

- “I'd never join a club that would allow a person like me to become a member.” Woody Allen
- We want to belong, to be known and accepted by others in community... and yet we also know that it's in community we come face to face with the difficulties of other people, and even the difficulties of our own selves.
- We all like the idea of community and church, but the reality is often quite different. It can be painful.
- People have grown skeptical of the church, seeing the Christian community as unnecessary. “After all, it's about private experience”
- See, most people claim to be “spiritual” but not “religious” which is usually a way of saying “I may believe in a God or deity but I do not want to associate with an organization, or commitment to a group of people.
- And that is why, perhaps it is all the more shocking when you look at what Christian faith says about community... it's not only important in the Christian life, it is *irreplaceable!*
- But if we understand this passage, not only will we see the necessity of the church community but have renewed hope for it
- The words of Jesus are clear in Matthew 16. The church is not an afterthought, it is essential to the purposes of God! It is absolutely unique!
 - He did not say “upon this rock I will build my non-profit” but my church!
 - This thing called the church is so connected to Him, that it is called the body of Christ!
 - And you learned in the first week that Jesus is the founder of the church! He is the source and center! It's all about Jesus! He is the senior pastor of the church!
- You then learned last week that since Jesus is the founder of the church, he is then the foundation for everything that happens! The authority of the apostles then, and leaders today, is all built on the authority of God's word, which reveals Jesus.

- He is then building a spiritual community based on him, through qualified leaders and the members that make up the church.
- Great. But what does this mean for each of us personally and practically? Especially when church can be so hard and difficult? To answer those questions, I want to connect what you have been learning about the church from Matthew 16 to the New testament book of Hebrews.
- Hebrews 10, like many other places in the NT, tells us that we were never intended to be isolated from others, but connected with purpose.
- We do not know much about the writer of Hebrews but we are not uncertain about its purpose!
 - Written to a church of Hebrew Christians who faced many pressures and seemed to be ready to give up
- But there was a deeper issue, there was some theological confusion that needed clearing up and so the writer seeks to establish them in the truth, and here in particular, it is the truth about christian community
- And from this text I want to give 6 reasons why belonging to the church is so vital, and I want to make it personal...
- So why belong to the church? Why commit? Invest?
- 1. **The Good News is not my Private Property** (15-18)
 - a. There is no real Christianity without other people.
 - b. The writer of this letter speaks to the readers as members, partners, and... friends and family. Why?
 - c. Before the author gets to practical responsibility, he lays the foundation: God has always had a plan to rescue humanity and bring us to himself. And so, the OT is quoted (read v 16)
 - i. God would make us new by bringing us into relationship with himself, giving a new hearts and renewed minds that want to know and love God
 - d. And notice, the nature of this promise is not singular, its plural! Is it for each of us individually? Yes. But it is also for all of us corporately!

- e. This will happen because the barrier to a relationship with God, and with each other, will be removed! V 17
- f. And it will not be a temporary solution, but a permanent one (v 18)
- g. How can this happen? Through the good news about Jesus. Please listen to what is being said, and I will put it simply
- h. **Jesus died to bring us together** (Because Jesus...) v 19-21
 - i. The job of the Priest in the OT was to be a mediator, standing between God and man, offering sacrifices continually because of our sin! But Jesus came to be the ultimate priest and ultimate sacrifice.
 - ii. The result? A WAY verse 20, has opened for us! And it is plural!
 - iii. The barrier has been removed. The very thing that keeps us from God and from each other has been removed. There is always a resource for you to forgive! But more than that!
- i. **Jesus rose to keep us together (verse 22-23)**
 - i. Read 21-22! He is alive and forever represents us, so we can continually be forgiven, reconciled to God and each other.
 - ii. This is our hope, this is what makes our community possible and necessary and we are to hold on to it together! Read V 23
- j. That which is true for us is true for others!
 - i. We are “organically” linked to one another
 - ii. Not simply collection of individuals in one place, but something greater. Grapes not marbles.
 - 1. Its not just a personal and private experience!
- k. See, true spirituality is not a private search for what is highest in ourselves. It is a communal invitation to belong to God and others.

