

# Community <sup>in</sup> the Country Church

A number of articles in recent years have pointed to a change in church attendance: people in rural areas are statistically less likely to attend church than their urban/suburban counterparts.

With the daily chores that often accompany a rural life, not to mention school sports and other extracurricular activities, along with the long distances we often have to drive just to do the normal things our lives require, it's not so hard to understand.

*Meeting together with & serving alongside God's people is a beautiful means of his grace to us.*

But especially since we began serving with Village Missions nearly 15 years ago, we have found meeting together with and serving alongside God's people to be a beautiful means of His grace to us.

Church isn't just an hour a week of singing hymns and listening to a sermon (though it does include that); the Church is less about what we do and more about who we are. God's grace saves His people, His grace keeps His people, and His grace changes His people into the image of Christ...and it does it all in the context of community. Fellowship. Relationship.

There's a reason He likens His people to a body. At any given moment, there are a hundred thousand different things

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happening within our body that are both independent of one another, and yet utterly reliant on one another. It's the same with our spiritual lives. God didn't save us into a family by accident; rather, His design is that His people are the Gospel made visible. Meeting together regularly, faithfully, and actively is one way God chooses to work our salvation from the inside out. We are called together to worship, to learn, to grow in unity, to spur one another on to love and good deeds. When conflict happens, God brings reconciliation. When hurt results, God heals and allows us to take part in healing one another. When betrayal breaks relationships, God gives us the pieces to move forward in forgiveness. God has forgiven us much, and so He enables us to forgive each other.

We have experienced these graces and more over and over as we've served on our fields. We've walked with friends through deep waters, and God has given us a front row seat to what He is doing in their hearts and lives. We've experienced the joy of watching God bring new eternal life when someone trusts Christ.

We've been amazed at how childlike faith has brought strength and encouragement in even the toughest circumstances. When we rural folk choose to skip church, this is what we're missing. What a privilege it is to be a part of God's people! What a joy to serve Him together with our brothers and sisters in Christ!



Matt & Stephanie Van Gorden have served with Village Missions since 2005, and at Yampa Bible Church in Yampa, CO since 2012. They have been married for nearly 18 years and have two elementary-age children. The family will be moving to a new field in Hartland Center, OH, on March 5.

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