

At One Together
Hebrews 10:19-25

When Mark Lowery, Christian musician, singer, and comedian, was growing up, his family was at church more than is was at home. If the pastor was in the church on Thursday evening cleaning windows, they were in the pew watching.

Growing up, I too felt like we were at church more than we were at home. The church we attended had two Sunday services. With the church 20 miles away, we had just enough time after Sunday school to go home, eat Sunday dinner, and take a short nap before returning for evening services – yes, we HAD to go.

I'd like to say that going to church was always a good experience for me. Oh, the people were great and the sermons weren't too bad and I liked the singing. But sometimes church just didn't do anything for me. I couldn't see the harm in skipping an occasional evening service, or even a whole day's services for that matter. The previews to "The Wonderful World of Disney" seemed a lot more interesting than the evening sermon title.

As I moved into high school I discovered there were times I couldn't wait to get out of church. But there were other times the Spirit of God was so alive to me that I didn't want to leave. Sometimes I would come to church expectantly and ready but for some reason leave cold and discouraged. Most often, though I would come to church cold, empty, and totally unprepared to worship God, let alone be with other people, and leave filled to overflowing. Why such extremes? Do you experience those extremes? And do you also find, as I do, that there is a gap, a hole, a void in the week if you miss worshipping God with other believers?

I am bothered by a trend I sense in the church today. *Why do more and more of us go to church less and less?* Please don't get me wrong. I find nowhere in the Bible that God says we will always get along with and enjoy being with other Christians. Nor is there any reference that

says we must be in church every time the doors are open. Clearly that cannot be, right? There are times when it is important to be elsewhere. Yet God's Word does have a command to keep the Sabbath day holy, which does mean that one day of the week is set apart for rest and focus on the blessings of God and the God of those blessings. As many times as God mentions the importance of the Sabbath in the Bible, keeping Sabbath must be important to God.

Perhaps the reason God's people are not faithfully coming together is that we forget why it is important. We have been looking at God's immense love for us and the extent that God went to make it possible for us to be at one with God. Jesus became our sacrifice, taking our place, shedding his life-giving blood, so that we could have victory over death and the sin that separates us from God. But for us to truly live into the life and freedom that Jesus gives, it is important that we share that life and freedom. The writer of Hebrews says it this way (**Read Text**).

Did you notice the pronouns used? The writer uses all 1st person plural pronouns. 1st person denotes inclusiveness, not exclusiveness. Plural, we & us, causes the writer to include himself and gives evidence to just how important it is that we need each other. To live at one with God in this world, we must live at one with one another. And this is what we are called to do in our oneness with each other:

1. *We are to draw near to God together.* Before Jesus made us one with God this was impossible. But now it is possible. We are to draw near in confidence and with full assurance of faith relying on God and his mercy toward us. We can walk right up to God, as it were, not in fear, with hesitation, or reluctance, but in confidence. Jesus tells us, "Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Mt.18:20). Of course we can go to God alone, by ourselves. but, Jesus says that something special happens when we do so together – He will be with us!

2. *We are to hold onto the hope we profess together.* The hope we have together is not a wishy-washy, "I sure hope this or that will happen," like the world hopes. Rather, our hope is a

confident expectation of the life that is ours in Jesus our Savior and Lord. Our hope is confident for it is founded on the promises of God which have already proven him faithful.

3. *We are together to spur one another to love and good deeds.* I recently did a funeral for a man who was a swimmer in high school. His coach would use a bamboo pole to nudge him, which made him a stronger and faster swimmer. In a similar way, we are called to nudge each other on in our life and love of God and others, which will help us persevere as we grow in faith.

4. *We are together to encourage one another.* Isn't encouraging the same as spurring? Not really. Spurring pushes us to love and do better. Encouraging helps us to stay at one with God and each other. Earlier the writer of Hebrews counseled, "*Encourage each other every day—for as long as we can still say "today" – so none of you let the deceitfulness of sin harden your hearts*" (3:13).

The devil wants nothing more than to see us not at one with God and will do anything he can to draw us away from God. The temptation to be independent from other Christians soon leads to the temptation to be independent of God. It is safe to say that the tragedy of those Christians who have fallen away from God can be traced to a spiritual loneliness caused by independence/separation from God's people.

Perhaps this story will help illustrate just how important it is that to truly be at one with God necessitates that we are at one with each other: *The Lonely Ember*, by John MacArthur.

A member of a certain church, who previously had been attending services regularly, stopped going. After a few weeks, the pastor decided to visit him. It was a chilly evening. The pastor found the man at home alone, sitting before a blazing fire.

Guessing the reason for his pastor's visit, the man welcomed him, led him to a big chair near the fireplace and waited. The pastor made himself comfortable but said nothing. In the grave silence, he contemplated the play of the flames around the burning logs.

After some minutes, the pastor took the fire tongs, carefully picked up a brightly burning ember and placed it to one side of the hearth all alone. Then he sat back in his chair, still silent. The host watched all this in quiet fascination.

As the one lone ember's flame diminished, there was a momentary glow and then its fire was no more. Soon it was cold and "dead as a doornail."

Not a word had been spoken since the initial greeting.

Just before the pastor was ready to leave, he picked up the cold, dead ember and placed it back in the middle of the fire. Immediately it began to glow once more with the light and warmth of the burning coals around it.

As the pastor reached the door to leave, his host said, "Thank you so much for your visit and especially for the fiery sermon. I shall be back in church next Sunday."

Have you been less than faithful to the fellowship of believers? Come back. Come on in. It's warm inside and with your help we'll blaze even hotter.

Have you been faithful? Praise God for his faithfulness to you. Don't ever discount your value in the fellowship of believers. We need to be at one with each other. We need to spur one another on to love and good deeds. We need to encourage one another to resist the lure away from being at one with God and each other. There's nothing more powerful and urgent to both the faithful and the not so faithful than the inspiration that we receive and give to be at one with God and one another.

How urgent is it? We must spur each other, encourage each other, inspire each other "*and all the more as you see the Day approaching*" (Hb.10:24). The closer we get to the day of Jesus' return, the more difficult our struggle will be, the more determined the devil will become, the more important it will be that we are at one with God and each other, and the more important it will be that we are helping others be at one with God.