

“Why Believers Gather”

Hebrews 10:19-25

One of the most common symptoms of a person's declining faith is that they stop gathering with other believers. This sad pattern was already taking place within the first few decades of the church's existence. By the time this letter was written it had become a longstanding habit among some. Undoubtedly there were a wide variety of reasons why people were choosing to abandon Jesus, but when they did they abandoned His people as well. In other words, they stopped going to church, they stopped being part of a spiritual family. They didn't want to be around people who loved Jesus, they didn't want to hear people preach about Him and they stopped worshipping Him in the midst of a congregation.

To remedy this situation the author gave two specific instructions: First, that every believer would do all they could to reach out to those who were struggling in their faith. And second, that none of his readers would follow their example. Obviously he believes it is important for Christians to gather regularly, and obviously he believes we are responsible to support each other's faith. Agreeing with him is the easy part. Living out these realities takes some deep personal reflection and a lot of patience.

A. Who wrote Hebrews?

- 1) Acts 4:36 – Joseph, a levite from Cyprus
 - Levitical, priestly emphasis
 - Cyprus: fluent Greek, Septuagint
- 2) Acts 13:1; 15:12, 35
 - A highly respected teacher in the church
- 3) Acts 13:23; 14:8-18
 - Close to Timothy
 - Lystra
- 4) Acts 9:26, 27; 13:1-3
 - Close to Paul
 - First missionary journey

B. What does this passage say?

- 1) vs 19, 20 – Jesus' death on the cross allows believers to fearlessly enter God's presence to speak to Him.
- 2) v 21 – As our high priest Jesus not only made it possible to enter God's presence, but now we can remain there even when we sin because His offering is “once for all.”
- 3) v 22 – The new covenant removes the shame and fear we feel and replaces them with boldness.
- 4) v 23 – Our responsibility is to hold fast to our confession of Jesus Christ as our hope for eternal fellowship with God.
- 5) v 24 – Every believer is responsible to think hard about how they can help others who are struggling in their faith. We should be alert when someone's love for other believers grows cold or they stop being willing to serve or suffer for Jesus.
- 6) v 25 – We must not follow the example of those who refuse to gather with the church. Rather we should reach out to them realizing the danger they face if they cease putting their faith in Jesus.

C. Why did these believers stop gathering with the church?

- 1) Persecution (13:13)
- 2) Family pressures
- 3) Inadequate understanding of Jesus (divinity, incarnation, atonement, new covenant...)
- 4) False teaching (13:9)
- 5) Bitter relationships (12:14, 15)
- 6) Worldly temptations (12:16)
- 7) Tired of waiting for Jesus to return (10:36)



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D. Why do people today stop going to church?

- 1) Weary from work
- 2) Personality conflicts
- 3) Shame over personal failure
- 4) False teaching (internet?)
- 5) Spiritual immaturity that doesn't recognize my need to be with others
- 6) Critical attitude: always points out faults in every sermon, every service, every Christian

E. What does Hebrews tell us?

- 1) God wants me to regularly gather with believers.
- 2) The spiritual health of fellow believers is my responsibility. I must consider how I can help you grow in love and good deeds.

F. Here's what God has shown me as a pastor:

- 1) The church is God's idea, not a human invention. He calls believers to regularly gather with other believers.
- 2) We must preach the gospel accurately so that those who believe will have their hearts miraculously transformed.
- 3) The Body of Christ needs to be nourished week by week.
 - Bread
 - Wine
 - People who refuse to regularly feed tend to decline in faith and morals
- 4) We must regularly provide for confession and cleansing of the conscience so people can confidentially approach God.
 - Communion
 - LTG
- 5) We must always make room for new people to belong to the family of God. (MiniChurch, classes, ministries)
- 6) We must constantly provide fresh opportunities for people to serve
 - Ministry Fair: a menu
 - Have the door open so when people are ready they know where to begin.
- 7) We must pray corporately and teach people the value of prayer and spiritual warfare.
- 8) We must serve the work of God's Kingdom around the world.
 - Give, go, pray
 - Denomination
 - Missions
 - Radio, internet
 - Pastoral mentoring
 - LMI, LPC
 - Coming soon: publishing
- 9) We must provide our best resources for our children and youth.
 - Prefer their needs over our own.

G. What do you have a right to expect from a church?

- 1) Integrity, honesty, openness
- 2) Faithfulness to the Word
- 3) Genuine worship
- 4) A wisely-led, safe environment for children and youth
- 5) The gospel proclaimed fully and clearly
- 6) Healthy leaders who model godly behavior and service
- 7) Fair, even-handed biblical discipline when necessary

H. Questions

- 1) Are there obstacles which have made it hard for you to gather with other believers? Name one and tell us how the Lord helped you overcome it.
- 2) Name a way you have been personally strengthened by being in a church.
- 3) How would you describe your spiritual life right now? Are you growing, plateaued or declining? Why do you think this is so?