

## **A GOOD HABIT!** Heb. 10:24-25

There is just so much that can be discouraging about this world that we live in, and the circumstances we face; it should be no surprise to us that God wants the church – that is every Christian – to take responsibility for urging each other, stirring each other up, motivating each other and not neglecting meeting with each other.

And so today I want to encourage you on what it is to keep a tight grip on faith and hope in Christ and how that translates into spurring others on through a *good habit* of gathering together. And I'll do that from the scripture in Hebrews 10:23-25 and explain why that should be our habit.

We'll see that encouragement extends to keeping one-another spiritually on track, we have a biblical responsibility to do that. Iron sharpening iron. Challenging each other to be Christ-centred, to be dealing with sin, particularly habitual sin<sup>1</sup>, because together we are the body of Christ. We're the sum of all our parts, we're in this together. All this is an essential aspect of our encouraging one-another, as we meet together.

So strong is the emphasis we see in Hebrews and other places in scripture there is a sense that to not be in the habit of being this kind of church, is to not be the kind of church that's honouring God.

A discouraging world is one thing, but being a dis-couraging church, that would really weigh heavy on our hearts...and fortunately there are some clues in the scripture that will help us be quite the opposite. Not least, the kind of love and support and encouragement toward one another God wants us to have, is the kind that has its foundations in Christ and the faithfulness of God.

This kind of encouragement is well illustrated in nature in the groves of the giant sequoia trees of California. These trees reach up to 90m and have unusually shallow root systems that reach out in all directions to capture the greatest amount of surface moisture. As their roots extend horizontally, the intertwining roots of the trees close together weave a network of support which provides stability against violent storms. You could say the trees are so 'designed' by their Creator that they need each other, they 'help each other out'. Which explains why you virtually always see them growing assembled together in clusters ("*not forsaking their assembling together*").

I'm told you seldom see a giant redwood standing alone, because the high winds would quickly uproot the shallow root system of the lone trees. The Hebrew believers of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Jesus left the 99 for the one.

first century desperately needed to grow in groves, the church of the 21st century are no different!<sup>2</sup>

God has so designed the body, of which Jesus is the head, to function as a body. With all its different parts and abilities, and flaws and failures and needs and graces, there is a very distinct and deliberate purpose for the body.

Aside from what today's text teaches us there can be little of John 17 oneness and Psalm 133 unity and blessing if our habit is to isolate ourselves or withdraw from intentional fellowship. Yet many will, isolate and withdraw, along with their time, treasures and talents (gifts). I'm suggesting today that's not God's idea of church.

For me there is a strong emphasis in scripture that church is about *the body gathered*. It is not church as God intended church when we have Christ followers attempting to exist apart from the gathered body. We need each other. We're interdependent on each other. And that will be made clear to us in Heb. 10.

(READ Heb. 10:23-25) *Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 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.*

If I were to ask you, when you wake up in the morning, what direction do you give yourself for the day? Where do you get your direction from? What do you consciously give priority to doing in the day? What might your response be? A long list of things...? What if, every day, you and I could intentionally be a source of the encouragement of the Lord, to someone, to others? To "*spur*" them on – tell you what that means shortly – potentially making a significant difference to someone's life. What state does my heart need to be in to be there?<sup>3</sup>

We can deduce from these verses what must have been going on in the hearts and lives of those written to. It's clear that for those believers, and us, God wants us aiming at something, not 'swerving' here and there aimlessly, not drifting, not giving into temptation, not just professing the hope, but living the hope.

God wants us to have a purpose.

And that purpose is "*unswerving hope*" in Jesus, demonstrating itself in "*spur(ing) one another on toward love and good deeds*". And this "*spur(ing) one another on toward love and good deeds*" demonstrates itself through "*not giving up meeting together, as some*

---

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from: [https://www.preceptaustin.org/hebrews\\_1024-25](https://www.preceptaustin.org/hebrews_1024-25)

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/consider-each-other-how-to-stir-up-love>

*are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching”.*

So let's consider together what these three verses teach us about the purpose and priority of our lives as Christians. What might God say, what might God clarify for us...let's start with v. 23...

