



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

REDISCOVER CHURCH

Why Do We Gather?

Hebrews 10:19–26

Tim Badal | September 24, 2023

Please turn in your Bible to the book of Hebrews as we continue our series titled “Rediscover Church.” Maybe you don’t think about the titles, but this title kind of bothers me. It implies that I’ve lost what church is. I’ve been in church for a long time, so what do I need to rediscover? Maybe you’re with me on that this morning. You’re like, “Listen, I know the church like the back of my hand. What is there to rediscover?” Anything that’s a tradition in my life, anything that just happens routinely and is part of my schedule, I’ve come to understand it’s altogether good and right for me to reevaluate and rediscover why I do the things I do, why I’m part of the things I’m part of.

Church is one of those things. Because we do it so often, because we know it like the back of our hand, we can often begin to think we know why we’re here and what we’re called to do. But it’s good from time to time to stop and ask, “Why is church a part of my life? What is it supposed to be doing?” I need to evaluate whether or not my experience is right and true.

In a group this size, we should also recognize there are some who are new to the faith, who don’t understand the things we do. For some of you, it’s discovering what the people of God are all about, His program, how we’re to go about praising His name in this place and throughout the world.

Today I want to ask a very simple question, but a question that involves a profound answer because it will determine what we do here and how we go about doing it. The question is simply why are we here at church? Why are we gathering together as a church? What is the purpose for this corporate setting? What is the purpose of our small groups and other ministries? Why are we gathering as a church?

Pollsters and survey writers ask these questions of Americans all the time. The overwhelming response to why Americans go to church is—this should not be surprising—they go to be closer to God. But there are a lot of other reasons why people are part of church. Maybe one of these reasons is the one you have.

- It could be so the kids will have a stronger moral foundation.
- Maybe you think this hour makes you a better person during the next 167 hours of the week.
- Maybe you’re in a place of great trouble. In fact, I saw one study that said people who have had a difficult week are more prone to attend church than those who have had a great week because they have a sense that God will be there to help them in their time of struggle.

I love this next one.

- Fifty-nine percent of people surveyed find the sermons to be valuable. Now, I know in a church this size, those numbers will change...to 95%. Amen? It’s good that you find value in the things that are taught, in what you’re learning.
- For another set of people, they attend to find a community of faith.



- More than a third said it was just to continue tradition. Let's be honest, while we're not a traditional church, the tradition is just going to church. Some of you might be here this morning just to continue a tradition you learned from your parents or grandparents.
- Some of you may even feel obligated to be here. You have in your mind, "If I'm in church, God won't be mad at me. If I'm participating in worship, then God is happy with me and good things are going to come."
- For still others, it may be the place to find new people to socialize with, or it might just be to please a family member or spouse. You're here because it makes them happy. We see that a lot on Mother's Day when there's a big increase in attendance because it's where Mom wants you to be.

Looking at the other side of this question, surveyors asked people why they don't go to church. I thought this was revealing.

- First response: people say they practice their faith in other ways. Now we need to understand this. Even in evangelical circles, we begin to think church is disposable. We don't need the church to practice our faith. "So I can practice my faith on the golf course. I can enjoy God's creation there. I'm not bound to what the Bible says is the way to practice my faith. I can do it in other ways."
- Then 18% said they just don't like the sermons. Amen. I don't like them either. Okay?
- Some don't feel welcome. Let's be honest, 28% don't buy what's taught in church.
- For 12%, it's because they just don't have the time.
- Ninety percent are shut-ins and it's difficult to get out.
- Then there is a group of 26%—and this is the group I want to focus on for a moment. Many of these are committed evangelical Christians. But in reality, only 55% of our body is at church on any given Sunday. That means there are things that have arisen that are more important than being in church.

Before you see this as a guilt trip—which I don't want it to be—just think about it as a guide. What we'll be looking at today is our habits. What are the patterns and priorities in our lives, especially when it comes to church? In order to have a priority, we have to tie it to the truth of why we should gather. Why are we part of this thing called the church? That's the question we want to answer today in this "Rediscover Church" series.

