

PERSPECTIVE

JUNE 2021

serving other churches:

the reality

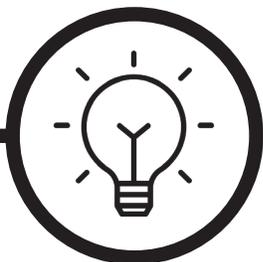
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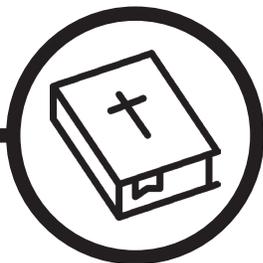
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Serving Other Churches: The Reality
Aaron Menikoff



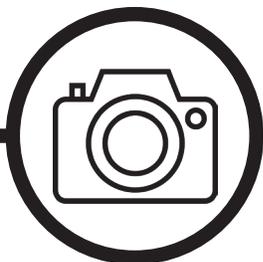
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Serving Other Churches: The Reality

This year, we are thinking and praying and talking about serving other churches. We do this by knowing, encouraging, strengthening, and sharing, all for the sake of the gospel. Our heartbeat behind this vision is the Bible. We often hear we aren't to live the Christian life alone. This is true, and it is just as true that churches aren't to go about ministry alone either. We are to be known and cared for by other churches. Unfortunately, we are highly individualistic people, so lessons like this take a long time to sink in.

I've wanted to showcase the importance and value of serving other churches by publishing interviews with local and international church partners. These are churches we have tried to serve and churches who, along the way, have been an unusual blessing to us. For example, last month, we had the privilege of reading about Josh Manley and his work as the senior pastor of Ras al Khaimah Evangelical in the UAE. This month, I had hoped to publish another interview with a partner we have in Central Asia.

Something happened.

The government of our partner's host country intervened and just asked him and his family to leave the country. As I type out these words, he is having to figure out whether to heed this order—which may be in the best interest of the larger team—or fight with a lawyer and see if somehow he can stay in the country he has learned to call home among a people group he is desperate to see call upon the name of the Lord.

A SIMPLE REMINDER

Perhaps this is a good time for us to take a step back and remember how hard it is to see the gospel go forth among unreached and unengaged people groups in the twenty-first century. The challenges are steeper than Everest. We know theologically that our "adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). But are we just as aware that the machinations of the devil include doing all he can to hit the brakes on the Great Commission?

Our friend overseas left a good church, a stable future, and an opportunity to evangelize and disciple in the States because he believed God would have him line up his ministry closer to Romans 15:20, where Paul wrote, "and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on

someone else's foundation" (Rom. 15:20). The devil hates this strategic, selfless, and Christ-honoring mentality.

The devil's ministry is one of containment. He knows he can't get rid of the church. He knows God is far more powerful than he is. He knows he cannot wish the church out of existence—as much as he might try. The devil knows Jesus's words in Matthew 16:18, "the gates of hell shall not prevail against" the church. The devil can't get rid of the church, so instead, he tries to contain it. If he can keep congregations isolated from each other, if he can keep church members at odds with each other, if he can keep us occupied with ourselves and our careers and our sports and our retirement plans—so occupied we don't have time to think about going where Christ has yet to be named, so occupied we don't have time to serve other churches working where Christ has barely been named—if the devil can keep us focused on our own naval and not the proclamation of the gospel among the nations, he has done all he needs to do to slam on the brakes and bring the Great Commission to a screeching halt.

I have no doubt, therefore, that the devil is at work in our friend's situation. Satan couldn't keep this dear family from moving overseas in the first place, but once there, he has undoubtedly been trying for years to get him off the field.

Here's the reminder: we are engaged in a spiritual war of global proportions. Satan's fight is not merely with our personal holiness; he is opposed to the corporate witness and global outreach of the church of the living God. He is fighting tooth and nail to keep missionaries away from hard places where false gods reign in the hearts of blind sinners. The simple reminder is summarized by Paul in Ephesians 5:12, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

Right now, I feel this reminder painfully and acutely as our partners ponder the possibility they will be packing their bags in just a few days.

NOT AN ISOLATED EVENT

The potential expulsion of our friend is not an isolated event. We have other partners who have committed themselves to serving in East Asia. They've learned the language, made friends, established churches, trained locals, and strategized how to multiply ministry in a part of the world that may, in fact, represent the future of the missionary movement.

