**Give Truth**

**Hebrews 3:12-19**

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We’re going to be reading from Hebrews chapter 3 today. In January, we take four Sundays to talk about specific core issues of the Christian life, and today we’re going to talk about giving truth to one another in the church. Hebrews is this great letter that talks to Jewish Christians who are being persecuted and they’re being tempted to go back to Judaism because it’s so hard to be a Christian. The world around them is just closing in on them with persecution and difficulty and suffering. And this whole letter appeals to Jewish believers to say, “Christ is worthy of being worshiped. Don’t turn back!” And it calls us as a church, as Gentiles—most of us here are Gentile believers—to still lean in to one another and encourage each other to hold onto faith and not harden our hearts. Let’s read about that today from Hebrews 3.

***12*** *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.* ***13*** *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.* ***14*** *For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.* ***15*** *As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”* ***16*** *For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?* ***17*** *And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?* ***18*** *And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?* ***19*** *So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.*

May that not be true of us! May we enter into the rest, the promise that God has for us.

In our church family devotional guide that we provided for you this month, I told the story of the time that my wife and I joined a group of adventure campers to stay the night high atop a Colorado mountain. We had only been married for 7 months and my wife graciously agreed to go on this, even though this is not her preference whatsoever. And so we made this trek. It was five miles from the entrance point where no motorized vehicles, not even horses, could travel up this particular path. We went up to this mountain lake, and it rained cold rain almost the whole time we were walking up this path. We each had packs on.

When we arrived to the campsite, Kimberly was exhausted. She nestled into her tent to rest and yet, despite her body’s weariness, she didn’t hardly rest at all. She literally had to lay on rock hard ground, so she tossed and turned all night. And in the morning, she awoke with a stabbing pain in her side. Well, we had no recourse but to walk out. As I said, you couldn’t get a motorized vehicle up there. So I encouraged her as best I could, and I took her pack in addition to mine to lighten her burden. And yet, step by step down this mountain, her pain intensified. She began to lean on me just to make progress. We were stopping more frequently every mile downward. And about a half mile from the end, she just doubled over, gasped in pain, and she couldn’t move another step. And so others came around me. They took our packs. I grabbed up Kimberly and we just trudged along to get to the van at the bottom of this trail.

We had an EMT as part of our group, and when we got to the van, I still remember the look in his eyes. As he checked her over, his eyes were just filled with fear. It was a fairly warm afternoon by that time and she was shivering. I put her in the van. We put many coats and blankets on top of her, cranked up the heat, and the EMT knew that she was going into shock. The van raced down the mountain. We were 25 minutes or so away from the nearest medical clinic in a little tiny village. We were swerving down the mountain as fast as safety would allow, and I just began to pray. I believed that I was seeing my dear bride’s life passing right before me. I just prayed, “O God, save her! O God, save her! O God, save her!” as I held her hand. I didn’t realize that I was praying so fast and furiously that I wasn’t taking in enough air and I began to hyperventilate. All of the sudden I was getting dizzy and I thought, “Oh no! I can’t pass out right now. My wife needs me.” I kind of put my head between my legs as I continued to pray.

We finally made it to this little medical clinic. I got out of the van and grabbed her in my arms. Now she was unable to walk a step, and I barged in. At this time particularly in my life, I was a pretty shy person, but all my shyness was completely gone away in this moment. The nurse looked up as I barged in and I began to give orders. “My wife needs help! My wife needs help now!” I saw the little door to the back of the clinic and didn’t wait to be invited. I bashed through that door. There, a doctor met us. He was undoubtedly surprised by all the noise and commotion, hearing someone just barge in. And then as he directed me to a table, I carried her over to put her on the table. I looked at her face and suddenly her eyes dilated completely black. Her head rolled back and she was gone. She had completely now lost consciousness. The doctor took out a needle and jammed it in her leg, and he said, “We’re going to wait about one minute and then we’re going to call the rescue helicopter.” Thankfully, her body responded to the shot that he gave to her. She didn’t need a helicopter, but she did need an ambulance. We transported her to the nearest hospital, which was over an hour drive away.

