

5-4-25 Everyone (Gathering: The Power and Priority of Gathering)

Week 1

Text: Hebrews 10:19-25

Big Idea: The church is God's plan A. There is no plan B. The Power and Priority of Gathering Together.

Church, we are facing a crisis. A crisis not of persecution or opposition, but of disconnection.

Twenty years ago, it was common for believers to gather three times a week—Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night. But today, the fastest-growing group in church life is the once-a-month attendee. -Thom Rainer

A recent Gallup survey revealed that only 20% of Americans attend church weekly—down from 32% in 2000. The “nones”—those who have no religious affiliation—now account for 30% of the population.

But perhaps the most troubling is this: The percentage of evangelicals who never attend in person church has jumped from 25% pre-COVID to 33% today. (2023)

One pastor put it bluntly:

“The great task of the church is not only to get sinners into heaven, but to get saints out of bed.”

Isn't that the truth? One of the most heartbreaking things I hear in our community is when someone says: "I'm a Christian, but I don't really go to church."

Another preacher writes:

"Churchless Christians. Flockless sheep. Bodyless body parts. First-century believers would not have had a category for such a thing. It would have been one of the most bizarre phenomena imaginable."

Another pastor laments:

"Many have untethered themselves from the ministry and mission of the visible church. They prefer a highly personalized spirituality cobbled together from websites, books, and podcasts. They have grown partial to online worship for reasons of convenience and autonomy. They envision Christianity on their own terms—without accountability, discipline, or shepherding care. But nowhere in Scripture do we see this kind of privatized faith. It's utterly foreign to biblical Christianity. A Christian without a church is like a lone sheep in the wilderness, exposed to countless dangers."

But here's some good news...I believe Bethel Church is an outlier.

I have never been around so many committed Christ-followers in my life! You, church, are countercultural in your dedication to gathering with God's people. But even here, there are some who have not yet made this commitment. And for those of you already all-in, God is calling you to reach out and bring others back.

God's Plan for Us: Gather, Grow, Give, Go (This is our series)

Our assignment from the Almighty is simple yet profound:

- **Gather in worship.**
- **Grow in faith.**
- **Give in service.**
- **Go with the gospel.**

And today, we focus on the first—EVERYONE gathering. We want to see everyone connected every week.

Four Action Steps

1. Prioritize in-person worship. Make it non-negotiable. Be present in the house of God.
2. Get to know someone you don't. Fellowship is about relationships, not routines.
3. Get involved. Use your spiritual gifts for God's glory in God's local body.
4. Encourage others to return. Some have drifted away, and they need an invitation home.

Read Hebrews 10:19-25

In **Hebrews 10:19-25**, we see an urgent call for believers to hold fast and remain faithful.

Some of these Jewish-background believers were ready to bail on their faith because it was becoming too difficult to identify with Christ in a society which was headed south. On top of that, some were compromising their convictions while others had simply allowed other pursuits to crowd out the primacy of Christ and the priority of gathering with other Christians.

The word **“therefore”** in **verse 19** signals a turning point. Up to this moment, Hebrews has focused on doctrine. Now, it shifts to duty.

In this passage, three great Christian virtues emerge:

- **Faith (v. 22)**
- **Hope (v. 23)**
- **Love (v. 24)**

And the passage is rich with togetherness—12 plural words like **“brethren,” “us,” “our,”** and **“one another.”**

I. Our Position in Christ. (Remember!)

1. We Have Access to the Almighty (v. 19-20)

- The word **“brethren”** (of the same womb) reminds us that we are family in Christ.
- **“Boldness”** means confidence and freedom to enter God's presence.
- The temple veil that once blocked access to the Holy of Holies? Jesus tore it in two!
- Through His new and living way, we have direct access to God, something unimaginable for the early Jewish believers.

- Jews would travel to Jerusalem 3 times a year, the Passover, Shavout (Pentecost), in the spring and Sukkot (tabernacle, tents, booths) in the fall. At the very least they would pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover.
- This would be quite an ordeal to make these trips. Very costly, and time consuming.
- The only person that was allowed into the inner courts of the temple were the priests and only the High Priest was allowed in the Holy of Holies of the temple.
- No commoner was able to access God. Until Jesus!
- We have complete access to go before the throne of God. We don't need a priest, a pastor, a politician, anyone and everyone is welcome to come to God.
- Jesus made this possible! Praise God!

