**Session 4**

**Communal**

Does anyone remember the TV show Lone Ranger? This was an old Western TV show in which one Ranger was the last survivor of a group of six Texas Rangers. He wore a mask to conceal his identity as he traveled the west fighting for law and order. But the title of the show was misleading. The Lone Ranger was never alone. He rode a trusty horse named Silver and traveled with his friend named Tonto, who frequently helped him escape perilous situation. Even the Lone Ranger knew it was impossible to live alone.

Unfortunately, the idea Lone Ranger Christianity has infected the church. Some believers think they can live separate and apart from the local church when, in fact it is impossible
to grow as a Christian apart from the community of faith. Remember, the Church is not a place, but a people.

Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger stated in their book *Transformational Groups*, "A call to discipleship and spiritual maturity is a call to biblical community. The call to discipleship is an invitation to hear and obey the voice of God. Also, a call to discipleship is a call to follow Jesus and be sent as a missionary to your community and world." Living isolated and alone is an unbiblical concept. God expects us to live communally with other believers for spiritual growth, encouragement, and accountability.

The writer of Hebrews explains why living in community is vitally important for a Christian's life:

*Therefore, brothers, since we have boldness to enter the sanctuary through the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way He has opened for us through the curtain (that is, His flesh), and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water. Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us be concerned about e mother in order to promote love and
good works, not staying away from our worship meetings, as some habitually do. but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day drawing near* (Hebrews 10:19-25).

**A Common Confidence In Christ**

Have you ever wondered what it's like to enter the presence of a king or a queen? To stand in the halls of Buckingham palace waiting to visit the Queen of England for the very first time would be a nerve-wracking and humbling experience because of her persona and prestige. Now imagine standing before the God of the universe. The God who created you with His own hands.
The God who numbered the hairs on your head and knit you together in your mother's womb. The God who set moons into orbit, galaxies into motion, and cellular mitosis into full swing. On what basis do you have the right to stand before such a God?

The writer of Hebrews tells us believers are able to boldly enter the presence of God because of the finished work of Christ on the cross of Calvary. Prior to Jesus' death, people were unable to enter into God's presence, but were separated by the curtains of the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. Gentiles were not even allowed to stand in the same court as the Jews, much less approach the curtain surrounding the presence of God.

However, now because of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we can approach God freely. The curtain that segregated us has been destroyed once and for all. Jesus' shed
blood on the cross of Calvary satisfied the penalty that God imposed on sin. We do not approach God because of any merit we have achieved on our own, but only through the merit of Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross. We are now members of the family of God, joint heirs with Jesus, and inheritors of eternal glory. We are citizens of heaven, sojourning on the earth.

Every Christian who has professed faith in Christ is able to stand in the presence of God. What a privilege this is! Our confidence is based on nothing that we have done. It is based solely on
the person and work of Jesus Christ.

**A Clear Conscience and Common Confession**

"*Since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, our hearts sprinkled clean from on evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water*" (Hebrews 10:21-22).

Since the author of Hebrews is writing to a Jewish audience, he draws on images they would be readily familiar with in order to emphasize the death of Christ. Among the High Priest's many
duties in the temple was overseeing the sacrifices. He was the one in charge of ensuring the blood of the sacrificial lambs was offered properly. He alone was able to enter the Holy of Holies. The problem with High Priests job was that it was never over. None of the sacrifices at the temple were good enough to cover the sins of the people forever; hence, sacrifices were perpetually offered to provide access to God.

This is why Jesus' death is essential—because His blood is sufficient to cover any persons sins who put their faith in Him. He is not just a High priest. He is the Great High Priest who offered Himself as the sacrifice once and for all. As a result, everyone washed by His blood has hindered access into the presence of Almighty God.

When the author of Hebrews mentions the “house of God”' it does not imply a tabernacle or a temple made by human hands, for God's place of residence has changed. No longer does He confine His manifest glory on earth to an ark in a room. He dwells in the hearts of men and women who are born again and covered by the perfect sacrifice of His Son.

Therefore, it is with great joy that we should draw near to God in three ways:

**With a sincere heart**, meaning a true one. This is a heart that is focused and undivided, directed toward the Lord.

**In full assurance of faith**, meaning that the faith we have is not in man-made rituals but in God Himself. Hebrews 11:6 reiterates this point: "*Now without faith it is impossible to please God, for the one who draws near to Him must believe that He exists and rewards those who seek Him."*

**With a clean conscience** because of our consecrated, blood-washed bodies. Old Testament priests needed to consecrate
themselves with blood and water in order to enter the presence of God, but we do not need to engage in this ritual any longer. The finished work of Christ on the cross cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

When a man named Chrysostom was brought before the Roman emperor, the emperor threatened him with banishment if he would not renounce Christ. Chrysostom replied, "You can't banish me, for this world is my Father's house." But I will slay you," said the Emperor. No' you cannot" said Chrysostom "for my life is hid with Christ in God.” “I will take away your treasures." “You cannot, for my treasure is in heaven and my heart is there." "But I will drive you away from man and you shall have no friend left." "You cannot, for I have a friend in heaven
from whom you cannot separate me. I defy you, for there is nothing you can do to hurt me."

Chrysostom demonstrated precisely what it means to act in assurance of our faith. Remember Hebrews 10:23: "*Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who
promised is faithful.*" Through His faith in God, Chrysostom was able to access God directly and tap into the hope that is found in Him.

The author of Hebrews wrote about this long before Chrysostom lived, but he did not stop at describing our newfound access to God; he goes on to give us a picture of how we should live by talking about our confession of hope. He summarizes the passage: we must actively believe in the face of any circumstance in life, death, riches, or poverty, knowing that the God who saves the believer through the sacrificial death of
Christ has promised to never leave us.

