

Grow in Christ

Hebrews 10:19-25

Our goal as Christ-followers is MATURITY. We want to grow up in Christ - **to become fully devoted followers**, not just fans. Here at Oakwood we try to run the bases from loving God to growing in Christ to serving the church to reaching the world. We try to **keep moving forward** as individuals and we seek to stir up one another to love God more, to make progress toward maturity, to serve more actively and to reach out more effectively.



Christianity is a team sport. We need each other.

One of the big lies of our culture is that religion is private. Religion is deeply personal, but **true Christianity is NOT PRIVATE**. In fact, when faith in Christ is real it will always express itself in love for other believers, service in the church and outreach in the world. **“We are saved by faith alone but saving faith is never alone”** (Calvin). True saving faith always expresses itself in love for other believers, service and outreach. The gospel takes root in your heart and produces the fruit of the Spirit.

This passage in Hebrews 10 includes three exhortations - three corporate callings.

Three Exhortations in Hebrews 10

- **“Let us draw near with a true heart”** (v. 22)
- **“Let us hold fast the confession”** (v. 23)
- **“Let us consider how to stir up one another”** (v. 24)

Even **the phrasing of these exhortations** models for us the importance of relationship and mutual exhortation to our Christian growth. “LET US draw near. LET US hold fast. LET US consider how.” This is what church should be like. We come alongside each other and say, “Let’s go! Come on! You can do this! Watch out for that! Let me help you.”

I’ve been on several **long bike trips**. I’m not saying I liked it – cycling is almost as painful and ridiculous as running. But our youth group in Chicago used to ride from the Mississippi River in LaCrosse, Wisconsin to Lake Michigan by Sheboygan, Wisconsin. We covered 250-300 miles in five days of riding. My record ride was 117 miles in one day. (Don’t be impressed. I was like 22 and invincible. And I was in pain for a week afterwards.) It was an epic experience. We rode the last 15 miles in a massive thunderstorm and when we reached the final segment of the ride we saw the road was called: **Seven Hills Road**. We raised our water bottles on the top of the first of those seven hills and with rain pouring down on us and lightning flashing we toasted our inevitable doom.

One of the first things you learn on a long bike trip is **the importance of DRAFTING**. You learn how much it helps to get your front tire within an inch or two of the rear tire of the bike in front of you so that your bike is literally drawn along in the slipstream of the rider in front. This can cut wind resistance nearly in half.

A lead rider PULLS from up front and a whole group can tuck in behind them, each one taking a turn in front to share the challenge. Together, taking turns up front, you can maintain a much faster pace than any one rider can alone.

This is why in the **Tour de France** the riders all have **teams to support them**: eight total riders, all with different strengths; at least 17 support staff members driving 10 vehicles and helping the team of riders eat, sleep and ride their way through more than 2,000 miles over 21 days. Though advertising celebrates individual riders like four-time winner Chris Froome, such **“winners” would have zero chance of winning apart from their devoted and sometimes equally skilled teammates.**

We understand this with cycling, with football, with hockey, with any team sport - **you cannot win alone.** No matter how good you might be as an individual, you cannot win without your team. We know this - and yet **when it comes to our Christian growth we let ourselves believe we can go it alone. It is foolishness and outright rebellion.** We are a team - we need each other!

But in the church we are **much more than a team.** We are **ONE BODY** - the body of Christ. We are bound to each other by the blood of Christ that saved us. Our lives are interconnected. It is a contradiction in terms to say that you belong to Jesus but you have no connection with the church - His body. Brothers and sisters, **don't walk alone!** You are a member of the body, so don't live disconnected! We need you as much as you need us!

Hear God's Word in Hebrews 10:24-25
*“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.**” Hebrews 10:24-25*



This is why we seek to be **a church OF small groups** – with EVERYONE who attends here plugged into a Community Group. We don't just want to have small groups – **we ARE a body made up of several cells.** If you look on the website and don't find a group that works for you, please contact me or Dave Dorsey and let us help you start a new group. The odds are there are others in your situation.