2. We Have an Advocate (v. 21).

- Jesus is our **“High Priest”**—our Mediator, our Defender, our Champion.
- The word **“High”** is the Greek word “megas,” meaning “superior in stature.” The earthly high priest could only go into the holy place once a year, after making sacrifice for his own sins first.
- Unlike the earthly high priest, Jesus never needs to atone for His own sins.
- He stands in the gap for us, interceding on our behalf.

My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous 1 John 2:1 NLT

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Hebrews 4:15 ESV

- As the accuser (Satan) stands before God throwing us under the bus Jesus sits on the mercy seat as a reminder of the work He did on our behalf.

II. Our Practice as Believers

Now, here's how we put our faith into action. Three powerful commands begin with **“Let us...”**

1. Let us draw near (v. 22).

- *This is about our relationship with God.*

“Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.” James 4:8

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:16 ESV

- Because of what Jesus has done for us; we can draw closer to God. This is done through submission and surrender.
- Are you drawing near or drifting away?
- Through our surrender of our lives, our actions draw us closer to God.

**“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
Matthew 5:6**

- How hungry and thirsty are you?

2. Let us hold fast (v. 23).

- *This is about our relationship with the world.*
- We must loosen our grip on things of this world and hold fast to things of God.
- We must hold onto our hope because God is faithful.
- Without wavering! God desires to be our priority. Is He in your life, or do you fit Him in when you can? Does our relationship take precedence over everything else?
- Can I be a witness? Until He gets his proper place of priority in our life, we will continue to run the rat race of this world.
- We will continue to be exhausted, overstimulated, consumers, or servants with battered hearts.

He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. 1 Thess. 5:24

- Society is sliding into sin; will you stand firm or continue to be swept away?

3. Let us consider one another (v. 24).

- *This is about our relationship with others.*
- In **verse 24** we're called away from our own self-centered desires: **“And let us consider...”** To **“consider”** means to “contemplate, notice, and observe.”
- So, we are to consider one another...that means someone besides you.
- **“Stir up”** means, to provoke, sharpen, stimulate, but not to stir up trouble! (Hmmmm)
- **We are contributors, not consumers. Stimulators, not spectators. Encouragers, not eeyores. Joyful, not jealous!**

I like how the New Living Translation puts it: **“Think of ways to encourage one another to outbursts of love and good deeds.”**

- There's no way to live out the 59 **“one another”** commands in the New Testament unless we are in close community with one another.
- The word **“saints,”(ssss)** which refers to Christians, is used 62 times but is never once used in the singular. God designed us to gather together in community to bring Him glory.

III. The Urgency of Gathering (v. 25).

God's Word commands:

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some."

The word **“forsaking”** is strong—it means to abandon, neglect, or desert.

Let me say it plainly:

- Attending/being a part of church is **NOT** optional for a follower of Christ.
- **NOT** being part of a church is an act of disobedience.

Yes, there are legitimate reasons why some cannot attend, and I thank God for the ability to livestream. But online church should supplement, **not replace**, gathering in person.

Even Jesus Himself prioritized gathering in worship:

"As was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day." (Luke 4:16)

"Bad habits are like comfortable beds, easy to get into, but hard to get out of."

From **Acts 2** to **Revelation 3**, the local church is central. Of the 114 times **"church"** is mentioned in the New Testament, at least 90 refer to specific local gatherings.

There is no such thing as a lone-ranger Christian.

IV. Encourage One Another, THE Day Is Approaching.

Verse 25 ends with urgency:

"Exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

Christ is coming soon.

- Some believers are more committed than ever.
- Others are unplugged and unraveling.

Blessings and Benefits of EVERYONE Gathering:

I thought it might be helpful to list some blessings and benefits which flow out of gathering with God's people for worship on a regular basis. This list may come in handy when you hear someone say, "I'm a Christian but I don't need to go to church." And it might be helpful when you don't feel like coming:

1. God is glorified when His people gather to give Him praise (**Psalm 29:1-3**).
2. We are humbled when we realize He is God, and we are not (**Psalm 100:3**).

Paul David Tripp writes, *"Corporate worship is designed to humble you by pointing out the depth of your need and enthrall you by pointing to the glory of God's provision..."*

3. Gathering together helps keep us grounded in our faith (**Colossians 2:6-7**).
4. When we meet for worship, we're impacted again by the glorious message of the gospel (**1 Timothy 1:15**).
5. Gathering together gives us courage in witnessing (**Romans 1:16**).
6. Our worship through song fulfills the command for God's gathered people to sing praise to Him (**Colossians 3:16**).
7. Our singing together reinforces God's truth in our lives (**Ephesians 5:19**).

