

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

DEVO

SEPTEMBER 16 - 20, 2024

Romans 12-13

PECULIAR PEOPLE

Sermon Series 9/8 - 11/24



MONDAY

Read **Matthew 5:14-16, 24:14, 28:18-20; Revelation 7:9-12**

This week's devo series, supporting next Sunday's message, considers "the state of the church." Today's focus: the professing global Christian church.

"Christianity's [global growth exceeds the general] population's growth. From 2020 to ... mid-2024, the world's population [projects growth] from ... 7.84 billion people to ... 8.11 billion, 0.87% growth. ... [Concurrently, Christianity's population should increase from 2.52] to 2.63 billion, ... +1.08% [and expected to top] 3 billion before 2050. Protestants (+1.63%), independents (+1.96%) [and] evangelicals (+1.66%) ... are the fastest-growing groups. ... [Non-evangelical] Protestantism [projects] to ... 625+ million [in 2024], Evangelicals numbering ... 400+ million. ...

"The fastest-growing areas for Christianity are ... Asia (415 million people, 2.11% growth rate) and Africa (734 million, growing 2.64% annually). ... In 2020, more Christians lived in Africa than any other region ... By 2050, 1.28 billion ... Christians will [be African, more than those in next-most-Christian-populated] Asia and Latin America combined. ... Currently, 51.6% of Christians live in 'Christian nations.' By 2050, that [will prevail] for less than half of Christians (49.4%). The global 'atheist' population is ... [annually declining] 0.12%. ... Atheism peaked around 1970 [at] 165 million. ... [Global 'agnosticism' is flat], ... +0.09%, [though also] projected to decline [eventually]. ...

"The past 120 years, ... church [locations globally] increased tenfold, ... from 400,000 in 1900 to ... 4+ million in 2020. ... By 2050, ... worldwide [Christian congregations] will top 5.4 million. ... In 1900, ... 54.3% [of all people worldwide] didn't have access to the Gospel. That percentage [continues declining], reaching 30.1% in 2000, ... [currently] at 27.8%. [US] giving to Christian causes [forecasts to] \$1.3 trillion in 2024 ... [This is up from] \$320 billion in 2000 and \$1 trillion in 2020. Projections set [such] giving in 2050 at \$5.2 trillion." (Aaron Earls, Lifeway Research)

This is encouraging for Christ followers, particularly the growth in global evangelicalism and Gospel exposure! Via Glenkirk's global mission partners—Three Angels Haiti, GTi HOPE, For His Children, Pars Theological Centre, African Enterprise, Ethnos Asia and ZOE International—you support worldwide Kingdom-building. But how are comparable things going here in the US? That's tomorrow's emphasis.

QUESTIONS

Which of the global trends relevant to Christianity most surprise you? By which are you most encouraged? What will you do to enable the continuing growth of God's Kingdom worldwide?

PRAYER GTi HOPE

GTi HOPE brings hope to the hopeless in South Asia, helps train and equip the indigenous church, and distributes Scripture. Pray for literacy and empowerment programs, as well as church leader training programs starting this fall to be effective. Pray for ears and hearts open to the Word. www.gtihope.org

TUESDAY

Read [Joshua 1:8-9](#); [Hebrews 10:24-25](#); [Romans 1:16-17](#); [Psalm 145:18](#)

There is cause for optimism regarding the global Church. Growth is outpacing the general population's growth, "evangelicals" advancing notably. Atheism is declining, agnosticism projected to follow. The Church is flourishing in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Global Gospel illiteracy is diminishing and Christian giving is increasing. If only related findings regarding the US were so heartening!

In 2003, 61% of surveyed Americans indicated religion as "very important"; by 2023 this same finding declined to 45%. In 2023, 33% of Americans self-identified as "Protestant," 11% as "Christian," and 22% as "Catholic"; 22% self-described as "nones" for religious preference. In 1948, 69% considered themselves Protestant, 22% Catholic, and only 2% "none." In 2022, 32% of Americans reported being "born again" or "evangelical," whereas 42% self-identified accordingly in 2017. (Gallup)

Churchtrac's 2023 research indicated only 20% of Americans attending church weekly, down from 32% in 2020. Churches generally report attendance levels 85% vs. pre-pandemic. There are hopeful gains, however, among "Millennials" (born 1981-1996): 39% report attending church weekly, up from 21% in 2019.

Lifeway Research found that "the more churches can plug their attendees into a small group, the healthier the church will become and the more likely it will be to grow." Alarming, however, "half

(52%) [of US churchgoers] say their church teaches God will bless them if they give more money to the church, up from 38% in 2017." This indicates troubling levels of biblical illiteracy and maturity among US "Christians"—the "prosperity Gospel" seems to be thriving, reinforcing skeptics' damaging stereotypes regarding the Church.

