

How to Help Others Remain Faithful to Christ Part 2

a sermon in the series
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

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Hebrews 10:24-25

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some [is]; but exhorting [one another]: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

It is a marvelous design. What a marvelously intricate, strategic, and holy thing, this thing we call a local church. It amazes me that the church is literally the bodily representation of Jesus Christ on this earth. I have to admit to you, it sends my mind reeling to think the Lord God chose to represent Himself physically on this earth through sinners saved by grace. He did not choose angels above, nor did Christ remain on this earth in physical form throughout the ages. He came to this earth in a physical form as a man, and He walked upon this earth thirty-three years. He died, rose again, and ascended back to the Father, but before He did, He left a physical entity that could be visibly witnessed and seen by this dark world. We call it His body—you and me. Now that is marvelous to me.

The human body is strategic; it has to work in complete synchronization, one cell in cooperation with another. When one cell does not work in cooperation with the others, you get illness, disease, and if not checked and corralled, it will eventually lead to death. When you think about this body and its multiplicity of cells, multiple billions upon billions, it truly is astonishing that they work with absolute precision and harmony one with another. Why, the New York Philharmonic Symphony will never work in sync as closely as these God-designed bodies of ours. If that is true about our bodies physically, then it must be true spiritually about His body called the church. Each of you is an individual cell in the body of Christ. You are not a cell that is self-contained and self-sufficient, but you are a cell connected with other cells.

Last week as we looked at verses twenty-four and twenty-five in the message we entitled, “How to Help Others Remain Faithful to Christ,” we discovered that it is our calling to be our “brother’s keeper.” It is your business, according to these two verses, to keep a watchful eye on your brothers’ and sisters’ spiritual welfare. It is your business to study your brother and sister and to know them well enough to know when they need encouragement; when they need a loving hand, a gentle hand to lift them up; or when they need a loving rebuke. It is our calling by God to exhort, admonish, encourage, and provoke each other to love and good works. We also discovered that in order for this to take place you must first really love Jesus. You must be passionately in

love with Christ if you are going to love your brother and sister the way these two verses tell us to love. You cannot love your neighbor, your brother, and your sister if you don't love Jesus with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, but loving Jesus with this kind of passion will produce love for your brother, sister, and your neighbor. The main principle we learned last week was that in order to grow and remain faithful to Christ, we need to consider others and how we can help them to be faithful to Christ.

Today, we are going to learn that you need others to help you remain faithful to Christ. You need brothers and sisters in Christ to help you remain faithful to God. It is in no way the truth to suggest that a man and Jesus is enough. I am here to tell you that is a contradiction to the Word of God. It is contrary to this wonderful design called the church. This self-indulgent and individualistic mindset, which sees rugged individualism as a premium quality and attribute, has crept into our churches. With it has come this notion that we don't need one another—"Jesus and me is enough." But if you try that philosophy, I am telling you, you are in for trouble. It just won't work. This preacher needs you, and I don't need you just to have someone to preach to. I need you to help me to remain faithful in my walk with Jesus. It would not be wrong or presumptuous for any one of my brothers in this room to walk up to me and say, "Pastor, I want to ask you, how is your devotional life?"

Most of you have never thought of asking me that question, and if you did, you have been too afraid to do so. Perhaps it is because you think I don't need any help. I am a pastor by calling and by gifting, but before I was ever a pastor, I was a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and a brother in Christ. I am still a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, and I am still a brother. I am a brother that needs others to encourage me, exhort me, and by the way, so do you. It doesn't matter how long you have walked with Christ, how much knowledge of His Word you possess, you still need others to encourage you. I am impressed with the Apostle Paul. He is one of the men that I try to emulate in my life and ministry. Yet, in 2 Timothy, Paul writes to his beloved spiritual son to come to him and do so quickly. He also requests that Timothy bring with him John Mark who he says that he needed. Here is Paul, who single handedly by the power of the Holy Spirit, has done more than any living human being since Christ. Even Paul said that he did more than all the other apostles because of the grace of God in him, and yet this beloved apostle says at the end of his journey, "I need John Mark. I need Timothy. I need you men. Come." Paul needed somebody, and so do we!

Why do we need others? Our text is very clear. It is because of the natural tendency to drift. There is a natural tendency in each one of us not to stay focused, but to drift in our focus, and to lose priorities. Where do I get this from our text? It is in the twenty-fifth verse.

