

“Sunday Lunch” (Hebrews 10:19–25)

How many of you generally look forward to Sunday lunch? How many of you are looking forward to Sunday lunch at this very moment? Are your stomachs growling? What are you craving? A tender, perfectly seasoned steak? A moist, fillet of salmon? A large supreme pizza? Any of these meals would be out-of-this world about now, wouldn't you say? But what about a nice, juicy head of lettuce? [Display a head of lettuce.] Is anyone craving such a meal? Doesn't it just make your mouth water? I didn't think so. Nonetheless, I'm going to feed you a biblical buffet of lettuce.

At this point, you're probably thinking to yourself: What in the world is he talking about it? Let me explain. Our text today is Hebrews 10:19–25.¹ While you're turning there, I'll explain our menu. In these seven verses, there are three exhortations that are introduced by the words, “Let us!” This trio of “Let us” appears in three consecutive verses. Beginning in 10:22 we have “Let us draw near.” “Let us draw near” is followed by, “Let us hold fast” (10:23), and finally we conclude with, “Let us consider” (10:24). In these seven verses, we learn how we should relate to God and one another. But before we study the text, it will be helpful to quickly summarize the book of Hebrews. From 1:1–10:18, the writer's primary concern has been to lay a doctrinal foundation. The doctrinal foundation was a theological treatise on Christology (i.e., the study of Christ). In fact, Hebrews can be summed up in these three words: “Jesus is better!” In 10:19, however, the author shifts into the practical section of his book.² The shift can be stated in many ways: from doctrine to duty, from creed to conduct, and from precept to practice.³ Interestingly, 10:19–25 is a microcosm of the entire letter.⁴ In 10:19–21, he briefly summarizes our position in Christ with two vital truths. Then in 10:22–25 he shows how this position should affect our practice. Let's begin with our first “let us” exhortation.

1. Let us draw near to God (10:19–22). The key word is: *Enter*.⁵ The author of Hebrews yearns for us to experience intimacy with God and other believers. In 10:19–21, he whets our appetite to draw near to God by sharing two blessings. (Notice the word “since” in 10:19 and 21.) In light of these blessings, in 10:22, we are exhorted to draw near. Our author puts it like this: **“Therefore, brethren,⁶ since we have confidence⁷ to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new⁸ and living way which He inaugurated⁹ for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near¹⁰ with a sincere¹¹ heart in full assurance¹² of faith, having our hearts sprinkled¹³ clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed¹⁴ with pure water.”** The first blessing we have is confidence. The idea of having confidence arises directly out of what has just been said. Please notice the introductory “therefore” (*oun*) in 10:19 refers back to 10:14, “For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.” Then in 10:17, our writer quotes the new covenant promise from Jeremiah 31, “I will remember their lawless deeds no more.” Do you understand what is being said here? Hebrews teaches that if we have trusted in the work of Christ we are perfected for all time because God has chosen to place our sins upon His Son. It is because of Christ's work on our behalf that we can draw near to God. But most Christians don't understand or appreciate the significance of this because of the age that we live in. We are apt to forget what an innovative—even revolutionary thought this was to the Jewish mind. Before Jesus Christ's crucifixion, separation was stressed and distance was enforced. In the Old Testament, intimate fellowship with God was dependent upon a blood sacrifice. The purpose of this exercise was to prepare men and women for the once for all sacrifice of Christ, the perfect lamb. The people brought their animals to the door of the outer court and surrendered them to a priest, who alone could take the offerings inside. The people then withdrew to safety. They were then restrained within the court while only the priests fearfully ventured into the holy place. Even they went no farther into the tabernacle. Only the high priest dared enter the holy place, and then only on the annual Day of Atonement. While he was doing this, the people quite literally held their breath until he returned safely. To stand before the glory of God over the Ark of the Covenant was a fearful thing! Yet, because of Jesus, we have confidence to be intimate with God. We can draw near to Him through Christ anytime, anywhere, anyplace.