John MacArthur tells the story of a young boy whose dad left him on a downtown corner one morning and told him to wait there until he returned in about half an hour. But the father's car broke down and he could not get to a phone. Five hours went by before the father managed to get back, and he was worried his son would be in a state of panic. But when the father got there the boy was standing in front of the dime store, looking in the window and rocking back and forth on his heels. When the father saw him, he ran to him, threw his arms around him, and hugged and kissed him.

The father apologized and said, "Weren't you worried? Did you think I was never coming back?" The boy looked up and replied, "No, dad. I knew you were coming. You said you would."

In the same way, our Heavenly Father promised He will never leave or forsake us. Such a common confession bonds people together closer than brothers, for it is a connection that will
last throughout eternity.

**A Common Consideration for Others**

What does this have to do with disciple-making?
The author of Hebrews brings all of the previous statements to a point: "*Let us be concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works, not staying away from our worship meetings, as some habitually do, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day drawing near"* (Hebrews 10:24-25).

**In this text are two commands that simply cannot be disregarded: spur one another on and meet together.** Both are indispensable in our walk as believers. While these exhortations may seem disjointed and disconnected, they actually flow directly from one another. Notice the author does not give his audience a choice in whether they should care for one another; if is a direct order. How is it possible to promote good works and care for other believers if you only attend a 1-hour weekly worship service? It's impossible.

A D-group offers the opportunity to live out the “one anothers” in the Bible. There are 59 “one anothers” found throughout the New Testament, including:

* Love one another. (John 13:34)
* Be in agreement with one another. (Rom.12:16)
* Accept one another. (Rom. 15:7)
* Instruct one another. (Rom. 15:14)
* Greet one another. (Rom. 16:16)
* Serve one another. (Gal. 5:13)
* Be kind and compassionate to one another. (Eph. 4:32)
* Submit to one another out of reverence for
Christ. (Eph. 5:21)
* Admonish one another with all wisdom. (Col. 3:16)
* Encourage one another and build each other up. (1 Thess.5:11)
* Be hospitable to one another. (1 Pet. 4:9)
* Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another. (James 5:16)

The Christian walk is one we simply cannot live out alone. Remember, it was born directly out of a Hebraic culture deeply entrenched in community. Every facet is expected to be lived together with like-minded individuals, spurring one another on to good works daily. Even a number of our prayers are communal! How strange would it be to pray in a group of believers, "My Father, Who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name"? Jesus, when instructing His disciples on how to
pray, begins, "**Our** Father" (Matt. 6:9, emphasis mine).

So much of our lives are lived isolated and insulated from other believers. This is not the way Christ or the disciples of the early church encouraged their people to live. It is not the way
Christianity is designed to function.

**Worship with Other Believers**

Hebrews 10:25 specifically references "worship gatherings," as the HCSB renders it. Meeting together is in one sense the weekly church service that so many associate with Sunday mornings, but it more appropriately means meeting with other
believers regularly for community and accountability.

The author offers a strong admonition to continue meeting together since some have apparently stopped. He actually uses the phrase "gather together" as a foreshadowing of the eschatological gathering of all of the saints at the second coming of Christ. This further meaning gains credibility from the end of the sentence: "*As you see the day drawing near*" (Heb. 10:25).

Because we are anticipating the final gathering of God's people, it makes sense to gather together now in preparation for that day. Our assembling on this earth is a picture of our assembling in Heaven. If gathering together with other believers isn't necessarily your cup of tea, think of how miserable heaven will be for you, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with people from every tribe, nation, and tongue, worshipping the God of the universe forever! A true disciple of Christ seeks community with like-minded believers. D.L. Moody put it this way: "Church attendance is as vital to a disciple as a transfusion of rich,
healthy blood to a sick man.”

**Unity In the Community**

Living as a believer is tough within a Christian community. It is impossible without it. An essential component you experience in a D-group that doesn't happen in the large gathering or even in a small group or Sunday school class is participation. In a group of three to six, there are no passive participants. The small numbers simply do not allow someone to sit in the back of the room without posing or answering a question.

As this group meets together, they grow together as well. The Jewish people called their gatherings *haverim*. In modern Hebrew, *haverim* means "friends." In Jesus' day, haverim were companions in study—they were dedicated members of the covenant community who immersed themselves in God's Word together.

Here is a line from the Babylonian Talmud that encapsulates this point: "Much have I learned from my teachers even more from my *haverim*, but from my disciples, most of all." The level of transparency, trust, and participation in our D-groups should foster a community of dedicated followers of Christ seeking to grow closer to Him as we grow together.

Another practice to include for developing close friendships is a one-on-one lunch meeting with each D-group participant. My current group set appointments with every member to meet
individually for lunch throughout the year. The group of six men I'm currently leading will schedule six lunches over the course of a year to get to know each participant better. Ultimately.
D-groups develop what I call 2 AM friends. These are close friends you can call at 2 AM with the full understanding they will answer the phone and be there in your time of need. It is one of the great benefits of being in a D-group.

The sustainability of the Church in the decades ahead will not be determined by the breadth of its members, but by the depth of its disciples. Depth is unearthed through trust and rapport with others. It's great that a weekly worship service I may be attended by several thousand people, but the real question is: How many of those members are meeting together in discipleship for life-transformation?

Community was so important to Jesus that he lived communally with twelve men for three years. Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger conclude, "We need to ' presenting community as just another option for the religious consumer and start presenting it as God's will for everyone. It should be seen as the reality of those within the church and the refuge for those without."

To carry out the commands of Christ by caring for one another, we must avoid isolation at all cost. D-groups are the solution.