This is why we started a **group for women on Wed nights** at 5:30 p.m. Many women are working and can't attend the Tuesday morning study but they wanted to be connected in fellowship with one another. Maybe that group could work for some of you. Similarly, I'm starting back up my Wed morning men's group – 6:15 a.m. Like cycling it's not easy to get up at that hour, but if we are going to win the battle for growth in Christ we need brothers and sisters beside us in the fight.

Let's look together at Hebrews 10 and walk through these **three exhortations to Christian community.**

First, “Let us draw near.” This is our FUEL as followers of Jesus - Gospel-centered worship. V. 22

Our Fuel – Gospel-Centered Worship

“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.” Hebrews 10:22

Hebrews is a book about ACCESS. Using *the temple and the priesthood* as the controlling illustration, the writer shows us the significance of the work of Jesus Christ in opening a new and living way into the HOLY OF HOLIES – the very presence of God. Before Christ, the way was closed and God could only be approached from a distance with much fear and trembling. But now we are invited to come as God’s own children – **to DRAW NEAR to God our Father.**

Nothing is in our way anymore – now that our sin has been dealt with. Now that our hearts have been purified and our bodies have been washed clean. Feel the force of the phrase: “in full assurance of faith.” **FULL ASSURANCE.**

If you think your relationship with God depends on what YOU DO, then you will never have full assurance. You will struggle your entire life to know **if you have done enough** – and you will be plagued by the suspicion that what you have done could never be enough. And your suspicion would be right. If salvation depends on our effort we are all doomed. We could never be good enough, we could never work hard enough, we could never worship sincerely enough or sacrifice enough.

This is **why religious people are stressed out.** They lack full assurance. **That was my story until I was 13.** I lived in fear of God’s judgment. I knew I was a sinner. I knew God was holy. And I knew that God would punish sin. So I was scared – even though I had heard all about Jesus and even “asked him into my heart” as a young child.

What I lacked was FULL ASSURANCE... until a youth leader helped me understand this wonderful Gospel truth – that salvation does not depend on our performance, **it all depends on Jesus’ performance.** It’s not about what we DO, but about what He has DONE for us. It was like a light went on in my heart. I tasted the FUELING power of the Gospel.

Gospel-centered worship is FUEL for the Christian life. It is our food. This is why we need to gather every Sunday to feast on God’s Word and sing the praises of Jesus. This is why we need to feed on God’s Word every day - taking in the GOSPEL just like we take in PROTEIN. Just as we need food and water every day, so we need to fuel our hearts and minds on the Gospel – with a focus on the finished work of Christ.

Our Fuel – Gospel-Centered Worship

“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.” Hebrews 10:22

- **Focused on the Finished Work of Christ**

The more we study and **meditate on all that Christ accomplished for us** the more we will have FULL ASSURANCE. The more we think about ourselves the less assurance we will have. Brothers and sisters - our hearts have been sprinkled clean by the blood of Jesus. Our bodies have been washed with the pure water of the Holy Spirit - so **“Let us draw near to God the Father with full assurance of faith!”** Do you feel the fueling power of those gospel truths?

Our fuel is Gospel-centered worship focused on the finished work of Christ. Second: our foundation as Jesus-followers is Christ-Centered Confidence. V. 23

Our Foundation – Christ-Centered Confidence

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.” Hebrews 10:23

Life is a battle. Picture it like a boxing match. We fuel up for the fight by feeding on the Gospel. And the ground underneath us – **the stability of our foundation – is our confidence in Christ**. If your knowledge of the character of Christ is weak and flimsy it would be like trying to have a boxing match while balancing on **a ramshackle stage made of decomposing lumber**, tacked together with a few nails by neighborhood children. Every step would be uncertain. Every shift of your weight would introduce new dangers.

How strong is your foundation? How well established is your knowledge of God? Do you know Jesus well so that your confidence in His character is rock-solid? Or do you waver from your confession because you aren't really clear about who he is? The writer to the Hebrews exhorts us to “hold fast the confession of our hope WITHOUT WAVERING.”