Our challenges and opportunities? If you are not in a small group already, find one to join—it will bless you and strengthen Glenkirk. Invite unchurched relatives, neighbors, friends and colleagues to church—you might be surprised at their receptivity, particularly among those with young families. Read the Bible regularly—it draws you closer to Christ, enabling hopefulness, God-honoring service and discernment. Share the Gospel lovingly, openly and unashamedly—unlike politics, programs, counseling or even education, Christ alone can save and redeem this fallen world. And pray. "Satan dreads nothing but prayer. ... He ... trembles when [the redeemed] pray." (Samuel Chadwick)

QUESTIONS

A prior message from Pastor Tim characterized the continuing increase in US "nones" (those professing no religious affiliation)—how is this trend opportune for Glenkirk? What can we do to better engage and attract "Millennials"—apparently increasingly receptive—to Glenkirk? If you're not in a small group, why not?

PRAYER GTi HOPE

Pray for the collection of gently used Bibles and Christian books. There is a tremendous need among English reading believers and seekers. The revenue received makes ministry happen. Our container is about 40% full. Pray it will be filled soon and for volunteers to help with sorting books. www.gtihope.org/books

WEDNESDAY

Read [John 4:34-42](#); [James 5:13-16](#); [Luke 12:22-34](#)

As characterized earlier, global Church trends are generally encouraging whereas related US developments are decidedly more mixed. Today let's consider the state of Glenkirk Church, our progress in advancing God's Kingdom purposes.

First, our mission: "Glenkirk Church is a worshipping community, inviting everyone to join in the journey of becoming fully devoted followers of Christ, loving God and His world." (GlenkirkChurch.org) Glenkirk's currently stated major goals are: increase average weekly attendance at least 20%; have 250 people in discipleship groups; reboot Lay Counseling efforts; develop a strategy to reengage the homeless.

Weekly attendance through July was up about 15%, short of our 20% growth ("inviting") goal. Encouragingly, we have seen previously "new" people visit Glenkirk and remain, some as a fruit of God's work via VBS. One such family's parents became covenant partners and had several family members baptized on August 18. However, every day—not only Easter, Christmas and VBS—provides opportunity to reach out to others invitationally. Jesus reminds us, "*the fields ... are ripe for harvest*" (John 4:35).

We met our "becoming" oriented goal regarding last autumn's Sermon on the Mount series discipleship groups: 254 Glenkirkers participated. But this is no cause for complacency—small group

participation for *all* will bring God's blessings. Jesus promised, "*... where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them*" (Matthew 18:20).

Lay Counseling efforts—per Glenkirk's "becoming" and "loving God and His world" emphases—are planned for October startup; application reviews are in process. COVID shut down lots of homeless efforts—efforts to reengage relevant support networks have been challenging. This aspect of "loving," however, will restart via a Glenkirk homeless showering program coordinating both with the Shepherd's Pantry and Glendora. Jesus said that denying appropriate, godly service toward those struggling actually denies Him: "*... as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me*" (Matthew 25:45).

There is much to celebrate at Glenkirk, yet much to do. Jesus declared, "*My Father is always [working] ... and I too am working*" (John 5:17). Where is God calling you to serve for His glory faithfully, gratefully, and joyfully?

QUESTIONS

How will you be "part of the solution" in helping Glenkirk reach its "20% Weekend Attendance" goal? Where do you feel God calling you to serve? Efforts serving the homeless? Youth ministry? Other?

PRAYER GTi HOPE

Pray for the Madiya people group project sponsored by Glenkirk which has had delays. Both the church leader training for 12 students and the year 3 adult literacy classes for 300 adults should be finished soon. Pray for Christians and seekers living in states which have anti-conversion laws.

THURSDAY

Read **Romans 10:14-15; 1 Peter 4:8-11; Isaiah 41:17-20**

Today let's continue reviewing Glenkirk Church's state, highlighting other activities and results from recent months. As God draws us, His call is both personal and community-oriented. "Inviting" is one aspect of Christian community, as is communal worship. Last Christmas Glenkirk experienced a 25% attendance increase; Easter's gain was 8%. Glenkirk started a Sunday Chinese bilingual Bible study, 6 people resultantly accepting Christ. Glenkirk hosted a men's worship night with 5 other churches and ECO Southern California Presbytery's Spring Meeting; 10 attended ECO's 2024 South Carolina National Gathering. Many Glenkirkers joined a community Young Adult Worship gathering.

Per Glenkirk's "becoming" emphasis, 7 children and 9 others were recently baptized. We've welcomed 31 new covenant partners and seen a 200% attendance increase in our student ENGAGE ministry. In Glenkirk's summer camps, 44 elementary, 56 middle school and 6 high school students participated—supported by 25 leaders. Also, 24 Glenkirk women attended our Calvin Crest Women's Retreat. *La Casa Church* launched a small group ministry along with a discipleship ministry for teenaged boys. Director of Women's Ministry, Caitlyn Schan, was ordained as a Glenkirk ECO assistant pastor. Julie Ahn joined us as Director of Student Ministries and Mason Eldridge as Assistant Director.

Serving and generosity reinforce Glenkirk's "loving" theme. VBS 2024 quickly filled to capacity, its 350 campers supported by 250 student and adult leaders. Glenkirk gave \$183,114 to local and global missions and sent 33 students and 7 leaders to Maui on an immersion trip. We collected 400+ toys for Shepherd's Pantry Christmas Toy Store and hosted four Pantry food drives.