There at the hospital, we discovered that the combination of exhaustion, high altitude, and a ruptured ovarian cyst, the pain that was so intense, caused her body to just lock up. It couldn’t take that and was going into shock. This was a storm that nearly took the life of a very healthy 24 year old woman. It was a storm that would have broken my heart. It was a storm that would have been somewhat of a deprivation for Jackson today. (Laughter!)

As I look at that story, I give thanks to God for the many people who came alongside us during that time of distress. There was a team of campers who supported us in our trek down the mountain. There was the EMT who acted with very little resources to mediate the shock that was capturing Kimberly’s body. There was the driver who drove that van furiously. There was the nurse and doctor at that little village clinic. There were the ambulance drivers and the medical personnel at the hospital. There were so many people involved to rescue one person. Was it worth it? Yes, it was worth it. All of those folks focused and were engaged in giving energy, giving time, giving talents, to rescue this one precious person. What if there had been no such support? Well, I do not doubt that it would have ended in disaster.

The church of Jesus is designed by God to be a family who watches out for each other; a family who gets involved when spiritual affliction strikes her members. There are spiritual dangers, spiritual diseases that capture the souls of brothers and sisters in that family. And these disasters and diseases must be anticipated. There is the disease of spiritual drift that Hebrews speaks of in chapter 2, and there is the disease of hardness of heart, cold unbelief. And these diseases can capture the life of any member of the family, even those members who seem to be the strongest at the moment.

Oftentimes, we do not have many external indications of internal progress in disease until it breaks forth. When my wife and I began this trip, we had nothing to anticipate except that she is a super healthy person. In fact, at that time, I was the one that she was concerned about because the doctor had just told me a week before that I had mono and to be careful of exerting myself too much. So we weren’t concerned about her at all, yet this disease, this difficulty nearly took her life.

For members of Jesus’ church, God calls us to be ready and to always feed health to one another, to our brothers and sisters, and to anticipate that our brothers and sisters are going to experience temptations, discouragements, sufferings, heartbreaks, disruptions. God intends for many people to be involved to bring each one of us safely to our journey’s end; to bring us to the point where we are persevering in faith all the way until we arrive at home. The danger of unbelief is a clear and present one for every person. God calls us to be alert to it. We have flesh inside of us that is weak. We have a world around us that is corrupt. And we have a devil that is chasing after us to devour us, to devour faith.

So what can we do to help our brothers and sisters make it through life faithful, believing all the way to the end? That’s where Hebrews 3 helps us. If you haven’t opened your Bibles yet, turn there to Hebrews 3:12-19. The central idea is that we, each one of us who are part of the body of Christ, must encourage and exhort one another every day. This is a daily action, so that each person in our church family finishes life with a good, believing heart.

This letter is filled with warnings to believers whose faith is being tested by persecutions and trials. And these warnings are given so that none of us in the 21st Century grow lax in our faith. Never assume that the faith that we hold won’t fade, that it won’t be under siege. We have an enemy that seeks to dislodge faith from our hearts. And if our faith is precious to us, we must fight to keep it! On a physical level, we protect possessions that are precious. We lock up our bicycles when we’re on the trail. We keep our wallets and our purses close to us. We set the alarm on our cars. We lock the doors in our homes. We close the garage door. Friends, no possession is more valuable to any of us than our faith! It is the greatest possession we have because it is the possession that God gave us that connects us to Him, the source of life. So God says to pay attention to protect it, so we don’t lose it. In fact, watch over that precious possession for one another.

The first alert in this letter to Hebrews is given to us in 2:1. Turn there.

