



## 10 Reasons Every Believer Needs The Local Church by John R. Carter



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A *purpose* is a reason for being. Everything God does has a purpose. Everything God has made has a reason for existing. There are specific purposes Jesus intended for His church to accomplish. Knowing those purposes is important for every believer. The *law of purpose* states that unless you know the purpose of a thing, you will be likely to either neglect, misuse, or abuse it. The reason some Christians neglect the local church is because they really don't understand its purpose in their lives.

### Hebrews 10:25 (NLT)

And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

There are many people today who have received God as their Father, love Jesus, and mistakenly think that they can grow spiritually without having to make any formal connection with the local church. Because of technology, it is possible to watch church meetings online, listen to great teaching through electronic means, and interact with others on the internet. While all

of these things are wonderful tools that can supplement our spiritual development, none of them can replace God's purpose for the local church.

It is especially important for we who are called as Christ's ministers to passionately teach God's purposes for the local assembly. In the United States today a new phenomenon is occurring. Believers are forsaking the organized local church in favor of alternative systems of private worship that consider themselves a truer expression of the biblical church. However, upon close examination, these meetings lack some of the key elements that constitute a biblical expression of the local church. Among these are a resistance to recognizing human church authority and an "allergy" to tithing and church building programs.

In many cases they are under the misguided belief that since the New Testament teaches the authority and priesthood of the believer, it is unnecessary to emphasize any special "class" of ministerial authority. While it is certainly true that every believer is a king and priest unto God (1 Peter 2:9), Jesus never intended His church to do away with spiritual authority. In fact Jesus spent 3 and a half years training ministers for His Church, and Paul clearly understood that a biblical church required human leadership by specially called and gifted ministers (Eph. 4:11-12).

Naturally, as leaders of the church, we who occupy that position of special calling are to passionately preach God's purposes for His Church while maintaining the attitude of a servant. After all, biblical leadership *is* servanthood (Matt. 23:11).

**The Lord designed the church as a *distribution system*.** There are many things that Jesus distributes to His people exclusively through the local church. The Lord intended for us to live the transformed life in community together. Knowing the purposes God intends for us in the local church enables us to receive them. Let's look at these purposes.

## **1. Experiencing the Special Presence of Jesus**

When Jesus began teaching about the purpose of His church, He made this statement:

“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20).

Throughout the Scripture, whenever God’s people would gather to worship, God promised a special manifestation of His presence. This is known as the *corporate presence of God*. While the Lord is present inside of each of His children, when we come together to worship as the church, He is present in an even greater way. All throughout the Bible, when God’s people came together in His name, powerful things occurred. Whether it was the dedication of Solomon’s Temple (1 Kings 8:10), the miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), or the sudden healing of a lame man (Acts 14:8-10), the record shows that the Lord longs to manifest special blessings on His gathered people.

When you come to church, expect the Lord to manifest His presence. Know that regardless of what you may feel emotionally or physically, Jesus is there in a special way. Often it is your presence in church and participation in worship by faith that sets the environment for the Holy Spirit to move in the service. He is present to minister to the needs of His family, so attending worship services is a selfless way in which your presence helps to create the environment God uses to move in the lives of *others*.

“*Together, we are his house...We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord...being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit*” (Ephesians 2:20-22 NLT).

## **2. To Make Disciples by Teaching God’s Word**

“All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42 NLT).

“Go therefore *and make disciples of all the nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe* all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’Amen” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Every believer needs to regularly hear the teaching and preaching of God’s Word in order to develop in faith and grow to spiritual maturity. Paul told us

to be “transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). Anointed preaching in the local church is the cornerstone of this transformation.

When the Lord Jesus left the earth, He appointed ministers to lead His church. “And He himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints in the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-12). They are referred to as the *ministry gifts* because Jesus personally chose, called, equipped, and sent them as gifts to minister to the local church.

