

INSIDE OUT
Hope and Habit
Hebrews 10:23-25

Are you a creature of habit? Do you tie your shoes with the same motions or drive to work on the same roads every morning? Do you tend to use some of the same phrases in all of your prayers? Admit it; all of us are creatures of habit in some way. **The truth is, habits actually HELP us because they allow us to do everyday activities smoothly without much thought. Habits come naturally to us by virtue of repetition!** Now, if they are good habits, then that is great. I love good habits. Some of you have more friends because of good habits that you have cultivated during your lifetime. For instance, most of you brushed your teeth and put on deodorant this morning before you came to church. I thank you, your family thanks you, and the people standing beside you now thank you! Habits can be awesome. Good habits not only make our life more pleasant, they actually help to make us healthier, stronger, and more successful by far than we could ever be without them. But BAD habits are another story! I myself have struggled to overcome bad habits that have the potential to wreck my life and health. I actually have an addictive personality. This does not mean that Lisa cannot get enough of me. It means that I fall into addictive behavior quite easily. It is not my fault! Oreos are the devil! My habit of cookies and milk every evening made me nearly twice the man that I once was, and it is still a habit that I struggle to overcome. Maybe you struggle with some bad habits as well. I have prayed with many people who were trying to quit drinking or dipping or looking at pornography. Many of these people feel absolutely powerless over their bad habits. But thankfully, many of them have experienced the power of God that allowed them to be overcomers in those areas. **Let me tell you a secret: There is a habit that you can cultivate that can help you to KICK the habits that you least want to have.** But you have to RECOGNIZE a bad habit as being BAD, and then CHOOSE to DISPLACE it with a different habit if you really want to change.

Today, I want to challenge you to cultivate this secret, high priority habit. But it will require that you stop practicing the OPPOSITE of that good habit in your current life. Your practice of this BAD HABIT is actually keeping you from WISDOM, blinding you to DANGER, stunting your FAITH, and robbing you of the BEST kind of FRIENDSHIPS. So, what is this bad habit that I am talking about today? Let me read it to you out of a letter that was written years ago to Christians who had chosen to follow Christ, but were close to losing hope and going back to their old ways because of their fear of persecution. **Hebrews 10:23-25 NIRV**

23 Let us hold firmly to the hope we claim to have. The God who promised is faithful. **24** Let us consider how we can stir up one another to love. Let us help one another to do good works. **25** And let us not give up meeting together. Some are in the habit of doing this. Instead, let us encourage one another with words of hope. Let us do this even more as you see Christ's return approaching.

The BAD HABIT I am talking about is the practice of neglecting the rhythm of consistent spiritual community in your life. When I was a kid growing up in my home, church attendance was not an option. Our lives revolved around the people who shared our mutual faith. I do not regret one aspect of that godly habit. I am eternally grateful for it. Society was better because of it.

This is the MAIN POINT of this message:

Every child of God must develop the GOOD habit of living in CONSISTENT SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY with other believers.

If you want to grow in your faith and experience the joy of being used by God, then quit skipping out on INTENTIONAL, Christ-Centered gatherings with your Christian brothers and sisters. I cannot stress this enough, especially since I have seen abundant evidence that people are skipping out on church meetings and fellowships like never before. Recent polls have shown that the average yearly church attendance of members is 17 weeks per year! That is less than two times a month. There is NO WAY that people who spend this little of an amount of time in committed spiritual engagement are actually growing stronger in their faith! This is no small matter. The writer of Hebrews encouraged these believers to stay connected with one another even with the threat of persecution looming over them. **When these people met together for the sake of their faith, they risked losing their jobs, their freedom, and even their lives; but this writer believed that it was worth the risk.** God's word is speaking to you and me today. Consistent spiritual community is not just a good idea; it is a VITAL NECESSITY! It is the difference between spiritual health and sickness for us, and LIFE and DEATH for our SOCIETY. You see, I am not just concerned about our attendance and health at CHC; I am worried about the implications of this for our entire nation! Current culture is making this clearer than ever!

Have you ever thought about how COSTLY it is to the spiritual life and health for you and for others when you only get with other believers on a sporadic basis? Perhaps you should. Even secular behaviorists acknowledge the connection between healthy social networks and our physical, mental, and emotional health. Nicholas Christakis, a professor of medical sociology at Harvard University says, "People are better able to make changes in their lives-lose weight, quit smoking, become happy-when they do this with a large number of other people." Christakis believes, "social networks have this interesting property of magnifying whatever they are seeded with, and so taking advantage of your social network ties can result in a magnification of your own efforts." Your social network is deeply impacting your life. This is true for ALL people, whether or not they are Christians. **ALL of us are in consistent relationships of SOME sort.** But I must ask you: How HEALTHY are your relationships? What kind of behavior does your community encourage in you? If your social network is "seeded" with good and with God, then it will encourage you toward the best things that God has for you in life. The Holy Spirit capitalizes on this for our benefit! But if

your closest relationships have nothing really to do with God or with that which is truly good, then they are not serving the single greatest aspect of your life! **You see, God DESIGNED us for relationships, but we have to CHOOSE the kind of relationships that complement and encourage faith and godly character. Are you doing this?**