**Hebrews 2:1** Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

He says, “We’re getting lackadaisical here. And when we take our eye off of this battle, we will be defeated. So we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard.” Now he has just explained what we heard in chapter 1. It’s the excellency and the glory of Christ. And we have to pay real close attention, or we will drift away from it. So there is a danger to our soul of slow, gradual drift into unbelief. There is a current in which we are all swimming in this world, and that current does not flow in the direction of faith. It flows against us. If we are going to move toward deeper and deeper faith, we must make the effort to swim against the stream. We must, as Hebrews 2 says, pay much closer attention to the message of Jesus; His glory, His excellence, His goodness. Now God doubles down then on this alert, on this warning, in chapter 3.

**Hebrews 3:6** And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence…

If we take our faith and grab hold of the confidence we have in Jesus,

**Hebrews 3:6-8** …and our boasting in our hope. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,…

He goes on to talk about how their ancestors during the time of Moses did just that. They lost the blessing of entering into the Promised Land because they became hardened in their heart, because they didn’t listen. They didn’t receive God’s Word with faith. There is a danger not only of gradual drift, but also of a hardening of our hearts to the wonder, the beauty, the majesty of God Himself.

Now, how does a person receive a hard heart? The hardening of heart happens when we hear God’s Word but don’t receive it by faith. We don’t submit our lives to it. It’s fascinating that in the same room, the Word of God can be proclaimed and in one person, faith is ignited. Life in Christ begins. It deepens. They leave thrilled! The blessing of God has been upon them as they heard the Word of God. There is internal and external transformation. There is new hope. There is new freedom. And in the same room, another person sitting right next to them hears the same Word and they leave with no transformation whatsoever. And in fact, the only transformation that has happened is a negative one. They have left more hard. They have left more resistant. The Word of God is given to us to give life, but there’s a real danger. That’s why he says

***15*** *As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts…*

We see what happens when we hear God’s Word but we don’t respond to it in faith; we don’t receive it in submission to the Lordship of Jesus. Hardening costs us the joy of seeing God’s promised blessings in our lives. So what are we to do?

***12*** *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.* ***13*** *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.*

Verse 12 emphasizes the personal responsibility each of us holds for the health of our own soul. So if our hearts become hard, we can’t point at our parents or our pastor or our church and say, “Well, they didn’t exhort me enough.” No. God Himself, by His Spirit, says,

***12*** *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart,*

Yet in verse 13, we’re reminded that we’re responsible for more that our own soul.

Do you remember how murderous Cain responded to God when God confronted him about the absence of his brother Abel, a brother whom he had killed? Cain asked the question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” What is the answer to that question? If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, the answer to that question is, yes. I am my brother’s keeper. I am responsible for the care of my brother and my sister’s soul.

I want you to look around for a moment at the people who are sitting near you. I know it’s uncomfortable. It’s a little bit like being in an elevator and you’re looking at the numbers (Laughter!). But just look around for a moment at some of the people. Are you your brother’s keeper? Yes! God has placed you in this family to care deeply about the condition of the soul of the people around you. God has some way for you to express that care. We’re not to say, “Whether they arrive safely in heaven or not, that’s not my concern.” No, it is your concern. God calls us to such concern. For some, church feels like just a download of information. For some, they go to a church service, they hear some good stuff, they sing some great songs, they pray some sweet prayers, and then they get in their car and they go home. God intends for His church to be far more than that. That’s why He says that we are to

***13*** *But exhort one another every day…*

Disconnection and loneliness is a growing problem in our culture. And that surprises some because we have so many ways through social media to connect to one another. And yet poll after poll is showing that people in our culture are lonelier and lonelier.In 1985 a poll was done that said the average person would say, “I have three close friends.” For that same question today, people would say, “I have an average of two close friends.” And in that poll, it was said that 25% of the people responding to that poll said they have no close friends. None! That’s a huge problem! God didn’t create us to be isolated. God created us to be in community, to be in relationship inside this family. In any family, information is really important. But information that is communicated is so that we would grow in our relationship; grow in caring for one another and loving one another. Here’s what Paul says in 1 Timothy.

