

What Christians Do
Gather Together – Hebrews 10:24-25

I have some questions for you. First, what is the purpose of the church? I believe there are several purposes of the church. We meet together to worship God. We meet together to encourage each other, and we meet together to reach non-believers. Now, with that in mind, if money and resources and people were no issue, what would you like to see our church do? How could we do any of those things better? Would you like to see us build a huge fountain out front? Maybe we should add some stained-glass windows. I have an idea. How about we build a baptistry with natural rocks and some real plants to make it look like it is the Jordan River. The water will flow from a small waterfall and into a nice, heated pool. And when we aren't baptizing people, we can all just hang out in the pool. Maybe add a small diving board or slide. You know, something subtle and appropriate. No?

Seriously, I'd love to see our food pantry grow even more. I've always had a dream of having a yard mowing ministry. I'd like to have a place where people that struggle with drugs and alcohol could live and be helped. I wish we had more people to get involved in our jail ministry. We acknowledge around here that God has called us to minister specifically to the poor, the addicted and the incarcerated. So, I would like to be able to be more effective in those areas. So, why can't we do those things? Well, the question I asked earlier was, if money and resources and people were no issue, what would you like to see our church do? So, of money, resources and people, which of those things has free will? Which of those things makes the choice to be here? Money does what money is supposed to do. It goes where it is given. It has no choice. And the God we worship...is LOADED! He paves the streets of Heaven with gold. Jesus paid His taxes by getting a coin out of a fish's mouth. Money is just a tool and God is like Tim "the tool guy" Taylor who has a garage full of it. That is not an issue. The people are the issue.

The other thing the church is supposed to do is encourage each other. We lift each other up. And we do that with our words and with our works and by our examples. How many of you have ever come to church and somebody gave you a compliment? *"I like your shoes."* *"Nice car."* Or maybe, *"You don't sweat much for a fat guy?"* I'd take that. It's better than nothing, I guess. And that is encouraging. But how many of you have ever had people from church help you move? Victoria and some others. Man, I sure have. How many of you have ever had somebody from church bring you food or mow your grass after a surgery? Maybe somebody changed your flat tire or fixed your plumbing. That's really nice. But how many of you have ever had somebody see the hurt behind your smile and say, *"I know you are having a hard time right now. Let me pray for you?"* How much is that worth? Where else do you go for that? Where else do people love on you when you don't feel lovely? Where else can you go to get unconditional love? Can you get anything close to that at the bar? The ballgame? The lake? The grocery store? That is what the church is for. We encourage each other, we love on each other. We minister to the unbelievers and we worship God who lives inside of us and allows and empowers us to do all that.

There are two verses of scripture that tell us that in the New Testament book of **Hebrews**. Turn toward the back of your Bible past **Titus** and **Philemon** and before **James**. We don't know for sure who wrote the book of Hebrews, but his concern was that the Hebrew people might turn away from Christianity and back to the old Jewish laws and traditions. It's what they grew up with and what they were comfortable with. It's what they knew. But it wasn't the right way.

For us, we want to know what Christians are supposed to do and not do. We want more than anything to please God with our lives. Last week, we learned that, as Christians, we need to be ready for Jesus to come back at any minute. But since He hasn't come back yet, the next thing we need to do is to gather together. Let's read how the author of Hebrews puts it in **Hebrews 10:24-25**. *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not*

giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Now, my first question is for the end of this passage. Where it says, *“and all the more as you see the Day approaching”* ...what Day is he talking about? Friday? Saturday? Labor Day? No. He is talking about the Rapture, the Day the Lord comes back to get us. And when is that going to be? We don’t know but it could be anytime. And as we learned last week, the Day is getting crazy close. So, he is saying that this passage applies more to us today than it did for them back then. So, what should we be doing? We should be spurring one another on toward love and good deeds. “Spurring” sounds kind of painful if you think about it but the word literally means to provoke or to stir up or to make a feeling even sharper. Maybe somebody is loving and giving. Well, you see that and encourage that so they will do it even more.

I heard the story of a woman who walked out her front door one morning and found a strange little dog sitting at the door with her newspaper in its mouth. She thought that was great and was thrilled to have that kind of newspaper delivery, so she gave the dog some treats. The next morning, she was horrified to find the same dog at her door, except this time he had **eight newspapers**. She had to spend the day returning the stolen papers. (Marion Gilbert in *Reminisce, Reader's Digest*, February 1994, p. 12.)

But that’s what a little encouragement will do. We should spur one another on to more love and more good deeds and we do that by encouragement. You might say something like, *“Hey, **Troy**, I see that you take the trash out of all the trash cans around here and dump them every week. I appreciate that. It really makes a difference.”* I bet you next week Troy is a trash-dumping sucker and he does it with a smile on his face. If you were to tell **Ben** that you really appreciate the work he puts into the Wednesday night Bible study, that next week it’s even a little bit better. If you told **Morris** that the bulletin really helps you and you appreciate the little touches he adds every week, that would just make his day. I’ll tell you what, if you want the little kids group to grow and thrive, and we all do, I bet if you told **Cindy and Anna** that you appreciate what they do even while there are but a few kids, that would be the water to grow the plant of children’s church. The opportunities are endless around here for stirring up other people to love and good deeds. My **Uncle Bill** was an evangelist and he said when he would go to a church for a revival that he would ask the pastor about certain people and who did what and who was responsible for what around the church. Then he would ask the pastor to say what was the best thing about that person. Then later on, Uncle Bill would approach that person and say, *“Your pastor tells me you are...”* the friendliest person in the church or the best Sunday School teacher or a great custodian or whatever it was. Do you see what he did there? He gave someone a genuine compliment but credited the compliment to somebody else! That’s genius! That is exactly what it means to stir somebody up to love and good deeds – and doing it without making yourself look good. That leaves everybody smiling, including God.

