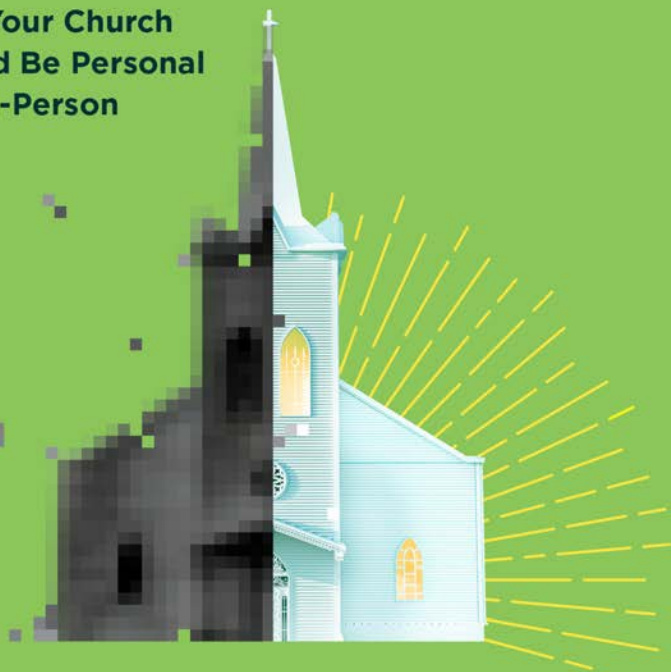


**Why Your Church
Should Be Personal
and In-Person**



THE REVIVAL OF THE
ANALOG
CHURCH

THOM S. RAINER

Foreword by Chuck Lawless

**Why Your Church
Should Be Personal
and In-Person**



THE REVIVAL OF THE
ANALOG
CHURCH
THOM S. RAINER



A Tyndale nonfiction imprint

Visit Tyndale online at tyndale.com.

Tyndale, Tyndale's quill logo, *Tyndale Momentum*, and the Tyndale Momentum logo are registered and/or common law trademarks of Tyndale House Ministries in the USA and various other jurisdictions around the world. All rights reserved. See tyndale.com for a full list of trademarks owned by Tyndale House Ministries. Tyndale Momentum is a nonfiction imprint of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois.

The Revival of the Analog Church: Why Your Church Should Be Personal and In-Person

Copyright © 2026 by Thom S. Rainer. All rights reserved.

Cover illustration of church copyright © Andrea Crisante/Shutterstock. All rights reserved.

Cover illustration of sunburst copyright © ulimi/Stockphoto. All rights reserved.

Author photograph taken by Allen Clark Photography, copyright © 2014. All rights reserved.

Cover design by Eunseo Ko

Interior design by Cathy Miller

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*,[®] *NIV*.[®] Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.[®] Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at csresponse@tyndale.com, or call 1-855-277-9400.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-1-4964-4909-2

Printed in China

32	31	30	29	28	27	26
7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Contents

Foreword by Chuck Lawless vii

Before We Begin 1

1. What Is the Analog Church? 3
2. How Analog Is Making a Comeback in Culture 17
3. The Dangers of an All-Digital World 33
4. The Opportunity Before Us 47
5. Why In-Person Worship Services Are Thriving 65
6. Discipleship with Clarity 81
7. Praying in Analog 97
8. As I Write This Letter 119
9. Did You Hear That Bible? 139
10. Taking Time to Do Evangelism 155
11. Creating an Analog Culture 175

Notes 193

About the Author 196

Foreword

It took me a while to slow down and write this foreword—and maybe that's an indication of just how much I needed to read this book.

Thom Rainer, a longtime friend, begins with a reminder that he is an introvert. I'm an introvert, too, and perhaps that's one reason we've worked well together over the years. I'm exaggerating a bit, but here's what it generally looked like when both of us were presenting on the same program: We showed up close to the time we were introduced, mingled only as much as we had to, gave our presentations, and returned to our individual rooms exhausted from too much interaction with people! Then, we began running the race again in our individual rooms, preparing for the next presentation—a race that seemingly had no finish line.

The pace has been crazy at times, sometimes compounded (at least for me) by the reality that video conference systems

now make it possible for me to train others from my home office. I can influence other church leaders from a distance without stepping too far out of my introvert zone. And I can convince myself that I'm actually accomplishing more than if I were training in-person.

On the one hand, I'm grateful for these opportunities to train and teach. It really is possible to train people around the world in ways we could not when I started ministry more than forty-five years ago. On the other hand, Thom's words have challenged me to my core.