**1 Timothy 1:5** **(NASB)** But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

The reason why we’re given information, the teaching of God and His revelation about Himself and about His purpose and His plan and His actions, is love. It’s love for God, vertical, but love also horizontal to one another. Friends, we are our brother’s keeper. We’re responsible to press into other people’s lives; not to wait until they press into ours. Press in to other people’s lives to find an avenue to encourage and exhort. Again, the responsibility that commands each of us here in Hebrews 3 is to exhort one another every day. The same responsibility is spoken in a slightly different tone in Hebrews 10.

**Hebrews 10:24** And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,

Let’s take a moment and think about that. And he goes on and says

**Hebrews 10:25** 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.

If we don’t meet together, we’re not going to encourage one another. Already there were some in the 1st Century church that didn’t come to worship services, didn’t come to fellowship gatherings. So he says, “Let’s not do that. But rather, when we come to meet, let’s make sure that we’re encouraging one another.”

Now if you had your Greek glasses on and you were looking at Hebrews 3:13 and Hebrews 10:24-25, you’d make an observation. The word that is translated “exhort” and the word that is translated “encourage” is the same word. It’s *parakaleo*. It just means to come alongside to help another person. It’s the word that Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit. He said

**John 14:16** And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,

This is another Helper, another Counselor, another Encourager. He is One who is going to come alongside to assist you, and He’ll be with you forever.

**The Meaning of Encouragement and Exhortation**

So when we think about what God is saying to exhort and encourage, what do we mean? The word “exhort” is usually a stronger word. It’s to appeal to another person; to urge them on through advice. The word “encourage” means to inspire. It’s to inspire hope and courage. Why does the ESV translate the same Greek word, *parakaleo*, with two different English words; encourage and exhort? The answer is because the context seems to justify it. Sometimes we come alongside a person to help them through this soft word of encouragement and inspiration. Sometimes we come alongside of them through a harder word of urging, a harder word of appealing.

In Hebrews 3, the context is you’re going to harden your heart and you’re going to end up like the Israelites in the days of Moses. In Hebrews 10, the context is Jesus has sacrificed His own blood for us so that He has made a way for us to come and enter into the very presence of the Holy of Holies. So exhort in this context where you’re struggling with temptation to harden your heart. Encourage when you have Christ in front of you. Both of them are necessary. Anyone who has coached any kind of team understands the necessity of both exhortation and encouragement toward team, so that the team can be successful. That’s how a coach comes alongside.

I remember when I was a youth pastor, we took a group of kids to Colorado. One of the activities we did was repelling down a mountain. So we gathered them up on top of the mountain. There was staff at the camp that was leading this event. They were experts in repelling and all the safety procedures. We had a group of about 20 kids up there, teenagers. At the end of the instruction, the counselor said, “Who wants to go first?” We had a 6th grader, he was about 12 years old, immediately raise his hand. “You want to go first? Are you sure?” “Yeah! I want to go first!” He was so excited and so enthused. Okay, we let the twelve year old go first. So he gets everything strapped in and gets his ropes and all of his gear on. He was so excited that he just takes that first step which is the harder, scariest one. He leans into that rope and down he goes. And he is just flying down the thing until he gets about 50 yards. Something happened in his mind and fear just absolutely consumed him.

He was the first one. Everybody was waiting for him to get to the bottom so they can go. But he is just clinging to the mountain now and he’s crying out, “I can’t move!” And the staff is so encouraging. You took the hardest step already. You can take the next step. “No I can’t!” You’re a brave young man. “No I’m not!” (Laughter!) So then one of them repelled down alongside of him and said, I’m here right with you. “I don’t care!” (Laughter!) The counselor said, Why don’t you just take this one foot and move it six inches. “No I’m not!” He was just frozen right there. This went on for about fifteen minutes. Fortunately his dad was present at the camp and he was ten minutes away. So we called his dad. “Hey, you’re son’s kind of stuck up on the mountain. We don’t know what to do.” (Laughter!) So his dad started making his way to us.