This is something we can and should hold fast to – our confession of faith in Christ. And the reason is right there, **“for he who promised is faithful.”** Again, if you fix your trust in yourself you will stumble and fall. Your foundation will collapse. But if you hold fast to Jesus, he will never let you slip. Hold fast the confession of your hope.

Our Foundation – Christ-Centered Confidence

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.” Hebrews 10:23

- **Focused on the Faithful Person of Christ**

Our fuel for worship is focused on the WORK of Christ - his sacrificial death and victorious resurrection. **Our foundation as believers is built on the PERSON of Christ** - His perfect faithfulness, holiness, mercy and love. “He who promised is faithful.” The One who started a good work in you is the One who will carry that work on to completion.

Of course our confidence is in our Triune God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Just as our joy and delight is drawn from the overflowing happiness of God, so **our confidence is based on the unchangeable CHARACTER of God**. He is eternally, infinitely HOLY, righteous, good, loving, merciful, gracious, faithful and a million other perfections all at once. This is what we stand upon - the firm foundation for our lives - when the storms of life are raging around us; when the battle is fierce and your heart begins to waver, HOLD FAST TO THIS. “He who promised is faithful.” Jesus is the reigning King. He will never let you go. Hold onto Him and know the truth that **He is always holding onto you**.

Ok, all of this was setup for the main message today - Our fight. With the gospel as our fuel and the character of God as our foundation, we are ready to do battle together. Verse 24.

Our Fight - Community-Supported Growth

“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.” Hebrews 10:24-25

We will grow best as individuals and our church will be most fruitful if we make **FOUR COMMITMENTS to one another**: to work together, stand together, believe together and endure together. First, "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works."

Our Fight - Community-Supported Growth

1. Work Together

*"And let us consider **how to stir up one another to love and good works.**" Hebrews 10:24*

The word for "stir up" here is to provoke. Your translation might say "spur one another on," like a rider with a horse. Provoke can mean "awaken" like a little brother going in to wake up his big brother. Sometimes this might seem like a nuisance, but imagine the house is on fire - then you want to be stirred up, don't you? You want someone to awaken you - to provoke you to move, right?

The reality is that we all get complacent; we all get stuck in a rut; **we all tend to settle down like cheap lemonade powder** in the bottom of a glass. You first need to stir that powder up so it can saturate the whole glass, otherwise you will drink watered-down lemonade.

The same is true for us as believers. **Our love for the Lord settles down** and we need our brothers and sisters in Christ to help stir it back up. **Our love for each other settles down** into isolation and self-focus and we need our fellow believers to stir us back up to the needs of others. **Our service**, especially the hard, sacrificial kind, tends to settle down - we lose energy - so we need each other to stoke the flames of our love and stir us back up to love and good works. And our service in this dark and broken world definitely settles down.

Brothers and sisters, "Let us consider HOW to stir up one another to love and good works"! Think about it! How can we provoke each other out of our passivity and internal focus? A fantastic example of this happened three years ago when ***an anonymous donor gave Oakwood \$10,000***. The elders decided to take a massive risk and give all of that money back to the church family in the form of \$100 dollar bills. The only instruction was to use it for the Kingdom - not for yourself or someone in your family or in the church - and then come back and share what God did.

The stories are amazing to hear - how the Lord led individuals and families to step out in faith and invest that \$100 into outreach and compassion. One of the ideas was to ***give blankets to homeless*** people and that effort continues as Blanket Tampa Bay! Every Monday night a team provides blankets and hygiene supplies for local homeless people. They have a vision to open an Urban Rest Stop in the near future - where the homeless can take a shower, store some things, schedule an interview or meet up with a family member. That first Christmas they gave out 308 blankets. Now they provide over **5,000 blankets every year**. All of this from a one hundred dollar bill that "stirred up" a young woman to step out in faith.

How can we stir up one another to love and good works? How can we ***work together to resist the INERTIA*** that tends to rule our lives as we settle down into complacency? It is a battle to grow in Christ. Staying in neutral will not move you forward. We need to WORK TOGETHER to stir each other up.

Second, we need to stand together.