Verse 20 goes on to say that we have a new and living way through the flesh of Jesus (10:20). Our author is saying it is “new” because it is recent in contrast with the Old Covenant forms of approach.¹⁵ The most significant act in the history of human history took place 2,000 years ago when Jesus Christ died on the cross. On that cross His flesh was torn and His blood was shed for you and for me. Our author tells us that this “new way” is also a “living way” because the One who opened it lives and He is the source of our spiritual life. The author of Hebrews draws an allusion to the splitting of the curtain in the temple from top to bottom.¹⁶ Just as the curtain was split, so Christ’s body was broken for us, to give us access into God’s presence.

The second blessing that should motivate us to draw near to God is: We have a great priest over the house of God (10:21). Jesus Christ is now our High Priest—there is no other Mediator between God and man! In other words, there’s no need to go to a human priest or a pastor to have access to God, Jesus Christ is available 24–7. Therefore, because of the confidence we have from our great access and advocacy, our author exclaims, “Let us draw near to God¹⁷ with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (10:22). The verb “draw near” (*proserchomai*) is in the present tense and refers to repeated occasions. The term has connotations of prayer (4:16; 7:25; 11:6; 12:13, 22), but includes all of worship.¹⁸ We must draw near to God with a heart that is sincere (i.e., real, honest, genuine, true). We must draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith. In other words, we must count on God to fulfill what he says He will do. We are to come to Him in our inadequacy—with full assurance that He will be adequate. We do this by having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. The background metaphor that is being used here is found in the fact that the Old Testament priests were sprinkled with blood and bathed at their consecration.¹⁹ These same priests also repeatedly washed with water whenever they served in the Tabernacle. Consequently, when we draw near to God we ought to rest in the cleansing blood of Christ, which has permanently purified us. And we ought always—by confession—avail ourselves of the cleansing we need from the daily defilement of sin. These images of sprinkling and washing here are also figurative symbols of the effect of Christ’s sacrifice.

[We are called to draw near to God. Now our author provides a second “let us.”]

2. Let us hold fast the faith (10:23). The key word is: *Endure*. Our author urges us to be faithful to Christ because He is faithful to us. He writes, “**Let us hold fast²⁰ the confession²¹ of our hope²² without wavering,²³ for He who promised is faithful²⁴.**” The writer’s use of the present tense suggests that the hearers call to “hold fast” (*katecho*) is an ongoing call. He uses this verb to speak of keeping a tight grip on the Christian faith, keeping it from slipping away. He intensifies the concept of “holding fast” with the adverb translated “without wavering” (*akline*). This word literally means “that which does not bend” or “that which is straight,” which communicates the concept of stability or immutability. Thus, the believer is challenged to hold onto the Christian hope, which the author so clearly has depicted as grounded in the person and work of Christ, without being moved by changing circumstances.²⁵ “Holding fast” the faith brings an “eternal inheritance” (9:15).²⁶

Why must we be exhorted to hold fast the faith? Won’t all Christians do this? Not necessarily. The reason that the book of Hebrews was written was to encourage Jewish Christians to press on in their newfound faith. The listeners of this first century book were primarily Jewish Christians who recently converted from Judaism to Christianity. Needless to say, this didn’t go over real well. Their Jewish friends began trying to persuade these new Christians that Jesus wasn’t sufficient. Faith alone in Christ alone was too easy. What about the sacrificial system and keeping the law? There was great pressure to turn back to Judaism.

High school and college students, don’t fall away from your faith. Don’t let your professors or classmates pressure you into relinquishing your grasp on Christ. Don’t be intimidated. Be strong in the Spirit. Christ is all you need. Make sure that you are strong in His word and hold on for dear life. This will ensure your spiritual growth and well-being.