*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.*

### **MOORED TO HOPE**

Our motivation and willingness to spur others on and to encourage others is founded in Christ. The deeper and more robust and secure our foundations the greater our motivation and willingness to spur on and encourage. This is the fruit of a spirit-filled Christian.

Here, we are asked to keep a tight grip (*“let us hold”*) on Christ, *“the hope we profess”*, so that faith doesn't fly away.

The writer doesn't leave it there though he says, we've got to keep a tight grip, and, don't move, don't bend, don't shift, stay in that place (*“unswervingly”*), in Christ.

A few weeks ago I caught a clip on TV of a woman and her family making their way down to Bondi Beach. She had several huge inflatable beach toys including a big ball, and the wind was blowing and she was grappling with all these things, then a big gust a wind and she just couldn't hold this thing and off it went.

Faith is like that for many Christians because our circumstances dictate faith and hope, rather than our faith and hope in Christ dictating how we approach our circumstances. So why such strong encouragement in Heb. 10? Probably, because there were a number of believers ready to quit faith in Christ...too hard, persecution was just too much, too many issues with others in the church, they gave way to their circumstances that outweighed depth of faith in Christ and were withdrawing from fellowship.

(Heb. 3: 6) *But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.*

Let's talk for a moment about this hope we profess in v.23. This hope we're asked to *“hold unswervingly”* to. I've heard hope described as “the feeling you have that feeling you have isn't permanent”<sup>4</sup>

We're not hoping in someone imagined or fictional, and it's not on again off again intermittent, hope, this is persistent, persevering, white-knuckled *“hold(ing) unswervingly”* to Jesus whose grace is always sufficient for you and I.

---

<sup>4</sup> Jean Kerr in Heb. NIV App Comms, pg 247

The writer to the Hebrews has just spent the best part of 10 chapters making his case explaining to and encouraging Christians in whom our hope is, Christ. Which is why if you go to v.19 – the start of this section of verses, you see the word “*therefore*”. “*Therefore*” – given everything I’ve just told you about Jesus, this is someone you can put your hope in!

...just to really cement my point and this truth let me take you to...(Heb. 4:14-16)  
*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us **(what?)** hold firmly to the faith we profess. **(why?)** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

I’ve spoken about having a tight, unbending, unflinching grip on hope (“*hold unswervingly to the hope we profess*”). Heb. 6:19 speaks of hope being an “*anchor for the soul, firm and secure*” This verse further reinforces that idea except here using the image of an anchor to describe the hope we *can have* in Christ.

Plutarch the Greek philosopher suggests a person who gives in to life’s urges, in defiance of reason, has no more *stability* than the hook of an anchor lodged in loose sand. However, an anchor is for a boat, what hope in Christ is for our souls, for now and for eternity to come.

How tight is the grip, how unswerving is the hope you have in Christ, as we speak? Because according to God’s word he has promised us he is faithful and will be faithful. He has promised to remember your sins no more (Hebrews 10:17), that Jesus Christ was a “*once for all*” sacrifice (10:10) his promise is, he never leaves us or forsakes us (13:59), his promise is that pain and hard times are for our good (12:10). And God keeps his word.

And so how do you know when this depth of anchored hope has taken effect in your life? There will be outward signs, evidence, visible effects. Such as... (v.24) ...

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,*

## **MOTIVATED TO LOVE**

Our hope in Christ activates something in us to want and will to “spur” on others! “*Consider how we may*”, is not suggesting we just give a little thought to it, even though that’s the right thing to do.

"Consider how we may" is a very definite and ongoing focus on **how** we will actively stir up others. There's one other place this word "consider" is used in Hebrews. Take a look at 3:1, "Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession" Consider carefully, attentively, think about, study, Jesus, let your mind be occupied, with Jesus<sup>5</sup>.

