

COMMITTED: Convictional Decisions for the New Year: Part 3
Hebrews 10:24-25

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works...”

Introduction: An intriguing phenomenon happens each year around this time on the East coast. Fans of certain football teams, this year the Buffalo Bills, brave blizzards, snow flurries, and freezing temperatures to watch their team play live in a playoff game. They could easily stay at home in warmth, watch the game in high definition on an oversized flat screen, and enjoy normally priced food, but instead tens of thousands gathered together. Some were understandably bundled up in parkas and blankets, while others were inexplicably seen without shirts or jackets to show some sort of misguided manhood or team loyalty. They had to shovel the snow off their seats while their feet stayed on top of the drifts that were left. Dressed in team colors, they cheered and jeered together, felt the tension of the scoreboard, and braved frostbite for the opportunity to have an embodied experience. For this privilege, they each were willing to pay hundreds of dollars. *What compels people to do this?*

As we conclude our mini-series on our convictional decisions for the New Year, we turn our attention on our commitments to each other. We started a couple of weeks ago considering the commitments that God made to us, *forgiving* our sins, remembering them no more because of the blood of Jesus shed for us on the cross. Forgiveness opened the door for reconciliation, giving us confidence to enter the holy place, in which we can be in the presence of God, in which there is fullness of joy (Ps. 16:11). By faith, we believe that Jesus tore down the separating curtain and as our Great Priest, He brought us to the Father, giving us new hearts and clean consciences. We can **hold fast** to our belief in all of this in hope since God always fulfills His promises. For those that are born again to this hope, they are free to make **loving commitments to each other**, since our security no longer rests in this world or what we can keep here, but in what Christ has secured for us in the future (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

What compels us to be together? We are embodied creatures, made for relationship with both God and fellow man. Sin complicates and negates both, but the gospel makes it possible for us to be reconciled to God and each other. When people gathered in blizzard conditions, they did so with a desire **to be together**, to know they were not alone and to find people who shared a common affinity. They all actually understood the nature of **corporate worship**, since they fixed their attention on a common goal and were engaged with emotion, affection, and objective reality. They came prepared. They knew the cheers. They slapped complete strangers with high fives for 3 hours, regardless of background, socio-economic standing or upbringing. The problem is: when the game ends, so does worship, or at least the commitment to each other.

This morning I want us all to evaluate our lives in this church. *What role or place does it have in your life? Do you think about it in terms of an event once a week, or something that you attend? Do you do any kind of planning **before** you come here on a Sunday morning? How do you view the other six days of the week in terms of your life in the church? Do you believe you are an integral part, a passive participant, or simply a visitor (regardless of how long you've been here)?*

This morning we want to challenge our presuppositions, habits and values when it comes to our commitment to each other in the church. Our hope is that this church will be a **greenhouse for making and maturing disciples**, for those who don't know Christ will hear the goodness of the gospel and those who know Christ will move forward in their faith, hope, and love.

Life in the Church: Active Consideration FOR each other
And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works

On a typical Sunday morning or midweek gathering, we often feel fortunate to simply show up on time...or at least by the last song of the worship set. We need to get kids ready to go, we've had a busy weekend, and 9 am (or 7 pm) sneaks up quickly. I remember when our girls were young (3 under 4 years old) the Bakker family made a commitment to free dad up to be here early to prepare and pray, which required Mrs. Bakker to get three young ones up, changed, dressed, with hair done, and be here by 8:30 each Sunday. That came out of a conviction, but also came at a cost. It meant less sleep, planning the night before, and saying 'no' to certain social engagements Saturday nights. *Why would we make this kind of choice? Was this simply some sadistic experiment?* I hope not.

Gathering as a church, a group of born again believers called out of the world into the household of God, is imperative in Scripture and God's economy. Often people can claim to know Christ and view the gathering as an option, but there is NOTHING in Scripture to back up this claim. But here, we have a command that explains the *what* of gathering. Before even talking about being together, the author of Hebrews states that just like we **draw near** to the presence of God and **hold fast** to the confession of our hope, we equally **consider how we gather**. The word "*consideration*" here means to give **thoughtful attention, deep concern, and careful contemplation**. This cries out for an *active participation* rather than a *passive observation*. It means that BEFORE we gather together, there is prayerful, creative, and purposeful consideration of how we will pursue people in the gathering. *Doesn't that sound different than how most of us approach gatherings?* We can all easily drift into a **consumeristic** mindset when we gather, judging the value in terms of what we liked or got out of it, or if it was entertaining or helpful. If we are not giving proactive consideration, we will fall into the **preference trap**, which has US as the center, as the determiner of what the church should be rather than "*Outdoing one another (or 'showing preference to') in showing honor.*" The church, like all of our lives in Christ, is NOT ABOUT US. *But what are we to consider?* **Two specific areas that we are to give consideration:**

