

David Carter / General Adult

Gather Grow Give Go / Hebrews 10:19–25

At the end of month, I have another opportunity to travel overseas with a group of pastors to help with training for local pastors, church planters and ministry leaders. I'll be preaching at a couple of conferences and church services and it's always a blessing; I count it a privilege to represent our church family, it's an amazing opportunity and blessing.

I guess it would be no surprise to you that the hardest part of going is the time I'm away from my family. It can be difficult to be away for an extended period of time. Thanks to modern technology, there are great ways to keep in touch, we can have video calls and see their faces, send them videos and pictures of the places we go and sights we see.

But I think we can agree that video conversations will never be the same as being in the same room together, of sharing dinner together, of being a part of the everyday life of family. I always feel like I'm missing out on something, and I still feel the distance between us.

There is something powerful, something intimate about being together with your family. You know, I think that's why the Bible places such an emphasis on the importance of God's people gathering together. In fact, the local church is often described in the New Testament as a family, God's household.

Something powerful happens when God's people gather together. We are, no doubt, still the church when we are out there living our lives, but there is something about the power of God's presence, the unity we sense with each other, the fellowship that happens when God's people gather together in one place.

It was just a few short years ago that we were forced to not gather together for worship under COVID restrictions, many churches were forced to have online service and at first maybe we kind of enjoyed it, didn't we?

We get to sit at home in our pyjamas, with our coffee, on our comfy couches and watch worship on our TV. And to some, maybe that's still a reality.

I'm grateful for the technology that allows us to still minister to people who, for one reason or another cannot join us on Sunday morning, but I think we all realized through COVID that online gathering will never replace the power of physically gathering together as the church.

Something is lost when we are disconnected from the fellowship of God's people for a prolonged period of time.

This morning, I want to talk about why we gather... why it's important for us as believers to not forsake the gathering together of ourselves.

Why can't I just be a Christian at home, on my own? Why is it important that part of my worship, part of my growth and discipleship is that I am regularly gathering together with the family of God?

Why do we have gathering together as part of our values and discipleship journey as a church?

Why do we gather?

Look with me at Hebrews this morning. [Hebrews 10:19-25](#).

Gather, you may know is the first step on our discipleship path, you'll notice it up on the wall.

We have what we call the four G's, Gather, Grow, Give, Go. Each of those words represent a step in a discipleship path that we challenge everyone who is a part of our church to journey through. It's a path of discipleship, a path of growing in Christ.

Gather is the first step, when we gather together, this is really the entry point of your journey with us. We'll spend the next four weeks going through each of these steps and talking about what they mean and why they're an important part of our discipleship journey.

Part of your walk with Jesus, part of your spiritual growth, your own discipleship is to regularly gather with other believers.

I think it's important for us to emphasize why we're here this morning.

We're here to worship Christ no doubt, that's why we call it a worship service.

But you're being disciplined while you're here. We're not here this morning for your entertainment and enjoyment. We're here to either call you to become a disciple of Jesus or to build you up in your discipleship with Christ.

You are being disciplined... either introduced to Jesus invited to become his disciple or challenged to grow. It's why we do what we do, in the songs that we sing, the prayers that we pray, the discipline of regularly giving to the Lord and of course it's why we focus on the Word of God each Sunday, because this is God's tool in your discipleship, his Word.

Why can't I just do that at home? Why can't I just be a Christian on my own and listen to sermons online and listen to worship music in my car – and I would say you can, you can do that.

And it would be about as effective as me being married to my wife but living in a different home. I can be married to Ally but never come home to her, never spend time with her, or the kids; our family. I would technically still be a husband and father, but not a very good one, and our relationship would be severely impacted.

I think that's a great way to think about your relationship to Christ's church, you can be a follower of Jesus all by yourself, but because the Christian life was meant to be lived in community with other believers, if you are not a part of a

local church, you are missing out on a huge part of what it means to follow Jesus, to serve him and his Church.

The writer of Hebrews gives us four main reasons why gathering together with God's people should be a priority in our lives.

Reason #1 is because we're commanded to gather.

That's what these verses about gathering are built around, they are built around the command we see in verses 24 and 25.

Do you see it? Look there with me.

Hebrews 10:24–25 ESV

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

This command is to stir one another up to love and good works, and he says do not neglect meeting together.

Do not neglect meeting together as is the habit of some... You need to be stirred up to love and good works, you need to be encouraged in your faith, and that happens as you gather together, to not neglect it. Make it a priority!

We need to see that it's stated explicitly as a command, it's even clearer in the original language, it's stated as an imperative, an authoritative command from God's word.