John Stott “I trust that none of my readers is that grotesque anomaly, an un-churched Christian. The New Testament knows nothing of such a person. For the church lies at the very center of the eternal purpose of God.”

- i. The full experience of life takes place in community

- ii. Look at all the instructions in Scripture that pertain to “one another”
 - i. So, why church? This good news is not my private property.

2. God calls me to be responsible for others (verse 24a)

- a. The importance of community become especially apparent once the writer has laid this gospel foundation. There are very practical implications, calls to action! And the first is found right at the beginning of verse 24, “and let us consider one another”, The word means “put your mind to work” for other people.
- b. When you see your doctor, it’s not just to have a little chat, you are in a particular area of need that you must pass on. And what does the doctor do? The very thing Hebrews 10 verse 24 tells us to do in regards to one another: consider, put your mind to work!
- c. Do you see yourself as being responsible for others?
- d. This doesn't mean making people’s decisions for them. But it does mean you make decisions in regards to others.
- e. And yet, in western culture, the need of the individual is placed far above the needs of a community. We see this in our culture...
 - i. And yet we also sadly see this in church...
- f. Our choice of whether to gather on a Sunday, or go to a mid-week group... is often made only on the basis of what “I” get out of it.
 - i. But if this is how we live then we will never fulfill our call to love each other! And we will not grow!
- g. Yet God himself is relational and so he has chosen to bring us together and to bring about renewal for our city within community
 - i. *And it is a call!*
- h. Commitment gives you the opportunity to die to self-centredness.
- i. Part of your responsibility to continually get together with the aim of figuring each other out, in order to help each

other grow. And in that, you not only look after others, they look after you!

j. Does that make you feel a bit uncomfortable? Good.

3. Because I need holy irritation (v 24b)

- a. He continues “in order **to stir up** love and good works”.
- b. The word there is provoke, or even irritate! It carries the idea of a spur digging into the side of a horse to start moving
- c. And indeed, this may not be what we want, but it is most certainly what we need.
 - i. When people consider your life, watch your life, speak into your life... it will stir you up, it will provoke you, though irritating as it might be, to love and good works.
 - ii. This is not about just provoking each other in general. It's about love!
- d. We often understand love as something without irritation. But at times, there may be an irritation in love!
 - i. We often choose the people we are committed to based on how little they challenge us.
 - ii. But it should not be so! We need others!
 - iii. “God will change me!” yes, and one of the primary ways He has decided to change you is IN community!
- e. Are you taking your own life seriously enough to understand your need for teaching?
- f. Are you taking your friends seriously enough that you actually teach one another?
- g. If you aren't... it's not because you love *them* too much, it's because you love yourself too much!
- h. See, I think we often go wrong in three ways:
 - i. We only correct, but don't affirm
 - ii. We only affirm and don't correct
 - iii. Or we do neither!
- i. But the gospel enables us to speak truth in love.
- j. This consideration that leads to irritation is meant to be directed *by* and *for* love and good works.

- k. It's about the need I have for other people to point me in the right direction, even if it's irritating! And I need this! And that is 4thly

4. It is not good for me to be alone (25a)

- a. Have you ever had an experience where your family (mothers, fathers, sisters' brothers) spend a good amount of time with your city friends? Work friends? If so, we all know what happens. The truth comes out!
 - i. Family will, usually, tell it like it is.
 - ii. And when it is done rightly, that's a good thing.
- b. Is the church imperfect? Yes. Is the church broken? Yes. But, like your biological family, they are REAL. And will bring out what is real.
 - i. "The church is full of hypocrites" No its not.
- c. Think about it like this: If I chose to live outside of and non-commitment to a church community, I give myself a free pass to live what some call the unconforted life., where I pick and choose elements of faith that I want to add to my life that I selectively share with other people like me (or that I like!) that will most likely not confront me where I need the biggest challenge.
- d. It is when our illusions are shattered, the superficial is stripped away that you discover what real relationships are all about
- e. If you share life together, gather regularly and commit to hearing and applying truth together, then any fantasies you have created about your life will be dispelled and replaced with truth.
- f. When you are born, our design is such that we cannot survive without others! To be isolated actually goes against our design, rejects God's very purpose!
- g. In the presence of others, under the preaching of God's word and applying it in community, you know what this does? *It makes it hard for me to live a lie!* We cannot deceive

ourselves into thinking that we are more holy than we are, or less needy than we really are!