Our Fight - Community-Supported Growth

1. **Work Together**

2. **Stand Together**

*“Let us stir up one another... **not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some.**”*
Hebrews 10:25

In 1858 Abraham Lincoln made a famous speech. He ended up losing that campaign for a Senate seat, but the truth of the speech roused the nation. Quoting JESUS, Lincoln said:

“A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently, half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved — I do not expect the house to fall — but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other.” Abraham Lincoln, 1858

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.” ***Imagine if the Union had broken up in the 1860s.*** Our United States of America would not be united. It would probably be in five or ten different pieces right now, if not more - all speaking different languages. And we would not be the world superpower we are now if that had happened. Truly it has been said, “united we stand, divided we fall.”

The same is true for us as believers. One of the devil's favorite strategies is to **foster division** among believers in a church and among churches in a city. ***Division weakens us.*** Together we stand strong. Separately, the devil can pick us off one by one.

Brothers and sisters, ***“Let us not neglect to meet together.”*** That must have been a common issue in the early church since Paul says it was “the habit of some.” Just as our passion for the Lord and our commitment to serve settle down, so we drift in our relationships from connection to isolation.

It takes effort to maintain and develop a relationship. Ask any married couple that's been together more than 10 years. ***Marriage takes WORK.*** It is good work. Rewarding work. But it is work. If you let any relationship drift, you will drift apart. It takes effort and energy to communicate, to serve, to engage with each other, to find ways to connect and have fun together.

The same thing is true in our relationships in the church. We need to ***proactively schedule*** to meet with people so we can stand together. I have had way too many friends - many of them who used to be pastors - who fell into sin. I've seen too many marriages break apart, too many kids estranged from their parents. ***Find one or two brothers or sisters*** that you can stand together with in the battle. Lock arms with each other. Be totally open and honest about where you are struggling. Invite them to stir you up to love and good works.

We need to work together, to stand together and our third commitment: to BELIEVE together.

Our Fight - Community-Supported Growth

1. **Work Together**

2. **Stand Together**

3. **Believe Together**

*“Not neglecting to meet together... **but encouraging one another.**”* Hebrews 10:25

In the battle for growth in Christ, **we need courageous faith.** We need to hold on to the truth we learned earlier about the person and work of Christ. The battle may seem on the surface like

it's about managing sin but the truth is that it's deeper than that. The battle is to BELIEVE the Gospel.

One pastor said it this way:

"The battle is not to conquer sin. That's impossible. The battle is to believe the gospel: that Jesus has conquered sin." Jonathan Dodson, *Gospel Centered Discipleship*

This is central to how we grow as followers of Jesus. We need brothers and sisters beside us who **encourage us to truly BELIEVE** all that Jesus has accomplished for us. We are very easily discouraged - for 1,000 reasons. We need people to encourage us and continually point us back to the truth of the gospel: it's not about what we do, it's about what He has done for us!

- When you have a **setback with work** or even lose your job - you need someone to encourage you to trust the sovereign plans of God.
- When you go through a **rough patch in your marriage** you need someone to encourage you to hold the course and continue to love and respect your husband or wife.
- When you hear that **scary diagnosis** for yourself or a loved one you need someone to encourage you to find your hope in the Lord and not panic.
- When your **kids have the audacity to grow up** and go off to college and get jobs and get married - you need someone to encourage you to leave them in God's hands.

At every stage of life, in all the different experiences of life, we need brothers and sisters beside us to encourage us to **KEEP BELIEVING, keep holding on**. Because of Jesus it is all going to be ok. Maybe not right now, maybe not today or this week - but hold on to what you KNOW to be true: God is good. Life is short. Jesus is with you. God is at work even in the hardest things. God is shaping us more and more into the image of Christ. Don't fight the sculpter - trust Him to do His work.

No matter what you are experiencing right now the battle is to BELIEVE the gospel. And to hold on to the faithfulness and goodness of God you need strong believers beside you to encourage you and strengthen you - to hold up your hands when you get weary and begin to lose heart.

One more commitment: we endure together.

