

Why We Matter to Each Other

Upon This Rock, Part 7

Selected Scripture

Carthage, North Carolina was once the home of the Tyson Buggy Company. It was considered the “Cadillac” buggy manufacturer in the heyday of horse-drawn carriages.

I have read that at one time in its history, Carthage, North Carolina was the place where royalty from Europe and South America visited. They came with ideas and designs for their custom made deluxe carriages.

When he started looking for a place to build his newfangled horseless carriage, Henry Ford visited Carthage as well. He thought it was the perfect place to build his engine powered carriages. And he was excited to present to the town fathers his idea to convert their carriage plant into an automotive assembly line. He explained that they could easily modify their lines so that instead of making carriages, they could mass produce the bodies of automobiles.

They turned him down – uninterested in making such radical changes to their way of life.

But Carthage, North Carolina also has the distinction of not only failing to envision the coming automobile industry – they were also slated to become the home of the University of North Carolina. But city leaders at the time decided they didn’t want all that a university would demand of their quiet town – in fact, they argued that Carthage wasn’t a good place for a University anyway because the town was on too steep of a hill for locomotives to climb.

When I read that brief history of town fathers, it strikes me that their vision never moved beyond their personal desires and the need for life to not involve so much change – and so many people.

Today, the population of Carthage is smaller than the size of this local church.

We can’t fault them . . . we prefer the same.

If you read the history of the church – from its very inception in *Acts 1*, you discover embedded in its DNA the very elements of involvement with people . . . the church is an organism – a living, breathing body . . . which involves change . . . and growth . . . and movement . . . and organizing . . . and serving . . . and activity . . . and noise . . . and more people.

Belonging to a local church is making a decision to move past a quiet, solitary life where everything stays where you put it and nothing changes.

You happen to be in this auditorium today because 600 people voted to accept change and financial sacrifice and even hardship.

In fact, the change was incredible. We had just finished building our first building on a 7-acre tract of land – we had finally moved from the school house where we’d spent our first six years; we had sacrificed greatly to build a 600 seat fellowship hall where we would meet until building our church sanctuary on that property.

But within six months of moving in, so many new people had arrived, we not only outgrew that Fellowship Hall, we outgrew our entire master plan for those 7 acres.

Now that congregation could have decided to stick to that plan; we’d experienced enough change for a while.

Six months after moving into our new church facilities, that congregation voted unanimously to put that property eventually up for sale; to start

looking for land – and change everything – and sacrifice all over again.

A church member effectively promises to change – not only spiritually – because that’s what spiritual growth is – change; but also to accept noise and distraction and responsibility and sacrifice and vision that transcends our lives and reaches into the lives of others.

Now in our study so far, on the church, we’ve taken a closer look at who we are, why we belong, how we behave, why we exist and what we promise.

And what we promise effectively relates to what we believe.

Thus far we’ve covered the promises we are making each other that relate to our conduct.

Now we’re going to cover some of the promises we are making each other that relate to our church family.

They will be immediately understood as a commitment to participate and engage in the life of the church.

The first promise of a member regarding his or her church is:

1. To purposefully and faithfully participate in public worship services.
(Hebrews 10:25; Ephesians 5:18-20)

Now you might think that this is really too obvious to ever have to promise.

Yet, in the New Testament, you discover that early on, people were choosing to retain their quiet solitude rather than accept the busy, noisy, personally invested participation with the church family.

Turn in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 10.

Before announcing the personal responsibility of belonging to an assembly of believers, the writer of Hebrews takes us back to the Old Testament Tabernacle.

Look down at verse 19. Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh.

Stop for a moment . . . the veil of that Old Testament tabernacle – and later the Temple– that veil announced – keep out.

But Jesus, we read here – represented that veil in His crucified body that, at the moment of His death, was torn in two. And because of Christ’s atoning

work, you now have access into the Holy of Holies – the very presence of God.”

But first, in this text, he challenges us not to take the assembly for granted. But first – here – he challenges us not to take the privilege we have of entering into the very presence of God.