- **TO STIR UP** – This is one of the most interesting of words to describe our interaction together. The word is predominately used in a **negative** context in Scripture, since it means to *incite, to shake up, and even to have a sharp disagreement*, like the one between Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15:39. But here, it is used in a **positive** way, a kind of provoking or annoying each other to action. *Why is it necessary to be thoughtful in stirring one another up?* We know that love can easily grow cold (Matt. 24:12), that we can get in ruts personally and spiritually, and are far too easily distracted and satisfied. The reality is, none of us can "**one another**" alone, since our life in Christ was NEVER intended to live in isolation or individualistically. We need each other to grow and mature, and fulfilling all that God has commanded us will not simply happen, it must be **provoked by others**.
- **TO LOVE AND GOOD WORKS** – But what are we supposed to stir up in each other? Doesn't this smack of the kind of busybody that Scripture condemns (2 Thess. 3:11; 1 Tim. 5:13). It certainly would be without a clear focus and goal. That is why the goal of stirring up is to love and good works. These are simply two sides of the same obedient coin in pursuing Christ. Love without good works is mere sentimentalism, and good works without love is a form of a works based gospel of earning rather than grace. **Love is the motive, good works are the active response. 1 John 3:16-18** captures it this way:

*By this **we know love**, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 17 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, **how does God's love abide in him?** 18 Little children, **let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.***

We spur on love for each other and good works by knowing each other enough that we can care for each other's needs, *so then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith* (Galatians 6:10).

It's also clear that we all have good works that have been prepared for us beforehand, that we should walk in (Eph. 2:10). When we come to Christ out of our dead state, we are made alive and set out to accomplish all that God has intended for us. The reality is, I need more than mere individual effort to get these done to His glory. I need to have others who remind me, exhort me, compel me, and spur me on to continue to love and do all that God has commanded.

Two implications of these which are important to point out. **1)** This is a general call to **ALL BELIEVERS**, regardless of maturity level or personality type. Thoughtful engagement with each other is not simply reserved for the professionals or extroverts, but for all who know and love Christ. But notice that there are no numbers or scope attached to this. The consideration is that we would all take **responsibility, ownership, and stewardship** in using all that God gave us by way of make-up and personality to spur someone else on. If you are an introvert, or feel socially awkward, or have a hard time making friends, or feel like people are annoyed by you, or hate small talk, this command can feel overwhelming. Again, the goal of all of this is to **adopt a proper mindset toward others**. You have something to offer, something to give because God has crafted and gifted you exactly the way He intended, and you play a vital role in building up the church. Remember, this consideration is an action taken out of **faith and hope**. Prepare to be used and be pleasantly surprised when God delivers and blesses your obedience.

2) This environment of active participants spurring one another on creates a hotbed for new believers to enter in. We often draw this artificial line between maturing and making, with the focus needlessly on one or the other instead of triumphing both. When we have ACTIVE PARTICIPATION of believers who have a mindset on spurring others on, then evangelism and incorporating new believers will become a torrential flow. We have seen it in Rancho and Dover, starting with teaching and training believers who in turn reach new people, incorporating them into the church since they already have the proper mindset. **Remember this:** *who is responsible to do personal ministry and discipleship in this church?* The answer? Every single believer who knows Christ, has been born again, and follows Him. When we have a growing number of disciplers and ministers here, the outcomes will be abundant and fruitful. When we leave it up to the professionals or "others", we will be limited and stunted.

Life in the Church: Convicted Commitment TO each other

...not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some...

Now, we've stated before that belonging and participating in a church is far more than coming on Sunday morning, but again, not less than this. Meeting and gathering are essential to any healthy family, and healthy families love and desire to be together. After **Pentecost** in Acts 2, a group of new believers repented and were baptized (Acts 2:38), accounting for three thousand souls (v. 41). What did they do next? **Acts 2:42-47** gives us insight:

*And they **devoted themselves** to the apostles' teaching and the **fellowship**, to the **breaking of bread** and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed **were together** and had **all things in common**. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, **as any had need**. 46 And day by day, attending the temple **together** and **breaking bread in their homes**, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. **And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.***

Notice there were no programs or buildings per se, but there was a commitment to teaching/learning, being together in fellowship, over meals, and going to the temple, as well as the care of meeting each other's needs. This became the place, the foundation where new believers could enter in as God brought in those who were being saved. There was no separation between **making and maturing**, since the church was **committed to both**, desired both, and realized both.

So in our consideration of stirring up, it comes out of a **commitment to meeting together**. *What does this meeting entail?* The author leaves the statement broad, without pointing out any one particular meeting. So the command is to do so **regularly**, and encapsulates the formal and informal, the spontaneous and planned out, the casual and formal. This command is more about a **mindset than a list of events**. Much like trying to define: *how many things should a family do together throughout the week/month/year*, the desire to gather and meet together, as a church, should be primary, not tertiary.

