

[MJTM 25 (2023–2025)]

#### BOOK REVIEW

Jonathan Griffiths. *Gathered for Good: God's Good Design for the Local Church*. Brentwood, TN: B&H, 2025. 192 pp. Pbk. ISBN 9781430096320. \$13.49.

Jonathan Griffiths's book offers a timely and theologically grounded call to rediscover the centrality of the local church in Christian formation and mission. In an era marked by declining attendance, digital detachment, and widespread disillusionment with institutional religion, Griffiths challenges believers to re-anchor their faith in embodied community. A seasoned pastor and biblical expositor, Griffiths builds his case on the conviction that God's saving work is not only personal but also profoundly communal.

Structured around key biblical themes—including mutual care, discipleship, worship, and mission—*Gathered for Good* opens by acknowledging cultural shifts that have pulled many away from the church, from the forced isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic to increasing spiritual consumerism. Yet Griffiths argues that Christian flourishing is inseparably linked to the local church, and that any attempt to pursue Jesus apart from intentional community is spiritually impoverished (5).

Each chapter is organized around a specific aspect of gathering. To give readers a clearer sense of Griffiths's structure, what follows is a brief summary of each chapter's focus. Chapter 1, "Gathered to One Another," introduces the metaphor of "nailing your colors to the mast," drawn from naval history, urging believers to make visible, costly commitments to their church communities (8–9). Drawing on Rom 12, Griffiths contends that the church is not a spiritual convenience store but a grace-shaped family marked by mutual care, service, accountability, and solidarity in an increasingly secular age.

Chapter 2, “Gathered to Meet Together,” explores why the local church’s regular gathering matters. While all of life is worship, Griffiths shows that corporate gathering nourishes faith, fosters encouragement, and shapes believers in ways that digital or individual practices alone cannot replicate, referencing Heb 10 and Eph 4. Chapter 3, “Gathered to Serve,” reminds readers that ministry is not reserved for a professional class but is the calling of every believer. Griffiths emphasizes that believers are recipients of mercy, not merit, and that gospel-shaped service flows from grace received. He draws heavily from Rom 12 and Eph 4 to illustrate how the body builds itself up in love.

Chapter 4, “Gathered to Witness,” expands the vision outward. Griffiths argues that a healthy, grace-shaped community is itself a powerful witness to the reconciling power of the gospel, showing a skeptical world a visible apologetic for Christ. Chapter 5, “Gathered to Endure,” deals honestly with the cost and challenge of church life. Griffiths roots perseverance within the biblical narrative, reminding readers that the gathered church is God’s means for sustaining faith in the face of conflict, weariness, or cultural drift, drawing on Hebrews and Revelation. Chapter 6, “Gathered for Glory,” closes the book with an eschatological vision. Griffiths traces the biblical arc from Eden’s scattering to the final gathering of God’s people from every tribe and tongue. Each local gathering becomes a foretaste of the ultimate assembly around the throne.

The book’s theological sweep is impressive for its brevity. Griffiths traces the biblical narrative of scattering and gathering from Genesis to Revelation, showing that God’s redemptive purpose culminates not in isolated salvation but in a gathered people drawn from every tribe and nation (6–7, 33–34). He effectively highlights the New Testament’s assumption that Christian life occurs in the context of community, regularly referencing passages such as Heb 10:24–25 and Eph 4 to demonstrate the relational nature of spiritual maturity.

Griffiths is also particularly strong in framing church participation as an act of service rather than mere consumption. In chapter 3, “Gathered to Serve,” he reminds readers that believers are recipients of mercy, not merit, and that gospel-shaped service

is the overflow of grace—not a means to earn favor (42–43). Ministry, he insists, is not the task of a professional class but the collective work of the entire body, with pastor-teachers acting as coaches equipping the saints (46–47).

The book's tone is pastoral, compassionate, and often gently convicting. Griffiths avoids idealism, readily acknowledging the pain and cost of church life—conflict, inconvenience, even boredom. Yet he portrays these not as deterrents, but as catalysts for sanctification. He also engages sensitive topics like spiritual apathy and disconnection without lapsing into guilt-driven exhortation, which enhances the work's credibility and approachability.

That said, the book's strength is also its limitation. Readers seeking a deeper engagement with digital ecclesiology, sociological research, or post-pandemic trends may find *Gathered for Good* light on analysis. Griffiths largely sidesteps empirical data and avoids direct discussion of online-only church models, preferring instead to make a theological case from Scripture. This is not a flaw so much as a feature: the book's aim is not to critique culture, but to restore conviction. Still, for an academic audience or those involved in ecclesial innovation, a more critical engagement with digital trends might have added helpful nuance.

Another area where the book could be enriched is in its engagement with broader cultural challenges facing the church today, such as racial reconciliation, generational deconstruction, and trust breakdown in institutional Christianity. While the book rightly centers the biblical mandate for community, there is room for more reflection on how the church can model reconciliation, justice, and transparency in a polarized world. A second edition or companion resource—perhaps written in collaboration with voices from diverse contexts—could extend the theological framework of *Gathered for Good* into some of these vital conversations.

Still, these critiques do not detract from the book's overall effectiveness. Its biblical clarity, pastoral tone, and ecclesial urgency make it a powerful tool for ministry renewal. *Gathered for Good* is especially well-suited for churches seeking to re-center on biblical community after a season of disconnection or drift. It would serve well in elder training, small group leader cohorts,

and church membership classes. Its chapters are concise, it's theology accessible, and its messaging consistently challenges cultural assumptions about what it means to *attend* rather than *belong*. Griffiths offers a vision of the church not as an event but as a people.

The book is also an excellent fit for leadership pipelines or discipleship tracks within church-planting environments. For example, at our local church—where our model is built around multiplying small, mission-driven gatherings—the call to prioritize commitment, mutual care, and accountability resonates deeply. Griffiths's emphasis on "gathering to serve" and "gathering to witness" equips both new believers and emerging leaders with a theological vision for participating in the church not just for their own benefit, but for the growth and mission of others.

In church revitalization contexts, *Gathered for Good* could help cast vision to long-time members who have grown weary or disillusioned. It reminds readers of the spiritual vitality that can only come through consistent, costly, grace-shaped relationships. For younger generations navigating faith deconstruction or wrestling with skepticism toward institutions, this book offers an affirming yet uncompromising invitation: don't give up on the church. Reimagine it through the lens of Scripture rather than cynicism. And then, as Griffiths repeats often, "nail your colors to the mast" (8).

Pastors and ministry leaders will also find in this book a preaching companion for sermon series on the local church. The themes map well onto biblical texts in Romans, Ephesians, Hebrews, and Revelation, making it easy to integrate Griffiths's insights into pulpit and small group curricula. The book also lends itself to community-wide discussion campaigns that encourage congregants to transition from casual attenders to committed contributors.

In conclusion, *Gathered for Good* is not revolutionary in content, but it is restorative in spirit. Griffiths has written a deeply encouraging and biblically faithful call to reclaim the joy and necessity of the gathered church. In a cultural climate that tempts believers to privatize their faith, Griffiths offers a reminder that church is not a product to consume but a people to whom one be-

longs. For pastors, church planters, and lay leaders committed to rebuilding gospel-centered community, this book is a worthy guide—and a faithful echo of God’s good design for his people.

Jose G. Santiago  
Liberty University  
Lynchburg, VA