Can you imagine the revolutionary truth the writer is delivering to these Hebrews – these Jewish believers, primarily – and to us – **verse 19 – we have confidence to enter the holy place.**

We can go into the very presence of God – as many times a day and night that we desire.

We have direct access to the very presence of God.

You may remember me telling you a couple of years ago about my visit to South America with a translator to preach in several radio rallies. And when we flew into Miami on the way down to Santiago, we had a 4-hour layover. My host and translator said, “Not a problem, come with me.” And we walked through double doors into the marble lobby of the Admirals Club. We had soft cushioned seats . . . all the fruit, juice, coffee, and snacks we wanted as we read from a free selection of newspapers – so here I was in the lap of luxury instead of sitting out there on a piece of plastic stretched between two metal bars . . . eating a Snickers – that’s the good part.

Inside that club even the bathrooms were made of marble – they were spotlessly clean.

I came back and asked my secretary to find out how much it cost to join these flight clubs. She called me later on and said, “You’re not going to believe it, but you had access all along through your Platinum American Express card. All you had to do was show them your card and pay a nominal daytime fee – which was about the price of a newspaper, Diet Coke, and Snickers bar.”

All this time, while I had been sitting out there with all the other peasants . . . I could have been in there with royalty.

Well, I traveled to Santiago this past summer with my oldest daughter who was permanently moving there to join her husband and set up their home. And I knew we had that same 4-hour layover in Miami, and I told her, no worries, we’re about to enter the promised land of free food and soft drinks and all the cookies and fruit you can eat– just wait.

We entered the club and walked across the marble foyer up to the receptionist, and I said, “How much will it cost for me to bring a guest in with me.”

She said, “Are you a member?” I pulled out my wallet and said “No ma’am, but I am a Platinum American Express member.” And I showed her my card. She said, “Well, I’m sorry . . . we no longer allow access through American Express . . . I’m sorry, sir.”

All these years of flying, I had access and didn’t know it – and now that I knew it – they changed the guidelines for giving people access.

So out we went to sit with all the other peasants – with our Diet Coke and Snickers.

Here’s the good news – the guidelines for access into the presence of God have never changed. The gospel never changes.

- a. You get into the family of God by faith in Christ alone.

For by grace you have been saved through faith – and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9)

When we gather together, we do so because of our kindred faith in Christ alone.

What a privilege it was this past week to meet with a woman in our class for our customary GreenHouse interview . . . to explain the gospel to this former Roman Catholic and a few other religious systems mixed in – a woman trying her best to get into heaven . . . what a privilege to deliver the gospel of Christ to her and hear her pray to accept what Christ did for her and offers her by grace . . . as she left my office, she met our membership secretary and she told her what she’d just done and used these words – “***my eyes were opened.***”

My eyes were opened. Isn’t that what the Spirit of God has done to us all who believe?

For many of you, Sunday is the only day you get to be around people whose eyes have been opened; this is the only day you get to be around people who love the Lord like you do . . . who believe the gospel and the Bible that you believe . . . who long for spiritual food and fellowship and encouragement like you do.

Who got into this family by faith alone – like you did?

The writer here stresses first and foremost; you get into the family of God by faith.

- b. **Secondly, you get a grip on life because God is faithful.**

Look at verse 23. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering – literally, without swaying – for He who promised is faithful.

Cling tightly to your confession – that isn’t simply believing – it’s living. This is what we believe, and this is also how we behave.

By the way, the writer is not telling you and me to **hold fast** so you won’t lose your salvation – he’s not talking about entering the faith – you already did by faith in Christ alone.

He’s not talking about beginning the faith; he’s talking about being built up in the faith . . . growing up in the faith.

And the joy and assurance of your faith – that allows you to get a grip on a life worth living is bound up in the faithfulness of God.

You never need to waver because He never will.

We get into the family of God by faith.

We get a grip on life because God is faithful.