Last week, I spoke about our MISSION as a church. **I said that the mission of CHC was to bring hope to the world by helping people to FIND and FOLLOW Jesus Christ.** I hope that mission inspires you as much as it does me! But we must remember that this is a RELATIONAL mission that requires us to STAY TOGETHER as we MOVE OUT toward those who do not know Christ. This can only happen when we spend meaningful time together in groups of twos and tens and hundreds! I have preached this to you for years. I am living it out myself. I love my Christ-centered friendships, and I need the encouragement that comes from my regular involvement in LIFE GROUPS. We DO LIFE TOGETHER. The EARLY CHURCH did this constantly by meeting DAILY at either the temple or in one another's HOMES. Jesus also demonstrated this by the way he spent the MOST TIME with his disciples even as they moved among those who were UNBELIEVERS. This must be our PATTERN.

Now, I realize that some of you have been BURNED by a church in your past, and this has caused you to "cool off" in your excitement about being with other believers. I have tasted the very same thing in my own life. But I want to plead with you not to allow that awful experience to keep you from God's best for your life. Even in the best of churches, you will experience times of pain and disappointment. Don't quit! **Being burned by church is not the only reason why some people stay disconnected.** Maybe some of you went to a church that was just about RITUAL or the ROUTINE of just "doing your duty" rather than the RESPONSIBILITY and the RUSH of experiencing joy with other Christians as you follow Christ and change the world together. Or, maybe you are disconnected from people of faith simply because you CARE MORE about things OTHER than your faith and your spiritual health. **For you, community is based solely on CONVENIENCE.** I hate that for you. You are rejecting (or at least neglecting) one of the greatest benefits and responsibilities of the Christian life.

This morning, I want us to UNPACK several KEY words in these verses from Hebrews to show you that consistency in spiritual community - AS GOD DESIGNED IT - is a LIFESTYLE of MUTUAL MOTIVATION. It is FOR us, and it requires much OF us. We bring out the best in those who bring out the best in us! Our passage today shows the connection between our HOPE and our HABIT of maintaining HEALTHY Christian relationships. **Hebrews 10:23 NLT**

23 Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise.

First, let me ask you about your faith. Have you truly found your hope in Jesus Christ? Are you overwhelmed with gratitude and love for the One who has rescued

and redeemed you? If not, then our MISSION really means nothing to you. You cannot SHARE what you do not POSSESS! But if Jesus has truly and radically changed your life, then how can you refrain from staying deeply invested in anything that helps you and others to know and love him better? The followers of Christ have an awesome Hope. Jesus has saved us and changed our lives, and he promised to be with us as he uses us to CHANGE THIS WORLD by his power. He is faithful to deliver on every one of his promises. But we must HOLD TIGHTLY to those promises. Our enemy is relentless and life can be exhausting, so we need every sort of help that we can get to stay strongly centered in our faith. [In light of this, the writer of Hebrews goes on to tell us HOW we can hold on tightly to our eternal hope without losing our grip.](#) **These verses also demonstrate WHY it is so important for us to stay connected in intentional Christian gatherings and relationships!** **Hebrews 10:24 Amplified Bible**

24 and let us consider [thoughtfully] how we may encourage one another to love and to do good deeds.

In this verse in Hebrews, we are instructed to CONSIDER how we can encourage one another to greater LOVE and better CONDUCT. **We make each other BETTER! How?** Let's break it down. The Amplified version helps us to more clearly see what the word "CONSIDER" really means. This is a word that implies deep thought about another person. It does not mean that you give a PASSING THOUGHT to the people who are in your church family, but that you give SERIOUS CONSIDERATION to who they are and what makes them tick. This word is defined in the Strong's Exhaustive Concordance as "fixing one's eyes and mind upon another." Now normally, this would make us shudder. If someone is watching me in this way, I am afraid that they are focusing on everything that is WRONG with me! (This really is the same word used by Jesus in [Matthew 7:3](#) – "Why do you consider the speck that is in your friend's eye and not the log that is in your own eye?") Thankfully, this verse in Hebrews shows the appropriate way to consider others. It is the idea of a prolonged look that is trying to figure out another person's gifts and passions in order to encourage and increase them in that person. Can you imagine how YOU would feel if you knew that someone was giving you that much thought in his or her life? It would be remarkable! If I knew that someone was praying for me and asking God for wisdom about how they could bless and encourage my life and my gifts in some positive way, it would just bowl me over! I think that it would do the same for you. **But how often is it the other way around?**

Let me ask you: When was the last time YOU took time to really consider someone at CHC in this way? Have you ever given deep thought like this to someone who was NOT your own FLESH AND BLOOD and tried to think of how you could motivate or encourage them in ways that brought out the best in them? Why not? This is why God PLACED YOU at CHC! You are not here just to be the beneficiary of this kind of thinking; you are supposed to be doing this yourself! It must be MUTUAL. This is

not a minor issue; it is the STUFF OF LIFE! When God's people are doing this for one another, it not only CHANGES A LIFE, *IT CHANGES THE WORLD!!!*