[Perhaps you're thinking: "Yea, I know I'm supposed to draw near and hold fast, but that doesn't help me. I need to know how. How can I draw near and hold fast when it seems like everything and everyone is keeping me from intimacy with God." Brace yourself, here is the heart of our text! It is found in our final "let us" exhortation. We cannot fulfill the first two exhortations without carrying out the final exhortation.]

3. Let us consider one another (10:24–25). The key word is: *Encourage*. How do we consider one another? The author of Hebrews tells us: ". . . and let us consider how to stimulate one another²⁷ to love²⁸ and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." It is often assumed that the main verb in these verses is "to stimulate," however, "stimulate" is actually a noun. The main verb is "consider." Notice carefully, it's not what you might expect. It is not: "Consider how to love each other and do good deeds." That would be biblical and right. But it's different: 10:24 says, "And let us consider *one another* to provoke love and good works."²⁹ The direct object of the word "consider" is "one another."³⁰ Consider what? Consider one another! This is God's call for us to consider one another, that is, to look at one another, think about one another, focus on one another, study one another, let your mind be occupied with one another.³¹ Intensive scrutiny is required. Back before we used calculators and computers, we would add columns of numbers manually. To do this, we had to pay close attention to each number and how it related to the numbers before and after it. That type of careful examination is what the word means. We aren't to reach conclusions about each other quickly or casually. Rather, we are to take time to understand who other people are and how best to approach them about areas where they need to grow. "Consider" means that you have to give some thought to this or it won't happen. To give thought to it means that you have to take your focus off of yourself and think about others. "What does this other person need to help him [or her] grow in love and good deeds?" And the goal of this focus on one another is to think of ways of stimulating others to love and good deeds. This is the focus of your life. This is what you should aim at from morning till night as a Christian.

The word that is translated "stimulate" (*paroxusmos*) is an extremely potent word! Other English versions render it "spur" (NET, NIV), "stir up" (ESV, NKJV), "provoke" (KJV, NRSV), "motivate" (NLT), "promote" (HCSB), or "arouse" (NEB). The author of Hebrews couldn't have chosen a more intense word. The only other use of this verb is found in Acts 15:39, where Luke refers to the strong "disagreement" between Paul and Barnabas. It is also used twice in the Greek Old Testament (LXX) and has negative connotations, meaning to provoke (Deut 29:27; Jer 39:37). So our writer is saying that we ought to provoke our spiritual family members to love and good deeds. This is strong language! It seems to me that our author may be using this term ironically to grab attention: "Rather than provoking one another to anger, think about how to provoke one another to love and good deeds."

So how can we spiritually provoke other believers? In 10:25, our author gives us two ways to fulfill this great task. **First, we must gather with other believers:** "not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some." Now stop right there! We need to ask a question: Why had these Hebrew Christians stopped meeting together? In 10:32–34, our author informs us that these believers were facing severe pressure to turn away from their faith. Many of them were suffering persecution, some had been thrown into prison, and others had their property confiscated, others still lost their jobs. These believers were facing a spiritual crisis. From a human perspective, these early believers had a reason to skip out on church. What about us? What's our excuse? We skip out on church for football, shopping, sleeping in, and a host of other things. We are guilty of indifference, fear, ignorance, busyness, or just plain self-centeredness. Yet, the exhortation remains: Do not forsake assembling together. Interestingly, the author of Hebrews only uses the verb "forsake" (*egkatalaipo*) in one other place—Heb 13:5 where the Lord states, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (cf. Deut 31:6, 8; Josh 1:5).³² Even though believers forsake God, He refuses to forsake them. "If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself" (see 2 Tim 2:13). However, I am confident that it grieves God deeply that we are not committed to His bride.