By this time we have to *parakaleo’s, paraclete’s* coming alongside the guy. We can carry you down. “No, don’t touch me!” His dad steps out of his truck. He looks up at the mountain, sees his son, and he shouts out, “Johnny! You get down the mountain right now!” (Laughter!) “Everybody’s waiting on you! Move it!” And do you know what? Johnny started moving. (Laughter!) And when Johnny got down the mountain he had this big smile on his face. He hugged his dad. He was so proud. Johnny needed some exhortation. Encouragement wasn’t helping him. And that’s why we have to understand the context of how we’re helping each other. Sometimes we need encouragement. Other times, we just need a word of exhortation. When we meet together on Sunday and through the week, God intends for each of us to come alongside of each other. Use words to urge one another forward in the faith. Why would we do that?

**The Motivations for Encouragement and Exhortation**

Motivation #1: The real danger of unbelief entering the heart of our brothers and sisters and bringing disaster.

***12*** *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.*

He is the One who is the source of all that is good.

***13*** *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.*

That your mind won’t be clouded. Sin clouds our thinking. Truth that used to seem so clear to us can be lost the next day. Deceitfulness of sin is so strong.

***14*** *For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.* ***15*** *As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”* ***16*** *For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?*

Look at all those people who saw God do miracles. They were led by the greatest leader, and yet they hardened their hearts. If it’s possible for them, who are we to say that that won’t happen to us.

The writer of Hebrews is highlighting this danger of unbelief by quoting from Psalm 95. That’s very significant to a Hebrew, to a Jew. Every Jewish person would have known this passage by heart because it’s the opening line that serves as a call to worship every week at the Sabbath meetings. This is the line that they would recite every week: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” These were solemn words repeated out loud by every faithful Jewish person, week after week, year after year. God uses this to perk up the messianic Jews, those who have come to believe in Jesus, to the warning. The Jews understood something that we Evangelicals may have forgotten. And that is that no one reaches a point in their life where unbelief is not a clear and present danger. None of us can afford to grow lax. Not one of us! The battle is hard. The Enemy is powerful. Left to our own resources, we will fail. That’s why we need the resource of God’s Holy Spirit and the resource of Jesus’ church.

There’s a picture that I’ve set before you on one occasion in the past. I want to set it before you again. It speaks to me.



These are cape buffalo in Africa. You see that they have sharp horns. They are deadly horns, but this animal is not a predator. This animal knows that there are predators around. Lions are all around seeking a tasty cape buffalo to eat. And in order to defend themselves…they’re not predators. They’re not going to devour any other animal. But they have to defend themselves. That’s why they were given these tusks. But do you notice what they’re doing? Their hind quarters, which are very soft and fleshy and completely defenseless, are pointed toward each other. And each of these adult cape buffalo are relying on the other adult cape buffalo for protection. But they’re also both willing to courageously stand in their gap to say, “If a lion comes, I will meet him head on, face to face. In this way, we’re able to defend ourselves.” I love this picture also because you see the little calf? It’s unable to be part of the protection efforts. And so they said, “Let’s put him right in the center.”

In the church, there are strong believers. None of us are so strong that we don’t need each other, because we all have vulnerable parts to us. We need each other. And we need mature people to be able to say, “We’re going to be courageous. We’re going to be faithful. We’re going to stand in the gap for each other and we’re going to face that Enemy head on by the power of the Holy Spirit.” But inside the church there are also some folks who are either because of immaturity or because of spiritual sickness, they are unable to be part of the defensive efforts, at least right now, and they need to be set right inside with that community saying, “We’ll hold the line for you for this season.” This passage calls us away from a passive approach to relationships, and to an active approach to relationships. I need to find other believers and stand with them or I’ll be devoured and others will be devoured.