We'll be in Hebrews 10:19-26 this morning. We've studied the book of Hebrews before, but as a reminder, the book of Hebrews was written to a group of Jewish believers who had left their community and family to follow Jesus. The pushback from their family and community was so fierce and difficult that many were giving up on the faith. It just wasn't worth it for them. So they were drifting back to their Jewish traditions, Jewish faith and practices. That kept everybody happy. "Mom and Dad are happy. The neighbors are happy. My boss is happy. So that's what I'll do."

For the first nine chapters of Hebrews, the writer is telling us how great Jesus is. As we called it in that series, Jesus is the greatest of all time. Then in chapter ten, the writer begins to explain why worshiping God in community with God's people is so important. He uses a theme throughout the book that we are a household. We're a family. We are people who are brothers and sisters in Christ.

- This is seen in Hebrews 3:6 when we're told we are God's house.
- Hebrews 10:21 says we enter God's house, not as visitors but as family.
- Hebrews 2:11 tells us that Jesus Christ Himself isn't ashamed to call us His brothers and sisters.

So we're in this household, in this family, and we're building this house together. Jesus is our Savior, our older Brother. We're to do life together with Him. Life is not to be done in isolation, apart from one another. In fact, three times we'll see the phrase, "Let us—let us—let us." The writer is speaking to the corporate nature of Christianity. We were never intended to be saved individuals who do faith on our own. We do it in close proximity with other believers.

That then begs the question: why do we gather together? We have three answers this morning.

We are invited, but will we go in?

First, we gather because we have been invited. The question that comes with that is will we go in? Let's look at Hebrews 10, starting in verse 19:

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers [and sisters], 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.

The first thing we need to see is that we're not part of a religion; we're part of a family. *"Therefore brothers and sisters..."* This family idea is important for why we gather because families gather together. The bigger the families get, the more difficult it is to get them together.

I've watched this. My parents didn't have any problem getting us together when it was just the five of us: Mom and Dad, my two brothers and me. But when we started bringing girls and eventually wives into the mix, then added kids, it became much more difficult. But we didn't stop gathering together. We spent time with one another. We were involved in each other's lives.

We need to understand this morning that to be a Christian is to be part of a family. With family, there are obligations. With family, there is connection. With family, there is community.

So here we have this community, this family. Notice that being part of this family brings an invitation. *"We have confidence"* — we have been invited—*"to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus."* When the writer says we have been invited to enter the holy places, his audience—the Jewish Christians—know exactly what he's talking about. In the Jewish faith, the place of worship wasn't a family; it was a nation, the nation of Israel. This nation of Israel gathered in one sacred place—the temple of God. They brought their offerings, handing them to the priests. Then they would hang out in the outer courts where men, women and Gentiles were allowed to be. Then the Levite priests took those offerings into the Holy Place. That's where the ordinary sacrifices were given to God. In other words, the people were separated from much of the worship experience. They could see the smoke from a distance, then they would know their offering had been made.

Then once a year, the high priest took an offering that represented the entire nation of Israel and offered it to God. This time, instead of offering it in the Holy Place, he entered the Most Holy Place, also called the Holy of Holies. In other words, one man, once a year, went behind the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. It was a massive curtain, 60 feet high, 40 feet wide and about six inches thick. For those of you who are older, think of the New York Yellow Pages; you who are under 30, you have no idea what I'm talking about right now. This was a dense curtain and its job was to keep everything out—the sights, smells, sounds, distractions. Within this most holy of places was the presence of God. This is where the high priest could draw near to God in a way that no one else could.

Now the writer of Hebrews is telling us that you and I have been invited into this place. You and I have been invited to praise God in a place where only the high priest used to be able to go. Why can we do this? Because the curtain is gone. It's obsolete. We know from Matthew 27 that the curtain had been torn in two when Jesus died on the cross at Calvary. This supernatural act meant the Holy of Holies was now open to people under the new covenant.

In other words, this invitation to go behind the curtain means we now have VIP status. You and I have been invited in because *"he opened [a way] for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh."* We have now been permitted to enter into God's presence, dwell with and worship Him—but it wasn't free. It came through the price of the body of Jesus— *"through his flesh."* It cost the crucifixion of Christ.