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching (Hebrews 10:25).

There had been some who identified themselves with this church or churches that our author was writing to. There were evidently members who had been there and now had drifted and

forsaken the assembling of the saints of God. He uses the word “manner;” “the manner of some.” The word “manner” means custom. It had become their custom, or in other words, it had become their habit to not fellowship with other saints. The writer is saying, “Don’t forsake the assembling of yourselves together as is the habit of some.” As I stated a moment ago, this drifting from the habit of assembling with the saints has a natural tendency to occur. Why do I say that? Well, it is very easy to understand. Have you noticed how easy it is to slip, or deteriorate into bad habits, yet how it takes a great deal of discipline and work to establish good habits? As believers with a new nature, we still have a tendency to decay, to degenerate, to slip-slide in unfaithfulness to Christ. There is remaining in us an inner corruption. I need the power of the Holy Spirit to resist and to have victory over this corruption. That is what this holy writer is talking about in our text. You cannot resist this tendency of the flesh to drift and become unfaithful to Christ all by yourself. You need the encouragement of others to prevent a misstep, and if you take a wrong step, there will be somebody there to encourage you. It is just that simple.

There is a natural tendency in every one of us to become unfaithful to the Lord. You must be aware of it and on guard against it day and night. Diligence is required. What the text shows us is that there was a habit with individuals to stop making themselves available to the encouragement and exhortation of other Christians. I am not here to preach necessarily that you ought to be here every time the doors are open. Every now and then I need to be away just like you might have to be away. Nor is this message an attempt to try to build up Sunday school or even worship attendance. This message is about being faithful to God.

Beloved, what I am about to propose today goes beyond just meeting here on a Sunday morning or a Sunday or Wednesday night. It goes beyond a gathering of brothers and sisters once or twice a week. I propose that we do what the writer of Hebrews is saying. We need to have intimate relationships with the people that we assemble with on Sundays and Wednesdays so that we might know each other well enough to know how to encourage each other to keep being faithful to Christ.

There is a second reason why you need the assistance of others to help you remain faithful to Christ. In Matthew chapter twenty-four and verses eleven and twelve, Jesus warns us of a day in which even Christians will battle within their own hearts and minds concerning what is right.

And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold (Matthew 24:11-12).

Paul talks about this same day in 2 Timothy chapters three and four. He called it “perilous times.” He was speaking about things within the church as well as without. In 2 Thessalonians there is a warning that the return of Christ would be preceded by a great apostasy, a great falling away. All of these passages speak of a day when deception will reign. Many false teachers will come deceiving but not by saying something that is totally off the wall and doesn’t make any sense. Just the opposite. They will deceive by teaching enough truth to make their words sound plausible. But their teaching is adulterated with error, and if it were possible, Jesus said, even the elect could be

taken in because the teaching will be so deceptive. May I suggest, without trying to be an alarmist, that we are living in that age. We have been here for a while, and it is not going to get any better.

Friends, we are living in the time that Jesus spoke of when iniquity would be on the rise, when men would be allowed by a sovereign God to do whatever is right in their own eyes and be carried away by their own wicked, perverted desires. God has allowed this generation to do exactly that. Look at your evening news. Every form of perversion is occurring before our disbelieving eyes; things, I would have never dreamed of happening in my lifetime. Evil is accepted as commonplace. We truly live in a day, of which the prophet spoke, when men are not able to distinguish between good and evil. Today our world says evil is good and good is evil. Many people's hearts are growing cold toward Christ. Many people who were once numbered among us are no longer part of us because their hearts have grown cold. They are not in church anywhere, not serving the Lord in any capacity whatsoever. Friend, you need somebody to come alongside you and love you and encourage you and exhort you. You and I need a brother or sister to say to us, "Brother, let's keep going!"

Read the thirteenth verse of Matthew twenty-four. After Jesus told us the bad news, He gave us one glimmer of hope. He said, "he that shall endure unto the end the same shall be saved" I am thankful that Jesus said it that way. How shall we be saved? He didn't say those who love Him more and more would be saved. Christ didn't say those who do great deeds, build massive churches, and have wonderful, glamorous, spectacular ministries shall be saved. He said those that endured. Notice the word "endure." Some of us may barely seem to be able to even lift the shield of faith and to draw the sword of the spirit. But Jesus said those that are saved are those that never drop the sword and never drop the shield. They endure until the end. It is not how fast we get to Heaven; it is not a matter of how strong we are. It is all about endurance. The writer of Hebrews is declaring that you and I cannot endure by ourselves. You and Jesus are not sufficient. You need others. Oh, what I need today are brothers and sisters that will say, "Michael, let's run together. I will pray for you and you pray for me. Examine my heart with me and I will examine your heart with you. Let's endure."