This verse goes on to say, "consider how we may MOTIVATE one another . . ." This is another great word. It means to "SPUR ON, to INCITE, and to PROVOKE." It is a very strong word. It can even mean to IRRITATE! Of course, it is set in a very positive context. The idea is that of one person helping to STIR UP the very best qualities that are lying DORMANT in another person. We call it INSPIRATION! To inspire someone is to act in a manner that causes him to WAKE UP to the longing for something that is inherently GREAT or that DRIVES him TO USE a gift or ability that he has been UNAWARE was even in his capacity to do so. There are people like that here at CHC. They INSPIRE me. *This word also refers to the piercing of our conscience that happens when someone else CALLS US OUT to do something that we already KNOW we should be doing. They are provoking us to our best self!*

Oftentimes, the relentless encouragement of others makes me aware of my own laziness and causes me to TIGHTEN UP. I love my wife, but sometimes I get lazy and selfish and I fail to demonstrate love to her the way that I should. I do the same thing in my love for God and my love for other people around me. At those times what I NEED MOST (whether I WANT it or not!) is for someone to PROVOKE ME into SHOWING the LOVE that is missing in me right then. And I NEVER REGRET IT when I finally choose to do what I knew I should have done in the first place! This is a win for the PROVOKER, for the PROVOKEE! This is the power of the HABIT of HEALTHY Christian Community. There's more! **Hebrews 10:25 NASB**

25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

The NASB uses the word "forsaking" here to describe the idea of abandoning or deserting one's post. It means that you leave the rest of the body holding the bag and handing the burdens. I see this all of the time. I have watched people who were a key part of the ministry of the church just choose to step back and then step away from their corner of service because they were not engaged in healthy relationships with other members of their faith family. Don't just serve; ENGAGE in DEEP, H.O.T (Honest, Open, Transparent) relationships with your brothers and sisters! This is NOT just about ATTENDING church. It is about purposeful spiritual engagement.

The final word that I want to highlight in our message on the healthy habit of biblical community is the word ENCOURAGE. This is one of the most powerful words in the English language. I love this word. **I know for a fact that EVERYONE needs encouragement. It is what I call genuine SOUL FOOD; it is FUEL that feeds us when we are down and defeated.** This word has three principal meanings. First, this word means, "to urge someone FORWARD." When we do this for people, we help keep them ON TRACK and MOVING in the direction that we know that they were intending to go! **They are like Coach Tom Landry who said, "I lead men to**

do what they LEAST want to do in order to help them accomplish what they MOST want to achieve!" We can see how common QUITTING is in our world today, and FEW FINISH STRONG. We need encouragement if we want to keep going when it seems that all our reserves have been used up. When we speak to someone in this way, it is like we are shouting for him to KEEP GOING exactly when he feels like he is about to give up. **Research has actually shown that people can continue a difficult task MUCH LONGER when someone is nearby encouraging them along the way.**

This word also carries the idea of MOTIVATING another to the FULFILLMENT of the ORDINARY DUTIES of life. Nothing is more necessary than staying motivated to fulfill the MUNDANE, FUNDAMENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES of daily life. That is where the MAGIC actually happens. Anyone can get excited about things that are NEW and EXOTIC. But how can you stay motivated about doing DISHES or wiping your kids NOSES or READING your bible every day or keeping your TEMPER in check when you really want to take someone's head off! These are the things that we need the most help doing! Are you GETTING TIRED of your EVERYDAY DUTIES? Is the enemy tempting you to WALK AWAY from your DUTIES so that you can HAVE FUN and FEEL FREE? If you are, then I pray that God will put an ENCOURAGER in your path who will help you to REALIZE THE LIE in what the enemy is saying to you; someone who will help you to stay MOTIVATED in your everyday duties by reminding you of their REAL GLORY. They may seem mundane to you, but they are actually the BASIS for the STABILITY and the RICHNESS of your HOME and your MINISTRY. I feel this every time I see what happens in the lives of those who do not have a strong, Christ-centered partnership with the members of their own faith family. Many of them lose hope and fall off of the path. God help us!

Finally, I want you to see that this word ENCOURAGE is a word of close relationship. It is the word "PARAKALEO," which means "TO CALL ALONGSIDE." It literally means that we encourage people by GETTING CLOSE TO THEM or ALLOWING THEM to GET CLOSE TO US! We need encouragers who encourage us by coming alongside of us in the BATTLES we face. People like that have helped me keep going when I was tempted to quit more times than I want to admit to you. We need one another, but we will not benefit from each other's faith or gifts or encouragement if we are not spending time in CLOSE FELLOWSHIP with each other.

The application of the message is simple and straightforward today. Don't neglect opportunities to be with the members of your faith family. Make coming to church and being in Life Group and doing life with other believers the HAPPIEST HABIT of your life. You won't regret it!
LET'S PRAY.