If this is God's Word to us, and we submit to God's Word, God's Word commands us to not neglect meeting together.

Regularly gathering together is not optional for followers of Jesus. I know we treat it as such in many cases. Like maybe you wake up and you're tired, oh I don't really have to go today, or maybe other things become a priority, and you think, well, I'll get back to worship service shortly.

But it's a command in God's Word. Do not neglect it. And the writer recognizes that it's not always easy to do it, it's why he says *as is the habit of some*.

He's saying there are believers in some places who have just given up on it, because it's easier for them, it's more convenient, but he says not you, do not neglect it.

It's one of the reasons why, as we travel to some places in the world, you have believers who have to gather in secret. In some places they are putting their safety, their freedom, maybe even their lives at risk to meet with other believers and worship Christ.

Why would they do that? Why would they make gathering together such a priority, and this is one of their reasons why. Because we are commanded in God's Word not to neglect, to make it a habit to gather to worship Christ with other believers.

That was the risk even for this group of believers that this letter is written, it's the very reason he gives this directive... because they were being persecuted, their business would be boycotted, friends, family would disown them, they could be put in prison.

And some may be tempted to say, well why take the risk, why not just keep my faith private and worship to myself... And the writer of Hebrews is saying, no, no, you need to make gathering for worship a priority.

In our country, we have the freedom to worship. We have just been spoiled for so long with this freedom that we kind of take it for granted. We take it for granted that in some places people literally risk their life and freedom to gather with other believers in worship.

Because God's Word places such a priority on the value and the importance of gathering with other believers to worship Christ.

So maybe you're asking well what does that mean? Does that mean that I have to be here every Sunday, well that depends, like, are you just sitting at home doing nothing? Then I wouldn't see why you wouldn't want to be in God's house.

But every situation is different. Some people work, some people have other obligations on the weekend, I get that. I think it means that gathering together needs to be a priority, a regular habit. That might mean because of your schedule or your life situation, that you come every other week, or once a month.

The question is, is gathering regularly for worship with other believers an important part of your walk with Jesus, is it a priority?

Or do you come sporadically?

We're commanded to gather...

But here's what we know, we know that God doesn't arbitrarily give us commands in his Word. Like we know that when God gives us commands in his Word there is always a purpose and that purpose is for our good.

One of the reasons that God commands us to gather is that when we gather, we celebrate the gospel.

That's reason #2, we gather because we celebrate the gospel.

In fact, gathering with a local body of believers is how we respond to the gospel.

That's the point that is being driven home here in the first three verses.

Hebrews 10:19-22 ESV

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

The writer is describing the good news of the gospel, but he is doing it in a way that resonates with a Jewish audience, those who have grown up steeped in the Old Testament imagery.

He says, we have confidence to enter into the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain that is through his flesh.

That's rich in Old Testament imagery, the holy places.

The holy place is a phrase used to describe what the Jews understood as the most holy place in the temple.

There were three parts, three sections of the temple, and the most holy place was the very inner part of the temple and no one was allowed access to the most holy place except the High Priest, once a year, and it was only after going through a series of cleansing and sacrificial rituals where the sin of the High Priest was atoned for by the sacrificing of a lamb.

This place was considered so Holy because it was where the very presence of God dwelled. No one could enter the presence of God and live.

God is Holy, perfectly righteous. And our sin, our sin is what separates us from a Holy God, we cannot approach God, we cannot be in his presence in our sinful state, and this is what is drilled in throughout the first five books of the Old Testament.

You could not just walk into the temple and walk back behind the curtain where God's presence dwelled. You would be struck down.

But now, he says not only can you and I walk in, he says but we can walk in with confidence. Why? What has changed?

Well, look again, we can have confidence to enter the holy places **by the blood of Jesus**, the new living way that he opened for us, behind the curtain.

Do you see? This is what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross, we all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory, we are sin-stained and yet, and yet Jesus Christ goes to the cross, and he sheds his blood for the cleansing of our sin, he offered up his flesh as a sacrifice so that we might be forgiven and purified. Jesus has torn that curtain of separation between us and the presence of God.

And now, not because we're worthy, no, but because of what Christ has done, we can walk into the presence of God. Jesus Christ has washed us, purified us, purchased our forgiveness and restored us to a right relationship with God, we can boldly come into God's presence.

He's celebrating the gospel, isn't he? This is the good news of Jesus.

Only Jesus can bring us into God's presence... I mean listen maybe, maybe you can book a flight and fly to London England and get a cab driver and say hey, can you take me to Buckingham Palace, I want to see it... And the cab driver drives you to the palace and says here is the palace, this is what it looks like.

