

# Leadership Sermon 2021

Today's Title: "*Vital Connections*"

January 3, 2021 – *Hebrews 10:23-25*

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**Objective:** To help people know the importance of connecting with others in the church and community.

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Each year – at the beginning of the year – I preach a sermon in which I try and set the course / trajectory for the year ahead. New Years is a holiday in which the only thing that really changes is the calendar.

But, before we look forward, I thought it would be interesting to look back at this past year.

It's always difficult to summarize an entire year in a few minutes – to get a sense of the year.

However, one of the best windows into the American psyche is what we're searching for on the internet.

## **Top 10 Google Searches in 2020:**

1. Election results
2. Coronavirus
3. Kobe Bryant
4. Coronavirus update
5. Coronavirus symptoms
6. Zoom
7. Who is winning the election
8. Naya Rivera
9. Chadwick Boseman
10. PlayStation 5

It has been a year we won't soon forget!

However, as a new year begins, it serves as a good time for reflection – and examination. Reflecting on the past year – on the blessings and difficulties of the year – and a time to examine our life – family, work, relationships – and see if they are aligned with Christ – with Scripture.

We are entering the New Year – which we have all waited for and created impossible expectations!

So, today, as we consider the past year, I want us to look ahead – and determine...together...to take full advantage of 2021.

My email inbox is bombarded with adds and articles:

*“How to Lead Your Church in 2021”*

*“What Changes Can Your Church Expect in 2021”*

*“The New Reality of Church in 2021”*

All sorts of leaders – forecasting what this new year will bring – and how church leaders can be faithful with the Gospel this next year.

One of the emails was interesting and brought up some interesting points to consider.

- Digital church strategies will complement in-person strategies.
- Church adoption (by healthy churches) will increase
- Post-pandemic – average worship attendance 20% - 30% lower.

- New definition of large church: 250+ (pre-pandemic 400+)
- Giving in churches will decline 20% - 30%.
- Overall conversion growth in local churches will improve.
- 9 out of 10 North American congregations will self-define as needing revitalization.

(Source: ChurchAnswers.com)

I have thought about the past year – and what needs to happen as we move into 2021.

That’s what I want to talk about this morning.

**Important:** *Scripture must be our guide!*

### ***Opening Prayer***

It’s really important as we look forward to another year – and we try and make plans – plot the direction for the church – that we don’t rely on our own thoughts – but we look to the Bible.

We need to honestly evaluate where we are as a church – and hold that up to the light of Scripture – so we can be faithful in the mission He’s given us.

As I’ve thought about 2020, one of the big realities of the year has been isolation / lock-down / much less person-to-person interaction.

There have been good reasons for some of this...and there is vigorous debate as to the wisdom of our governing authorities decisions in dealing with the Corona-virus.

But...setting that aside – the question I have is:

*In a context of isolation, and as the vaccine is administered to more and more people, what do we – the local church – need to work on – emphasize – lean into?*

**2021 Theme: (re)Connect**

This may seem easy...but it will be a big challenge!

I believe we need to connect with others this year – both in the church – and outside the church.

I realize the timing of this will be different for different people. Those at high risk should be cautious and use prayer, wisdom and personal conviction on when to *(re)connect*.

Others, whose risk is not as great – can begin to *(re)connect* sooner.

I don't want us to ignore our safety and health protocols we have in place – but I do want each of us to begin praying and shifting our thoughts to *(re)connecting* with those in the church.

If you would please turn to our text this morning - **Hebrews 10:23-25** - and we'll see a very clear picture in these 3 verses of the importance of connecting with one another – and connecting with the community for the sake of the Gospel.

**God's faithfulness in the past strengthens our present faith.**

vs. 23

Any Gospel work is a work of faith.

It's not a work that saves us – but a work we do because we've been saved.

In many ways, churches have removed themselves – or been removed from the community because of COVID restrictions.

Throughout our country we have a problem of isolation and disconnectedness in the culture – and in our churches.

**vs. 23** - “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.”

What is the “confession of our hope”? **Jesus is Lord and Savior.**

Our ability to “hold fast” – to have a tight grip on. The verb tense in the Greek (subjunctive) indicates this should happen, but it's not certain that it will. There's a chance you won't “hold fast” to your faith in Christ as Lord and Savior.

It's a sobering reality that each of us can fall away from Christ.

Each of us can be overtaken by sin, doubt, despair.

This pandemic has led many to doubt and despair – to levels of frustration – anger – loneliness – isolation – fear – panic – concern – anxiety.

- Do you approach the realities of the pandemic differently as a person of faith?

- Do you approach it with a different attitude and perspective than non-believers?
- While others are overcome with uncertainty and possibly fear about this life – are you comforted by the promises of Christ?

***Do you have peace – in the midst of chaos?***

**Psalm 56:1-4** – *David held captive by the Philistines*

“Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me; all day long an attacker oppresses me; my enemies trample on me all day long, for many attack me proudly.

When I am afraid, I put my trust in You. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?”

**Philippians 1:23**

“My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.”

Historically, Christians have bravely faced threats of death - threats against their health and livelihood – because they know this is not their home – this life is not the point.

