

Encourage One Another: Community among Believers

Hebrews 10:24-25

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Some of you have heard an illustration which pictures two ways Christians can relate to each other.

One way is we can be like a bag of marbles. You throw a bunch of marbles into a bag -- they impact each other -- ricochet off each other -- but when you take them out again, each remains intact, distinct and individual. When Christians operate like marbles, they get together, and then go their separate ways, and everyone's still the same as when they arrived.

The alternative is Christian community. That's pictured by a bag of grapes. Put grapes into a bag, and apply a little pressure; the grapes break open and all their flavors get mixed together -- they influence the others and are influenced -- they become one -- what's certain is they'll never be same individuals as when they began.

The marble mentality grows from individualism. Individualism which is totally foreign -- foreign to the New Testament and foreign to the way God created us as human beings. Chuck Swindoll hits it on the head when he says, "We're formed for family." Both God's design and God's plan indicate that we flourish spiritually and emotionally only in the context of Christian community.

The Bible says before we knew Christ we were alienated, not just from God, but from each other -- but now, since we believed in Christ, we have been made one -- with Christ and with His Body. **Scripture says when we come to believe, God positions us into Christ's Body, the Church. The upshot of that is we just can't function separately and individualistically -- because we're members of one another.**

We need a value statement that will guide us as a family of believers. It's "**Community among Believers**". Here is our value statement, "**We believe people develop best in an atmosphere of being together. We should be part of smaller contexts (smaller groups) than what we experience Sunday morning, caring for the needs of one another and sharing our gifts, time, homes and hearts with each other.**"

This value flies in the face of much of what our culture offers. For example, our busyness. There's hardly a person alive who doesn't try to impress others with how busy we are.

And of course, both our natures and our culture have pressed us in the direction of pursuing selfish objectives. So, anything that sounds like serving, or giving, or sharing our time and baring our souls to others in the context of community threatens selfish

urges, and comforts and pleasures. Author John Patterson says three cultural components combat community: **individualism, isolation and consumerism.**

And yet, the New Testament portrays Christ's Body as the vibrant and vital alternative to pursuits which drive us apart. It describes Christian community. I want to look at a couple of verses which give us a handle on the concept.

The context of the **2 verses** is **Hebrews 10:19-25**, the verses you heard read. I'd encourage you to take a look at them with me, and jot down a few notes. **Hebrews 10** is packed full of great news to the Jewish people it addresses. It declares that God Himself qualifies us to worship him directly through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It asserts that Jesus is the only One perfectly qualified to enter into God's presence. And so, by His pure sacrifice on the cross, He flung open the door to God's presence when nothing else would have. So if we're Christ's, we too can come freely into God's eternal and holy presence.

Building on that foundation of access, the writer urges his readers to respond in three ways;

Beginning with **verse 19**, look at the 3 times you see the words **"let us"**:

"Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which 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.

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

These verses exhibit beauty and simplicity in their structure.

Two phrases describe God's provision.

First, confidence before God is a gift God gave you because of Jesus' blood. You'll never earn it or keep it because of how you perform. Second, that same idea of grace comes in **verse 21**, since we have a great priest.

Those are God's grace gifts and they explain why Christians have a vastly different approach in worship. **Out of grace, flow 3 statements of response.**

Verse 22: let us draw near with a true heart; verse 23: Let us hold fast to hope; and verse 24 says, let us consider how to stir up. Three times comes the call to do something in response to God's provision in Jesus.

We want to concentrate on that last one, which takes us from God's provision of relationship with Himself to His provision of great relationships with each other as

believers. Christian community is possible and it is desirable because of reconciliation. Let's see how relationships should develop in authentic community.

Look at three principles based on [verses 24](#) and [25](#).

First principle:

1. The objective in community is spiritual formation in others. (24)

The command in [verse 24](#) is packed into one word: consider -- if you're a believer, you need to carefully think about, not just yourself, but one another. That term consider means to approach thoughtfully. The writer is saying we should deliberate about a course of action.

The verse is first a reminder that getting involved with the spiritual progress of other believers is for all of us. Being a Christian is both very personal and very public. We don't live to and for ourselves as believers -- it doesn't matter what culture has foisted on us. Christians are now a counter culture -- we're no longer individualists. The New Testament urges us be devoted to one another -- [Philippians](#) tells us, consider others and their needs above your own. Scripture's intent is that we outwardly express the Truth that we are members of the same body.

