Heb 10:24-25, 3:13 "Let's Stay Together"

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[0:00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

All right. Let's start the Wheel of Bible text for today. Where are we landing? Oh, the Wheel of Bible text.
Where are we going to go today? This is exciting. Is that really what I'm supposed to preach on? I'm just kidding. It's good morning. I'm so glad everybody's here today. Happy July 4th weekend. I hope it's been a safe and fun one for you and your families. I'm excited this morning to continue on in our series of one another as we talk about living in gospel community together.
I have to be honest, Will's last two sermons have unsettled me quite a bit. And so as we move this morning into considering how to spur one another on toward righteousness, I feel like he did me the service or disservice of knocking down some of my basic objections to moving together into commitment to a gospel community.
[1:22] And that stuff comes from serious pain that's been dealt to me from people in the church, from churches themselves, basically by other sinners in what was supposed to be a really safe and spiritual and Christian and one another environment.

And over the last two weeks, we've dealt with the joint realities of first confession and then with forgiveness. And they've served together.
I think it's on your cards, kids. It's together on your cards. Yes. No, it isn't. Put it at the top of your card. You get extra credit. Together to knock down most of my biggest practical and felt objections toward developing some kind of a deep and intentional gospel relationship and community and dive in.
And I know that's not something a pastor is supposed to say, but we're all wounded in different ways. And for me, these are two areas that help to knock down those objections.
Love has been defined by will as a deeply felt value moving toward another in sacrificial action. And while God doesn't call us to dive into manipulative or self-destructive relationships or spiritually abusive relationships, he does call us to remember who we are as blood-bought and blood-washed followers of King Jesus.
[3:01] He chased sinners like you and me down through time and space. And he still chases us down and he loves us.

And he showed us his love and his death and resurrection. So we ought to confess our sins to one another. Not only is it a commandment of the Bible, it's something that's good to do.
We ought to do it not only because we're commanded to, but because of the practical help it offers believers. We seek God and we love each other well by telling each other our sins and what's going on in our lives.
We confess because we're not alone in our sin. When you confess, you find out that other people go through it too. And not that it's okay, but that you together can push each other and spur one another on to King Jesus.
And we forgive each other not only because we're commanded to, but also because it reminds us of our need for a Savior. We've been forgiven much.
[4:05] God had to send his son down to die for us. And forgiveness and that self-sacrificial reality helps us to remind ourselves of that and to remind others of it as they watch us.

But most importantly, we do these things because it's God's design for his people. So that we can grow in our understanding of his love for us in this gospel community.
And that we might be equipped to show that love to people who are not a part of our gospel community. Or should I say yet a part of our gospel community. So this morning we press on to the

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equally daunting goal.
One that perhaps shows how great the stakes are when we abandon gospel community. Or when we replace it with something else. And so since we've tackled several factors over the last couple of weeks, today we're going to tackle the comfortable factors of idolatry and selfishness.
That lead us often to that replacement or abandoning of gospel community. So whether it be family or money or boredom.
[5:15] Or simply what appears to be greener grass. We are all prone to wander away from the built-in grace of meeting together. So with that in mind, let's humbly approach scripture.

You see there, it's in your pew Bible on page 1007. And I'll begin reading actually earlier than the verses assigned there. I'm going to begin reading in 19 so that we get a broader context of what we're talking about.
Although we will focus mostly on verses 24 and 25. Or 23 and 24. So beginning in verse 19.
Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus.
By the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain. That is through his flesh. And since we have a great priest over the house of God.
Let us draw near with a true heart and full assurance of faith. With our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.
[6:20] For he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir one another up to love and to 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. For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth. There's no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.
But a fearful expectation of judgment. And a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. You're welcome to back up with me to chapter 3.
Or you can just listen as I read aloud. Beginning in verse 12. Actually I'll back that up to verse 7 as well. Therefore as the Holy Spirit says.
Today if you hear his voice. Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion. On the day of testing in the wilderness. Where your fathers put me to test. And saw my works for 40 years.
[7:18] Therefore I was provoked with that generation. And said. They always go astray in their heart. They have not known my ways. As I swore in my wrath.