It all came to a stop a few months ago. Covid-19 became a

convenient excuse for the government to tighten its reign against any and all unauthorized religious groups. As a result, more than one ministry partner had to flee with no guarantee of returning to a field of missions that had proven so fruitful these past several years.

Right now, these families are hunkered down in the states begging God to open a door and allow them to return. They need our financial support and our personal encouragement. Our brothers and sisters who have been forced to flee stand in a long line of persecuted Christians who take their cues from the Apostle Paul:

Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily anxiety for all the churches (2 Cor. 11:24–28).

Not only did Paul suffer physically, he suffered knowing that many, if not all, of the churches God used him to plant faced persecution themselves.

The world is filled with nations that do not want to see healthy, flourishing Christian churches. They do not value religious liberty, and they are laboring hard to expel Christian workers. The believers who leave undoubtedly worry about the underground churches that remain. They know Paul's pain; they experience "daily anxiety for all the churches."

One such believer is our friend, Nordine, who pastors in Algeria. It has been over a year since the government *literally* locked the doors of his meeting place and forced all Spring of Life Church members underground. From North Africa to the Middle East, to Central Asia, to East Asia, we have brothers and sisters—family we will see in heaven—prohibited from publicly worshipping our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In other words, what is *currently* happening to our partner in Central Asia is not an isolated event.

AN OLD STORY

It's important to understand that what is being experienced today by our brothers and sisters is really nothing new. As you read your New Testament, you realize that the

earliest persecution came from the Jewish people who did not want to make room for what they considered a blasphemous sect of Judaism called Christianity.

Before long, opposition to Christianity spread from beyond the synagogue and Sanhedrin to the very halls of power within the Roman Empire. When a fire raged in Rome in July of AD 64, emperor Nero accused the Christians of setting the city ablaze. This led to the arrest and execution of Christians, perhaps even the Apostle Peter. Is it any wonder, then, that before he died, Peter exhorted fellow believers to suffer well "so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame" (1 Pet. 3:16).

In the first century, Roman officials increasingly saw Christians as a threat to the Empire. Christians demanded allegiance to Jesus Christ. He was to be their only hope and their chief satisfaction. They taught that to be a Christian one needed to be a follower of Christ, first and foremost. Of course, the apostles went to great lengths to remind Christians that obedience to Jesus includes respecting secular authorities. "Honor the emperor," wrote Peter (1 Pet. 2:17).

But scriptural calls to be faithful citizens rang hollow in the ears of the Roman leaders. They concluded that Christians couldn't want the well-being of the Empire since they refused to bow the knee and worship the Roman gods. A historian of the early church, Michael Haykin, summarized the Roman attitude this way in his book, *Rediscovering the Church Fathers*:

It was, after all, the Roman gods who kept the empire secure. But the Christians refused to worship these gods—thus the charge of "atheism" that was sometimes leveled at [Christians]. Therefore, many of their pagan neighbors reasoned, they could not love the emperor or the empire's inhabitants. Christians were thus viewed as fundamentally anti-Roman and so a positive danger to the empire.

Nothing much has changed, really. Again, this is the devil's plan. The church is a fire he can't put out, but he will do all he can to keep it from spreading. Throughout history, his plan has been one of containment. By convincing secular authorities Christianity is not good for society's overall well-being, they are motivated to do all they can to silence and expel our brothers and sisters in Christ. It has always been this way.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US?

How does one fight the works of the devil? How do we

labor, from the comfortable environs of Atlanta, to spur on the good work of global evangelization when the partners we know and love are being pushed out of the ring? Scripture is our guide here.

First and foremost, we each need to personally resist the Evil One: “Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world” (1 Pet. 5:9). Thus, each of us has a personal war to wage against the devil and his schemes. We are all called to resist.

But how do we resist? Peter signals two courses of action. The first course is to be firm in your faith. Be a theologian. Know the Bible. Be an Ezra who studies, does, and teaches the Word of God. If we are flabby in our faith, we will be picked off the moment suffering comes our way. The second course is to keep an eye on what is happening to our brothers and sisters around the world. Let their righteous suffering serve as an example to us. If we are suffering here in Atlanta—and we are, members of Mount Vernon are being pressured by employers to let go of Christian convictions—keep in mind nothing unusual is taking place. Our brothers and sisters across time and space have faced similar trials.