- c. **And now, thirdly, we gather together to encourage our faith.**

Notice verse 24. And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good works.

The word **stimulate** can be translated to stir up, or to provoke.

You come together as an assembly to provoke one another.

You’re thinking, I know some people who definitely have the spiritual gift of provoking people. In fact, every time I go to church they provoke me!

That Greek word is often used in a negative sense for irritating or exasperating someone. But here it carries the idea of inciting, prodding, infusing others with courage to live godly lives.¹

This is a positive action word – and it takes your presence to pull it off!

You see, would you notice that this is not an invitation for a few people in the church – the staff, the pastors, elders, and deacons of the church – this is for everyone in the church.

Let us consider how to stimulate one another.

In other words, this needs you to make it happen.

In fact, the writer goes on in **verse 25** to add a common sense warning – notice - ***not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some***

By the way – don’t be one of the **some**.

Don't be one of these somebodies . . . not simply because you need the assembly, but because those around you need you.

Christianity is a team sport . . . we can't pull this off without you.

The trouble is, we often come to the assembly looking for someone or something to encourage us – the writer of Hebrews effectively says we're to come to the assembly on the lookout for someone that we can encourage.

He writes, *but encouraging one another* – that word means to infuse one another with courage – to literally cheer someone along.

I love that incident, recorded by Pastor Brad Estep, who wrote about Jamie Scott trying out for the annual elementary school play. Jamie had his heart set on being one of the characters in the play, but his mother knew better. He wasn't the most outgoing kid and could be somewhat reserved and quiet . . . she feared that he would be so disappointed when he wasn't chosen to play one of these leading roles.

On the day the parts were awarded to the children, Jamie's mother went to pick him up, expecting him to be crushed with disappointment . . . she had even baked some cookies to offer him on the way home . . . she was expecting the worst . . . but when Jamie saw his mother, he ran over to the car, his eyes filled with excitement, and said, "Guess what, Mom . . . a bunch of kids were chosen to cheer . . . and I'm one of 'em."

Wouldn't it be interesting to discover the reality one day that in the mind of God for the church cheering, on other believers just so happened to be one of the most important roles to play in the assembly.

According to this text, we all have been chosen to cheer.

We as church members are basically promising:

- that we will cheer on each other –
- that the faith and growth of each other will become our own sense of responsibility –
- that whenever this assembly meets, it isn't just to encourage us, but to allow us the opportunity to encourage someone else.

Along that same line then is this next promise;

2. To actively pray for, care for and serve one another spiritually and physically.

(Romans 12:9-13; 1 Corinthians 12:25-27, 16:1-2; Ephesians 1:15, 6:18; Philippians 2:3-4; Hebrews 13:16; James 1:27; 1 John 4:7-12)

In other words, it isn't loving in word only – but indeed.

We don't just verbally cheer one another along; we physically get involved as well.

And most of what we do for one another is behind the scenes – rarely is it ever center stage.

In the morning when I arrive, I'm met here by security and we walk through some side doors and backstage – and many times when we walk through one particular classroom there is a man in there setting up chairs. Getting the chairs just right.

I happen to know he's been a pastor for decades – now in his 80's – and his service away from the limelight he once knew deeply moves and encourages me about what really matters.

When was the last time you watched a movie and then stuck around to read the credits as they rolled by? Indian scout number 43. Indian scout number 44.

And that musical score you thought was so beautiful – did you stick around to find out who composed it?

Probably not . . . the shows over . . . it's time to head out for the next event.

One of my favorite verses in scripture is found in Journal of Nehemiah and chapter 6 where they are rebuilding the walls and that broken down city of Jerusalem. And tucked inside that chapter is a phrase – *And the people blessed all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.*

The Hebrew word for *volunteer* is an absolutely wonderful word. It is the word, "nadab" and it means, to be impelled by an inner urge, to be compelled to be courageous.

It can be translated to read, "to be noble."

These people volunteered to take a difficult assignment – to literally move into the unfinished city of Jerusalem – to accept difficulty and inconvenience for the sake of their people.