His recognition of the renewal of the analog church is fascinating to me because of what I'm realizing in my own life. My long-term study of spiritual warfare has reminded me over and over again that God never designed us to fight spiritual battles on our own. He created us so that it is not good for us to be alone (Genesis 2:18), and I've learned that few choices make us as vulnerable to the enemy's arrows as isolation.

I'm also realizing I'm too busy. I love everything I'm privileged to do, and I know I won't get to do all of it forever—so I don't want to miss opportunities when they come my way. Lately, however, my ears are more attuned to those who know me best and love me most saying, "You really need to slow down." I'm recognizing (or perhaps finally admitting) that accomplishments don't mean much when I miss relationships with people along the way.

Indeed, life continues to teach me just how important other people are. I sometimes do accountability check-ins via email or texts, but accountability questions I hear from someone across the table from me have more impact. A written prayer I receive from a friend truly encourages me, but it's not the same as hearing that friend pray for me in my presence. I love singing God's praises when I worship Him alone, but I'm increasingly blessed by the combined voices of God's people singing together. Gathering with other believers may sometimes stretch my comfort zone, but it's well worth the stretch. I need to be with the people of God for my sake and, I trust, for theirs as well.

That's why the phrases Thom uses to describe the *analog church* gave me pause as I read them: "analog delivers connection"; "the analog church is a place where we find a different pace"; it "invites people to pause"; "it reflects"; "it rejoices"; "it moves deliberately, guided by the Spirit, anchored in the gospel." This book exhorts *and* encourages, convicts *and* comforts, diagnoses *and* directs. It will force you to pause, just as it has done for me.

The danger, of course, is that you will be tempted to skim the chapters, quickly grab what you think you want, and then move on. If you read it that way, you will have missed the essence of the book. I challenge you to slow down, consider your own life, reflect on your church, and allow yourself to long for what Thom describes here.

Better yet, study *The Revival of the Analog Church* with a group of people from your church. Read it. Discuss it. Pray about it. Do something with it . . . together. *Connecting* is simply what the analog church does.

Blessings!

Chuck Lawless

Before We Begin

What does *analog* mean? Generally speaking, the word describes systems, devices, or experiences that work through direct physical, sensory means rather than through digital or binary processing. Some examples would be sound waves from grooves on a vinyl record, the movement of a clock's hands, or a face-to-face conversation with another person.

For the church, *analog* emphasizes human presence, embodiment, and relational connection, in direct contrast to technological interaction. It is often best understood with the analog example of an in-person worship service versus a streaming or digital worship service. Each approach provides content, but only the in-person worship service provides presence.

I'm excited to be witnessing a revival of the analog church, with incredible implications for the future growth of God's Kingdom. Let's dive in and see why analog works.

WHAT IS THE ANALOG CHURCH?

For my friends and readers who know me, I suspect they will chuckle to themselves when they discover I am writing this book.

Thom is writing about slowing down? Thom is writing about connecting with people in person? You're kidding! Thom was digital-paced before digital was cool!

The anticipated laughter—and perhaps a bit of incredulity—is on target.

I am an introvert. People drain me.

I am goal-oriented. I am task-driven.

I have hurt relationships many times with my pace. Too often, it's clear I care more about getting something done than getting to know someone better. My drive has hurt

friendships, distracted me from my role as a father, and caused my marriage to struggle. Let me give you one example.

Many years ago, when all three of my sons were children and living at home, I was in a season of intense travel. My schedule was packed with speaking engagements around the country. One afternoon, I found one of my sons sitting on his bed, quietly crying. When I asked what was wrong, he said, “Dad, I just miss you.” That moment hit me deeply.

“What can I do to help?”

He simply asked, “Could you stop traveling for the next month?”

As difficult as it was, I canceled every speaking engagement for that month—one of them being in Hawaii. But that month changed me. I discovered that working for God includes being there for my family. The fulfillment I found in being with my sons far exceeded anything I would have gained from the speaking circuit.

Analog is not just about slowing down—it’s about seeing the people right in front of you.

So those criticisms about me are fair. I have no right to profess expertise on an analog pace. But I hope I can demonstrate a willingness to change. Maybe I can even point to a few positive steps you could take along the way. Perhaps my grandchildren will defend me a bit.

Despite being an unlikely candidate to write on this topic, I am compelled by research—and convicted by Scripture—to

do so. Jesus demonstrated the analog pace. There is no better reason for me to change than to follow my Lord. It is thus with some apprehension and even more excitement that I can write with conviction: The analog church is coming back. It is reviving. It was never meant to go away.

The Local Church. The Analog Church.

