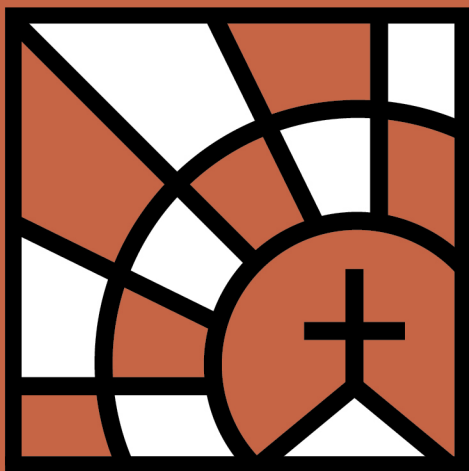


**IX** 9Marks

# How Can I Make the Most of Sunday Services?



**Erin  
Wheeler**

**Church Questions**

## **Endorsements for the Church Questions Series**

“Christians are pressed by very real questions. How does Scripture structure a church, order worship, organize ministry, and define biblical leadership? Those are just examples of the questions that are answered clearly, carefully, and winsomely in this new series from 9Marks. I am so thankful for this ministry and for its incredibly healthy and hopeful influence in so many faithful churches. I eagerly commend this series.”

**R. Albert Mohler Jr.**, President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Sincere questions deserve thoughtful answers. If you’re not sure where to start in answering these questions, let this series serve as a diving board into the pool. These minibooks are winsomely to-the-point and great to read together with one friend or one hundred friends.”

**Gloria Furman**, author, *Missional Motherhood* and *The Pastor’s Wife*

“As a pastor, I get asked lots of questions. I’m approached by unbelievers seeking to understand the gospel, new believers unsure about next steps, and maturing believers wanting help answering questions from their Christian family, friends, neighbors, or coworkers. It’s in these moments that I wish I had a book to give them that was brief, answered their questions, and pointed them in the right direction for further study. Church Questions is a series that provides just that. Each booklet tackles one question in a biblical, brief, and practical manner. The series may be called Church Questions, but it could be called ‘Church Answers.’ I intend to pick these up by the dozens and give them away regularly. You should too.”

**Juan R. Sanchez**, Senior Pastor, High Pointe Baptist Church, Austin, Texas

“Where can we Christians find reliable answers to our common questions about life together at church—without having to plow through long, expensive books? The Church Questions booklets meet our need with answers that are biblical, thoughtful, and practical. For pastors, this series will prove a trustworthy resource for guiding church members toward deeper wisdom and stronger unity.”

**Ray Ortlund**, President, Renewal Ministries

How Can I  
Make the Most of  
Sunday Services?

## Church Questions

*Can Women Be Pastors?*, Greg Gilbert

*Does It Matter What I Believe?*, Samuel James

*Does the Gospel Promise Health and Prosperity?*, Sean DeMars

*Does the Old Testament Really Point to Jesus?*, David M. King

*How Can I Be Sure I'm Saved?*, Jeremy Pierre

*How Can I Begin to Teach the Bible?*, David Helm

*How Can I Encourage My Pastors?*, Carmyn Zamora

*How Can I Get More Out of My Bible Reading?*, Jeremy Kimble

*How Can I Grow in Hospitality?*, Keri Folmar

*How Can I Love Church Members with Different Politics?*, Jonathan Leeman and Andy Naselli

*How Can I Make the Most of Sunday Services?*, Erin Wheeler

*How Can I Serve My Church?*, Matthew Emadi

*How Can Women Thrive in the Local Church?*, Keri Folmar

*How Do I Disciple Others?*, J. Garret Kell

*How Do I Fight Sin and Temptation?*, J. Garret Kell

*How Do I Get Started in Evangelism?*, Mack Stiles

*Is God Really Sovereign?*, Conrad Mbewe

*Is Hell Real?*, Dane Ortlund

*Should I Be a Missionary?*, Andy Johnson

*What Do Deacons Do?*, Juan Sanchez

*What If I'm Discouraged in My Evangelism?*, Isaac Adams

*What If I've been Hurt by My Church?*, Daniel P. Miller

*What Is a Church?*, Matthew Emadi

*What Is the Church's Mission?*, Jonathan Leeman

*What Should I Do Now That I'm a Christian?*, Sam Emadi

*What Should I Look for in a Church?*, Alex Duke

*Who's in Charge of the Church?*, Sam Emadi

*Why Should I Be Baptized?*, Bobby Jamieson

*Why Should I Give to My Church?*, Jamie Dunlop

*Why Should I Join a Church?*, Mark Dever

# How Can I Make the Most of Sunday Services?

Erin Wheeler

## *How Can I Make the Most of Sunday Services?*

© 2025 by 9Marks

Published by Crossway  
1300 Crescent Street  
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law. Crossway® is a registered trademark in the United States of America.