Our Fight - Community-Supported Growth

- 1. Work Together**
- 2. Stand Together**
- 3. Believe Together**
- 4. Endure Together**

"But encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." *Hebrews 10:25*

The "Day" with a big "D" means the last day - **Judgment Day** - the end of the world. The writer assumed that believers would be watchful for the signs Jesus mentioned in Matthew 24 - signs he calls **"Birth pains."** Just as contractions signal the time when a baby will be coming, so there are signs to watch for related to the end of times. THE DAY may not be very far off.

We must keep our eyes open to signs like increasing **devastation from famines**, earthquakes, floods, storms and other natural disasters. Those could be birth pains. We must keep our eyes open for increasing **conflict** - wars and rumors of wars. Signs of increasing deception and **false teaching**, increasing persecution of believers. And, to me, the most important sign - **increasing proclamation** of the Gospel. There is a lot about the end of the world that is unclear, but this much is very clear:

Signs of the End:

Increasing devastation, persecution, deception and gospel proclamation

*“And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and **then the end will come.**” Matthew 24:14*

There is only one reason that Jesus has not yet come back - there are more people who still need to hear the good news. Paul writes in Romans 11 about **“the full number of the Gentiles.”** There is a number that has yet to be reached. Once that last Gentile hears and responds to the Gospel, I expect we will see a massive global persecution coinciding with a massive revival among ethnic Jews.

Some think believers will be **raptured** - carried up into heaven before everything goes totally crazy. Personally, I think that is wishful thinking. And if nothing else, I think it is just common sense to be **prepared for the worst**. When a hurricane is coming, you put up the shutters or board up the windows, you stock up on water and batteries, you get fuel for the generator and all that. When the world could literally be ending - SOON - you prepare yourself for the WORST CASE SCENARIO - which would be persecution and martyrdom.

But for the believer, that is not the worst case - it is actually the best case. Sure, our bodies can be killed - probably in some gruesomely creative ways. **But our spirits can't be killed.** We can't be separated from the love and power of Christ by anything - not nakedness, danger or sword - not anything. “To be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord.” “To live is Christ and to die is GAIN.”

Our Fight - Community-Supported Growth

- 1. Work Together**
- 2. Stand Together**
- 3. Believe Together**
- 4. Endure Together**

“But encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” Hebrews 10:25

The enemy cannot defeat us - all he can do is send us HOME. Our calling as believers in Jesus is to ENDURE TOGETHER - to stand firm all the way to the end.

It is not about how well you start your walk with Jesus - it's about **how well you finish**. It is a battle. It is a fight. Only a fool would march into battle alone. This is not Fortnite for goodness sake. (And even in Fortnite you appreciate the value of a good player in a duo or squad with you. You don't want me on your team - I am terrible at the game.) Don't walk alone. Don't try to fight alone. Let's work together, stand together, believe together and prepare to ENDURE together - whatever that might mean.

In 2005 **four Navy Seals** were sent to Afghanistan in search of a Taliban leader. Soon after their insertion they stumbled on goat herders who informed the Taliban of their presence. Within a couple of hours the four Seals were under heavy fire from a well armed group of Taliban soldiers. Three of the Seals died in that battle but one of them, named Marcus Luttrell, survived - but with serious injuries including a broken back.

The story has been published as **Lone Survivor** - which is also a film. But the truth is that **Luttrell would never have survived had he been alone**. A major reason he helped tell the story is to honor the sacrifice of his three comrades in arms who gave their lives to save his. Even then, Luttrell would not have survived had it not been for an Afghani family led by a man named Gulab. Risking his own life and that of his family, Gulab took Luttrell in, cared for him and hid him from the Taliban and even sent word to the Americans so they could get him out.

Like those Seals we are on a dangerous mission. On our own we cannot succeed. But we can accomplish our mission if we work together, stand together, believe together and endure together.

As we close today we will sing a powerful Gospel song together. But first we want you to listen to a song that may be new to some of you. As Rebekah sings, let the truth of this song minister to your heart. **Let our worship team encourage you and strengthen your faith**. Remember - **“He who promised is faithful.”** Whatever you are going through - whatever you have done or not done - whatever you are worried about right now, hold on to this truth: **HE WILL HOLD YOU FAST**.

Let's pray.