So what does this have to do with why we're gathered here today? The only reason we are here is because Jesus died to make it possible. He was beaten and abused. His blood was poured out for you and me, so we can be invited into the presence of God. Now, as a new covenant believer in Jesus Christ, we can now enter into the Holy of Holies—but we can think we're the only ones invited. When we come to church, we see that isn't true. We start rubbing shoulders with many other believers. We then realize this invitation wasn't just given to us; it was given to a great many. Many have responded to the invitation and have entered in. Amazingly, we now have total access to God. We no longer need a mediator between God and man—except for Jesus Christ Himself. We see in our text that we have "confidence." In verse 22 we also have "assurance." Those two words speak of total freedom to act and speak without reprisal, fear or concern. It's the ability for us to be ourselves, with no mask, no posturing or cleaning up before we can enter this place.

It's helpful to remember that when we enter into the presence of God and the presence of His people, it should be the most transparent of moments for us. We don't need to put on masks to hide behind. Rather, we should be admitting to one another why we're here. We can say, "I'm in this place because I was a sinner, held captive by evil, lost in my ways, then Jesus saved

me. He's invited me into this place, and when Jesus invites me somewhere, you'd better believe I'm going to be there. This is going to be a priority of mine, because as a follower of Jesus Christ I want to be with Him any chance I get."

The greatest expression of this is the corporate gathering of God's people in God's presence, worshiping and praising Him with total confidence and assurance of faith. You've been invited to this and this cost Jesus His life. Now we have the great opportunity, in this moment of time and space, to be part of something Jesus has invited to. Will we go in?

You're like, "Well, I'm here. You're preaching to the choir." So let's go to the second point.

We are invested, but will we grab hold?

We gather as members of God's family because we are invested, but will we grab hold? We're in God's presence, with God's people. We have our Mediator Jesus with us. Now the question is, "Am I simply going to be a spectator, taking in everything that's going on around me, or will I grab hold of what this signifies?"

Look at how the writer continues in verse 23. We need to draw in because we've been invited. Now here's the second *"Let us..."* *"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful."* As we enter into the Holy of Holies—God's presence—He says to us, "I've done the work of inviting you in. Now the question is will you grab hold of all that has been made available to you?" The word that means 'grab hold of' or 'hold on to' is the Greek word *katecho*, which means to hold on to something at all costs. It was a nautical term that refers to how a captain of a ship would grab hold of the steering wheel and not let go. The reason he didn't let go was he realized that if he did, the ship would go off course. He knew if he let go of the wheel, they would be tossed to and fro by the waves that were battering the ship. So he would hold fast to that wheel to stay on course toward his destination.

What are we heading toward? We're to *"hold fast to the confession of our hope."* What's that? When did our confession take place? Notice in verse 22 how he speaks of us being *"sprinkled clean from an evil conscience"* and having *"our bodies washed with pure water."* What does that remind you of? What in the church's gathering involves water? The answer is baptism. Baptism is a symbol of the washing that has taken place, but we don't just get baptized. When several people were baptized a few weeks ago, we didn't just walk them into the water, dunk them down, pull them up, then leave. "Well, that guy got wet." Why? "I don't know. It was kind of weird." No, you know what happened. It's not just the event of baptism, but it's the significance of the person's confession of faith.

Each person said, "I believe. I believe my life was a wreck. I believe Jesus is the only answer to the wreckage of my sin and disobedience. I believe Jesus is sufficient in remedying my shame. I believe that He has now cleansed me from an evil conscience and made me pure. Now I get to enter the Holy of Holies in the presence of God. I believe... I believe... I believe..."

That belief is going to change your standing in the world, because not everybody believes. You have now separated yourself from those who don't believe. This is the struggle the Jewish people were having. When they said they believed in Jesus, it meant they no longer believed the same way their family did. You saying you believe in Jesus will set you apart from others in your life.

Our gathering together here is to remind you of your confession of faith and hope, and hopefully to build in you a more secure standing in that confession. Listen carefully. A win at Village Bible Church has nothing to do with numbers. A win here this week is not about the offering. A win isn't that a record number of people were at the Barn Bash. A win at Village Bible Church is that you leave this place more confident and assured in your faith than when you walked in. It's when you walk out more secure in your standing with Christ. It's when you brought in all your uncertainties that come from living in a pagan world, with all their ideas and solutions, and you're not even sure Jesus is all He says He is. But then you leave saying, "Now I am sure."