Perhaps you're thinking, "Keith, aren't you being a bit hard? I attend church once a month or when I'm really on a spiritual roll twice a month. What more do you expect? I do have a life you know. I need my weekends and Sunday is the only day I can sleep in." I would simply ask you a series of questions. If your car started one out of three times, would you consider it faithful? If the mail lady skipped Monday and Thursdays, would you be satisfied? If you didn't show up at work two or three times a month, would your boss call you faithful? If your refrigerator ran nine months out of the year, would you excuse it and say, "Oh, well, it works most of the time." If your water heater greets you with cold water one or two mornings a week while you were in the shower, would it be faithful? If you miss a couple of mortgage payments in a year's time, would your mortgage holder say, "Oh, well, ten out of twelve isn't bad?" I think you see my point. All that I ask is that we apply the same standards of faithfulness to our church activities that we would in other areas of our life. That doesn't seem too much to ask. The church, after all, is concerned about faithfulness.

There is a second way that we can spiritually provoke other believers. ***We must encourage one another:*** "encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." The word translated "encourage" (*parakaleo*) in the NT communicates the idea of one person standing alongside another giving appropriate counsel and help. To encourage is to inspire another with courage. Courage is the mental or spiritual strength to persevere in the face of difficulty. So to encourage someone is to fortify that person with the spiritual strength to persevere in spite of hardship. Depending on what the situation calls for, encouragement can be a gentle word, a hug, practical help, or a kick in the pants. Yet, it is always done alongside, never condescendingly. Another interesting note is the phrase "encouraging one another" also carries the idea of constantly giving careful attention to ways in which we could encourage others. It's not enough to encourage one Sunday a month or shoot out an email or Face book entree, all of us need to encourage at every opportunity. Emmanuel Bible Fellowship needs encouragers today. Although we are not facing the severe trials that the Hebrew Christians faced, many in our body are discouraged because of other conflicts. Some face marital conflicts, others have heartaches over rebellious or spiritually indifferent children. Some face demotion or even loss of their jobs, or various health problems. Many are wondering if God truly cares for them. That is why we need encouragers!

We should be asking: "God, who do you want me to encourage today? Who needs a word from you? Who needs my care and concern?" It isn't about you feeding yourself; it's about you feeding others. Who have you fed lately? Your presence is needed to encourage someone else. Pray for others, share Scripture, verbally affirm, and set an example. Look for any and every way to encourage another believer. Earlier in his letter, our author pens these words: "But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (3:13). Left to our own devices, we would probably all fall away! We are not only prone to discouragement, but also lethargy. We get tired of living the Christian life. We get tired of fulfilling our responsibilities to the body. We are all prone to live for ourselves rather than others, so we need to be encouraged to press on.

This verse is followed up nicely with 10:25, which goes on to say, "and all the more, as you see the day drawing near." The closer we get to Christ's coming the more we should be getting together. Many Christians seem to have it backwards. The closer we get to Christ's coming the less we get together and the more excuses we tend to make. Nevertheless, one of the strongest motivations for faithfulness is the soon coming of Jesus Christ. In fact, the only other place the word translated "assembling" (*episunagoge*) is used is in 2 Thess 2:1, where it's translated "gathering" and deals with the coming of Jesus Christ. The day that is spoken of in this final phrase of our passage is the day when Jesus Christ will return for His church. This day is also spoken of in 1 Cor 3:13 where Paul speaks of the Judgment Seat of Christ where Jesus Christ rewards believers according to their faithfulness on earth.³³ And you can bet, on that day, one of the items that we will have to give an account for is our faithfulness to the body of Christ. In the meantime, we should anticipate, contemplate, and celebrate the return of Christ.³⁴

If I could boil down my message into one statement, it would be this: *You need the church and the church needs you.* You need the church to keep you on track. You need the church to hold you accountable. You need the church to care for you during the disasters of your life. You need the church to encourage you as you keep walking down the right way. You don't need the church to be saved but you need it to make sure you're living like you're saved.³⁵ Today, you may think that you don't need the church, but I can assure you if you don't right now, you will. I've watched plenty of people drop out of church only to call me in their time of need or to return to our church because of a heartache that they can't handle on their own (e.g., marriage crisis, illness or death of a child, death of family member, loss of job, cancer diagnoses). In the end, God will not allow believers to be satisfied apart from a local church. You can invest all your time in your marriage, kids, work, and hobbies, but God will not allow you to enjoy complete fulfillment apart from His program—the local church.³⁶ *You need the church and the church needs you.*