The primary way these ministers lead the church is through anointed preaching and teaching. If the ministers of the church are Christ’s gifts to us, then we need to receive them in order to reach our potential and fulfill our purpose! There is a difference between reading the Bible on your own and hearing the anointed teaching of God’s Word through the pastors and ministers of the church. When the church gathers to hear God’s Word, the Holy Spirit speaks through the pastor to equip God’s people to transform their lives. The teaching of God’s Word is the most important aspect of the weekly worship event. No matter how long one has been a Christian, we never outgrow our need to be fed by our spiritual shepherd(s) by the living Word of God. The Bible tells us to “remember your leaders who taught you the word of God” (Hebrews 13:7 NLT).

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From the beginning, the church met weekly to hear the teaching of God’s Word (Acts 2:42; 20:7). Because most believers did not have personal copies of the available Scriptures, church meetings involved lots of Bible reading and teaching. The local church was the place the Lord’s “flock” came to be “fed” (1 Peter 5:2). One of the first Christian historians who lived less than one hundred years after the resurrection of Christ was Justin Martyr (AD 100-165). He wrote about the practices of the first believers:

“And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place and memoirs [letters and gospels] of the apostles or the writings of the prophets [Old Testament Scriptures] are read, as long as

time permits. Then, when the reader has ceased, the president [pastor] verbally instructs and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.” (Justin Martyr, First Apology 67, Public Domain.)

## Purposes of Local Church Preaching and Teaching

- **Increases Our Faith**

Paul taught that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). The Greek term translated “word” in this verse is the word *rhema* which means “that which is spoken in the moment.” Paul was teaching that we need to be present to hear the inspired message of the preacher (Romans 10:14-15). When we gather to hear a sermon each week, the Holy Spirit works through the gifts in the pastor to inspire our faith. Strong faith is essential to pleasing God (Hebrews 11:6), receiving answers to our prayers (James 1:6-7), and living a victorious Christian life (1 John 5:4).

- **Enables Spiritual Growth**

“As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2).

Just like a newborn requires the proper diet in order to grow physically, our spirits need the “milk” of God’s Word in order to develop into maturity.

- **Renews Our Minds**

Anointed teaching and preaching can often help us to change our thinking and renew our minds faster than private Bible study alone. The Holy Spirit anoints the pastor to minister God’s word in such a way that it takes deep root in our hearts and minds. The more we hear the preaching of the Word, the more our minds are strengthened in new and better patterns of thinking. Preaching and teaching uproots worldly thinking and replaces wrong and self-destructive thoughts with the inspired revelation of God’s Word. Paul told the Corinthians that when he arrived to preach he was going to “cast down” their unhealthy mental strongholds and take every wrong thought into “captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). This process is critical to our growth.

- **Corrects and Protects Us**

Timothy was a young pastor of the enormous local church in Ephesus. Paul wrote Timothy two letters instructing him how to lead the church effectively. Much of what Paul told Timothy had to do with His teaching and preaching ministry. Paul wrote: “Preach the Word! Keep your sense of urgency [stand by, be at hand and ready], whether the opportunity seems to be favorable or unfavorable. [Whether it is convenient or inconvenient, whether it is welcome or unwelcome, you as preacher of the Word are to show people in what way their lives are wrong.] And convince them, rebuking and correcting, warning and urging and encouraging them, being unflagging and inexhaustible in patience and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2 AMP).

The pastor needs to do more than encourage us. It is also the pastor’s responsibility to correct and warn us. When God speaks correction through the pastor, He is actually protecting us from error and deception (Ephesians 4:14).

- **Provides Prophetic Guidance and Needed Inspiration**

In the Spirit-filled local church, God often speaks through the pastor’s message to address hidden problems or prepare the church for future events. Sometimes the pastor will find himself saying something he did not plan to say. Often the pastor will not know why he is being directed to say things in his message. Later it becomes clear that the Holy Spirit was using the pastor to speak to issues in the congregation or future events that are beyond the scope of the pastor’s knowledge. This is a sign that God loves His people enough to speak personally to a room full of different people at the same time!

As a pastor, I have had several very unusual experiences along these lines. On Mother’s Day, May 13th, 2001, I was a guest at my pastor’s church, Christian Cultural Center in New York City. During the worship service, I had a vision in my spirit. When the senior pastor, Dr. A.R. Bernard sensed the Holy Spirit was speaking to me, he asked me to share what I was seeing in my heart with the congregation. Some of it I shared publicly, and the rest I shared privately after the service with Dr. Bernard. I remember saying, “I see dark clouds rising over the southern end of Manhattan—a great darkness that spreads out over the city and beyond. It feels like a disaster of some sort.” I went on to share that I felt the Lord was going to use Dr. Bernard and the congregation to be a light and help to the city when this event occurred.