Do these verses teach that a believer can lose his or her salvation? Not at all.All believers are secure in Christ; completely secure. But a part of God’s means for securing His people is to call us to press in faith to Him and to exhort one another. That’s God’s means on how He has us persevere. God’s sovereignty in saving us is not in contrast to our responsibility to fix our eyes on Him and to labor for one another, calling one another to listen to Christ.

Motivation #2: The glory of God in saving His people and building His church.

The end of Hebrews, in 13:21 talks about “to Christ be glory forever and ever.” When the church is weak, God’s reputation in the world is weak. Many are looking to defame God, and a believer who turns in unbelief, either cold unbelief of agnosticism, atheism, or what I would call soft unbelief, which is, “I still affirm those things, but I’m just not living it.” Those folks defame the Name of God. So we’re saying, let’s not let God’s Name be defamed. We care about the Name of God.

I wish that this danger were so distant that I could say I’ve rarely seen it in my life. But I have to tell you, too often have I walked with people, have I prayed with people, have I served with people, have I been in Seminary with people who now have entered into the deceitfulness of sin and have given their lives over to unbelief. In 25 years at this church, thankfully it’s never happened here at Bethany. But over and over and over I’ve seen folks who sat in services singing with genuine emotion to the Lord, wander away from the faith and be devoured.

**The Message of Encouragement and Exhortation**

What are we to say when we get with each other? And again, I turn back to Hebrews 2.

**Hebrews 2:1** Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

So what have we heard? What is the “it”? The “it” refers back to Hebrews 1. Hebrews 1 is a message of the excellence and glory of our Savior, Jesus. And the message we give is not a self-help message. It’s not “you can do better,” “try harder,” “live a better life,” “you can do it.” The message of encouragement and exhortation always has to do with Christ at the center. Then we won’t have any other kinds of encouragements, but Christ is always the center. Jesus is the message! Only with Christ as our center can we be successful in turning from sin and do what is right. So we remind one another of the glory, the excellence, the power, the faithfulness of Christ to win the battle. We urge one another to keep our eyes set upon Him; to grab hold of Him as sufficient for our every need. And so we lay hold of Jesus. That’s the message!

**The Means of Encouragement and Exhortation**

How do we go about encouraging one another with this message of Christ’s sufficiency, of Christ’s glory? What can we do to put feet to this command? Again in Hebrews 10, it’s not enough to just simply meet together. It’s not enough to simply attend meetings where we pray together, sing together and listen to the Word together. We must connect in real relationships with one another; relationships that are transparent to the point where we’re able to encourage and exhort one another. I want to get very, very practical this morning as we close. There are three applications.

Application #1: Meet together with a purpose of worship and encouragement.

So when we come, it’s really important for us to have purpose. Vertical first. I want to meet with God. I want to worship Him. I want to express His praise, His thanksgiving. But also, while I’m here, I want to be used by God to influence other brothers and sisters, some of whom really, really, really need encouragement and exhortation, or disaster will strike them this week. And I want my eyes to be opened, to be used by God’s Spirit. I want to live my life in a way that every moment is an exciting adventure of being used by God. That’s what every believer can anticipate.

And so, as you come, what I want to encourage you to do is prepare your heart to come. Don’t just enter into the church service, but enter with a prayer. “Lord, first I want to glorify You. I want to praise You with my heart. I want my heart engaged. But also Lord, would You lead me to some conversations with your people where I would encourage?” You’d be surprised at the kinds of conversations that God will create if you come with a prayerful heart attitude, asking God to use you and to open up those doors.

Yesterday was a great encouragement first because my wife had been a week in Arizona with her parents, and she came home. So that was a great encouragement. The second great encouragement though, before she took off on the plane, she asked in the morning, “I’ve been thinking about the message about us being ambassadors for Christ. I would really love to talk to somebody about the Lord. Would you pray with me about having God sit me next to someone that would allow me to talk with them about the Gospel?” This is great! I didn’t say, “No. We can’t pray that.” I said, “Yes. I’d love to pray for you that way.” So we prayed. When she came home, she had this huge smiling face, first thing in meeting her, other than giving me a great hug. She said, “I have to tell you how God answered that prayer.”