Marathoner runners tell me that fans encourage them and provide food and drinks throughout the course of the race. Typically, most supporters place themselves at the 25 miles marker because that's when many runners are about ready to give in and give up. When these fans spot a family member or friend coming into view, they shout the person's name, wave, and yell encouragement: "Just a little farther! Keep going! You're almost there. You can do it!" It is this encouragement that enables many marathoners to finish their course.

Similarly, in the spiritual realm, we are not running a sprint, we are running a marathon. It is often tempting to give in and give up. In these moments, we need to brothers and sisters who will encourage us to press on and finish our Christian race. God uses our fellow brothers and sisters to give us staying power. *You need the church and the church needs you.*

Scripture References

Hebrews 10:19–39
Hebrews 4:16; 7:19
Hebrews 3:1, 6; 3:14; 4:14
Hebrews 10:32–34
Hebrews 11:1–6
Hebrews 12:1–3
Acts 2:42–46

Study Questions

1. How do I feel about going to church every Sunday?

- I look forward to going every week.
- I was raised going to church, so it would feel strange not to go.
- I'm frustrated with the church.
- I rarely go.
- Other

2. Why do I go to church? What is my primary motivation? What are my motivations?

- To worship God.
- To learn from God's Word.
- To provide my kids Christian teaching.
- To connect with friends and meet new people.
- To comfort and encourage others.
- Other

3. If I stay at home on a Sunday morning, what do I tell myself?

- I stayed up too late last night.
- I haven't been learning anything from the sermons lately.
- I can spend time with the Lord on my own.
- I don't have anyone to sit with.
- Since I don't have any ministry responsibilities today no one will miss me.
- I think I'd rather . . .
- Other

4. If an unbeliever asked me why I stay home, what would I say?

- Everyone deserves a break now and then.
- My kids have a lot of activities that I need to support.
- I can worship God in the privacy of my own bed.
- The church is full of hypocrites.
- The pastors never miss me.
- I don't make friends easily.
- Other

5. What is my role at Emmanuel? What special gifts or insights can I offer our fellowship? How can I encourage my brothers and sisters in Christ? What will I do differently this year in my church participation or lack thereof?

Notes

¹ Guthrie does an excellent job noting the inclusio between Heb 4:14–16 and 10:19–25. See George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*. NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 340.

² Paul spends the first three chapters of Ephesians laying out many glorious theological truths before he applies it in chapters 4–6. He does the same thing in Rom 1–11, before the practical instruction in chapter 12. It is vitally important that we understand who God is, who we are, and what God has done for us in Christ as the foundation for how we live as Christians. Understanding our position in Christ is the basis for our practice in daily life.

³ R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul, Volume 2* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1993), 29.

⁴ Hebrews 10:19–25 is one long sentence in the Greek text. Although our English teachers may not like this, the Greek language has no problem with run-on sentences.

⁵ The three key words in this sermon come from Jerry Vines, *The Believer's Guide to Hebrews* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux, 1993),

⁶ The author of Hebrews uses the term “brother/“brethren” ten times (Heb 2:11, 12, 17; 3:1, 12; 7:5; 8:11; 10:19; 13:22, 23).

⁷ The author of Hebrews uses the term *parresia* (“confidence”) in Heb 3:6; 4:16; 10:19, 35.

⁸ The term *prosphatos* means “freshly slain” and is only used here in the NT.

⁹ The only other NT use of *egkanizo* (“inaugurated”) is found in Heb 9:18.

¹⁰ The author of Hebrews uses the term *proserchomai* (“draw near”) in Heb 4:16; 7:25; 10:1, 22; 11:6; 12:18, 22.

¹¹ The author of Hebrews uses the adjective *alethinos* (“sincere/true”) in Heb 8:2; 9:24; and 10:22.