Cover image and design: Jordan Singer

First printing 2025

Printed in the United States of America

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. The ESV text may not be quoted in any publication made available to the public by a Creative Commons license. The ESV may not be translated in whole or in part into any other language.

All emphases in Scripture quotations have been added by the author.

Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-9150-1

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-9152-5

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-9151-8

---

### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Wheeler, Erin, author.

Title: How can I make the most of Sunday services? / Erin Wheeler.

Description: Wheaton, Illinois : Crossway, 2025. | Series: Church questions |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024018889 (print) | LCCN 2024018890 (ebook) | ISBN

9781433591501 (trade paperback) | ISBN 9781433591518 (pdf) | ISBN

9781433591525 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Public worship. | Lord's Supper. | Church attendance.

Classification: LCC BV5 .W45 2025 (print) | LCC BV5 (ebook) | DDC

264—dc23/eng/20240711

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024018889>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024018890>

---

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

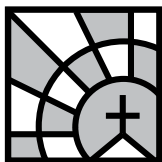
BP		34	33	32	31	30	29	28	27	26	25			
15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

For a day in your courts is better  
than a thousand elsewhere.  
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the  
house of my God  
than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

Psalm 84:10







Growing up, my Sunday mornings typically began by watching my parents figure out which service our family would attend. Once they decided, my siblings and I, bleary-eyed from waking up late, raced each other to the car. I'd scramble into the vehicle with wet hair from the shower I managed to squeeze in 10 minutes before. Once we arrived, I sang along quietly while the praise band belted their original tunes—they seemed to have a new song every week. I'd listen to the sermon while also wondering what we were going to eat for lunch—after all, I'd clearly gotten up too late for breakfast.

After marrying my husband Brad, we began looking for a new church. What were we looking for? We knew we wanted the word of God to be central, but we really didn't know what that should look like. We also wanted a certain "feeling" in the service but didn't know how to put that particular conviction into words.

We eventually landed in a pew at a church in Washington, DC. If we were going for a "feeling," this place didn't have it. I stumbled my way through old hymns, creeds, and antiphonal Scripture readings. It was the furthest thing from my casual California church upbringing. I felt out-of-place and confused—and yet, something drew us back week after week. Every part of the service had a purpose. Evident joy filled the room as the congregation loudly sang each song. The people clearly revered God's word, and they hung around for what seemed like forever after the service ended, talking about the sermon, praying for each other, confessing sin, and sharing struggles.

But what caught our attention most was what was happening inside us. We were growing like we never had before.

We joined the church and began to understand what the Bible says about God's design for the local church. We grew more excited about gathering with our church family each week, seeking to make the most of our Sunday mornings together. Over time, we began to see the importance of participating and serving, not just observing and consuming.

What about you? How do you think about the local church, particularly its corporate worship? Are you confused about what happens in your church? Are you bored? Do you feel like you're not getting much out of the service? Do you know what God's word says should be prioritized when the church gathers? Maybe your church has gone through some changes and you wish things could just go back to the way things were!

Read on, friend, this booklet is for you.

My hope is that in the following pages you'll see how God has designed corporate worship, why it matters for your spiritual health, and how you can make the most out of Sunday services.

But before we get there, we need to learn a fundamental lesson: corporate worship is just not about you.

### **It's Just Not about You**

I work as a nurse. At our monthly staff meeting, we review our hospital's vision statement. It can feel rote, but it actually reminds us how each employee contributes to the larger goal. Vision statements keep first things first. If you know *why* you're doing what you're doing, then you're better equipped to choose the right actions to meet that goal.

The Bible gives local churches a “vision” for what they should prioritize, particularly in corporate worship. Unfortunately, too many Christians develop their own personal vision statements and then impose them on the local church. We think the church exists to cater to our preferences or to give us a certain “feeling” or “experience” of worship. But corporate worship isn't meant to cater to our desires.

It's just not about us.

Our church's gatherings are ultimately about God. We worship according to his desires, not ours. When we gather we should be governed by God's word, not our preferences.

The Bible indicates that there are two ways you can commit the sin of idolatry. The first way is to worship something other than God: Molech, Marduk, a statue, your beauty, money, success, a happy family, or any other thing, good or bad, that's not God. The second way to commit idolatry—one we regrettably give far less attention to—is to worship God the wrong way. Many Christians are careful to avoid the first path to idolatry but are often unaware of this second path.