She had almost the entire plane ride, a conversation where she was opening up the Scriptures and just talking about who Jesus is and what God has done. It was a person who happened to be the sister of one of her friends when she was in Junior High. This person, at the end of this conversation, was so thankful for this kind of conversation because she had so many questions about God and about the Gospel. And she said, “You know, when I first came on this plane, I was not supposed to sit in this seat. But the seat I was sitting in, there was a husband who was going to be separated from his wife. So I said, ‘Why don’t you take my seat and I’ll just go back to the seat you were going to have.’” Do you see how God works? Isn’t it cool to be part of that when you see that happen? And I think that’s what we lose when we don’t come with an anticipation of being used by God in sweet ways. I’m not saying that every day is going to be a story like that, but I’m going to say that every day is going to be an adventure.

Application #2: Commit to building deep relationships in the church.

Open your life and your home to share generously and transparently with others. God, in love, opened Himself to relationship with us. And He did it while we were yet resistant. Aren’t you glad that God does not say, “Well, I gave My Son to you. I gave My Spirit to you. And now, after Me being so generous and opening up heaven for you, you still won’t reciprocate. You won’t invite Me to meet with you for fifteen minutes in the morning. I’m done! I’m not going to invite you anymore.” Aren’t you glad that God continues to persevere? Oftentimes, we act like, “I asked five people to my house and nobody asked me back.” That’s what God does for us, right? Let’s be Godlike in our attitudes towards reaching out, trusting Him to do something that is beyond our ability to create it, but knowing that God is honored through it. Take initiative and continue to take initiative in deep relationships.

Application #3: Take initiative today to speak words of encouragement and exhortation to strengthen faith in one another.

I want to get very, very specific. Again, the Word that God says is

***13*** *But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,”*

So that includes today and tomorrow and the next. I want to get very specific now. I want to ask you to write four little short phrases on your worship folder, bulletin, somewhere. Just write them.

1 Text each day.

1 Phone call this week.

1 devotional reading.

5 minutes.

1 Text each day. What I mean by that…I’m going to ask you to check now. Before you leave here, check two. Not all four. Just choose two. This is very specific. What you are committing to do is to encourage and exhort brothers and sisters in the faith this week.

1 Text each day. Just this week say, “Each day, I’m going to send a different person just a text telling them, ‘I’m praying for you. Here’s a verse that I’m praying over your life. Is there any other way I can pray for you today?’” It’s just that simple! Every day, a different person, for one week. It’ll take you about two or three minutes.

Second, 1 phone call this week. I know this takes a little longer, but call up someone, a brother or sister the Lord lays on your heart. Just say, “I’ve been thinking of you and praying for you. The pastor asked me to do this in his sermon. So I just want you to know that you’re the person that God has laid on my heart. First, is there anything that I can pray over you and for you? Second, can I share with you a verse that God has really encouraged me with? Here’s what God has been doing in my life as He’s teaching me?” Just one phone call where Christ is the center.

Third, 1 devotional reading. We have a devotional book for you. Do 1 devotional reading with a brother or sister. It could be with your husband. It could be with your wife. It could be with a friend. It could be with a coworker. Say, “Let’s just read through this. Read through the Scripture, read through that devotion, and let’s talk about one way we can apply what we’re learning.”

And last is 5 minutes. The last option. We’re going to say “Amen,” and have the closing song. Just take five minutes to hang around and say, “Lord, is there anybody You’d have me to connect with and talk with before I leave, before I get in my car today? Before I leave this church service, is there someone I can say, ‘Hi’ to? Someone I don’t know? Someone I do know and I just want to connect with them? 5 minutes. So choose two of those. I close with this:

***12*** *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.* ***13*** *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.*

Let’s be a family that ministers to one another the Gospel of Jesus.