Here's the thing. You hear me talking about my confidence. You hear me talking about my assurance. But did you know that you've already confessed some things this morning as well? Part of the problem that comes from repeating traditions is that we don't always think about what we're doing. So let's rewind the tape to a few minutes ago when you sang these words: "I searched the world, but it couldn't fill me. Man's empty praise and treasures that fade are never enough." What did you just confess? Some of you are barely ambulatory. You sing whatever is on the screen. Actually this is a confession. "I, like Solomon, have looked to the world—its possessions, its pleasures, its prestige, its popularity, its power—and I've come to the realization

that none of that will fill me.” Some here can say, “I went after that and it only brought me trouble.” Even man’s praise and the treasures of this world, none of those are enough. We confess that as people.

Then we sang this: “Then You came along and put me back together.” Jesus, You came along and there was something different about You from anyone else. That’s my confession. You put me back together. Wait a minute. To say that Jesus put me back together means that I was broken in the first place. Do you see your confession? I was broken.

“And every desire is now satisfied here in Your love.” Now we’re confessing one more truth. “Oh, there’s nothing better than You. There’s nothing better than You. Lord, there’s nothing, nothing is better than You.” That’s what you and I confessed this morning.

Here’s the thing. It’s easy to sing this on Sunday morning, but will we still confess that on Monday in our schools and workplaces? Will we confess that where we’re the minority? Will we confess that when there’s skin in the game? The gathering of God’s people is intended to make sure we have what we need to be ready to confess these things, whether it’s before the angels of heaven or the demons of hell. We can confess these things only with the steadfast assurance of faith that comes from Jesus.

We are involved, but will we get plugged in?

We need to understand that our confession is not only evidence of our investment, it is also a calling to be involved. In verse 24, the writer tells us to *“consider how to stir up one another.”* It’s not just about us; it’s about each other. In this household of God, we’re to look out for one another.

Parents, you know this. You know that you might be having the best day ever, then you get a report that one of your kids isn’t doing well. Your best day turns bad very quickly. Why? Because you’re family and when one part of the family is hurting, all the rest are hurting as well.

We’re called to be involved as a family to work in concert with one another, to do things together, to be connected. My kids can’t hear from me, “Well, I’m just your dad, so don’t ask me to do anything. As long as I pay the bills, as long as I put a roof over your head, that’s all you need from me.” No, to be a father, to be a family member, means I need to be very much involved in their lives. And they are invited to be involved in my life as well. This is what we’re called to as a household, a family.

So what does this involvement entail? It involves examining one another, engaging with one another and encouraging one another.

Examining one another

Being plugged in means we are to examine one another. We see this word in verses 24-25: *“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.”*

Let’s deal with this word “consider.” It means to look intently at something, to give close attention to something, to be focused on something. How does that work in God’s family? I am to consider my family. I’m to look at them, examine them. I’m to ask questions of them.

- How are they doing?
- What are their needs?
- Are they filled with joy?
- How can I help them have a greater sense of joy?
- Do they have purpose?
- How can I help them gain a greater sense of purpose?
- How can I help them?
- How can I carry their burdens?

These are the questions we should be asking among ourselves as the family and household of God.

So when we gather together, I take my eyes off myself and start looking at other people. How can I serve the people of God? How can I minister to them? How can I care for them? How can I encourage them? How can I make their life with Jesus more sweet and more profound? This means we need to start asking questions, not simply give pat answers to the things they're struggling with.

This can also involve agitation. We're to *"stir up one another."* The idea here is getting close up and personal with one another, being involved in each other's space.

Let's be honest. This is not the American church. The American church says, "I'm going to keep you at arm's length." We allow fellowship as long as it happens in a minute or less. We'll put a clock on this so it doesn't go too long. Everybody knows when they're supposed to sit down. No, the Bible tells us to stir each other up. We're to get up close and personal.

There are very few things in this world I would say I'm an expert in. Amanda would agree. But one thing I know a whole lot about is charcoal. Because of my life as a caterer and as a barbeque cook, I've been around charcoal for a long time. I know how it works. There are two types of charcoal: white charcoal and black charcoal. Hot charcoal and cold charcoal. That's the difference. If you want to get more charcoal cooking, you need to get it near hot charcoal.