But you couldn't ask the cab driver to take you in and introduce you to King Charles, no, no not just anyone can enter into the presence of the King... But if you knew the King's son, the King's son will not just show you the palace, he will take you right into the inner gates and introduce you to his father, the King...

Do you see? This is what Jesus does on the cross, he gives us access to the King, we can go confidently into the presence of the King because Jesus has opened up the way, torn down the curtain.

But the question is how do we respond? How do we respond to what Jesus has done for us?

Well, look what the writer says, notice this whole phrase starts with the word since... since we have this confidence, since Jesus Christ has, by his flesh and blood, opened up this new and living way, verse 22 says "let us draw near."

Don't just stay away, don't just worship from a distance, no, Jesus has opened up the way into God's presence for us to draw near.

Amazing, this is what we do on Sunday morning as we gather, we celebrate the gospel, oh we celebrate every week what Jesus Christ has accomplished for you and for me, we celebrate and remind ourselves of that blessed truth.

We gather to celebrate the power of the gospel, as we gather, it's a subtle, but powerful proclamation that this is what Jesus Christ has done, and this is important to us. We worship him, Jesus Christ is worthy of our worship, he saved me, he loves me, he set me apart for his purpose and worshipping him is of vital importance in my life.

But we also celebrate our unity in the gospel. That's why we're here this morning, because each of us has placed our faith and trust in Jesus, and we serve Jesus. His Holy Spirit lives in every one of his followers and that power unites us as one body this morning.

Think about that, look around this room this morning. Is there any other reason or any part of your life where you would see such a diverse gathering of people? Yes, racially and ethnically diverse, we celebrate that. But you have people here from all walks of life, you have people from different generations, different occupations, differing backgrounds, men, women, young, old, and we're all here for one reason, because we love and serve Jesus and Jesus has saved us from our sin.

What a powerful demonstration of the gospel, when God's people gather to celebrate the gospel.

We gather #1 because we're commanded, #2 because we celebrate the gospel.

We gather #3 because we need to be reminded of hope.

We start reading in verse 22-23.

Hebrews 10:22-23 ESV

let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure

water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

The writer of Hebrews says let us hold fast the confession of hope, without wavering.

Oh, how we need to be reminded of hope.

Hope... I remember a preacher telling the old story about a church member who had been attending church regularly but suddenly had been missing for several services in a row.

And the pastor decided that he would go and visit and check in on his missing church member. It was a cold chilly night and so as the church member opened the door and he let the pastor in, he knew why he was there.

The pastor found his church member sitting beside a warmly lit fire and so he found his way to a chair and got comfortable, but he didn't say anything, he grabbed the tongs and took one ember out of that fire and set it off by itself. They both watched as that one ember burned out and became completely dead. After a few moments the pastor picked up the ember and put it right back in the middle of the fire and immediately it became alive again and burned with fire as the rest.

And the church member got the message and said I will be in service next week pastor. I thought, what a great illustration of what happens when we set out to live this Christian life on our own. There is something about being around God's people, people who have the same faith, the same passion, the same beliefs, the same desire, the same struggles, the same God, that strengthens us to persevere. That keeps our hopes burning.

Something about coming regularly and sitting under the teaching of God's Word that stirs our hearts and reminds us of the truth that saves us, something about lifting our voices in praise with fellow believers that reignites our hearts with passion and zeal for our Lord.

All week long we are bombarded with the beliefs and the culture of the world around us. We are constantly surrounded by a world that does not worship, nor honour our God and so often it can leave us feeling hopeless and alone. It can cause us to start questioning our faith, our belief, and asking, why am I even trying to live my life for God? It seems like I'm the only one.

All week long some of us are burdened and dragged down by the challenges of life, the pain, the hurt, the brokenness. And left to ourselves man, it will wear us down.

But to come into the house of God to be lifted up in worship, challenged and encouraged by his word, oh man, it helps us to hold fast, to hold on strong to our confession of hope without wavering.

Look at some of the things the writer reminds us of, that we need to be reminded of.

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. We need that don't we? We need to be reassured of our faith at times. Left to ourselves, doubt creeps in, fear. But to come and hear the truth and sing the truth and pray the truth, it fills us with the assurance all over of what Christ has done.

He says, ***with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, our bodies washed pure with water.***

He's talking about the work that Jesus does through his Holy Spirit. When we first come to faith this is what happens when you place your faith in Jesus, your hearts are sprinkled clean, he washes you, purifies us. Guilt and shame are washed away from our consciences.