***Heaven is not only a future promise – but it’s a present motivation!***

**Job 14:5**

“You have decided the length of our lives. You know how many months we will live, and we are not given a minute longer.”

**Psalm 90:12**

“Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom.”

This isn’t an encouragement of license for foolishness.

This doesn't mean we should taunt death and live without wisdom and reasonable caution and care. These verses should teach us not to hold too tightly to this life. They should help us think in terms of eternity – not just temporal matters. “Hold fast...without wavering”.

Our present strength is not rooted in ourselves – in our experiences or knowledge – but in God's faithfulness. “for He who promised is faithful”

God's faithfulness is the reason we can “hold fast...without wavering”. It's not due to our self-discipline or self-determination – it's due to God's nature – His faithfulness to His own!

**Our faith is visible by our love for others.** vs. 24

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works...”

“stir up” – (Gr. *paroxusmos*) – in a positive sense it means to stimulate – to motivate.

Negative sense, it means to exacerbate – frustrate – anger.

**Acts 15:39** (same word)

“And there arose a **sharp disagreement**, so that they separated from each other.”

The use of this word here in **Hebrews 10** has a positive implication – but not necessarily a pleasant one.

There is a sense of an agitation – which causes the other person to consider something – to wrestle with a truth which contradicts something in their life.

This is not always a pleasant process – but a healthy and important process for each of us!

This *stirring up* is not just for thoughts – or for philosophical or theological truth – but for action.

LOVE

“love and good works”

It’s difficult to love others when you’re alone – isolated – distanced.

In this pandemic you can love while you are at home – but it requires you to reach out to others – **phone calls / emails / texts / notes or cards.**

On a temporary basis you can do these things while staying away from others, but over the long-term this becomes more difficult.

Zoom meetings and FaceTime calls are good – but leave you wanting more!

**God intends our faith to be lived in the presence of others.** vs.

25

We can love from a distance, but nothing can replace in-person interaction.

God’s people have always lived out their faith in a community setting – a family setting.



In the O.T., a large part of the Law was in regard to your interaction with others.

In the N.T. the ‘one another’ commands are woven throughout – implying that your faith in Christ is designed to be lived out in the community of other believers.

***Your faith is personal, but not private.***

**vs. 25 -** “...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.”

“meet together” – Gr. = *episunagóge* (ep-ee-soon-ag-o-gay) – which is a word referring to an assembly – public gathering, held in the synagogue – public worship.

Big question for many pastors: *‘Will people come back to church after the pandemic?’*

What kept the 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians from meeting together? *Persecution – threat of death – public reputation – loss of job.*

***Please hear the spirit of what I’m saying today...***

I’m wanting you to embrace a principle – a general principle: **The Priority of Personal Connection:**

- 1) With other believers in the local church
- 2) With the community

The Gospel is relational.

Ministry is relational.

Life is relational!

“It is not good that the man should be alone” – **Genesis 2:18**

Christians – the Christian life – is relational – not for isolation – but for reconciliation – for redemption – saved for a purpose – to bring the Gospel to others – which requires connection / relationship.

Christian faith is not primarily about piety and study – although both are important.

It’s about the mission of God – to bring the Gospel of Christ to others.

RU New? Lunch talking points

- Seekers into Saints
- Consumers into Contributors
- Members into Ministers

The worship service is not the point – but it is a priority. The gathering of the saints for worship is unique – and nothing else can replace its value.

4 reasons you should make attending church a priority

**1) The presence of Christ** – The presence of Christ is experienced in a special way in corporate worship.

*“...a person doesn’t have to go to church to be a Christian. They do not have to go home to be married either. But in*

*both cases, if they don't, they will have a very poor relationship.*” (Preaching the Word, Hebrews, Vol. 2, An Anchor for the Soul, R Kent Hughes, p. 34)

**2) Worship** – you can worship when you're alone, but the depth, passion, power and joy of public worship is unsurpassed.

**3) Theology** – When you don't attend church, your theology will suffer. With only our own thoughts our theology will be shallow and limited because our perspective will be the only perspective. When you involve yourself with a local congregation your theology will deepen and be strengthened as the gifts of teaching, knowledge and wisdom and utilized in the teaching and explanation of God's Word.

**4) Psychology** – Solitary – isolation – aloneness – is not healthy. God didn't create us for isolation, but for community, for it is in community that we can love, and be loved – serve, and be served – encourage, and be encouraged.

**Romans 12:15**

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.”

*“...theoretically...you can develop faith and hope on your own, but not love!”* (Preaching the Word, Hebrews, Vol. 2, An Anchor for the Soul, R Kent

Hughes, p. 35)

***Apply it...***

If you're high risk – work at connecting with others from the church.

Make phone calls – send emails – send a card or note – grab your church directory and put it to use!

When you're isolated you must be extra-intentional to connect with people in the limited ways available.

If you're not high risk – *(re)*connect with the church.

Use wisdom and reconnect with people – reach out to them – invite those you haven't seen or heard from.

Being with other people is important – for a variety of reasons that we've discussed this morning.

Be reasonable – apply wisdom – connect with others.

**1 Peter 2:10**

“Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people...”

The church is a community – we were created for relationship.

Our identity is not only an individual identity – we identify with the people of God – other believers.

Closing prayer