

From Followers to Family

CONNECTED #2 - Pastor Gary Combs - July 26, 2026 - Hebrews 10:19–25

INTRO: Good morning church! Today we are starting a new series entitled: “**CONNECTED: Finding Real Community in a Digital World.**” Though technology can draw us together it often pushes us apart. But the answer isn't ditching our devices; it's rediscovering the kind of connection we were made for: with God and with each other.

Series Theme: Acts 2:42 (ESV) And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the **fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Last week, we talked about what our screens are doing to us and how we need a better source of true connection. This week, I want to talk about what we have quietly stopped doing for one another, namely, face to face fellowship.

NEED: Sociologists have a term for the way many of us live now: “**networked individualism.**” We have traded smaller, tightly connected communities for sprawling networks of online relationships. (*Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman, Networked: The New Social Operating System, MIT Press, 2012.*)

We may have hundreds of followers and still not have a friend to call at two in the morning. We know what someone we have not seen since high school ate for lunch, yet we may have no idea that the woman sitting two rows away has not slept in a week. We are more reachable than any generation in history, yet somehow harder to truly reach.

And here is the trap: because the phone is always there, it can feel like enough.

- You send a text.
- You leave a comment.
- You click a praying hands emoji on the hospital post.
- You watch the worship service online in your pajamas.

Then a little voice says, “There, I stayed connected.” But not really.

Digital contact may represent connection, but it cannot fully replace it. A video of burning logs in a fireplace may look soothing, but you cannot warm your hands over it.

In May 2023, the Surgeon General issued an advisory concerning what he called an epidemic of loneliness and isolation. About one in two American adults reported experiencing loneliness. The advisory warned that the health consequences of social disconnection can shorten your life. (*U.S. Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy, Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation, May 2023.*)

On the other side: Researchers studying religious-service attendance repeatedly discovered that people who gathered regularly for worship experienced significant benefits. One major study found that those who attended religious services at least weekly had a 68 percent lower risk of deaths related to suicide, drug overdose, and alcohol than those who never attended. (*Ying Chen et al., “Religious Service Attendance and Deaths Related to Drugs, Alcohol, and Suicide,” JAMA Psychiatry, May 6, 2020.*)

Trans: This doesn't mean that screens are poison, but they are a poor substitute. The apostle John doesn't say that “paper and ink” are evil. He says they're not enough...

2 John 12 (ESV) Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete.

The apostle isn't condemning the letter; he's naming its limits. He says there's no substitute for “face to face” fellowship! We were created for fellowship with God and one another! Trusting Jesus, we were adopted into God's family. And the writer of Hebrews is about to show us what it looks like when that family refuses to drift apart.

BODY: In the book of Hebrews, the author urged believers, who were in danger of drifting and withdrawing, to live faithfully in fellowship as God's family because of the access they share through Jesus Christ. We can live faithfully in fellowship together as God's family. How can we live faithfully in fellowship together as God's family? The text gives three ways we can live faithfully in fellowship together as God's family.

Read text: Hebrews 10:19–25 (ESV) 19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 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. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 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.

WE CAN LIVE FAITHFULLY IN FELLOWSHIP TOGETHER AS GOD'S FAMILY:

1. By drawing near together in faith.

EXP: (19-22) Look at vv.19-21, before giving instruction, the author lays a foundation. Circle the word "since." It occurs twice (19, 21). Since what? Since we have this access to the Father through Christ... "Let us" (1st of 3) "draw near" (22). Not you, but "us." Let us draw near together... as a family... into the Father's presence.

"Confidence" (19) (παρρησία, *parrēsia*) - freedom in speaking, confidence, boldness, assurance.

"Holy places" (19) (ἅγιον, *hagion*) - holy place, sacred, sanctuary; the holy of holies

"Blood of Jesus" (19) (αἷμα, *haima*) - blood shed, to be shed by violence; the atoning blood of Christ

"New and living way" (20) (πρόσφατος, *prospatos*) - lately slaughtered, freshly killed; new. This perfectly fits Hebrews' emphasis that Christ's sacrifice is new, unique, and once-for-all, yet eternally effective.

"Through the curtain" (20) (καταπέτασμα, *katapetasma*) - the curtain that veiled the Holy of Holies. It was torn in two at Christ's crucifixion:

Matthew 27:51 (ESV) And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom...

"Great priest" (21) (ἱερεύς, *hiereus*) - great or high priest. Only one who could enter beyond the curtain.