8. We're reminded we're not alone as we receive support and encouragement (**Romans 12:15**).
9. We're equipped for ministry and mission (**Ephesians 4:11-16**).
10. We grow in our love for our neighbors and the nations (**Mark 12:31**).
11. We have the joy of supporting and praying for missionaries (**Colossians 4:3**).
12. We grow in our compassion and care for believers in need (**Galatians 6:10**).
13. We have the privilege of celebrating communion in union with other believers (**1 Corinthians 11:23-34**).
14. We have the joy of witnessing believers declare their commitment to Christ through baptism (**Matthew 28:18-20**).
15. We get to focus on the oneness we have in Christ (**Ephesians 2:14**).
16. When we gather for worship here, we get a foretaste of heavenly worship to come (**Revelation 7:9-10**).
17. We allow the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin and conform us to the image of Christ (**John 16:8**).
18. Non-believers will observe our worship and conclude God is in our midst (**1 Corinthians 14:24-25**).
19. Hearing the preaching of God's Word allows us to be discipled corporately (**2 Timothy 4:2**).
20. We experience the power of corporate prayer (**Acts 2:42-47**).
21. Families are strengthened when they come to church together (**Joshua 24:15**).
22. Worshipping together is an opportunity to grow in generosity (**1 Timothy 6:18**).
23. We learn how to bear with people who are different from us (**Ephesians 4:1-2**).
24. We get to practice forgiving and asking for forgiveness (**Ephesians 4:28**).
25. We're reminded of our identity, our purpose, and our meaning (**Genesis 1:26-27**).
26. Gathering together will help encourage us about the Lord's return (**1 Thessalonians 4:18**).
27. We'll have a front row seat when God brings revival to our church (**Psalms 85:6**).

Conclusion

Church, the time for casual Christianity is over.

The return of Christ is closer than it has ever been. And as the world grows darker, the need for the light of the Church has never been greater.

The enemy wants to isolate you...because a scattered army is a weak army. But God has called us to stand together...to gather, to worship, to serve, and to encourage one another.

Will you be a spectator or a soldier?

Will you be an attender or a warrior for Christ?

Will you be a churchgoer or a church builder?

Because this is not just about attendance, it's about allegiance.

Jesus Didn't Die for a Crowd—He Died for a Church

- Jesus didn't give His life so we could fit Him into our schedules when it's convenient.
- He gave everything so we could live with purpose, power, and passion.
- He didn't hold back His love....so why should we hold back our commitment?
- He didn't make excuses...so why should we?
- He didn't stay in the tomb...so why should we stay in bed, or on the golf course, or hunting, hiking, or any other busyness?

The Church Is God's Plan A—There Is No Plan B

- There is no substitute for the body of Christ.
- A **disconnected** Christian is a defeated Christian.
- A **disengaged** believer is a vulnerable believer.
- A **churchless** Christian is a powerless Christian.

The world desperately needs a Church that is **fully awake, fully alive, and fully committed** to the mission of Jesus.

Rise Up, Church!

This is not the time to shrink back.

This is not the time to stay silent.

This is not the time to sleep.

This is the time to rise.

This is the time to gather.

This is the time to stand firm, hold fast, and stir one another to love and good works.

Because one day, the doors of this church will close for the last time.

One day, the final sermon will be preached.

One day, the trumpet will sound, and the King will return.

And when He does, will He find you faithful?

Will He find you gathered with the saints?

Will He find you living for His glory?

Or will He find you asleep?

Wake up, Church! The Day is approaching.

Now is the time.

Now is the hour.

No more excuses. No more delays. No more half-hearted faith.

Let's rise up.

Closing Prayer:

Father,

The time for casual faith is over. We hear Your call and we will not hit snooze. Awaken Your Church. Shake us from comfort. Stir us with conviction. Ignite us with purpose.

Jesus, You didn't die so we could attend occasionally—you died to raise an army. You gave everything, and now we give You our full allegiance. No more half-hearted faith. No more excuses.

We rise today—not as spectators, but as soldiers.

Not just churchgoers, but Church builders.

We commit to gather, to worship, to serve, and to shine Your light in a dark world.

Use us now.

Send us now.

Revive us now.

In the mighty name of Jesus we pray, Amen.