So, why the careful consideration? What is it I should be turning over in my mind about other Christians? I'm to strategize how to provoke and stir them up. If you think the term provoke sounds negative, you're getting the right impression. The Greek word was almost always used negatively. It typically means to provoke someone to do something bad. Like, exasperating them to the point of anger, for instance. That word is used in [Acts 15](#), where it describes the sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas. Paul uses it in [Ephesians 6:4](#), where he says, fathers don't provoke your children to anger.

It's a very strong word. Even though it's used positively here, it has to do with strongly provoking other Christians to some action. Maybe the writer is saying to the Hebrew Christians: "you've provoked others' anger and bad actions long enough. It's time to do the opposite."

There's an objective in this stirring up and provoking our brothers and sisters. God wants to two results: **love and good works**. When you operate authentically in community, your fellow Christians will start loving like Christ loves and doing all kinds of good works.

The love he mentions is agape -- it's Christ-like love that has one source. Your relationship with God. It's the kind that the New Testament describes as a love which is committed to the other person's best -- it's never self-seeking. When we allow Christ's love to flow through us, we get our eyes off ourselves and look to how to meet needs in others. That sort of loving is God's objective in your fellow Christians -- and it comes when you begin to interact as God designs.

Ephesians 4 says as we grow up together into maturity, the body builds itself up in love. So put your mind to work on God's objective: how you can prod your fellow believers to be loving toward other people. Mull it over; think about that while you're mowing the lawn, or before you go to sleep at night. How can I mobilize fellow Christians to be loving others?

And, think about how to move others to good works. That's just a description of good things done for other people. Works done in the name of Christ -- good works which will attract other people to Christ. Jesus said, **"Let your light shine before men so they may see your good works and glorify My Father who is in heaven."**

God's directive is that I help people get off square one and start serving Him wholeheartedly. New Testament ministry belongs to every believer. Every Christian you know can be involved and engaged in doing what God put them on earth to do. Your task is to help some of them find that purpose and get on doing it. It's to get them engaged in battle and off the sidelines. It's to press people out of passivity and into eternally investing themselves.

So, before you come to church, before you get with your small group of friends, before you meet another Christian for lunch: here's the assignment. Think through how you can challenge them to grow in love and to do some good. Maybe they need to hear some biblical Truth about how God loves people through us. Maybe they need a practical idea on using the skills God gave them to meet a need. Maybe the two of you can go together and do some good and demonstrate Christ in the process.

Imagine how much more fruitful our interactions would be if we each gave concrete thought to how to stir up Christ-like qualities in 2 or 3 other people every time we're together.

A second principle:

2. The commitment to community is engaging others. (25)

Verse 25 says, **"not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some."** This part of the verse is a foundational reminder. The writer is thinking about some 1st century Christians who -- maybe due to circumstances, or hard times, or just spiritual lethargy, either made it a habit to stay away from the fellowship, or they were turning away from the Christian community altogether.

The word some is general, so we don't know who the people were or their reasons.

The attitude exhibited is serious stuff. If you study Hebrews, you might think these folks have a low view of Christ and Christianity. Some of the Jewish Christians saw it as something they should just add on to their previous religious practices. Or something to just patronize as they saw fit. Some did not recognize Christ as God's final and complete revelation. Some obviously feared persecution.

Whatever their reasons, and whoever they were, he says, don't go down that road.

Avoid their habit. Now, I need to be clear. This principle is not Scriptural basis for the kind of legalistic statement that says, "show up at church, and you're a good Christian" or "don't show up and you're not". The location of your body on Sunday morning doesn't determine your spirituality. That kind of "appearance religion" could not be further from the message of Hebrews or the New Testament. What the author is saying is this: It's in the community of authentic Christians that you will be challenged to grow in your faith, challenged to good works, and encouraged to walk with Christ.

He's saying if you stay distant -- either physically or by your attitude -- you won't be available for God to use in other believers' lives -- and, you won't benefit from God using them in yours. Body life, community, corporate worship, interaction and engaging each other spiritually -- those are key components of God's work in your life. That's the point of the stirring up time with brothers and sisters.