Now, look back at **verse 25 of Hebrews 10**. *“not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing...”* Like I said earlier, the Hebrew people being written to here were in danger of slipping back into their old ways of Judaism. And so much of that was about the external; keeping the Law was less about actually keeping the Law but instead more about if it looked like you were keeping the Law. And sometimes I have people ask me if missing church is a sin. Well, number one, this passage is God-breathed and divinely inspired and so if it says not to give up meeting together, then if you give up meeting together, that’s a sin. But honestly, I think you’re asking the wrong question. It’s sort of like asking how much can you get away with and still be in God’s good graces. That’s the opposite of the question you ought to ask. You ought to ask what else you can do to make God look good in light of the grace he gives.

I know you can’t make it to church every Sunday of your life. Sometimes you get sick or have some kind of emergency. We all understand that. But if you don’t make church a priority, then you are missing out on that encouragement somebody has for you. Somebody else is missing out on your encouragement. That’s not fair. If you don’t make church a priority, then don’t expect your kids to either. Don’t expect your neighbor to notice you go to church once a month and

say, *“Oh, I want what you have.”* If you don’t make church a priority, don’t expect to grow in the Lord. And if you prioritize work over church, don’t expect God to bless your finances or your health. I’m not saying that coming to church guarantees you health and wealth. Not at all! But I am saying that God has given us a Sabbath day of rest (Exodus 20:8). And if you keep that one day holy, separate, and different, God will bless the effort you put out on the other days. A Sabbath rest is good for you mentally and physically as well as spiritually. But I understand if some people don’t make church a priority. What I understand is that **2 Thessalonians chapter 2** says that in the end times (which we are in) there will be a great falling away from church and God in general. It calls it the great apostasy. “Apostasy” means literally to fall away from the faith. But you say, *“Oh, I haven’t fallen away from the faith. I just get busy with work and the kids have soccer and doing things with the spouse. You know.”* Yes, I know that is called apostasy and it is sin. It sounds just like what the author of Hebrews was concerned about when he wrote this book. He was concerned that the Hebrews would go back to the lifestyle they used to know. He didn’t want them to go back to what was comfortable because it was the wrong way. It was sin. And, as we have discussed lately, we all want nothing more than to stay away from sin and to please God with our lives.

Kids cardboard blocks Audra, you are creative. I want you to take this block and build something creative with it. Yes, it’s just one block but I bet you can make something cool out of it. Go ahead. A house, a car, a motorcycle, a castle; just use your imagination. Go for it. You can’t? You’re so creative. Why can’t you? Because you only have one block? Okay, here’s one more. I’m expecting something big now with two blocks. Tower of London maybe? A giraffe? What’s it going to be? Even with two, there’s not much you can do, is there? Maybe make a “t”. But if you have a whole bunch of blocks then you could do whatever you could imagine, right? **Empty the box** Now, the good thing about building a church is that is not really our job, is it? Jesus said in **Matthew 16** that was His job. And He doesn’t need rich people. He just needs people. He needs people that make the church a priority in their lives, which means, not just coming to the church building, but being the church all the time. Loving other people enough to show up when and where they are needed.

Let me close by telling you that most of you know I’m not a big sports fan. Let me tell you why. *Every time I went, they asked me for money. The people with whom I had to sit didn't seem very friendly. The seats were too hard and not at all comfortable. I went to many games, but the coach never came to call on me. The referee made a decision with which I could not agree. I suspected that I was sitting with some hypocrites -- they came to see their friends and what others were wearing rather than to see the game. Some games went into overtime, and I was late getting home. The band played some numbers that I had never heard before. It seems that the games are scheduled when I want to do other things. I was taken to too many games by my parents when I was growing up. I don't want to take my children to any games, because I want them to choose for themselves what sport they like best.* At Calvary, Covington, KY.

I actually found that online but it is a perfect analogy for why some people don’t come to church. And I get it. Church isn’t for everybody and our church is not for everybody either. You aren’t going to find a perfect church. But the thing is, the scripture says to spur one another on to love and to not give up meeting together. It does not say...unless it’s not perfect...unless you have something else to do...or unless you have to work. It doesn’t say that. Church doesn’t save you. But it’s what saved people do. And if you give up meeting together, at best there is something wrong with your relationship with God. And it very well could be that you don’t have a relationship with God at all. You can’t tell me you love Jesus if you don’t love His bride, the church.

So, let’s make sure, once again, that we are all saved, born-again believers following Jesus to Heaven. Can you remember a time – that one time in your life – when you asked God to forgive you of your sins and to cleanse you and change you and make you more like Him? Did you ask Him to come into your life and be, not just your Savior, but your Lord as well? Did you repent of that lifestyle, turning away from it and toward the way God wanted you to go? If you have, then thank God for that day. Thank Him for His grace that allowed that. If you never have, then I need to talk with you right now. Do it right now as the music plays.