Now why would Jesus not be sufficient? That is the question that we now need to address. How could Jesus not be sufficient to keep me and to help me endure? I understand there is grace that God gives that keeps me persevering. Grace keeps me walking with Christ. It will not let me totally and finally fall away. This is the Christian message of salvation. Salvation is by grace and grace alone. Along with the forgiveness of sin, there is also the guarantee of final salvation. How then do I have the audacity to say that Jesus is not sufficient and that you need others?

The answer is that the system or means that Jesus Christ designed to keep you and me faithful is the church. Christ is sufficient. He needs nothing to keep us strong and faithful. However, He chose to design the church to be a means of grace to keep you strong, to keep you faithful to Him. He placed you into a body to encourage you, to exhort you. That is the system that He designed, the church. Therefore, when you avoid the body of Christ, you have avoided God's design, and you have avoided Christ and His sufficiency!

Now these are the reasons why we need one another. “Communion is strength but solitude is weakness.” This is what Charles Spurgeon said as he gave an illustration of the strength of the brotherhood. He said that he that is alone is like a fine old beech tree, which cannot withstand the blast of a strong wind by itself. But in the forest where trees stand together, supporting each other, the trees laugh at the hurricane. Spurgeon is right. Again from Spurgeon, “The sheep of Jesus flock together: the social element is the genius of Christianity.” The genius of the Christian faith is that God designed a body in which there would be a social network giving you strength and encouragement to remain faithful.

So, this morning, I want to address a practical pattern. These two verses are very practical. And in them there is a pattern, which I believe we are to follow. We should develop and structure ourselves as a body, just as Christ intended. Last week we said that the author probably did not have in mind here a large church gathering like we are this morning. It probably was not his intention to say, “I want you to not forsake the assembling of yourselves every Sunday morning when everybody comes together at one place under one roof.” Now why do I say that? Because in many instances there wasn’t a building large enough to house all the Christians at one time under one roof.

We are not saying it is wrong that we come together like we are right here, in one location under one roof, worshipping and listening to the exposition of Scripture. Absolutely not, it is New Testament that we do this. I want to make sure that I am clear on this and not misunderstood. To come together as a large corporate body like we are doing this morning is biblical. Acts chapter two makes that very clear. The Bible states that the saints got together daily in the temple, and they took heed to the apostle’s doctrine. On the day of Pentecost there were three thousand people saved. Therefore, temporarily, there were three thousand people coming to the temple to hear the apostles teach. But in a few months, if not a few weeks, the Bible records, in Acts chapter five, that the number of men in the church had exceeded five thousand. If you add women and children we can safely assume a church that exceeds 10,000 in number. It would not be possible for the temple to be able to accommodate such a number. Another problem was that the Sanhedrin put a stop to the apostles coming to the temple and teaching a few weeks after the day of Pentecost.

So what other means did they have of coming together as a church and as a body? What is the practical structure of the early church that provided the opportunity of our text? The only other method that we know of is that they met together in homes and smaller groups. All throughout the city of Jerusalem a church numbering thousands was divided into smaller “house churches”. Often the Apostle Paul greets brethren who have churches meeting in their houses. “Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house” (Colossians 4:15). “Likewise greet the church that is in their (Aquila’s and Priscilla’s) house. Salute my wellbeloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ” (Romans 16:5). They met together in smaller groups more often than they did in a big location. It was in these smaller groups that personal encouragement and exhortation occurred.

Another reason that smaller groups had to be in the mind of the author of the book of Hebrews is because of the pronouns that are in verses twenty-four and twenty-five. He says, “let us consider one another.” He does not say, “let you consider one another.” He, the teacher, includes himself, “let us consider one another to provoke unto love or good works.” It is your business when we get together not just to hear a message or just to sing a song or give an offering, it is your business to exhort, provoke and stir up someone else. It is your business to provoke your brother. You are to stir and motivate others to want to love God more, and to love their brothers and sisters more, and to do it in such a way that is visible.

