

Battling Unbelief Together

September 18, 1988 by [John Piper](#) Scripture: [Hebrews 10:19-25](#) and [Hebrews 3:12-14](#) Topic: [Killing Sin](#) Series: [Battling Unbelief](#)

How I Thrive in the Ministry

I survive and thrive in the ministry because God has surrounded me with people who pray for me and exhort me to press on in the fight of faith. If you don't feel supported like this in your faith and work, we want to help change that. The Bible teaches that surviving and thriving in a life of faith and love depends on Christians intentionally building each other in faith and stirring each other up to love. Without intentional faith-building togetherness we lose our zeal, drift from God, become hardened in the deceitfulness of sin, and if someone doesn't snatch us (James 5:19; Jude 23), we make shipwreck of our so-called faith and perish in unbelief.

I got a post card from a brother in the ministry a week or so ago that built my faith and gave me hope and encouragement to press on. It was not addressed to me. It was addressed to Christ. It was prayer.

Dear Lord,

Glorify yourself, our Savior, by moving us as a family of believers to pray as never before. May we find delight and enrichment in new intimacy of conversation with you. May our churches experience new health and vitality. And grant to us, by a fuller liberation of your power through mighty, multiplied intercession, to capture the strongholds of darkness in our country and around the world. That your name will everywhere be esteemed and revered. Give special guidance to your servant, John, as he wrestles with the discernment of urgent issues for Bethlehem's future. Even in uncertainty provide such inner confidence of your ultimate leading that his peace will be unshakable.

Your servant Bill

It can happen through the mail. God means it to happen in person even more often. That's what we want to look at this morning.

Battling Unbelief and Fighting the Fight of Faith

Last week we saw from Romans 4:20 that belief—belief that glorifies God—is future-oriented. It is a banking on the promises of God. All the promises of God were purchased for believing sinners by an act that happened in the past, namely, by the death and resurrection of Jesus. But God-glorifying BELIEF doesn't merely stare at those acts; it stands on them, and then looks forward to all the promises Jesus bought for us, and banks its hope on the promises, and moves out in a life of faith. Faith is future-oriented. It is heartfelt hope in the promises of God.

Then we saw that this kind of belief is the root of love and righteousness. Galatians 5:6, "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love." The root of all love and goodness is belief in the promises of God.

And we saw the flip side of this truth: that UNBELIEF is the root of all sin.

Which led us to the conclusion that top priority in the Christian life is learning to battle unbelief and fight the fight of faith. We must be rid of the notion that before we were Christians, we were fighting for faith and battling unbelief, but now that we are Christians we can relax because the battle is over; I am a believer; I have won the battle. That's a wrong notion. It leaves you very vulnerable to the subtlety of unbelief. At the end of his life Paul looks back over several decades of being a Christian and says (in 2 Timothy 4:7), "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." He had fought the good fight to keep the faith all his Christian life.

The Role of Other Believers in the Fight of Faith

And one of the ways he had fought it was to surround himself with believers who would pray for him and exhort him. Did you know that Paul always traveled in a team? He was not a loner. There was Barnabas and Silas and Timothy and Luke and Aristarchus and Mark and Epaphras and others. The one time he was forced to go off by himself to Athens his spirit was almost broken by the overwhelming evil there and he sent immediately for Timothy to join him.

You might get the idea that Paul's faith (and the faith of other ministers) was never in need of human reinforcement. But listen to 2 Corinthians 7:5–7,

For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he told us of your longing.

Paul needed the partnership of close friends who could strengthen his faith when fear was beginning to get the upper hand in his life. We need that same partnership. That is what lies behind the 20:20 Vision.

Five Points on Hebrews 10:24–25

Now let's look at our text in Hebrews 10:24–25. I want to make five brief points from these two verses.

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

1. Meeting Together

We are commanded to meet together.

The kind of meeting in view seems to be one that allows for some kind of mutual encouragement and stirring up of one another. It is not talking about merely sneaking into a big church service and sneaking out again. It's talking about the kind of meeting where you say something to someone that will help them be more loving and where someone can say something to you that will help you be more loving, and help you have strength to more good deeds.

This is why we believe so strongly in a ministry of small groups in the church. There is this "one another" principle that requires personal interaction with people at a pretty significant level. Coming to worship on Sunday morning—as important as that is—is not enough. God means for us to face each other so that we can exhort and encourage each other to press on.