As a result, we let entertainment culture, tradition, or personal preferences dictate what we do in church. But orchestrating our corporate worship around tradition, what we “like,” or what makes us “feel” close to God isn't just unfaithful, it's self-destructive. It's like a little kid who pulls a stool up to the stove, turns the range on high heat, and proceeds to throw a Cadbury candy creme egg into the pan in an attempt to

make scrambled eggs according to his way and by “hissself.” It’s just plain foolish, not to mention dangerous and messy!

So the first thing you need to do to make the most of the Sunday service is recognize that it isn’t about you. It’s about worshipping God in the way he commands and according to his desires. We’ll talk more about what that looks like a bit later. But for now, let’s just get this point down. Corporate worship isn’t about having a souped-up quiet time in the company of other Christians. It’s about gathering with God’s people, checking our preferences at the door, and worshipping the one true God in the way he commands.

### **Corporate Worship, Not Entertainment Weekly**

We can make the most of corporate worship if we understand why we’re there in the first place. And praise God, he hasn’t left us alone to figure it out!

Scripture repeatedly shows us that God assembles his people for the express purpose of

exalting him and edifying one another. Before the coming of Christ, Israel—God’s people under the Old Covenant—gathered at the tent of meeting (Ex. 40:34) or the tabernacle in the wilderness (Num. 9:15) to worship him. They assembled to worship at the temple (1 Kings 8:1–11). They also assembled to praise God for the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem (Ezra 3:10–13). They listened to God’s word being publicly read (Luke 4:16). In the new covenant, the church continued this pattern of gathering to worship God corporately. They assembled together in local churches to devote themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to pray, to sing, and to celebrate the Lord’s Supper (Acts 2:42–47). God has always gathered his people so that they would exalt him *together*.

Why does God gather his people to worship him? Consider these two reasons.

### *1. We Gather to Edify*

First, gathering encourages and edifies the saints. When we’re together doing what God



has called us to do, we build one another up in our most holy faith (Jude 20).

When God saves us, he saves us into the church—the family of God. Like a family, each person contributes to the welfare of the home. The same is true for the church. As members of the same family, we gather each week to help one another and contribute to the well-being of the church. Yet many view corporate worship as consumers, not providers. But when the Bible talks about the church, it doesn't talk about “me” and “them” but about “us.” The church is an “us”—a family gathered to worship and serve.

As Paul taught, the church is one body with many parts (1 Cor. 12:20). You might have a more public role or you might serve in quiet, unseen ways like making coffee or restocking the bathroom paper towels. Or you might simply serve by a faithful ministry of presence, singing gospel songs to those around you, praying for a brother or sister after the service, or encouraging others by being an attentive listener to God's word.

Corporate worship is never a spectator sport. We gather to worship God and encourage one another—and that takes work. We don't simply "attend" church in the same way we "attend" a concert or a baseball game. We *are* the church, and each one of us has a role to play! We honor and exalt the Lord Jesus when we come to corporate worship ready to serve others.

A good friend in our church suffers with a chronic illness. She often can't make it to corporate worship. But when she's able to come, her physical presence fills the room. She praises the Lord with her fragile hands turned up to God, sitting in her seat with a look of joy on her face. Seeing her faith and perseverance year after year strengthens our whole congregation. She edifies us all just by her presence.

Your faithful attendance and service does the same. As fellow members consider your life, your afflictions, your joys, and your obedience to Jesus, they're edified by your ministry of presence. They're encouraged by hearing you sing. They're heartened by having a conversation

with you after the service. We can't edify one another if we never see each other.

We gather to edify.

## *2. We Gather to Evangelize*

Second, gathering with the saints for worship *indirectly* acts as a means of evangelism. The apostle Paul makes this point in 1 Corinthians 14:24–25, saying that if “an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.”

Corporate worship isn't designed for unbelievers—the primary purpose is to edify the saints. At the same time, an unbeliever might show up. We hope they do! And when they do, Paul says they should recognize through the church's corporate worship that God is really among us! Corporate worship pulls back the curtain and gives unbelievers a backstage pass to the life of the church. They get to see what the Christian life is about: exalting God,

celebrating the good news of the gospel, and edifying one another.

### **Directions for Assembly**

If you've ever purchased a piece of furniture from IKEA, you know the agonizing experience of trying to assemble it. Nothing taxes a friendship (or a marriage!) more. Both people have an idea of what the end product should look like. But getting from pieces in a box to a finished product can be quite a feat.

*Why did they give us eighteen extra screws? I think we're missing six nails. We don't have enough slats of wood. Why did they design the front and back pieces to look exactly the same!*

Worst of all, IKEA instructions often contain no words—only blurry, obscure pictures. Sometimes it feels impossible to know which parts go where. I've been guilty of just assembling the pieces in whatever way I think best.

Christians sometimes approach the weekly gathering like this. In God's word, they don't see more than obscure pictures that allow us to