Let me say something else: the opposite of the word neglecting or forsaking, isn't showing up. Again, the location of your body does not make you spiritual. The opposite of forsaking the body of Christ is engaging one another. It's being part of what God is doing. It's interacting and sharing and opening your life. See, you can show up every week in the year. You could show up five times a week. And you can still be closed off and unengaged, like a marble in a bag of other marbles. If you keep your heart and life closed off to your brothers and sisters, you will neither impact nor be impacted by your brothers and sisters, like [verse 24](#) told us.

So, engage with other believers. **The commitment is further described: the call is to consistent engagement. We are to have the good habit of consistently coming to minister to one another. This will get us serious about the Truth that we are members of one another.**

The believers who received this letter lived in Jerusalem just before it was besieged and nearly leveled. Huge changes were in store for them as part of the Jewish population. In turbulent times the only wise course for us as believers is to spend significant time together, strengthening each other's faith.

Cultural and personal turbulence should drive us to more consistent and engaging in authentic community, to find what we will nowhere else.

This means getting rid of any "spiritual masks" we've been wearing. Often times, when people experience pain and turbulence, they feel like they need to get away and hide because they can't measure up to the people we appear to be but really aren't.

Francis Schaeffer wrote "Unless people see in the church not only the preaching of the truth but the practice of the truth, the practice of love and beauty, [in relationships] they will not listen and they should not listen." (The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century.)

Scripture says, **“we weep with those who weep and we rejoice with those who rejoice.”** The strong language means we move in the direction of the other person. It means we reject superficial relationships. **Romans 12:9** says, **“let love be without hypocrisy. We keep on loving each other as God has loved us--unconditionally.”**

The motivation for and to engage often and regularly is the phrase, **“as you see the day approaching.”** The writer may have been describing the destruction of Jerusalem. But the term could also likely describe Christ’s second coming. In any case, the radically changing future is a powerful reason to commit to each other as Christians. Stirring up and encouraging other believers, is to intensify, not let up, in light of future events. Today is the day to grow in community.

The third principle:

3. The need in community is encouraging others. (25)

Instead, of giving in to a tendency to forsake community our task is to encourage one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching.

I like the definition of encouragement that says, **“pouring courage into someone who needs it”**. You’ll never have to look far to find someone who needs it.

The word **“encourage”** is a fascinating word in the New Testament. It’s from the same Greek word as one of the Holy Spirit’s names. Jesus called Him the Comforter. That’s the word for encourager.

The Holy Spirit, Jesus said, would come alongside to help. And that’s the role God has for us in the lives of other Christians. When you fill the role of encourager you come alongside to help.

The idea can include bolstering someone in their faith. Discouragement usually comes in the middle of hard times. So the writer probably is instructing Christians to not let others’ faith in Christ get weak-kneed because of persecution, or the destruction of Jerusalem that’s coming. Some would need practical help like food, clothing and physical help. Encourage one another.

How do we encourage? 1 Thessalonians 5:14 says, **“admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all.”** In the church, you’ll find people at all stages and spiritual conditions. Some people need to be challenged and admonished. They’re going down paths which separate them from God’s desires. They need to hear what Scripture says. That’s a form of encouraging. Someone may be in crisis. He or she needs the kind of encouraging which reminds them of God’s character or God’s promises in Scripture. Biblical encouragement is always Truth-based. Some people are weak and need help, the verse says. A brother and sister like some of the folks who are sick right now need practical help at their weak points.

I most often get discouraged when I've forgotten God's Word or lose perspective on His character. Discouragement often means Truth has gotten lost in our lives.

Encouragement reflects the love and good works in [verse 24](#). Encouragers come along side us at points like that and remind us of God's Truth and lend a hand where it's needed.

Steps I need to take:

Are you a marble or a grape? Does your life impact and influence other people in God's direction? Do you give thought and prayer, as you approach Sunday morning, or a small group meeting, as to how you can approach fellowship ready to challenge or encourage or love the other believers with whom you're going to spend time?

Do you come willing, and ready, and intentional about engaging your siblings in the faith?

Those are the challenges of this passage. It's also a description of authentic spiritual community.

As I've seen God use some people in my life in the last months, I see both how scriptural and how significant that kind of community is. Let's ask God to make us into grapes.

Francis Schaeffer said, **"Our relationship with each other is the criterion the world uses to judge whether our message is truthful—Christian community is the final apologetic."**