The first point, then, is MEET together in smaller groups.

2. Avoiding the Habit of Not Meeting

The second point is, don't get into the habit of not meeting.

This is almost the same as point #1, but verse 25 seems to give it a special stress. So I want to too. It says, "Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some." The warning here is that not meeting with other Christians in this way can become habitual. Ask yourself right now: Are you in the habit of only coming to more or less anonymous, bigger meetings of the church where there doesn't have to be much personal interaction or accountability? Does that pattern of life feel comfortable now?

Many of you would have to answer, Yes. Why? Because it is now a habit. It's what you are comfortable with. In fact it is so much your normal way of looking at the Christian life that what I am saying right now is threatening to you. You do not want to be told that the Bible insists that you are

outside the Lord's will when you do not meet in some kind of smaller group intentionally designed to stir you up to love and good works.

So my second point is: Don't get into this habit of not meeting in this way. And if you are in that habit now, resolve to break it this year. We want to help you with the 20:20 Vision.

3. Increasing Frequency and Seriousness

The third point is that the frequency and seriousness of your meetings should increase as the Day of Judgment draws near.

At the end of verse 25 it says, ". . . and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." That's the Day of Christ's coming and the end of the age. The stresses and troubles and dangers are going to increase as history comes to a close. There will be greater satanic activity, greater evil, greater threats to your faith and love.

Jesus said in Matthew 24:11–12, "Many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold." That's why we better take this word of Hebrews 10:25 very seriously in our day. If your love is going to survive the onslaught of Satan and evil, you must meet with those who can stir you up to love and good works. Woe to the person who thinks they can be a lone wolf Christian as the last Day draws near.

Let's make our meeting for prayer and exhortation be more frequent and more serious and urgent as we see the gathering storm of tribulation and evil.

4. Empowering to Love

Make your meeting together with believers a meeting specifically for the empowering to love. Empowering to love.

Don't be unintentional when you get together. Don't just say, Christian fellowship is good, so we are going to get together and talk. It is good. And talking is wonderful. But the stakes are too high these days to be that casual and lackadaisical about your gathering.

Verse 24 says, "Consider one another in order to stir each other up to love and good works" (literal translation). There is a clear goal. We are meeting so that when we leave, we will have more power to love, more resources to love, more motivation to love, more wisdom to love and do good works, so that people will see our good works, as Jesus said, and give glory to our Father in heaven. The visible glory of God is at stake.

And not only is there a clear goal, there is a kind of urgent intentionality. The word "Consider" suggests that we come on the look out for how we can specifically help other people get power to love. We don't just drift into a 20:20 meeting thinking about all kinds of worldly things. We come on a mission. We come "considering," on the look out, watching, listening. What does David need tonight? What would help Noël be stronger tonight?

So the fourth point is: Be intentional in your coming together. Aim at empowering each other to love and good works.

5. Strengthening Faith in the Promises of God

The last point is in answer to the question: How do you empower another person to love and good works? What is the root of love? What is the root of all righteousness and truly good deeds? The answer is belief in the promises of God. So the fifth point is: Make the main basic goal of every small group to strengthen faith in the promises of God.

This is implied in verse 23: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love . . ." So these two things are very closely related: stirring each other up to love, and helping each other hold on to hope in the promises of God.

How do you empower someone to love and good deeds in spite of all the obstacles they will run into at home and work? Answer: build their hope in the promises of God. Love grows on the taproot of BELIEF in the promises of God.

The Target of Our Exhortation

Look finally at 3:12–13.

Take care, brethren, lest there be in you an evil unbelieving heart [literally: "an evil heart of unbelief"] leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Notice carefully: the target of our exhorting one another is twofold. First, in verse 12 it is the evil heart of unbelief. We should do all we can to help each other battle unbelief in our heart. It is evil and it can lead us to fall away from the living God. Second, in verse 13 the target of our exhorting is the deceitfulness of sin: ". . . that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

The relationship between these two is plain. A heart of unbelief gives rise to sin. And sin is the opposite of love. So our basic agenda in small groups is clear. We must help each other BATTLE

UNBELIEF. We must help each other fight the fight of faith. None of us is above this need. I certainly need it.

And I would ask you to bow your head now and ask the Lord to reveal your need of it too, and how you should go about meeting that need.

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