"House of God" (21) (οἶκος, *oikos*) - the house of God, the tabernacle; here the true heavenly temple

"Let us draw near" (22) (προσέρχομαι, *proserchomai*) - to come to, approach, draw near to. 1st of 3 subjunctives, operating like an invitational imperative. The command isn't "try harder to get close to God." The command is "Since Christ has opened the way, come on in!"

"True heart" (22) (ἀληθινός, *alēthinos*) - true, veracious, sincere

"Full assurance" (22) (πληροφορία, *plērophoria*) - full assurance, most certain confidence.

"Sprinkled clean" (22) (ῥαντίζω, *rhantizō*) - to sprinkle; to cleanse by sprinkling, hence to purify, cleanse.

"Evil conscience" (22) (συνείδησις, *suneidēsis*) - distinguishing between what is morally good and bad.

"Bodies washed" (22) (λούω, *louō*) - to bathe, wash, of a dead person. Perhaps pointing to baptism.

"Pure water" (22) (καθαρός, *katharos*) - clean, pure; physically: purified by fire; in a levitical sense: clean.

ARG: Why is drawing near together the first thing? Because you cannot have fellowship with each other that you do not first have with God. John says it plainly:

1 John 1:7 (ESV) But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

The blood that reconciles us to God also reconciles us to one another. As Paul wrote:

Ephesians 2:13-14 (ESV) But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.

ILL: **Authorized Personnel Only.** You will notice that wording all over the place, even in your local grocery store. Only certain people can go back there based on their connection to the company.

Family Home. When my children come home, they don't ring the doorbell. They don't wait on the porch hoping I'll let them in. They just come on in because they know they belong.

APP: So here is the question: When did you last draw near, really draw near, in full assurance of faith? Not a glance at a devotional between meetings. Not the service playing while you fold laundry. Drawing near. And here is the part we forget in a digital age: you were meant to do it together. The screen lets you watch from a distance and call it worship. But you cannot obey this "Let US" command from a distance. This week, come near to God, and do it together with God's family. Let US draw near TOGETHER in faith!

2. By holding fast together in hope.

EXP: (23) The 1st “Let us” was draw near. The 2nd is “hold fast” (23). To what? “The confession of our hope.” Hope is the 2nd member of what has been called the Pauline Triad of faith, hope, and love (1 Cor. 13:13).

“Let us hold fast” (23) (κατέχω, *katechō*) - to hold fast, keep secure, keep firm possession of, to grip.

“Confession” (23) (ὁμολογία, *homologia*) - Lit., “same word.” profession; confession. In Hebrews, “confession” refers to our public allegiance to Jesus as Lord and High Priest. The recipients were under pressure to abandon Christ and return to Judaism because persecution was increasing (Heb. 10:32-39).

“Hope” (23) (ἐλπίς, *elpis*) - expectation of good, hope. Joyful and confident expectation.

“Without wavering” (23) (ἀκλινής, *aklinēs*) - not inclining, firm, unmoved, unwavering.

“He who promised” (23) (ἐπαγγέλλομαι, *epangellomai*) - to promise. Worldly hope says, “I hope it rains.” Biblical hope says, “God has promised, therefore I know.”

“Faithful” (23) (πιστός, *pistos*) - trusty, faithful; can be relied on.

ARG: Why hold fast together? Because confessing our hope together keeps us from spiritual drift. And when we isolate, we tend to waver. But holding fast together in Christ, we can overcome it.

Hebrews 2:1 (ESV) Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

Hebrews 3:13-14 (ESV) But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ...

ILL: Child Crossing a Busy Street. She thinks she's holding onto Dad's hand. But the reality is that Dad is holding onto hers. If her little fingers slip, his won't. Our perseverance is similar. We are commanded to hold fast, but our confidence ultimately rests in the faithful grip of our Heavenly Father.

Hope is like a rope. Biblical hope is more than a wish. It's like a rope anchored on both ends, one end to the cross and the other beyond the veil with Christ. And when storms come, and they will, hope holds.

APP: Some of you are holding on by a thread this morning, and you have been trying to do it alone. Who knows you are struggling? Who has permission to check on your soul on a Monday? If the honest answer is no one, that is not strength, it is danger. The deceitfulness of sin loves an audience of one. Tell someone the truth about where your hope actually is. And for those of you standing firm today, look around, someone near you is slipping. Grab the rope with them. We hold fast together, or we drift apart alone.

3. By stirring up one another in love.

EXP: (24-25) The 3rd “Let us” is “let us consider how to stir up one another” (24). Notice this is one of two “one anothers.” To what? To love and good works. How? Negatively: “Not neglecting to meet together” (25). Positively: “But encouraging one another.” Remember, you can't do the one anothers without...

“Let us consider” (24) (κατανοέω, *katanoēō*) - to consider attentively, fix one's attention, study carefully.

“Stir up” (24) (παροξυσμός, *paroxusmos*) - to incite, irritate, provoke. The writer of Hebrews took a word often associated with conflict and redirected it toward holiness. Not provoking one another to anger, but provoking one another to love. Not unlike the “sharpening” of Proverbs:

Proverbs 27:17 (NIV) As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

“Love” (24) (ἀγάπη, *agapē*) - God's unconditional love. Sacrificial love.

“Good works” (24) (καλὰ ἔργα, *kala erga*) - Lit., “beautiful works” or “noble works,” not the ἀγαθὰ ἔργα Paul more often uses. καλός carries an aesthetic and public dimension: works that are visibly attractive, that commend themselves as good when seen. Same word in Matt. 5:16, where good works are what people see and glorify the Father for.

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“Not neglecting” (25) (ἐγκαταλείπω, *egkataleipō*) - totally abandoned, utterly forsaken, to desert.

“Meet together” (25) (ἐπισυναγωγή, *episynagōgē*) - a gathering together in one place, an assembly.

“Habit of some” (25) (ἔθος, *ethos*) - custom, manner, habit. A person separated from the body loses the very environment God designed for encouragement and perseverance.

“Encouraging” (25) (παρκαλέω, *parakaleō*) - Lit., “to call to one's side,” to admonish, exhort, comfort.

“The Day” (25) - The Day of the Lord is coming, He is coming back soon.

ARG: Neglecting meeting together is not a new problem caused by the smart phone. It's an old sinful habit that our culture has turned into a lifestyle. How can we stop the spiritual drift? By stirring up:

1 Thessalonians 5:14 (ESV) We urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

And by meeting together and all the more as the Day approaches:

Acts 2:46 (ESV) And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.

ILL: Isolation → vulnerability → drifting. This pattern is the death of a sheep, who wanders and gets attacked by wolves. But it is also the spiritual drift of so many in our churches. We have seen so many who pull out from CG, then from serving, then they are gone, falling prey to all kinds of spiritual attack.

APP: Are you a stirrer, or a spectator? It is possible to attend church for years and never once provoke anyone to love, to consume the service and go home. That is not fellowship. This week, consider one another. Pick a name. Who is drifting? Who have you not seen in a while, and instead of assuming they're fine, go find out? Sure, sent them a text, but then show up. Do not neglect the gathering. Some of you have quietly slipped into the habit of not meeting together, but God's Word is calling you to come back home. Your family needs to see you face to face. And you need theirs, all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

CONCLUSION: We have seen **three ways** to live faithfully as God's family: 1) draw near together in faith, 2) hold fast together in hope, and 3) stir one another up in love. Faith, hope, and love, the three that always travel together. But I want you to see where all three of them come from, because it is the same place.

Go back to verse 19. How can we draw near? “by the blood of Jesus.” How is the way opened? “through the curtain, that is, through his flesh.” Everything in this passage, every command, every invitation, hangs on His torn body and spilled blood. On the cross, at the moment Jesus died, the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom, torn by God's own hand, because the way to the Father was finally and forever open. Jesus was shut out, abandoned, forsaken, alone in the dark, so that you would never have to be. He was cut off so that you could be brought near.

And that is the gospel for the lonely heart this morning. The deepest isolation you have ever felt, the ache no group chat could reach, Jesus went beyond that. He was truly forsaken so that you could be truly accepted. You do not draw near to earn a family. You draw near because the blood already bought you one.

So here is my appeal. Maybe you are here and you have never once drawn near, you have followed at a distance, you have watched from the back, you have kept God at arm's length. The veil is torn. The way is open. The invitation has your name on it. Come to Christ this morning. Trust his in His sacrifice for your sins. Enter in.

And maybe you are a believer, but you have been drifting, watching from home, holding on by a thread, consuming instead of stirring. Come home to the family. Christ is calling you to Himself and to one another.

Let's pray.