The LORD is a God of abundance; concurrently, however, He calls us to good stewardship of His provision. Glenkirk paid off the mortgage of the Seller's property mortgage, making us completely debt free for the first time in 20 years. The final stage of our transition from the PCUSA, our property encumbrance, is now finished.

God continues to move powerfully within and through Glenkirk's various ministries. Grateful service, generosity and love are fruits of our salvation—not its causes—and God delights in our faithfulness (Psalm 18:19-21). How will you increase your "inviting," "becoming," and "loving" emphases going forward?

QUESTIONS

Of Glenkirk's "inviting," "becoming," and "loving" emphases, which one do you find most encouraging? Which of these has results you wish were better? Will you increase your involvement in related efforts, enabling God's Kingdom purposes?

PRAYER GTi HOPE

Pray for the Mahadev Koli people group project sponsored by Glenkirk. Praise God for the year 1 literacy programs for 450 adults: 94% completed the 10-month program and 50% discovered hope. Pray for the selection process of the 12 church leaders to be trained during year 2.

FRIDAY

Read **1 Corinthians 13:4-7, 13; John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:7-11**

Glenkirk Church's key emphasis for the upcoming 12 months—and beyond—is “growing in love.” The pastoral staff will prepare and teach a series in 1 Corinthians accordingly. Today let's examine some of the underpinnings of growing in love, the Source and nature of love itself.

Of course, love starts with Yahweh Himself “*because God is love*” (1 John 4:8). Our ability to love is God-given (1 John 4:19). God's love is incomprehensible. Perfect and in eternal loving community via His triunity, God created humankind both as an expression and object of His love. The LORD needed nothing, but His love abounds such that He selflessly created us despite knowing that many would reject Him. The associated heartbreak in God's knowing this is expressed—among many other places in the Bible—in Jesus' weeping over unfaithful Jerusalem as He walked toward His crucifixion (Luke 19:41-42).

Regarding love, if “the vertical” (“godliness,” per the first four Commandments) is right-hearted and enduring, “the horizontal” (loving others for God's glory; “righteousness,” per the fifth through tenth Commandments) falls into place. Thus, the “Law of Christ”: love God; love others in Christ's name, for God's glory. Love is the highest virtue, the basis for God's creation. Love is always volitional, resulting from choice; it cannot be coerced. Love itself answers one

of humankind's most burning questions: God presently permits evil to enable love; loving choices build character, drawing us closer to Him.

Jesus honored the widow's selfless sacrifice of all that she had (Luke 21:1-4), just two mites (worth .25¢ today)—immeasurably valuable when compounded eternally. Similarly, “*even a cup of cold water*” lovingly given for Jesus' glory (Matthew 10:42) is an incalculable treasure in God's eternal economy. How, then, can we value and honor the most costly, precious Sacrifice ever made: Jesus' own life, given freely and lovingly at Calvary?

“Love is costly. It always involves some kind of self-denial. It often demands suffering.” (John Piper) Are you willing to “grow in love” along with the pastors, staff and your other Glenkirk sisters and brothers? Let's surrender to this and see what glorious things God will do!

QUESTIONS

Why did God create humankind? What is the “Law of Christ”? If “*God is love*” (1 John 4:8) while also holy, good, all-knowing and all-powerful, why does He presently permit evil? How will you commit to “growing in love” going forward?

PRAYER GTi HOPE

Pray for the persecuted church in India. Pray for protection, provision, and boldness among Christians and pastors. Pray that the persecutors have open ears and hearts to the message of the true God who loves them, who died for them, and who offers salvation. Pray against the spiritual forces of evil.



Sources

- Aaron Earls's (Lifeway Research) quotes can be found at <https://research.lifeway.com/2024/01/22/8-encouraging-trends-in-global-christianity-for-2024/>.
- Gallup's "religion" survey data can be found at <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1690/Religion.aspx>.
- Churchtrac's research findings can be found at <https://www.churchtrac.com/articles/the-state-of-church-attendance-trends-and-statistics-2023>.
- Samuel Chadwick's quote is from [https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/1148687.Samuel_Chadwick#:~:text="Satan%20dreads%20nothing%20but%20prayer.%20His%20one%20concern,he%20trembles%20when%20we%20pray."%20—%20Samuel%20Chadwick](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/1148687.Samuel_Chadwick#:~:text=).
- John Piper's quote can be found at <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-depth-of-christs-love-its-cost>.

These devotionals are written by a team of Glenkirk volunteers who represent a range of beliefs within the evangelical spectrum. As such, some of the expressed views may not necessarily represent those of pastoral leadership. If you find yourself challenged by a devo, explore why that might be and, should you have questions or concerns, please reach out to Pastor Kate Wallace Nunneley at KNunneley@GlenkirkChurch.org. If you are interested in joining those who pen Glenkirk devotionals, please contact Pastor Kate.

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