Notice that the author puts the command in the **negative**, with the command "not to neglect" since some had got into that **habit**. That is insightful, since this is NOT A NEW ISSUE and has more to do with our mindset, heart, and choices than the circumstances or era we live. It is far too easy to get into the habit of NOT meeting together. Life is demanding, families get busy, there are many good and needed things that vie for our time and affections. Most people do not **overtly** neglect the commitment to the church, but it happens in a subtle relentlessness, much like eating or exercise habits. One exception leads to another, one valid reason leads to a less than valid one, and pretty soon a new habit is formed and commitment to the people of God's church becomes **MARGINAL**. We like it, but don't love it. We think it's good, but not essential, and everything else claims priority.

This reminds us that commitment to meeting together is not only a command, but a disciplined decision coming out of our view of Scripture and the gospel. It requires us to say "no" to good or okay things. It reveals whether we will be driven by Biblical truth or taken for a ride by cultural norms. Obviously there are times and seasons where you may have the inability to meet, but they should be exceptional. Most do not taste the full goodness of the family of God because they are in the habit of neglect in meeting together. *But is the point to simply **BE together and sit there looking at each other?*** The author gives us one other action and motivation to end this section.

Life in the Church: Cultivating Ministry WITH each other

...but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

We ALL need encouragement sometimes, or maybe all of the time. Some like to operate independently, but none of us were designed to do this exclusively. Encouragement from the church is one of the distinctive of walking with Christ, since true life giving encouragement is hard to find in the world. The word used here is one of my favorite Greek words: **parakaleo**, which means to "call alongside" and has a range of meaning from *comforting, imploring, building up, urging, consoling, cheering up, and*

encouraging. We have this word in our arsenal as we approach each other, meaning our goal is meet the need of any moment by coming alongside another to parakaleo with them. *But what does this look like?*

- **Encouragement from the preaching of God’s Word – 2 Tim. 4:2** – *“preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and **exhort**, with complete patience and teaching.”* One of the greatest sources of encouragement is to sit under the faithful exposition of God’s Word.
- **Daily encouragement to see through the lie – Hebrews 3:12-13** – *“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 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.”*
- **Mutual encouragement through each other’s faith – Rom. 1:12** – *“that is, that we may be **mutually encouraged** by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.”* This is why we invest time in gatherings like Shepherding Groups, and in them we take time to share what God is doing in our lives and building each other up through prayer.
- **We hear testimonies of God’s work – Eph. 6:22 (Col. 4:8)** – In sending Tychicus... *“I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that **he may encourage your hearts.**”*
- **We encourage each other through the Scriptures – Rom. 15:4-5** – *“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and **through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.**”* How do we bring encouragement to others in ANY and EVERY situation? By being well versed in the Bible to bring the wise and needed counsel for the moment, like ointment in a first aid kit or tools in a tool bag.
- **We discern the need of the moment – 1 Thess. 5:14** – *“And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, **encourage the fainthearted**, help the weak, **be patient with them all.**”* This is so important! Encouragement requires discernment, and this means we must take **time to know people**. Is someone struggling with sin and needs to repent? Is someone struggling with motivation and needs encouragement? Is someone at a point that they simply need help physically or just someone to listen? We do damage when we admonish someone who is simply struggling with circumstances, or try to only listen when they actually need to be confronted about sin. **How we approach people is paramount.** 1 Tim. 5:1-2 says we are to **encourage** older men like we would a father, younger men as a brother, older women as mothers and younger women as sisters, in all purity. Sometimes we have to **command and encourage** busybodies in the church to work quietly and earn their own living (2Thess. 3:11-12) But with everyone, we will exercise **patience**, longsuffering, with expectations tempered to help people over the long run.

Discipleship is a lot like parenting...we train our kids over 18+ years, knowing that along the way they will make poor decisions, react immaturely in situations, and act their age. But the hope and goal is that over time, they will grow and change. We don’t expect a 6 year old to be as mature as an 18 year old. Patience must rule.

This is where we say that **ministry is for every believer, or that every believer is called to ministry.** We are called into a relationship with each other, and have a role to play and people to help. When we are

ALL exercising this faithfully, this or any church will be a dynamic place of **GROWTH**, both in depth and breadth. To the degree that we all take this on, prioritizing meeting, spurring on, and encouraging is to the degree that we will be effective together.

The final motivation is that we **see the Day drawing near**, meaning our time of sojourn here is temporary and short. Looking to the return of Christ should not fill us with angst, but with encouragement (1 Thess. 4:18; 5:11). We have a short amount of time for investment, and we want to use that precious commodity wisely. May we all evaluate our priorities and make sure that we are proactive, thoughtful, and encouraging to one another, so that we will both **make and mature disciples together**.