Take that same thought across to v.24, and it means literally to consider one another. "...consider, how we may spur one another..." which is literally to provoke others, irritate<sup>6</sup> others to action in two (ways) areas:

- a. "toward love" – Agape, unconditional love, "by this all men...love..." (John 13:35)
- b. "and good deeds" – are only "good deeds" when they reflect the life of Christ, done in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now I don't want us to miss the intent or emphasis of what the bible is teaching us here with "consider how we may spur one another on..." because this is vital to being a healthily functioning body. When we start our day and we are considering what we will consciously give priority to doing, could this very deliberately be asking, what can I do today so that someone will be stirred up and spurred on toward love and good deeds? Oh man, when do I get to do what I want to do. *That's the point.* This is \*what we should want to do, because what Christ did for us means that much! This is the posture and the attitude of the Christian who desires to pass on the hope that they themselves have encountered.<sup>7</sup>

So we consider, we're attentive, we're purposeful about how we love others and spur on others to love and good works and we ourselves are spurred on and stirred up. So if that's the aim, *how do we do this?* ... (v.25) ...

not giving up meeting together, as some **are in the habit** of doing, but encouraging one another....

## MEET TO ENCOURAGE

Several years ago, former American prisoners of war were interviewed to determine what methods used by the enemy had been most effective in breaking their spirit. Researchers learned that the prisoners didn't break down from physical deprivation and torture as quickly as they did from solitary confinement or from being frequently moved around and separated from friends. They discovered that the soldiers drew their greatest strength from the close attachments they had formed to the small military units to which they belonged.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/consider-each-other-how-to-stir-up-love>

<sup>6</sup> Stimulate, sharpen. Paroxysmos...is a word borrowed from physicians, who use it to set out the violent incursion of a fever, when the fit is so strong as to make the body tremble and bed shake with the horror and rigour of it.

([https://www.preceptaustin.org/hebrews\\_1024-25](https://www.preceptaustin.org/hebrews_1024-25))

<sup>7</sup> That's the oil in their wheels, so to speak. Hope is real for me, it has filled me...

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.preceptaustin.org/hebrews\\_1024-25](https://www.preceptaustin.org/hebrews_1024-25)

The implication in this passage is that to withdraw from fellowship, to not intentionally meet together regularly as believers, has a negative effect on your perseverance in faith. If you think of Jesus' words on the cross "*my God, my God, why have you forsaken me*" (Matt. 27:46) it is the same sense of 'forsaking', Christians were/are at risk of here: abandoning God and abandoning the church by an unwillingness to persevere in meeting together. And, if we read on from v.26 we find pretty serious warnings for those who forsake gathering with fellow believers.

*What were some of their reasons?* Threat of persecution, connection to previous religions **and ways of life**<sup>9</sup>, crisis of faith, and plain old apathy<sup>10</sup> – (just) can't be bothered! There's an important paradox to point out here: hard times, trials, difficult spiritual phases we go through are not the times to withdraw<sup>11</sup>, these are the times we must lean on each other.

Look also at...Heb. 3:12-13. *See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. **But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today,"** so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.*

At times throughout COVID-19 we've relied heavily on technology (TV, internet, social media) for some sense of connecting. It can be a good and useful resource; it can be a blessing to us. However, it can also have an isolating effect<sup>12</sup>. There is no substitute for the gathered body of Christ; gathering, not forsaking the assembling ourselves will always take precedence over any other form of connecting. *Technology will never do for you what the body of Christ ought to **be** for you, and you for the body.*

Now this text has been historically used as a basis for regular church attendance, and that's certainly correct. The gathering of Christians for worship is a biblically insisted upon practice, but here in this text, it is specifically for the purposes of *mutual encouragement*.<sup>13</sup> The writer was not addressing individuals, but a group, and his main purpose was to encourage and strengthen those whose faith in Christ was flagging.

Take a look at v. 19, "*Therefore brothers and sisters...*", v. 22, "*Let us draw near to God...*", v.23, "*Let us hold unswervingly...*", v. 24, "*Let us consider one another...*", v.25 "*Let us not give up meeting...*", v. 25b, "*let us encourage one another...*". That's a lot of let us's! Put that together with the rest of the text, God does not want us drifting away from him, rather constantly, moving toward him. How? "*Not giving up meeting together*"

---

<sup>9</sup> What might that be today?