But there is this sense though, when we are out there in the world, that these things start to take hold of us. Our hearts are often prone to wander, and to desire things that are ungodly. The pain of guilt and shame begins to wear on us all over again, and the forgiveness of Jesus feels so distant.

But we come into God's house, and we're reminded of his grace, his mercy, and we are reminded that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, we recommit our lives all over again to Christ.

We're reminded of the hope of the confession we made of why we decided to follow Jesus all that time go, as we gather in worship through singing, prayer and the Word, we're reminded that God is faithful.

Realize it or not, regularly gathering with other believers for worship is vital for our souls.

It empowers us to hold fast our confession of hope without wavering.

My prayer is that every time we gather, that you are reminded of the hope of Christ.

We need this... our souls need this.

The Christian life was not meant to be lived in isolation, but in a community of believers.

Which really brings us to the last point the writer makes. Why we need to gather.

Reason #4 We gather because we need the encouragement of fellowship.

That's really the point of verses 24 and 25, look there with me.

Hebrews 10:24-25 ESV

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

The local church is often described as a family, God's Household.

Fellow believers in the New Testament are described as our brothers, our sisters in Christ.

And no family is perfect, that's for sure, each family has issues, disagreements, conflicts. But it is still a family.

I hope that's how we begin to see each other here at BBC. Like, this needs to be more than just a place you go once a week, these are more than just people you share a space with to worship with once a week.

We are all a part of the family in Christ, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

We need each other, I need you, and you need me.

I need you to stir up, that is to lift me up, to encourage me, to pour into me with love.

And you need that from each other. As we come here on Sunday, you can just come in, and leave and not talk to anyone, that's easy to do in a church our size, but to really press in, to really get the full impact and effect of what a church is suppose to be, you have to press in and become a part of the life and ministry of the church.

To pray for one another, to be there for one another to hold each other accountable, to call each other to live in good works.

There is meant to be an interdependence of the family. And we experience that each time we gather. It's why we do things like have a BBQ after church on Sunday or serve coffee, not because we love giving away free food, but because we want there to be interaction with each other. We want you to be encouraged by one another.

That's really what the writer of Hebrews is getting at here.

That's why we gather, so that there is an opportunity for us to stir each other up in love and good works.

So that we can, as verse 25 says, ***encourage one another all the more as we see the day drawing near.***

My prayer is that you are encouraged here this morning. Not just by the songs we sing or the message today, but I hope you take the time to meet someone new; I pray that you are encouraged as you interact and talk with each other and share fellowship.

And that happens, not just as we gather here on Sunday morning, but it's one of the reasons we ask you to join a growth group. And we'll talk more about that next week as we dig into the *Grow* step of our discipleship path.

But this stirring one another up to love and good works, this encouraging one another all the more is vital part of our growth group model.

That as you gather in smaller groups during the week you have brothers and sisters who are going to pour into each other, hold each other accountable, be there for each other in times of hardship, celebrate with each other in times of blessings.

We need the fellowship of the saints.

And the writer of Hebrews, he gives us this sense of urgency, do you see it?

We need to encourage one another all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

The Day? What day? Whenever you see the Day with a capital D, it's referring to the day of Christ's return. That there are times when it's going to be hard to gather together, because times are going to get tough.

And there is a tendency that when times get tough that we tend to isolate ourselves, that seems to be the instinct, we just withdraw. But the writer is saying, the opposite should happen. In tougher times, gathering together becomes more vital because you're going to need each other, you're going to depend on each other.

I have seen that in my time here at BBC, how we just have a way of rallying around each other in tough times. When we have a brother or sister struggling

or going through challenges, there is such an instinct in this church to gather around that person.

We need that...

But there is a sense also in which God will use fellow believers to prepare us for Christ's return. People who speak into our lives, hold us accountable, challenge us, encourage us, pick us up when we fall.

We need the church, we need each other.

This is why we gather.

We gather because we are commanded to, making gathering together a priority in your life is an act of obedience to God's Word, but we're commanded for good reason, gathering together in worship is how we respond to and celebrate the gospel, the good work that Christ has done and is doing in our lives, we gather together because we need to be reminded of the hope we have, we gather together because realize it or not, we need to the encouragement of fellowship.

As we all get back into regular routines this fall, my prayer is that you would make gathering together for worship a priority in your life and your schedule. For you and your family.

Gathering together is a vital part of our growth as disciples and followers of Jesus, but it is only a first step, there are other components to being a disciple of Jesus and we'll talk more about that in the next few weeks. But for now, this is why we Gather.