In verse twenty-five the author insists that they should not forsake the assembling of themselves. Again he includes himself. “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.” He continues, “but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” Exhortation is to be done on a personal level. In a large corporate worship, like we are right now, one man gets to exhort many people at one time. But that is not what this verse is dealing with. This verse is dealing with you and me exhorting one another, and that just will not happen in a church where 100 or 1000 members are present at one time. It just doesn’t happen. It only happens when there are people who are more intimate in their understanding of one another, free in their spirits to share one with another and to encourage one another.

There is no doubt in my mind that the only way that we can really faithfully obey this text is to begin to meet in smaller groups. Now the closest thing we have at Oak Grove Baptist Church to this verse is Sunday school. And so, since that is the closest thing we have right now, it is time for you, if you are not in a Sunday school class, to find one. Get involved in that class; get involved in the lives of those people in that smaller group. Teachers, it is important that you allow the opportunity of exhortation and encouragement because when a group of people gets together there are always needs. Sunday School is therefore a means to meet some of these needs.

But I want to share with you something that the Lord gave me years ago, before I came here. Through the last eight years it has been developing in my heart and mind. In fact, when I first came here I proceeded with the idea, but within a couple of weeks I received what I call a stop sign from the Lord. It was as if the Lord said “stop.” It was not the time for this yet. Years later, I now know why, but the vision was never dampened. But I believe we are getting closer to that time. But before I share this with you, you have to promise me something. Please do not reject the idea with its first hearing. Pray about it and listen to whatever He should tell you. Please pledge yourself to the Spirit of God to listen with an open mind and pray about it.

There are three objectives that a local church ought to be working toward. The first objective is discipleship, meaning maturing saints in the faith. The second is evangelism, reaching people for Christ with the good news. And the third objective is fellowship, an interaction that will actually become the catalyst of the other two objectives—discipleship and evangelism. The question, of course, is how do you do that?

Today, traditional churches are basically set up like ours. We have rows of pews where you look at the back of somebody's head to listen to one man exhort. How are we to be structured so that we can exhort one another and stir each other up to love and good works? Why don't we do what the early church did? I think there are good reasons to do so.

Let me suggest an analysis. Is it possible that Jesus purposely came to this earth at a precise time in history? It was a strategic time in history for Jesus' arrival. Paul says in Galatians that Christ came "in the fullness of time." It was the right time.

There are many reasons why it was the right time in human history for Christ to come. Mainly, there was a universal language. Everybody spoke Greek. Also, there was one government that controlled most of the known world, and therefore, it was a time of peace. Another reason was there was commerce between nations and somewhat of a developed highway system where people could get back and forth from one country to another in order to spread the gospel.

But I think there is another reason. There was something about the culture of that time that allowed community and interdependence one with another. This community we see in the early church, with its smaller groups providing an interaction one with another, was much more involved and intimate than our Sunday morning, "Hello, how are you doing?" on the parking lot.

You cannot do that in a traditional church service. How then do you do it? The way they did it, you meet in homes. This is my vision, and it is my heart. I may be committing pastoral suicide, but my trust is in God. Let Him be pleased to do with me as He desires. It is my vision one day that this church will meet on Sunday mornings just like we are doing now and celebrate what God is doing in our lives. But on Sunday nights we will not meet here. We will be meeting in homes all throughout this city in smaller groups where we will learn to put in to practice Hebrews chapter ten verse twenty-four and twenty-five.

In these home meetings, one man will not be doing all the exhorting, lecturing and sharing. You will become accountable one to another, and, according to your gifts, will learn to minister one to another. If you are an exhorter, you will exhort. If you are a mercy person, you will have opportunities to express the gift of mercy. If you are a teacher, you will be able to express your gift of teaching. God will use you, not according to the dictates of a preacher or some board, but according to the dictates of Holy Spirit. You will be used, just like He used these in the early church. That is the vision.

When will it come to pass? I don't know. That is God's business. But it is our business to obey God. Frankly, with all of my heart, I think we are a wonderful church. There is a wonderful collection of people here that God has uniquely brought together. We have some things I think a lot of churches don't have. I think God's Spirit is working among us, and for this I am thankful. But brothers and sisters, I must be frank. I don't think we are doing what we are supposed to be doing. I think we are missing the mark of discipleship, evangelism, and a fellowship that will encourage the previous two objectives. We are locked into a mold of "how to do church". This

concept of how to do church is actually hindering us from really being a church. This text in Hebrews has nothing to do with location. If you get hung up on whether or not we should be in a church building or in a home, you missed what I am saying, you missed the text. The text has no emphasis on location. The author did not bring up location, since you can provoke one another wherever and whenever you meet. Love God with all of your heart, so that you love your brother just like you love yourself. You can do this anywhere. Location has no bearing.