This illustration reminds us that we need to ask ourselves, "Am I hot or cold in my faith?" A lot of us are cold in our faith and the number one reason is that we're not near any hot charcoal. We're not up close and personal with other people who are on fire for the Lord. We're wondering why we're not getting hot, why we're not like those people. It's because they keep rubbing up against other hot pieces of charcoal.

This is why small groups are so important. When we get together, some of us are cold when we walk in on Thursday night and some of us are red hot. So before the end of the night, if I get close to someone who is red hot, I'll be burning hot as well. We have to get up close and personal. We need to start engaging with one another.

Here's the truth: If you keep the cold charcoal away from the hot charcoal, the cold charcoal will stay cold. They'll never heat up. Some of us are not engaging in the process God has given us, so we're never heating up. Sadly, we tend to blame God for this. But it's the job of the church to agitate one another—to purposely put hot and cold charcoal together—so that the whole thing will burn hot for Jesus.

Engaging one another

The writer of Hebrews says in verse 25: *"...not neglecting to meet together."* Remember, I told you 55% of Village Bible Church is here on any given Sunday. That means 45% of us are not. Some of you might be thinking, "Wait a minute. Badal wasn't here last week. He can't get in my face too much; he wasn't even here." Listen, before we legalistically go after one another for missing church from time to time, I want you to notice the writer of Hebrews realizes that people will miss from time to time. They will miss because of work, illness, family—there are a variety of reasons why we miss. Let's remember that for the Hebrew church, worshiping together was a major challenge due to the culture they were in. The issue isn't missing church. Don't think, "Pastor Tim will be mad because I missed church, but then, he missed church too."

Notice what the writer goes on to say: *"...as is the habit of some."* That's the problem. Some habitually miss church. Why is a habit a habit? Because we've made it a habit. We've made it a priority. Do not hear me say that I'm going to come down on you, or the other leaders will come down on you, for missing church. The issue is to not make other things more important than gathering regularly with God's people. Remember what Jesus did that even allows us this opportunity to enter the Holy Place of God with full assurance of faith and full confidence. What's more important than that, such that week in and week out we decide to do something else instead?

Now we've got a problem, because we have habits and priorities and preferences that keep us from gathering. When is a habit a habit? I'll leave it to the Holy Spirit to ask you that. Or maybe even a better issue than your attendance record is the question, "Do I really want to be here?"

Encouraging one another

Here's how the writer ends this section: *"Encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."* Day is capitalized because it's an important single day. The Day he's referring to is the Day of the Lord. It's the Day when eternity is inaugurated. It's the Day when we stand in the presence of God, body and soul, with the people of God, past, present and

future. We will be worshiping and praising God for all eternity, fellowshiping with God's people in community with our Savior and our heavenly Father and His Spirit for all eternity. The closest expression of that, my friends, is what we're doing right now. The closest expression of what that will look like is what we're doing right now.

So let me say this: If this is boring to you, then eternity is going to be boring as well.

So why should we encourage one another to be involved in this gathering together? Because we're practicing for eternity. We're practicing what we'll be doing with the elect angels and saints in this great cloud of witnesses. We'll be worshiping and adoring our Savior. In those eons, He will teach us about Himself and we will be overwhelmed by what He tells us.

But for now, we're practicing. If your habit is to miss practice, if your habit is to be unengaged in this endeavor, then there's some examining that needs to happen. We need to ask, "Do I really have this confession of faith and hope? Do I really long to enter the most Holy Place of God, to live there and to experience that great reality with the brothers and sisters God has invited in with me? Or are there things that are more important than this?" That's what we have to decide.

Why do we gather? Because we've been invited in.

Why do we gather? Because Jesus has invested in us.

Why do we gather? Because we're part of a family that God has called us to be involved in.

So will we go in? Will we grab hold? Will we get plugged in? That's the application we need to ask the Spirit to guide us to today. Amen?

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All Scriptures quoted directly English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Note: This transcription has been provided by Sermon Transcribers (www.sermontranscribers.com).