The local church is not biblically designed to operate at the speed of a swipe or to be consumed in snippets. It was meant to be lived in real time—with real people, real presence, and real purpose. That is the heart of what I mean by the analog church.

The analog church values people over platforms, presence over pace, and connection over convenience.

Analog is more than nostalgia. It's more than vinyl records and handwritten letters, though those illustrations help us see the contrast. Analog is a rhythm. It is the texture of presence. It is the sound of a voice without a filter and the feel of a Bible page turned deliberately by hand.

The analog church doesn't race to a finish line. It rests in the presence of God and His people. It doesn't swipe past suffering. It walks alongside it.

We have not sinned by embracing digital tools. In fact, the digital revolution has brought immense benefits to our lives and ministries.

But we have, perhaps unintentionally, abandoned

something vital when we allowed the digital to overtake the analog. In doing so, we risk becoming efficient but empty, connected but not close.

The analog church calls us back—not to the past, but to presence. It is not anti-technology, but it is radically pro-embodiment. The analog church believes that gathering matters. That voices singing together in one space matter. That the hand on the shoulder, the shared tears in a prayer circle, and the sacred unhurriedness of Communion matter.

In a culture that is weary of screens and starving for presence, the analog church offers something beautifully countercultural. It offers people what they can't get from a device. It offers them *us*. Not our livestream, not our highlights—but our actual lives.

Scripture never rushes. The story of God unfolds with gardens and wildernesses, meals and journeys, decades and generations.

Jesus did not post the Sermon on the Mount. He sat down and taught it face to face. When the disciples misunderstood Him, He didn't send them a correction via group chat. He walked with them and talked with them along the road.

The analog church is rooted in this sacred slowness. It is not lazy; it is intentional. It is not old-fashioned; it is timeless. The analog church becomes the antidote to the anxious age, the gathering place where pace slows, hearts open, and lives are changed.

So we begin here—with a call to remember what it means to be the church. Not the content producer. Not the weekly broadcaster. The church. The people of God, in the presence of God, for the sake of the world. The analog church may just be the most forward-thinking thing we could become—or should have remained.

In the chapters ahead, we'll explore how analog is making a quiet comeback, not just in culture, but in the church—and how you and your congregation can be part of it.

The Difference Between Digital and Analog

Let's take a moment and talk about what these two words—*digital* and *analog*—really mean. You've heard them before. You probably live in a digital world and maybe haven't even thought much about the analog one. But they're both important. And understanding the difference helps explain why this book exists.

Imagine you're listening to music. If the music is coming from a vinyl record, it's analog. If it's playing from your phone or a streaming service, it's digital.

Analog is like a wave: It's smooth. It flows. It's always changing, just like the sound of a real person talking to you in the same room. There are no sharp steps or breaks in analog. It's how our ears naturally hear and how we experience the world—smooth sights, smooth sounds, smooth time.

Digital is different. It takes that smooth analog wave and

chops it up into thousands (or millions) of tiny steps called “bits.” It’s like turning a slope into a staircase. The more bits you have, the better it sounds or looks—but it’s never fully smooth like analog.

Computers use this chopped-up version because they can understand it. They work in ones and zeros—on or off. That’s what the word *binary* means.

Here’s a simple way to think about it:

- Analog is continuous.
- Digital is in pieces.

Analog is a clock with hands that move in a circle. Digital is a clock that jumps from one number to the next. Analog is the sound of a bird outside your window. Digital is a recording of that bird on your phone.

Why does this matter for the church?

Because the church was always meant to be more like analog. Continuous. Personal. Real. The digital world is helpful—it lets us share sermons and connect across miles—but it can never fully replace the feeling of being with someone, praying beside them, hearing their voice without a screen in between.

When you listen to a sermon in a room filled with people, it’s different than listening through headphones. When

someone writes you a note by hand, it feels different than a text message. That's the analog difference.

I'm not saying digital is bad. I'm just saying analog is something we've lost too quickly—and it might be time to bring it back.

So as you read this book and think about your own church, remember this:

- Digital delivers content.
- Analog delivers connection.

The church must always be about more than just sharing information. It's about walking with people. And walking takes time. It's not instant. It's not edited. But it's real. And that's what makes it powerful.

Scripture and the Analog Church

The analog church is not a sentimental retreat into the past. It is a biblical return to presence. The way of Jesus was personal. It was in person. It was rarely rushed. The analog church moves at a different pace to live like He did. And Scripture gives us a clear picture of this analog rhythm.

Let's begin with Matthew 9:36-38:

When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless,

like sheep without a shepherd. He said to his disciples, “The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields.”