<sup>10</sup> Heb NIV Comms, pg. 345

<sup>11</sup> As if to stay at home in isolation is the key to navigating my way through issues

<sup>12</sup> Given the amount of available resource online – preaching, worship, etc - can create the mind-set that "I don't need church"

<sup>13</sup> In the same way God's love includes disciple of his children, encouragement of fellow believers includes urging others to deal with issues of sin

What does that correspond to (look like) in this church?

- Worship gatherings on Sundays
- Our involvement in Home groups
- Our involvement in prayer groups
- Craft Groups
- Café Connect

How often ought this *"Not giving up meeting together"* be? *"all the more as you see the Day approaching"* (v.25b) What "Day" is this? The Day that Christ will return.

*Where are we in regards to v.25?* There's an old Jewish proverb that says, a friendless man is like the left hand bereft of the right hand<sup>14</sup>. It follows that a Christian habitually not gathering is like a left hand bereft of the right hand.<sup>15</sup> Proverbs 18 says, *a man who isolates himself seeks his own desire, and he rages against all wise judgement*. We...need the family of God.

(III) In a letter to the editor of a British newspaper, a man complained that he saw no sense in going to church every Sunday.

"I've been attending services quite regularly for the past 30 years," he wrote, "and during that time...I have listened to no less than 3,000 sermons. But, to my consternation I cannot remember any of them. I wonder if a pastor's time might be more profitably spent on something else." The letter sparked a lot of response. One was the clincher: "I've been married for 30 years. During that time, I have eaten 32,850 meals – mostly, my wife's cooking. I cannot remember the menu of a single meal. And yet, I received nourishment from every one of them. I have the distinct impression that without them I would have starved to death long ago."<sup>16</sup>

Now we know church is so much more than the sermon. Our assembling, and "all the more...", is ministry, we give, and we receive. Is that how we see it though? I know there are many reasons why Christians are not in the regular habit of committed and regular gathering, I know there are many reasons people are 'done' with church. Hurt, etc. I know there are things we don't always enjoy, more, really put us off, church. So many people, all those amazing gifts the body never benefits from. Do we see that our dedication to gathering is bigger than just me and my preferences?

We live in a day where the priority and value and biblical call to gather has shifted, not for all, but for many. Church has become optional.

<sup>14</sup> <https://sacred-texts.com/jud/ajp/ajp12.htm>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.bing.com/search?q=skip+heitzig+jewish+proverb+left+hand+right+hand&q&form=QBRE&sp=-1&pg=skip+heitzig+jewish+proverb+&sc=0-28&sk=&cvid=323AA57461A64F63A873F5308449369E>

<sup>16</sup> Adapted from: [https://www.preceptaustin.org/hebrews\\_1024-25](https://www.preceptaustin.org/hebrews_1024-25)

You say I'm spiritually strong I don't need to be with other Christians, I don't need church as much as others. You do, and I do, and we do.

When I look at Heb. 10:23-25 I see it calling us beyond ourselves looking to Christ, who is faithful to us. And his faithfulness to us extends to us being a source of the encouragement of the Lord, to someone, to others. If you read on from v.25 you see there are some pretty serious risks associated with not meeting together, God takes this that seriously. Gather to encourage, and to be encouraged. Spur others on toward Christ, potentially making a significant difference to someone's life...

Here's where I think this all starts.

Psalm 84, *"how lovely is your dwelling place Lord Almighty. My soul yearns, even faints for the courts of the Lord, my flesh and my heart cry out for the living God"*

Psalm 42, *"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you. My soul thirsts for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?"*

In the NT Acts 2:42 shows us what the early church did when they met together: *"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."* Christians came together: They made this their habit, this was their deal...

In the end today's scripture comes simply down to this, ***when we love the Lord we love his people... we love to gather; we love to encourage...will we be obedient to this?***

One final thought: Jesus said "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it" He's building the church. But, we by our commitment to gathering with others, encouraging others are part of Him building the church.

***Jesus doesn't build the church apart from us but, in us, with us and through us.***