- h. NOT being involved with church because of its faults usually skips over a deeper reason: I don't want my own needs to become obvious! But that is why it is not good to be alone!
 - i. You will not be changed in the way you ought apart from community! Transformation takes place in community
- i. Consider this, the sins that will **most** likely destroy you are the ones you are **least** likely to see
 - i. So, don't abandon your post!
 - 1. He is not simply saying "don't forget about your weekly rhythms" but don't "neglect", don't abandon them!
- j. Why would we neglect? (which category do you fit in?)
 - i. "I don't need them."
 - ii. "They don't need me"
 - iii. But neither are true! God has created us to be dependent upon one another...
 - iv. And as we do... something will happen!

5. I will find surprising encouragement (25b)

- a. God commands his people to encourage each other because he knows we need it!
 - i. When encouragement is absent, people will feel unloved, unimportant and useless. God knows we need reminders!
- b. Moving away from people does not cure discouragement, it causes it! So we can help put courage into each others heart
- c. What we need is to create a culture of encouragement!
- d. Point out evidences of grace!
 - i. Not just generic compliments. Encouragement is anything that will lift a person's heart towards God. We can do this by pointing out any and every way we see evidence of God's work in their life. As we do, it points them up!

e. Be specific

- i. Saying things that will build up courage in the other person.
 - ii. We help others see their worth in God
 - iii. We help others see the value of their gifts
 1. God gives us all different gifts, and we learn to appreciate each other as we see them in use!
 - iv. We help others see the importance of their presence
- f. Start now! (who has blessed you that you can thank?)
- g. Let's ask God to create this in us! And increase it. Why?

6. I am Practicing for the Future (25c)

- a. When it comes to love, never settle! Notice, when it comes to love, he has a further, future end in mind! Their ultimate purpose! "Until the day of Christ" the day that God makes all things new!
- b. We are all on a trajectory one way or another! When we look at each other, we should not only see with the present, but the future in mind!
- c. Love is helping others become their future glory-selves!
 - i. *Your future – we are headed in the same direction!*
- d. Knowing that we help each other in this direction changes everything about how I relate to others... Even the most difficult

John Newton "In a little while you will meet in heaven; he will then be dearer to you than the nearest friend you have upon earth is to you now. Anticipate that period in your thoughts; and though you may find it necessary to oppose his errors, view him personally as a kindred soul, with whom you are to be happy in Christ forever."

- e. So, how can this kind of community possibly be sustained?
- f. Make no mistake. Real community is costly. But there is both an example and an answer in this chapter...
- g. Imagine someone in your community group got thrown in jail unjustly. And imagine if going to visit them and hold a small group there could potentially get you in trouble?
- h. Well, that is exactly what the recipients of this letter did.

Hebrews 10:34a For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property...

- i. And where did they find the courage to love?

V 34b ...since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

- i. They went right back to where we started. They held fast to their confession. They cherished what they had in Jesus, above the value of temporary things.
- ii. Growing together is not going to be easy, it will be messy, and there will be cost. But mess and cost are no strangers to Jesus.
- iii. Jesus had compassion towards you, who were imprisoned by your sin... and he joyfully gave his life, accepted a death on a cross in your place to pay for your sin... so that you could be brought into relationship with himself. He didn't keep to himself... he gave himself
- iv. This stirs up love for others, this encourages you to take the risk

V 35 Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

- i. So... where are you in v 25? Pressing on? Or giving up?