



Scripture: 'And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.' (Heb.10:24-25 NIV)

A quick note on 'turning up for God'

Before we do a slightly deeper dive on why the apostles expected the church to keep meeting together, a short thought that Sarah shared last week on a helpful mindset.

"I want to encourage everyone to engage fully in church life but also, I encourage you to engage fully with Jesus. 'Turning up' we can be anywhere & turn up for God. I've been following the app lectio 365 for a few months now and the first part every morning is 'PAUSE' - As I enter pray now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly, to recentre my scattered senses upon the presence of God. It is my choosing to still my mind, put aside my selfish thoughts and loud internal voice for a while, and focussing on God. This, I believe, is key to our personal relationship with Jesus."

On meeting together Sarah shared, "I also firmly believe in the importance of meeting in worship together, setting time aside in our week to meet with God together. To hear what God is doing, experience God, receive prayer from others and bring my sacrifice of praise."

The BBQ briquette

A picture that is often used is of a BBQ briquette, or piece of coal in a fireplace. When it is removed from being nestled among the other hot coals, it goes cold.

God the Father, his Spirit and the Lord Jesus show God as a relational God. We are built for relationships with others, and his people are instructed to meet.

1, We are only able to encourage one another because he first encouraged us

the apostle John frames this as an act of love, saying,

'We love because he first loved us' (1John 4:19 NIV)

If you think that sounds too much of a stretch from the language of encouragement, consider this. Jesus used sheep as an example picture to represent his gathering of God's children, saying

'Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep." I tell you that in the same way there will

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be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent.

(Luke 15:4-7 NIV)

and 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.' (John 10:11 NIV)

What I want us to notice is that Jesus' express will was for his people, the church, to be together and that every one of his children is valued. When one wanders off, he does not simply let them go but seeks them out to bring them back into the flock.

- ✓ **Let us not take for granted his gift of meeting together**
- ✓ or that we have a dedicated place in which we can meet.
- ✓ **Instead let us encourage one another to revalue the gift of meeting together.**

2, who are called to meet?

Jesus goes further in his encouragement, saying, 'I have other sheep that are not of this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.' (John 10:16)

There is both a missional aspect of increasing the flock and a relational aspect where the increase comes from people of all cultures, ethnicities and languages.

In practice, this is a difficult thing - misunderstandings easily happen and one group within the diverse community may experience some form of unfairness.

This is a factor in why some do give up meeting together; they don't feel understood, maybe there is a particular group within the church family who are seen as the 'in crowd', whether those labelled as such realise it or not. Maybe there a shyness in individuals and they have times where they are not comfortable meeting in a larger group such as a church service.

Are the apostles insensitive to such problems?

Not at all, for they too have experience of it. When the church began to meet in groups a complaint went up from those who may be regarded at the 'other sheep' in Jesus' example.

It went like this, 'it's not fair the Jewish followers help each other out, but they are not catering for the gentile followers.' The apostles corrected this by having the church select deacons from among themselves so that all people groups were represented and cared for (see Acts 6:1-7).

Paul affirmed this in his letter to the church at Colossae saying,

Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and is in all.

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Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Col. 3:11-14 NIV)

Did he tell them this because they were meeting brilliantly together without trouble?

No, he told them this because they too struggled and they needed encouragement to keep meeting together and they needed an example of what spurring one another on to love and good deeds looked like.

3, attitude of meeting together

This brings us to the next layer of meeting together. The invite is for everyone, and we are not to give up, even though it can be difficult for us. To help us not to give up we must adopt an attitude of comradeship to each other.

We are not told to meet simply to serve our own needs, as if our meeting together is about what we can get out of it. That is attitude is a cursed attitude, a worldly one that does not walk in obedience to Jesus calling the flock together and of actively going out to bring in the lost sheep.

We meet not only for our self, for each of us do need encouragement, but also to spur one another on to love and good deeds. Everyone matters and is loved by Jesus and so we must clothe ourselves with compassion and kindness. We must realise that a misunderstanding is not a rejection but an opportunity to understand something new. Where someone has adopted a wrong attitude, there is opportunity to explore the reasons for it and to help each other put on the virtue of love.

Is it easy? Of course not! If it were so the apostles would not have spent so much time and energy reinforcing that Jesus has created the community of the church where his children, or sheep in his picture, are brought together in his kingdom to encourage one another.

Do not allow a falling out, a misunderstanding or a situation where some within the church are not putting on the virtue of love as an excuse to stop meeting with his people.

That is to judge the other sheep and to choose to separate oneself, which it itself disobedient the requirement for love and forgiveness. Someone else's blind spot or possibly disobedience should not be an excuse to stop meeting together. Instead, we must share those problems with another Christian we trust.

It might require involving some of the leadership team, for example the pastoral wellbeing or safeguarding team, a little like the church came together and made their case to the apostles in Acts 6.

4, mature faith (or good relational development)

The third and final example I give today springs from the examples of the early church who faced many struggles and some prejudices against each other to which they were blind.

We learn how to be a Jesus centred and Jesus following community.

As Paul taught young Timothy, 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness' (2Tim.3:16 NIV)

Scripture is the word we use to describe God's speech. His words to us, some said directly and some said through others.

By meeting together, we get to learn more of his words and attitude to us. By meeting we get to learn where we do have blind spots in our understanding, both of our relationship with the Lord and our relationship with each other.

We can get ourselves caught up in all kinds of wrong thinking, of allowing blind spots in our understanding to grow and of being led astray when we wander off out of the pasture like the lost sheep in Jesus' parable.

Since the lost sheep also has the meaning of someone who does not yet know God's voice, that should cause us opportunity to stop and wonder again at the extreme length Jesus goes to in bringing the sheep together.

- ✓ Brothers and sisters, let us not take so lightly the command to meet.
- ✓ Do not wander away but wonder with!

Summary

'let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds.'

Let's consider:

Is it easy? No, of course not.

- ✓ But it is the call of Jesus, and it is a spiritual discipline that separates us from the ways of the world. Jesus said, 'As I have loved you, so you must love one another' (John 13:35 NIV)
- ✓ the invite is for everyone
- ✓ we are not to give up, even though it can be difficult for us.
- ✓ to help us not to give up we must adopt an attitude of comradeship to each other.
- ✓ we learn how to live in community, many sheep but of one flock and pasture, by firmly deciding in our hearts to follow Jesus' example and command.

Let's do it!

Jesus also said, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Now remain in my love" (John 15:9 NIV)