Sounds a lot like a volunteer, doesn't it; someone who is willing to serve someone else . . . to take on the tough assignment.

What better way to describe them, than with a word that can be translated *noble*.

And listen, most of the noble things you do will never be recognized on earth.

When you watch that movie, you typically focus on 3 or 4 leading characters – and when the movie’s over, you get up and leave. You don’t stick around to read the name of the assistant to the assistant graphic arts director.

I wonder how many people will serve this church body today and not get noticed or even thanked.

The truth is, the ancient city of Jerusalem and this church have a lot in common – we advance as a church, not by a few leading characters, but by an unseen labor force of noble people whose Christ-honoring hearts have impelled them to do noble things.

And by the way, God reads the credits.

The writer of Hebrews addressed that when he wrote, *For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints (Hebrews 6:10)*

“God will not forget your deeds of love – the things you do to minister to the Body of Christ.”

People forget . . . God doesn’t. People might not thank you . . . people might overlook you . . . God never will. He always reads the credits. In fact, He’s in the process, even today, of writing more of them.

I couldn’t help but reflect this week on how our church is a university of moving parts; people and noise and action and involvement and noble deeds – given to Christ by people of all ages:

- who change diapers and vacuum floors;
- who pull weeds and paint walls;
- who arrange meetings and teach Bible lessons;
- who prepare for worship services and monitor sound boards;
- who clean bathrooms and count the offering;
- who practice and then play instruments as we sing;
- who send cards and pray for those who are sick;
- who take visitors to their classrooms and call on those who visited;
- who lead men in Bible studies and teach ABF’s;
- who cook meals for those in need and visit shut-ins;
- who love special needs children and plan story times;

- who dust furniture, clean nursery toys and set up chairs;
- who show up early to get out the equipment and make the coffee;
- who interpret sermons and burn CD copies;
- who park cars and usher people;
- who disciple teenagers and open their home for small groups;
- who mentor women and offer wise counsel;
- who sew costumes and serve in the library;
- who remember birthdays and give gifts;
- who crawl around with toddlers and rock infants to sleep;
- who wash nursery linens and clean the dishes;
- who plan class activities and counsel at teen camp;
- who listen to memory verses and stack tables;
- who lead children to sing and watch them on the playground;
- who coach sports teams and prepare devotionals;
- who recruit more volunteers and train them;
- who unload all the equipment and then load it back up again – only to be unloaded and then loaded up again, and again and again and again.

Let me tell you something – you are among the noble ones.

You are spiritually and/or physically demonstrating the love of Christ in action; credits that may never be read by people on earth, but are written and recorded and soon rewarded by God in heaven.

Listen to this inside information on the heart of God – the writer of Hebrews records in *chapter 13 in verse 16* – this is for the volunteers – and especially for those of you today who might have been wondering how God felt about it – the text reads, *do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices, God is pleased.*

You have effectively made this promise to your church, and you are tangibly doing good and gracious and loving and edifying and tiring and

weariness and difficult and repetitive deeds of love and *God is pleased!*

This is our promise – we’re going to make this family our family; we’re going to treat this house like our house; we’re not going to show up to be served, but to serve; it isn’t about us – it’s about serving one another as unto Christ.

These first two promises demand our personal involvement: we’re promising to put up with the busyness and the needs and the congestion and the taxing issues of a bustling ministry; we’re promising to fill in the gaps and roll up our sleeves.

And we’re promising not simply to put up with it – but to participate with it – even if it means our little town becomes a university town – even if it means our simple landscape becomes crowded with manufacturers of disciples . . . the vision of Carthage 100 years ago will not be the vision of Colonial today.

And so we promise – to invite change; to participate in the lives of others; because we understand that we don’t just belong to Jesus Christ – but because we belong to Jesus Christ, we belong to each other.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/1/2015 by Stephen Davey.

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i Charles Swindoll, [Growing Deep in the Christian Life](#) (Insight for Living, 1987), p. 154