Jesus did not hurry past the crowds. He saw them. He felt compassion for them. He didn’t simply deliver content—He delivered presence. He knew their confusion. He understood their helplessness. He stopped. He stayed. And He invited His followers to do the same.

The harvest was already there. Ready. Waiting. But the workers were few. Perhaps we’ve become so efficient that we’ve forgotten how to walk slowly through the fields. The analog church reverses that. It puts people over pace. It moves at the speed of love.

Evangelism in the harvest fields must be powered by prayer. And prayer is not an app or a quick blessing before a meal. It takes time. We ask the Holy Spirit to go ahead of us. We pray for opportunities. We pray for courage. We pray for obedience.

Now consider Acts 2:42:

All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer.

They met together daily, shared life, worshiped, and grew in number. It was relational. There was no livestream. No replay. They were present. Fully present.

Hebrews 10:24-25 offers another glimpse:

Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

The church was never meant to be a disconnected experience. Encouragement happens best face to face. You can inspire through a screen, but you disciple in the room.

Finally, Matthew 11:28-30:

Then Jesus said “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”

Rest is not found in digital content. It’s found in Christ. And His invitation is always personal. He doesn’t say, “Download.” He says, “Come.” The analog church is where that kind of invitation still lives—gentle and unhurried.

These passages together create a framework for why the analog church matters. Jesus saw. Jesus stayed. Jesus called. And the early church followed His example.

A Reflection on Three Questions

Let me invite you to reflect with me on three simple but important questions. They are not meant to accuse or to shame. They are meant to stir. The analog church is a place where we find a different pace and listen—not only to God, but to our own hearts.

1. When did church start feeling rushed?

It didn't happen overnight. There wasn't a single moment when someone flipped a switch. But gradually, subtly, our calendars filled. Our services tightened. We started watching the clock more than the congregation. I tried to address this in my book *Simple Church*, but I did not fully grasp how that connected to the analog church.

Efficiency became a virtue. But in the process, we lost something. We became quick to speak but slow to sit. Quick to move but slow to notice.

2. Have we digitized what was meant to be deeply personal?

The digital world gave us tools. Helpful ones. We could reach farther and faster. Sermons went online. Groups went virtual. Resources were available with a click.

But something was lost in the exchange. A screen can show a face, but it can't hold a hand. A podcast can teach truth, but it can't listen to a hurting heart.

God made us for presence. For shared space. For unhurried moments that can't be downloaded. The incarnation of Jesus is the clearest picture we have. He didn't send a message. He came in person.

3. What's been lost in translation?

We've lost the texture of real life. The interruptions that become ministry. The conversations that don't have a timer. The moments when someone sits next to you and doesn't say a word—but you know they care.

We risk giving people content without connection. Speed without depth. And the faster we go, the more likely we are to miss the people right in front of us.

The analog church is not a rejection of tools. It's a recovery of presence. It is the church being the church again—in person, in real time, in the places where God still moves slowly and beautifully.

A Moment When It Hit Me Negatively

It was Mother's Day. We visited a church with some people we love. The church was full. The attendance, we were told, was higher than usual.

Then it happened. At the moment the sermon ended—well

before the service actually ended—there was a flood of people heading for the exits.

I looked at my friend, who smiled sheepishly and said, “It looks like they have lunch reservations.”

The analog church had just been overtaken by digital pace. The sacred slowness of worship turned into a hurried agenda. I wonder if those honored moms might have preferred a few more minutes in God’s presence instead of a mad dash to a posh restaurant.

A Moment When It Hit Me Positively

Another time, at my home church where my youngest son pastors, I was preparing to leave quickly, as usual. But I was approached by a man. I knew him, but not well.

I could tell he needed to talk. And for some reason, I stayed. He didn’t want advice. He needed my presence. He needed me.

I listened. I prayed. That’s all.

As he walked away, he turned and smiled, saying, “Thanks for taking the time to listen to me.”

Thanks for taking the time.

That moment stayed with me. I think I did what Jesus wanted me to do.

The Revival of the Analog Church

For decades, I’ve researched and reported on churches. More times than not, the news has been challenging.

But something is happening. I thank God I am alive to see it.

People are coming back to church. And people are discovering the church anew.

I call it the analog church.

But in reality, it is simply the church God meant us to have.

I think the best is yet to come.

REFLECTIONS

1. What parts of your life have become overly digital, and how has that affected your relationships—with God and others?
2. How would you define an “analog church” in your own words?
3. Can you recall a moment when in-person presence made a significant spiritual impact on your life?
4. What obstacles might your church face in reclaiming more analog expressions of ministry and community?
5. If someone were to observe your church for one month, would they describe it as digital-first or personal-first?