But we must ask ourselves, is there a way a church can structure itself that will help facilitate this. I believe there is. I think that I have suggested one of the ways in which we can so structure ourselves. It is not the only way, but one of the ways in which we can do so. Now let me tell you the upside of this vision. Not only can you minister one to another, but here is the beautiful thing, we can better evangelize this community. How can we better evangelize our community if we meet Sunday nights in our homes? There are people who will come to your home but will never darken the door of a church building. They will never come inside of a church building, but they will come into your home. There may not be a lot of them, but there are some. What do you think would happen if you really got involved in your neighbor's life and began to love him or her? How would the lost respond if we gave ourselves to them? Baby-sit a young couple's children so that they can have a night out by themselves. Get involved in their hurts and their pains, and do you think they might open their hearts? What do you think will happen if you invite your neighbor to go fishing because you see he has a boat in his back yard? Or if you are a golfer, and you see he has golf clubs, and you invite him to go play a round?

If you get out of your homes and out of your comfort zones, and get involved in others' lives, I guarantee you that if you approach your neighbor or friend and say, "Johnny, Suzie, Friday night at our house we're going to have some friends over and we are going to have some snacks and look for some answers in the Bible. Would you come?", he is liable to come to your home before he will ever come here to this church building.

Friends, I know the first reaction is to reject this because it is not the traditional way of doing church. But it was the traditional way of the early church, and if it was good enough for them, why is it not good enough for us? Did you know that church buildings didn't even begin until the fourth century? Church buildings came from Roman Catholicism. In 342 AD Constantine legalized Christianity, and he built temples for Christians to worship. This he did because as a pagan all he knew of religion was that temples were the official place of worship; hence, the idea of a church coming together in one location. Now which would you rather pattern your life and your church after? The early church, the New Testament, the primitive faith of our fathers or an early form of Roman Catholicism?

Finally, in conclusion, whether we meet on Sunday nights in homes or not, it really doesn't matter. But here is what does matter. If we do not obey this text, we are guilty of three sins. If we don't begin to find out how we can provoke our brothers and sisters to good works and to love Christ with all of their hearts; if we don't stop being more concerned about what we are going to get out of a service; if we don't stop worrying about whether we are going to be ministered

to or not, or did we feel good or not, or did the preacher say something that will help us this week; if we don't stop being more concerned about these things and start being concerned about our brothers and our sisters, then here is what is going to start happening. First, you and I will sin against God. This text says that you are to prefer one another above yourself; you are to be more concerned about your brother's or sister's walk with Christ than your own. Thus, to disregard this command is to sin against God.

Second, you will have sinned against your brother or sister. You can't sin against God in this manner and not sin against your brother or sister. Your brother or sister will be stymied in their spiritual advancement because of your failure to obey.

Third, you sin against yourself because you will never grow. There are many of you who longingly wish you were like you were when you were a new Christian. How you seek to have the same glow, excitement, and passion. But stop and think about what you were doing when you were a new Christian. You were with believers all of the time praying and reading your Bibles. Brother, you are cheating yourself and are sinning against yourself. You could be so much farther down the road in your spiritual development if you would only begin to obey Hebrews chapter ten and verses twenty-four and twenty-five.

You cannot grow as you should without ministering to other saints. The Christian experience is so designed by God as to work only as we participate in other's lives. Therefore, helping others remain faithful actually helps you to remain faithful to Christ. A constant inward focus shrivels spiritual stamina. But an outward focus on others causes the spirit to thrive.

I don't want to have all the fun here. I mean it. This has not been easy for me to change my whole mindset about ministry. Yet I know that God wants me to be obedient to His Word. That means not always being the one doing all of the ministering. Ministry is fun, and I want you to join me. Come on in, the water is fine. I can assure you, you will enjoy it. Join me as I seek God on how we should do Hebrews chapter ten and verses twenty-four and twenty-five. Let's just follow what God will show us and glorify Him by strengthening one another, and thereby preserve our own faithfulness to Christ. Amen.