¹² The noun *plerophoria* (“full assurance”) is used in Col 2:2; 1 Thess 1:5; Heb 6:11; and 10:22.

¹³ The author of Hebrews is the only NT writer to use the verb *rhantizo* (“sprinkle,” Heb 9:13, 19, 21; and 10:22).

¹⁴ The verb *luou* (“wash”) is only used five times in the NT (John 13:10; Acts 9:37; 16:33; Heb 10:22; and 2 Pet 2:22).

¹⁵ The word translated “new” (*enekainisen*) originally meant “recently killed or freshly slain.”

¹⁶ See Matt 27:51; Mark 15:38; and Luke 23:45. See NET Study Notes.

¹⁷ For the use of *proserchomai* (“draw near”) in connection with approach to God see 1 Pet 2:4.

¹⁸ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*. Word Biblical Commentary vol 47B (Dallas: Word, 1991), 286.

¹⁹ Guthrie writes, “Commentators have been too quick to find in ‘having our bodies washed’ a reference to Christian baptism; who can deny that the phrase *may* have been intended to draw such a connection? Yet the author gives no overt signals that he has the Christian rite in mind. What we do have in Hebrews are uses of the washing imagery in connection with the purification rites found in the Pentateuch (e.g., Heb. 9:13). Thus, the writer continues his use of Old Testament imagery to communicate that the work of Christ has prepared believers to enter the presence of God. To suggest any more moves the interpreter into the realm of speculation.” Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 344.

²⁰ The author of Hebrews uses the verb *krateo* (“hold fast”) in Heb 3:6 and 14. A synonym of *krateo* is used in 4:14.

²¹ The noun *homologia* (“confession”) is used in 2 Cor 9:13; 1 Tim 6:12, 13; Heb 3:1; 4:14; and 10:23. In extrabiblical sources students could be said to “retain” a body of teaching, which calls to mind early Christian exhortations to hold onto the traditions of the faith (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:2; 15:2).

²² The author of Hebrews uses the noun *elpis* (“hope”) in Heb 3:6; 6:11, 18; 7:19; and 10:23

²³ The adjective *aklines* (“without wavering”) occurs only here in the NT.

²⁴ The author of Hebrews uses the adjective *pistos* (“faithful”) in Heb 2:17; 3:2, 5; 10:23; and 11:11.

²⁵ Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 344.

²⁶ Zane Hodges, *Hebrews Notes* 187.

²⁷ This is the only place in Hebrews where *allelon* (“one another”) is used.

²⁸ The author of Hebrews uses the word *agape* (“love”) in Heb 6:10.

²⁹ The best renderings of Heb 10:24 come from the KJV and NKJV: “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” (KJV). “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works” (NKJV).

³⁰ The verb “consider” (*katanoeo*) is used only one other time in the book of Hebrews (3:1). Here the writer says, “Consider Jesus.” That is, look at Him, think about Him, focus on Him, study Him, let your mind be occupied by Him. “Jesus” is the direct object of the verb “consider.” “Consider Jesus.” Consider what? Consider Jesus!

³¹ BDAG s.v. *katanoeo* 2: “to think about carefully, envisage, think about, notice.”

³² This is the word that translates Jesus’ agonizing cry from the cross (Matt 27:46): “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Paul also uses *egkataleipo* of Demas and others who forsook him (2 Tim 4:10 and 16).

³³ See also NET Study Notes; Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Hebrews”:

www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/hebrews.pdf, 92.

³⁴ Ron Phillips, *Hebrews: Finding the Better Way* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway, 2001), 122.

³⁵ Tony Evans, *The Victorious Christian Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 153.

³⁶ Watchman Nee (1903–1972) once said, “Alone I cannot serve the Lord effectively, and He will spare no pains to teach me this. He will bring things to an end, allowing doors to close and leaving me ineffectively knocking my head against a wall until I realize that I need the help of the body as well as the Lord.”