Second, pray. Having clothed yourself with gospel armor (Eph. 6:13–17), you are ready to be a Christian who is “praying at all time in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication” (Eph. 6:18). Our partners need our prayers. This is something we can give them—we can offer up our prayers of supplication for their safety, for their joy, and for open doors to make Christ known in some of the hardest, darkest, least-hospitable corners of the world.

Dear church family, almost every day, I speak to a member of MVBC who confesses he’s struggling to pray consistently. Can I call you to action? Grab ahold of our Sending MVBC brochure and use it. Please use it! Commit yourself to starting an Ephesians 6:18 ministry. We are called to serve other churches by knowing, encouraging, strengthening, and sharing, all for the sake of the gospel. May all this work be built on a foundation of zealous and constant prayer.

A WORD OF HOPE

I entitled this article “Serving Other Churches: The Reality” because the reality is serving other churches can be really, really hard. As you can see from this vague description of our partners being forced out of their country, building the church is not easy. That’s why we’re to pray and entrust this work to the hands of our strong and powerful God.

As you put this article aside, please don’t be discouraged. Remember the words in Hebrews that teach us all of creation, including God’s church, depends on the Lord himself: “For every house is built by someone, but the builder is God” (Heb. 3:4). Partners we know and love will be persecuted, harassed, and even expelled. Nonetheless, we can be sure God is building his church in hard-to-reach places around the world. He will not fail. He is the Lord.

– Aaron Menikoff

One Assembly: Rethinking the Multisite and Multiservice Church Models

Written by Jonathan Leeman

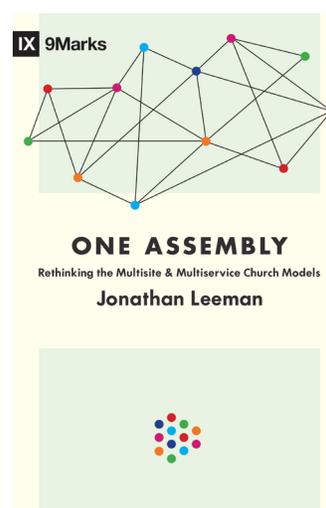
In *One Assembly*, Jonathan Leeman considers how the church is an *ekklesia*, or assembly, of God's people. Leeman examines the modern-day reality of many large churches. He argues that when a church separates itself into multiple services or multiple sites, it has created multiple assemblies and thus multiple churches. He suggests the model of multisite or multiservice churches redefines the meaning of church that is found with clear consistency throughout the New Testament.

While Leeman's focus is fixed on a repudiation of the multisite and multiservice models, *One Assembly* rings with an enthusiastic affirmation of what it means to be an assembly of God's people. Leeman provides the helpful analogy that the usage of *ekklesia* in the New Testament is similar to the way we use the word "team" today. A team is defined by the act of gathering together for a common cause: a team that never plays together isn't a team. Likewise, Christians must gather together at one time and in one place to be a church. This gathering, this church, is a physical manifestation of the kingdom of heaven, each one an embassy of God's heavenly kingdom here on earth.

Still, some may wonder how a church is to respond as its pews fill up. Rather than resorting to a multisite or multiservice expansion in the face of church growth, Leeman calls for churches to be more catholic. That is, for churches to intentionally consider ways they can work in partnership with local sister churches. When in partnership with other local churches, one church can joyfully recommend alternative churches to visitors who are struggling to find a seat. Should the Lord continue to provide growth to a congregation, this catholic mindedness may also manifest in a peaceful division of a church, perhaps providing an infusion of faithful members to a struggling congregation or a new church planted in an underserved location.

In *One Assembly*, Jonathan Leeman has struck a careful balance between clear presentation and deep consideration, making this book an edifying read for pastors and church members alike. The examination of the biblical meaning of "church" proves to be more than an implication for the way we structure our assemblies; it provides the Christian a lens through which the Christian views their role as a part of the assembled people of God.

– RECOMMENDED BY EVAN HARRISON



Excerpts From the Book

1

"To put it another way: *there is no such thing as a multisite or multiservice church* based on how the Bible defines a church. They don't exist. Adding a second site service, by the standards of Scripture, gives you two churches, not one. Two assemblies, separated by geography or numbers on a clock, give you two churches."

– Introduction, p.17

2

"The church gathering is where the nations of the earth can step inside the kingdom of heaven, the embassy of the eschaton. And it's where the citizens of that kingdom wield authority."

– A Church Is the Geography of Christ's Kingdom, p.42

3

"Or here's a doozy that my friend Andy once preached: if you pray for revival and it comes to the church down the street, do you rejoice?"

