WHEN THE LOCAL CHURCH FEELS UNNECESSARY by David Diestelkamp

What if we, way in the back of our minds, have kind of liked not assembling with the church during the pandemic? Maybe it’s just the slower pace of Sunday mornings, or more family time, or just the freshness of change of online studies. Maybe there’s a slight disappointment when church assemblies start again, a feeling of not being ready yet. We have missed the people, but not the worship or the sermons or the work or the serving. Or maybe we haven’t missed each other all that much and Zoom meetings feel good enough. An uncomfortable thought pops up: The local church feels unnecessary.

**It’s about God.** Serving God can easily slip into serving in a way that respects our likes and preferences over His. We have to remind ourselves that assemblies are about God and His will, not “me” and “my” will.

God knows that when we’re together it is a great time to “stir up love and good works…” and to exhort one another (He 10:25). Assemblies are a great time to remember our Lord in the Lord’s supper (1 Co 11:17-34). Assemblies are a great time to focus on the text of Scripture (Co 4:16), to pray and sing. Assemblies can even be an opportunity for spiritual warnings, discipline to remove evil influences and to save the erring (1 Co 5:4-5).

Some may suggest that what they’ve done at home has even been more helpful and meaningful, more intimate than what is done in a church assembly. God says there is value in assembling and so we will make it about Him by assembling. However, if assemblies are not edifying, we need to be present to help make them edifying. The Corinthians were not told to stay home because their assemblies were chaotic (1 Co 14:26) and divisive (1 Co 11:18-19). Our positive experiences at home during the pandemic can teach us what we should have been doing at home all along, and we can also bring what we learned to make assemblies more edifying.

**It’s about others.** Most discovered that, with a little creativity (like home delivery), we could be self-sufficient during the pandemic (of course, not really since we all depend on supply chains). Maybe we will be tempted to feel this spiritually—that we don’t need one another.

A lot of “one another” things happen when the church assembles. Others need you to stir them up, edify and exhort them, and set an example for them. Although the relationships, forbearing, submission, and cooperation that assemblies require can be challenging, local church assemblies give us opportunities to express our love in all these things!

**It’s about me.** We are often not the best judges of our own spiritual needs. We may need the stirring up and exhortation of an assembly (He 10:24-25) without realizing it. A group brings a wealth of knowledge, wisdom, and experience to worship and studies. Assembling gives us an opportunity to have fellowship, to literally not be alone in serving the Lord. The Lord values this and so we value it too.

I heard a brother recently lament that “Satan is sifting us” with this pandemic. It’s an allusion to Satan’s request to test Simon Peter in Luke 2:31. Assembling with local churches at this time may be a test of Satan. We may find assemblies to be awkward, non-traditional, uncomfortable, distracting, less connective, and maybe less edifying than in the past. Giving up on assembling isn’t the answer. The Lord has made assembling with the church important. Now it is up to us to make it equally important to ourselves.

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