometimes the message doesn't get you today but you never know what's going to happen tomorrow. And sometimes the song doesn't give you incredible peace in the moment but it will come into your mind on Wednesday when that unexpected news hits. And like spiritual squirrels, we stuff as much Jesus in our cheeks because we know sometime during this week we are desperately going to need him.

So here's my question: What's your next step? For those listening online, maybe your next step is to find a church - this one or some other - that lifts up the name of Jesus and gets you connected. For some of you who are here today, maybe for the first time in your life you're

going to decide that this is the Sabbath and you will keep it holy. That instead of figuring out next weekend if you're busy or if you have time or if people aren't going to be around, this is just going to be a rock solid part of your schedule and your calendar because you believe that you would miss something really important if you weren't here; that this root produces incredible fruit. And if you're ready to make that commitment, I want to help. Here's my promise to you: Next week at church, we're going to have it at the same time, at the same place, the same day of the week. So we'll be here with Jesus if you're ready for more of him.

What about for those of you that I see every Sunday? What's your next step? Well, maybe here's one idea: What if you studied the words of one song before you came? I've noticed this about music - that it can move my heart and it can become my favorite tune but to still actually stop and read the words, I've missed about 90 percent of what the author was trying to communicate. When we publish our playlist, our song list, days before the Sunday service itself, what if you went online and you just picked one of those songs and you read the lyrics and you found the meaning so that when we sang it and we lifted up our voices, we weren't just reading from here; we were singing from here? What about those of you with kids - if you would make a playlist of all four songs so that when you came to church, instead of zoning out and waiting for the pastor to be done talking, they would stand up and they would sing because they know these lyrics and they know this God.

I don't know what your next step is but I know this. That, that root, if you give it enough time, will produce incredible fruit. And that's what I told that 18 year old. "Pastor, why should I keep going to church?" Here's my answer. I said, "You know you're right. You know a lot about Christianity but Christianity isn't just about what you know. It's about how you love." Jesus said the two most important things for a human being would be to love God with their whole hearts, to treasure him and trust him above anything in this world, and to love every single human being, every neighbor as themselves. And I told him, "You have no clue." You have no clue this next year how many things will compete for first place in your heart. How many things - popularity or money or privilege or status or career or money - will fight to take the throne from Jesus in your heart. And you have no clue how hard it's going to be to love; to be on campus with Christians and atheists, with Muslim and Buddhist, with LGBTQ and pansexual. Or people who love the church and hate it. With men and women, with young and old, with republican and democrat and libertarian and everything. You have no clue how hard it will be to love everyone as much as you love yourself. So man, here's what I'm going to tell you - if you want that kind of fruit, don't forget about the root. Your mom and dad have given you 18 years of roots in the gospel of Jesus Christ and so if you have any faith, it's because of that. So don't uproot yourself and expect the same amount of fruit. But if you're ready to have faith and joy and love next year like you have this year, keep your roots.

That young man isn't here today; he's on campus. And I pray that this podcast is not his only connection to Jesus. I pray today and next week and next month he's planted in the house of God. Because here's what I just learned - those who are planted in the house of God will flourish. Even into old age, they will bear fruit. So brothers and sisters, if you want more fruit, do not forget about this gather root.

Let's pray.

Dear God, we thank you for church. I thank you for people who model this as not a burden and an obligation but a privilege; a chance to bless other people and to be blessed by other people. I thank you, God, for everyone who's here today. They may not know it but I was encouraged, I worshipped you, I remembered how worthy you are of all my praise because of their voices and it would not have been the same without them. And so, I pray, God, that we would see this as a high responsibility and a great opportunity for our faith. That we gather here today not just for ourselves but for people who are struggling, people who need to hear the sound of our voice, for young men who come to church who don't have a father in their life and it's going to be the guy who just happens to sit behind them who sings in his deep voice the praises of Jesus Christ. The person who feels guilt and shame for their sexual sin and they show up and see a sexual sinner and know that there is hope in Jesus Christ. For the person from a recovery group who sees that familiar face from the weekly recovery meeting and they know if they can be saved, maybe everyone can.

And so, I pray, God, every week until our health makes it impossible, that we would gather here today, that we would believe you that this root produces incredible fruit. I thank you, God, for our church. I thank you for everyone who encourages us to be here and I pray that you would now keep your promise that this work would not come back empty but it would change us in time to your glory. I pray all these things, God, in your incredible name and everyone who agreed with this prayer joined their voices and they said Amen.



TIME OF GRACE®

Roots and Fruit: Gather Together

Study Notes

Summary

You are not an accident. You are not a slave. That's what God wanted his people to remember every single week of their lives. The Sabbath Day commandment proves that knowing God as your Creator and Savior is one of our Father's highest priorities for us. We gather each week to celebrate those timeless truths—God made us. God saved us. Those facts produce joy and peace deep in our hearts, “fruit” that feeds us throughout our week.

Psalm 92: A psalm. A song. For the Sabbath day.

3 reasons to gather:

- **Psalm 92:1-5:** ¹It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, O Most High, ²proclaiming your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night, ³to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp. ⁴For you make me glad by your deeds, LORD; I sing for joy at what your hands have done. ⁵How great are your works, LORD, how profound your thoughts!
 - Gather's _____ produces _____, _____, and _____.
- **Psalm 92:6-11:** ⁶Senseless people do not know, fools do not understand, ⁷that though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish, they will be destroyed forever. ⁸But you, LORD, are forever exalted. ⁹For surely your enemies, LORD, surely your enemies will perish; all evildoers will be scattered. ¹⁰You have exalted my horn like that of a wild ox; fine oils have been poured on me. ¹¹My eyes have seen the defeat of my adversaries; my ears have heard the rout of my wicked foes.
 - Gather's _____ produces _____ and _____.
- **Psalm 92:12-15:** ¹²The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; ¹³planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. ¹⁴They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, ¹⁵proclaiming, “The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.”

- Gather's _____ produces _____.

Points to Ponder

1. Read Hebrews 10:19-25. What habit were some of the early Christians getting into? How does the author of Hebrews try to persuade them to recommit themselves to gathering in Jesus' name?
2. If your best friends believed they didn't need a church family to follow Jesus personally, what would you say to convince them otherwise? What Bible passages would you turn to in order to make your point more than your own personal opinion?
3. What is your next step to strengthen your Gather root? To put church in your calendar as a repeating event that you will protect in your schedule? To read/study the Scripture and songs before you arrive on Sunday? Other? Whatever your plan, share it with a trusted Christian friend or your group and ask them to ask God to bless it!

Homework for Next Week

Read Jeremiah 17:5-9.

*"You never go away from us, yet we have difficulty in returning to You.
Come, Lord, stir us up and call us back. Kindle and seize us.
Be our fire and our sweetness. Let us love. Let us run."
—Augustine of Hippo, 400 A.D.*