– A Church Should Be Catholic, p.103

What If I Don't Feel Like Going to Church?

Written by Gunner Gundersen

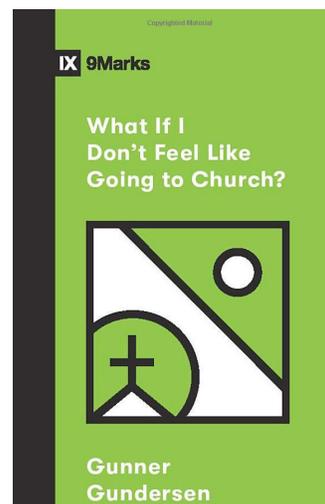
If you find yourself in a season where going to church feels more like a task than it does a delight, then Gunner Gundersen's *What If I Don't Feel Like Going to Church?* is for you. Gundersen begins by saying, "the most important time to be at church is when you don't feel like it" (9). He argues that whether or not the member believes their presence contributes to the well-being of the church, it is true that every Christian is not just an individual Christian but part of a body. Gundersen offers a couple of questions to consider: What is the church, and what kind of presence do you offer?

First, what is the church? When we are saved, we become part of the universal church, and we are called to be a part of a local church—or a "covenant community." When joining a local church, we are covenanting with Christ and one another. In the good times and bad, we are "not neglecting to meet together, as in the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as we see the Day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:25). Gundersen puts it plainly: "Commitment strengthens us by making us shoulder responsibilities toward other people – especially when we don't feel like it" (27). Our commitment to the church should not depend on our preferences but on our responsibility to serve the saints and grow in Christlikeness.

Second, what kind of presence do you offer? It isn't every Sunday that you wake up bright-eyed and bushy-tailed to gather. You may be facing tension in a relationship with another member, or maybe you've been arguing with your spouse all week. Regardless of the circumstance, we all show up to church with a certain kind of presence. Gundersen encourages the reader to show up with a presence that is consistent, honest, humble, unified, discerning, active, forgiving, and prepared. But he also soberly reminds us that we all show up with an imperfect presence.

Now that our church is regathering, I can imagine it may be hard for some to get back into the groove of regular church attendance. I highly recommend this short book because it explains why showing up to church is less about us and more about the entire congregation. The author ends by exhorting his readers, "The reasons you don't feel like going to church might be good, bad, or ugly. But, as a fellow sheep loved by the same Shepherd, I'm asking you to trust God, ask for grace, and go" (51).

– RECOMMENDED BY CARLI ANDERSON



Excerpts From the Book

1

"No temple stands firm when its quarried stones refuse to stick together."

– What is the Church?, p.24

2

"It's easy to slip into thinking that worship services are mainly for *me*. But they're actually sacred gatherings where God feeds us *all* with his grace and renews our devotion both to him and to each other."

– A Covenant Family, p.27

3

"Consistency is one of the most underrated weapons in our walk with God."

– Consistent Persistence, p.32

JUNE

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

June 1	Mark 3:22–35	June 17	Nehemiah 6
June 2	Mark 4:1–20	June 18	Nehemiah 7
June 3	Mark 4:21–41	June 19	2 Corinthians 11:21–33
June 4	Mark 5:1–20	June 20	Nehemiah 4–7
June 5	Jeremiah 31:1–8	June 21	Nehemiah 8:1–12
June 6	Mark 8:22–26	June 22	Nehemiah 8:13–18
June 7	Nehemiah 1	June 23	Nehemiah 9:1–25
June 8	Nehemiah 2:1–8	June 24	Nehemiah 9:26–38
June 9	Nehemiah 2:9–20	June 25	Nehemiah 10
June 10	Nehemiah 3:1–13	June 26	Colossians 1:24–29
June 11	Nehemiah 3:14–32	June 27	Nehemiah 8–10
June 12	Mark 1:29–39	June 28	Nehemiah 11:1–24
June 13	Nehemiah 1–3	June 29	Nehemiah 11:25–36
June 14	Nehemiah 4:1–14	June 30	Nehemiah 12:1–26
June 15	Nehemiah 4:15–23		
June 16	Nehemiah 5		

***Sermons in bold**

TAKE UP & READ

NEW MEMBERS



**Moses
Kangah**



**Sesame
Kangah**



**Allison
Leffler**



**Clay
Mimbs**



**Caleb
Oliver**



**Chase
Waddington**



Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH