

To Engage in My Church

"Advance" Series, October 24 & 25, 2026 | Hebrews 10:19-25

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Hebrews reveals a calling we almost always overlook.

Hebrews is a unique book in the New Testament.

We don't know the author's name. It could be Paul, Barnabas, or someone else entirely. The letter doesn't say. We aren't sure about the audience. Many scholars think it was written to Jewish Christians, but we don't know where. And it reads more like a sermon than a letter. It's an exhortation to early Christians to know Jesus in all His fulness and to follow Him faithfully. It turns out that Christians in the first century were a lot like us.

Just decades after Jesus' resurrection, people already struggled to follow Him faithfully.

Hebrews was probably written before the Romans destroyed the Temple in 70 AD. Probably in the mid to late 60s AD. Some of the people who had witnessed Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were likely still alive. It was all still so fresh! And yet, people were struggling to follow Jesus faithfully. Hebrews calls people to stay close to God. Were people losing interest? It calls people to cling to faith and hope. Were they tempted to deny the faith? It calls people to spur one another to love and good works. Were they tired? And it says to keep getting together. Did they get busy?

Their stories sound like your everyday life.

Do people ever challenge you and your faith? I've heard Christian faith called everything from naïve to bigoted. I'm sure you've heard some of the same things. Does that ever discourage you? Does it ever make you question your faith? Do Sunday sports wreck your ambitions as a disciple? You'd love to serve, but your kids have basketball games one season, track meets another, and camps all summer. Are you pulled in so many directions that you pull away from God? Or do you ever just get tired and find that flame you felt at one time turning into a flicker? Hebrews was written to you.

Today's reading crystallizes our calling to a church home.

This is a series of sermons on calling. We've talked about God calling us to Himself, His call to be and make disciples, His calling to a unique backyard where we make disciples, and the unique gifts God has given us and called us to use. When we talk about calling, you probably expect me to cover most of these subjects. But have you ever thought of being called to a particular church home? Hebrews does. Hebrews reminds us that we are called to be wholehearted disciples. But it acknowledges that without the Church, we are going to be on our own and vulnerable—like gazelles that have wandered away from the herd when the lions are hunting. So, Hebrews is reminding us that we are called to a particular church home—where we love and protect one another. It starts with the amazing things Jesus has done for us.

We have ACCESS to God and an ANCHOR in His presence through Jesus.

Jesus opened access to God's presence.

God is holy. His holiness is like a fire consuming sin. In our natural, sinful condition, we can't come into His presence. That's why in the Temple in Jerusalem, there was a massive curtain between the outer part of the Temple and the inner part where God's presence dwelt. The curtain kept everyone out except the High Priest—and he could only go with special preparation on special days. Jesus opened a way through that curtain. **Hebrews 10:19-20** says,

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,
by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh

...

When Jesus died on the cross to pay the price for our sin, the curtain in the Temple was torn in two, literally and figuratively. Now, when we accept forgiveness in Jesus, the way is opened for us to come into God's presence. We can have fellowship with God because Jesus opened the way.

He holds us close to God's presence, like an anchor.

Jesus opened access to God, but life tends to pull us away from God. So, **Hebrews 10:21** reminds us of a promise,

... since we have a great priest over the house of God ...

What does our High Priest do? **Hebrews 6:19-20** explains,

We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever ...

The High Priest who opened access to God is now like an anchor that we are tethered to. When life starts pulling us away, Jesus holds onto us. When people make accusations against our faith, Jesus won't let go. When basketball games pull us away from worship, Jesus holds onto us. When we are just getting tired and discouraged, Jesus is our anchor. Isn't that good news?

That word "therefore" at the start of this passage gloriously wounds our natural pride.

Hebrews 10:19 starts with the word, "Therefore ..." Everything that follows in this passage is attached to this word. Since Jesus has opened access to God's presence, and since Jesus is our anchor who holds us when life pulls us away, therefore ... We can follow Jesus wholeheartedly—as verses 22-25 encourage us to—because of Jesus. You may think, "Wait, don't I have to do this all on my own?" The clear answer is, "no." You can't do it on your own. That's the wound to our pride and our natural desire to do everything ourselves. But it's glorious! We can't do it all ourselves, but we don't have to. Jesus is doing the hardest work for us.

There are some things you just can't do on your own—like tickling yourself.

Some of us are ticklish. Touch our ribs or the bottoms of our feet, and we start laughing. But if you're going to touch your own ribcage, your brain knows it. It isn't surprised. And it dulls the sensation. Most of us can't tickle ourselves, and none of us can open access to God's presence or anchor ourselves in God's presence. Only Jesus can do that.

Jesus' work changes life now and not just someday.

We have access to God's presence ... now. We are anchored in God's presence ... now. That means that life changes ... now. We will think differently, relate differently, and behave differently. The change

comes from the inside, and it happens because of Jesus and by the work of the Holy Spirit. But thinking, relating, and behaving differently aren't easy. Thankfully, God has provided a home where we get help.

The Church is the HOME we need to be WHOLE.

Hebrews calls us to be wholehearted disciples.

Hebrews 10:22-24 gives us three exhortations that paint a picture of a wholehearted disciple:

... let us draw near... Let us hold fast the confession of our hope ... And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works ...

The first exhortation is to draw near to God's presence with faith because our hearts and hands have been washed clean by Jesus. That means having fellowship with God daily. The second exhortation is to hold fast to the hope without wavering. Here we look to Jesus. He will faithfully help us to be faithful, even when life gets hard. The third exhortation is to think seriously about how we can stir one another up to love others and do good works so that people will give glory to our Father in Heaven. That's Hebrews' picture of a wholehearted disciple.

We can't be whole disciples if we neglect our church home.

Hebrews 10:25 says,

... 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.

What's the implication? If you want to draw near, hold fast, and stir up one another, then don't pull back from your church home. Instead, lean in and encourage one another. Help one another.

Otherwise, we're missing something we need to be whole. Our church home is critical to living as wholehearted, healthy disciples.

We need our church home like a hermit crab needs its shell.

Hermit crabs don't make the homes they carry around on their backs. Instead, they borrow homes. Hermit crabs desperately need shells because their soft, exposed abdomens make them vulnerable to predators and competitors. Like hermit crabs, we desperately need our church home for protection and so we can thrive.

God calls us to settle into our church home.

What does that look like for you? If you are a follower of Jesus and you've never declared that publicly through baptism, then consider being baptized. We have a baptism class coming up soon and a baptism service this Thanksgiving. That might be a way to settle into your church home. You might also consider joining Valley. I know not all of you think that being a member is important. You may wonder what the benefits are. You may worry about the obligations. Becoming a member says that Valley is your church home and your spiritual family. That's a way to settle into your church home. Avoid being like a hermit crab in another way. Hermit crabs change shells repeatedly. When a shell gets uncomfortable, the hermit crab searches out a new shell. Don't let that be you. Settle into a church home and make it yours for many years.

Jesus gives us EARS so we can HEAR God calling us to a church home.

Our brains are conditioned and our ears are closed without Jesus.

We live in a culture with powerful narratives. Some of the narratives we run into every day tell us, for instance, that youthfulness is better than age. That technology always solves problems. Happiness is our goal in life. These narratives are powerful and pervasive. They are like an intellectual stew that we are simmering in constantly. That conditioning means that there are some things God is saying to us that we just can't hear. Our ears won't let them through. Jesus changes that when we become disciples, but sometimes there are still frequencies we're tuning out because those narratives have a powerful hold on us!

Our supermarket shelves are stocked with every conceivable kind of coffee.

There are dozens of brands. There are dozens of flavors. You can get your coffee whole bean or ground. And if the beans you want aren't at your local supermarket, you can go online and get just about any coffee bean you would like from anywhere in the world. You do not need to compromise.

All these options encourage us to focus on ourselves.

Amazon can have any shampoo we want to our house in less than 24 hours. I can go to Charles Tyrwhitt and order any dress shirt I want in any fabric I like with whatever collar I want, in my perfect size. If I go to Disney World, I can schedule an appointment to get on Space Mountain so I don't have to wait in line. We are trained to see ourselves as the consumer, and we sometimes apply that principle to our faith lives. We are pursuing a faith that works for us. And that can mean shopping around for a church home like it's a pair of chinos.

Jesus renews our minds and opens our ears.

Our mind has to change. It's not just a matter of declaring our belief in a set of doctrines. There are old, worldly, pagan narratives that have to go. Values that have to be busted up. New, Kingdom of God values and ways of thinking have to take their place. Instead of thinking of myself as a consumer, I learn to think of myself as a servant—the way Jesus thought about Himself. Instead of thinking of myself as the hero in my own spiritual journey, I come to see God as the hero. Instead of seeing my life as something to optimize, I think of my life as something to give away. That's when I begin to hear God calling me. My ears are becoming attuned to His voice.

Then God calls us to engage in our church home.

Suddenly, the church isn't like a pair of chinos anymore. It's the spiritual home where we belong. It's filled with the spiritual family we love and who love us. It is the place where Jesus is the Head—He is in charge, and we say "yes" to Him. And it's our launching pad for ministry. God doesn't just call us to go to church. He calls us to engage fully.

Let's say a joyful "yes" to God's call to our church home.

The first disciples showed us what engaging could look like.

Acts chapter 2 tells us how on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the first disciples and the Church was born. The disciples who had been uncertain and even afraid became confident and bold in their faith. Thousands of new disciples were added to the Church that day. In joy and gratitude

for what God had done in their lives, they gathered under the apostles' teaching. They spent time together—eating together and praying together. Some people sold property and funded the ministries of the church. God was moving powerfully among them, and people were getting saved daily.

The Engagement Wheel shows us what our joyful “yes” looks like.

When we are fully engaged here at Valley, we are worshipping God publicly and on our own. We are in some type of community or group. We are using our gifts to serve somewhere and bring God glory. And we are sharing our faith in Jesus across the street and around the world. When we engage, we grow. We thrive. The Engagement Wheel doesn't imply an obligation. It tells us where we can receive life and how we can respond to God with gratitude.

Our joyful “yes” overflows in giving financially.

The first disciples found that. As they came to saving faith in Jesus, and as they became part of the church community, they naturally responded not only with their time and talents but with their treasure as well. If Valley is your church home, I encourage you to give something. We all do this together, and we all do it in gratitude to God. It's part of our joyful “yes” to God.

Glenn showed me what a joyful “yes” looks like when you know that life is short.

Glenn was a cancer survivor when I met him. As I got to know him, I realized that he was living with a slow-growing cancer, so he was living with an acute awareness of how valuable life is. As a result, he wanted to invest intentionally in the Kingdom of God and in people. That included his wife, his kids, and his grandkids. And that included investing in a church home. He was an elder, head of one of our operations teams, and part of a small group. He took great joy in a group of people who went to the movies each week. They would meet for dinner, watch a movie, and discuss it afterward. The movie group was constantly adding new people. People came to faith and came back to faith through that group. It was like Glenn's own flock to shepherd. When I did Glenn's funeral a few years ago, members of that movie group were throughout the room. What would your “yes” to God's calling look like?

Our calling comes to life in our church home.

God calls us to Himself. He calls us to be and make disciples. He gives us a spiritual backyard where we make those disciples. He gives us gifts and calls us to use them. And our church home is where all of that begins to fit together and work. God is calling each of us to a church home. In an age where it is easy to hold your church home at arm's length, let's do the Kingdom thing and engage.