Naturally, I felt somewhat strange afterwards because I had no idea what I had seen or whether I was accurate or appropriate in sharing it. The pastor was very gracious and assured me that he had sensed they were preparing for something important as a church—to be a great witness to the city. On September 11th when the planes plunged into the World Trade Center, the congregation remembered the things I had shared and were instantly energized to bring relief. Dr. Bernard was asked by the churches of New York to coordinate a massive relief and recovery plan—helping thousands of New Yorkers rebuild their lives. His sensitivity to the Holy Spirit in recognizing I had a message from the Lord—combined with his great wisdom in leadership—set the stage for the thousands of members of that church to be prepared to bring Christ’s love to a hurting city.

***Not every pastor is used in the same way.*** However, every pastor called by the Lord will be inspired to teach and preach God’s Word in a way that will apply to the needs of the moment, while often preparing the church for things to come as well. By faithfully attending church and listening carefully to the messages that are preached, you will often discover that God is speaking into your life and preparing you for the challenges that lie just ahead. Many times we leave church thinking the message was probably for someone else, only to discover later that week that God was speaking directly to us! Thank God for the supernatural ministry of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Word of God!

“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32 KJV).

### **3. United Worship**

A powerful celebration takes place when believers gather and begin to worship and praise God together. United worship has a transforming effect on those who experience it. Throughout Scripture, we are told to praise and worship God *together* in His assembly.

“I will give You thanks in the great assembly; I will praise You among many people” (Psalm 35:18).

“Praise the Lord! I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation” (Psalm 111:1).

“Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord” (Psalm 134:2).

“I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You” (Hebrews 2:12).

There is nothing quite like the experience of openly participating in united worship in the local church. As believers lay aside their personal struggles and focus on God through music and song, God’s special presence begins to manifest in the church. The Bible says that God inhabits and “sits within” the praises of His people (Psalm 22:3). He often speaks to our hearts and reminds us of His love through His presence. Healing, deliverance, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit may begin to operate in the church as the Lord responds to His people in worship.

United worship is the part of the local church experience that is completely selfless. In true worship, we focus on Christ and His work, giving unrestrained thanks to God. The less we focus on those around us and the more intent we are on fully expressing our hearts to God, the greater our worship experience will be. While any believer may offer praise to God privately, there is something altogether different that happens in us when we openly worship God together in the local church.

“But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel” (Psalm 22:3).

#### **4. United Prayer**

There is something powerful that occurs when believers gather to pray. Each of us needs prayer. It is our living source of communication with our Father. The Bible teaches that we should pray both privately and with others. When the church prays together, there is a multiplication of our power in prayer. The Scriptures teach this principle in the Old Testament (Ecclesiastes 4:9; Deuteronomy 32:30). When Jesus was teaching about the church, He said,

“Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where *two* or *three* are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:19-20).

When the church gathers to pray, Jesus Himself is present and the Father has promised to do whatever is asked of Him. This is an astounding promise for the local church. In the book of Acts, we see that the Holy Spirit was poured out as the church gathered on Sunday to pray in *one accord* (Acts 2:1-4). Then after the church leaders had been threatened, the church gathered to pray, and something supernatural occurred:

“And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31).

Paul told Timothy, pastor of the Ephesian church, “I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them” (1 Timothy 2:1 NLT). In the New Testament, we see that some of the most powerful miracles occurred when the church gathered to pray about the needs of the moment. It is the faith we offer in prayer that moves the heart of God to work on our behalf (Hebrews 11:6; 2 Corinthians 5:7; James 5:14-15; Mark 11:24).

“Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24).

## 5. Fellowship

“All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, *and to fellowship*, and to *sharing in meals* (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer...And all the believers *met together* in one place *and shared everything they had*...They *worshiped together* at the Temple each day, *met in homes* for the Lord’s Supper, and *shared their meals with great joy and generosity*” (Acts 2:42, 44, 46 NLT).

The word translated “fellowship” in this passage means “to partake of something together, to share, to experience intimate relationship with.” One of the most important purposes of a healthy local church is to connect

believers to one another in fellowship. In the verses above, we see that they did not just attend services to hear teaching. They opened their homes, shared their possessions, and ate together with *great joy*. Nearly every change that occurs in our lives for the better or worse comes by way of relationships. People have gravity. That means that they have a certain spiritual, emotional, and natural force of influence. Whether we intend it or not, the people we habitually associate with have gravitational influence on our feelings, thinking, and behavior. The people we associate with will either pull us upwards towards positive transformation or pull us downwards towards negative or distracting patterns of thinking and behaving.

I told my sons as they grew up, “show me your friends and I’ll show you your future.” We become like the people we spend time with. If we are going to transform our lives, we need to discover people who are going in the direction of change we want to establish in our own lives. When a person becomes a believer in Jesus, they need to build genuine relationships with others who love Jesus and are hungry for personal transformation. While we may have many relationships with non-Christians who can help and advise us in natural things, our deepest intimacy needs to be forged with other believers in the local church who are seeking to follow Jesus. Choosing friends and building fellowship in the church is a choice that you must make. Because the church is made up of people from all walks of life, it is important to build quality relationships with different people and open your heart to the diversity of age, race, gender, and social status that make up the body of Christ, the members of the church.

## **6. Sacred Unions and Passings (Marriage and Funeral)**

The local church is the place where believers enter into the sacred covenant of marriage. Today marriage is thought of more as a legal contract issued by secular government. But human governments did not invent marriage. Neither can they change its definition. Christian marriage is a union of one man and one woman through vows of love and commitment made before the families and believers of the local church. The Bible calls marriage such a holy gift from God that everyone is to hold it in high respect (Hebrews 13:4). The Apostle Paul said that marriage was so sacred that it was the closest thing on earth to the special relationship the Jesus has with His people, the church. Marriage is the place that God designed for us to express and enjoy our sexual passions. God’s church is

the place where believers can enter into and learn to enjoy this sacred gift from God.

Naturally, everyone will eventually leave this earth through the passage of physical death. As we learned in chapter seven, the physical body is still mortal, and therefore ages and wears out. Sometimes death occurs unexpectedly, prematurely, or painfully. While God has promised us an abundant life (John 10:10), sooner or later this life will be over for us, as well as for everyone we know and love. This is a sacred passage for the believer as they prepare to enter the presence of God and their heavenly home.

*When a person becomes a believer in Jesus, they need to build genuine relationships with others who love Jesus and are hungry for personal transformation.* It is also a time of great emotion, as surviving family, friends, and co-workers endeavor to make the difficult adjustments of living their lives without their loved one. It is in these moments that the local church should be at her very best—a place believers go for comfort, counsel, as well as natural and spiritual support. The ministers of the church conduct special services for the families and friends of those who die, and offer perspective and hope to the living. At these moments, we need the body of Christ. We need living relationships with a visible community of faith to mark life's passages with dignity and meaning.

All of these passages of life—birth, marriage, raising families, facing tribulation, and physical death—are events for which God has provided the local church as a means of celebration, support, healing, and restoration.

## **7. Exercise of Spiritual Gifts**

“God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another” (1 Peter 4:10 NLT).

When you were born again, you received at least one spiritual gift from the Lord. That gift was designed to be used in the local church. Some people imagine that their spiritual gifts are the same as their natural talents. We all have natural abilities that we may use to help others and serve the church. But the gifts spoken of here are given to the believer for ministry to others in the local church. They are spiritual in nature and come from the Holy

Spirit. Every place in the New Testament where spiritual gifts are mentioned, they are always mentioned for use within the local church between believers. Not a single time in scripture are our spiritual gifts given for ministry to the unbeliever. Not once.

“A spiritual gift is given to each of us *so we can help each other*...It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have...*All of you together are Christ’s body*, and each of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:7, 11, 27 NLT).

“Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ’s body. We are many parts of one body, and *we all belong to each other*. In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well” (Romans 12:4-6 NLT).

One of the most important purposes of the local church is to discover and learn about spiritual gifts so that you can use the one or two that God has given you. He gives these gifts for use in the local church body. Someday we will have to give an account for what we did with our spiritual gifts as “good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10).

## **8. Evangelism: A Visible Witness of the Kingdom of God**

When Jesus introduced the church, He said, “I will build my church...And I will give you *the keys of the kingdom of heaven*, and whatever you bind *on earth* will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose *on earth* will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:18-19). He was indicating that the church would have authority on earth to manifest God’s kingdom to the world. Jesus was not just giving the keys of God’s kingdom to Peter or the first disciples. Nor should we understand this passage to apply to individual believers alone. He was giving these keys to the church as a collective community. He was stating that God’s invisible kingdom would be “unlocked” on earth through the ministry of the visible church.

When Jesus’ ascended to heaven He left a visible “body” on earth to carry on His work—the church. The local church stands in Jesus’ place as the visible representation of the invisible God and His eternal kingdom. Every genuine church congregation in each generation throughout the world is a visible witness to the unsaved community of God’s love and salvation

through Jesus Christ. As we gather together to joyously worship, attentively learn, powerfully pray, participate in sacred events, and lovingly serve one another, God's kingdom becomes manifest as a witness to the world.

The local church should also organize to meet the needs of their generation in a practical way. No religious group in history has been more creative, more generous, or more effective in sharing its message. The first schools, hospitals, orphanages, elder care facilities, and disaster relief agencies were started by, or in the name of, the church of Jesus Christ. Modern science was a result of Christian thinkers seeking to explore the physical world as an act of worship to God. No religious faith has spent more of its own resources on relieving the suffering of humankind—particularly the suffering of those who are outside its faith. Christians have been on the cutting edge of technology throughout the ages to spread the message of Jesus. Massive public preaching events, books, radio, television, movies, internet, and every form of creative arts have been used to share Jesus with the world. Some of the finest paintings, sculptures, architectural marvels, songs, operas, and musical genres, have been inspired by a love for Jesus and His church.

While it is the responsibility of every believer to share their faith with others through personal testimony, it is our collective witness of mutual love and worship that is the greatest force for evangelism in the world. Jesus said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

## **9. Spiritual Covering and Accountability**

We all need a roof over our heads. That is true physically and spiritually. The local church provides *spiritual covering* for people of God. A covering is not for the purpose of controlling or caging the people in its care. It is designed for protection, safety, and securing an environment for healthy personal growth. The local church is a community of believers who are living transparently with one another under the oversight and covering of spiritual leaders. The pastor, elders, and leaders of the church are responsible "for...constantly keeping watch over your souls and guarding your spiritual welfare, as men who will have to render an account" (Hebrews 13:17 AMP).

Every member of the body of Christ needs the spiritual covering of the local church and pastor. This “covering” is like a shelter in the midst of a world that is filled with deception, temptation, and demonic activity. There is a supernatural grace that connects members of the church to each other and their pastor(s) and leaders. Regardless of how long you have been a Christian or how gifted you may be, a believer should always seek to operate under the safety of a biblical spiritual covering in the local church.

## **10. Participation in Sacred Events (Sacraments and Ordinances)**

Last, but certainly not least, of the ten purposes for the local church is so that believers can participate in sacraments and ordinances. The word *sacrament* comes from a Latin word that means a “sacred or holy practice.” The word *ordinance* means a “commandment or sacred ritual.” Church groups sometimes use these words differently to describe various practices within their church communities. However, there are two special events that Christians agree should take a special place in the life of the local church: water baptism and Holy Communion, or the Lord’s Supper as it is sometimes called. Additionally, the Bible teaches there is special ordinance of the church called *the laying on of hands*. Each of these three holy experiences are given to the local church for the purpose of experiencing and building the transformed life.

This article is an excerpt adapted from *The Transformed Life*, by John R Carter. *The Transformed Life* is powerful discipleship tool that is designed to help believers experience personal transformation through a dynamic relationship with Jesus and the local church. *The Transformed Life* is now available for purchase through Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and [Transformedlifenow.com](http://Transformedlifenow.com).