They shall not enter my rest. Take care brothers. Lest there be in any of you an evil unbelieving heart. Leading you to fall away from the living God.
But exhort one another every day. As long as it's called today. That none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. This is the word of the Lord.
It's trustworthy. We should put our faith in it. Pray with me. Pray with me. Gracious God and Heavenly Father.
We need you to enter into this place. As we tackle a difficult issue. Please. Illumine our hearts and minds.
[8:13] To be open to what you are teaching us individually. That we might be able to share it with each other corporately. These are not black and white issues. This isn't a cut and dry conversation.

This is a conversation of hues of gray. And we desperately need to be convicted by your Holy Spirit. So that we can be fully convinced of our behavior.
Father. And I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts will be pleasing unto you as we do this. For the sake of King Jesus.
Amen. So many years ago in a church far, far away. A young pastor named me was asked by several families.
And one family in particular about the travel sports that they were going to participate in with their children. This family had a son who was exceptional at baseball.
[9:16] Exceptional at baseball at a young age. And they wanted to tackle what it looked like for them to participate in tournaments that often overflowed into Sundays. And would restrict them from being able to come to church.

They were the kind of people that came to church on Sunday mornings and Sunday evenings and Wednesday evenings. If the door was open, they were there. And they were very concerned about the effect and impact that this might have on their family.

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And I basically gave them the sage advice of, Hey, you should be in church. I don't know what to tell you. I was a little bit more nuanced than that in caring.
But the effect of what I said was that to them. What I didn't know I'd wandered into was somewhat of a hornet's nest. The father was fairly convinced that the son was on his way to the major leagues at age 13.
And the mother came up in a family that was very, very staunch attenders of church. And that's where you're supposed to be. And that's where you spend your time and your energies.
[10:17] So there I was, talking to them and not realizing what the actual situation was going on in their household.

To me, it really was that cut and dry. How could you get involved in something that's going to take you away so regularly from gathering together with people who encourage you? Now, Maryland is a much darker place than the South.
We don't really have church and things like that in our air and in our water the way that I see it down here. So maybe to me, I felt something more vital about attending.
But it raised a big question in my mind because what ended up happening was I found out that they actually made an idol of attending church.
To me, attending church was life-giving. It was what I needed to be around people who had been convicted by the Holy Spirit in the way that I had. And really didn't know what we were doing, but we knew that we needed him desperately.
[11:19] And we heard great stories from each other about his faithfulness. And we recalled stories from the Bible about God's faithfulness. And it girded us up to kind of participate and live in that world. And I was coming from that place.

They were coming from a place of idolatry of the church. And so by oversimplifying this conversation, I didn't serve to walk with them well through the issue. I unwittingly just kind of jammed a wedge down into the family.
They didn't need to be convicted by a young pastor that they should be in church on Sunday mornings and Sunday evenings and Wednesday nights. They needed to be exhorted by a loving sibling.
By a brother in Christ. By a brother in Christ. That we need to hold every thought captive to him.
And as we walk through this this morning, I want to encourage you there.
Don't hear me saying things that are pointed at you. Hear me trying to be a loving brother encouraging us all to hold our thoughts captive to King Jesus.
[12:33] That's the starting point for conversations about the meaning and the way conversations like this filter into our hearts and into our lives. And that family didn't need that young pastor.

They needed someone willing to walk with them through what it might look like to begin missing time with their fellow Christians. The church where they'd found that community.
To hazard a guess, we all have something. I mean, it could be travel baseball. It could be swimming. It could be vacations. It could be the next deal. It could be the once in a lifetime opportunity that needs my attention now.
It could be my family obligations. It could be school projects. It could be a lack of energy because your life has been sucked dry by your kids.
It could be a spouse that doesn't seem to care as much as you do about your faith. It could be that you have no way to attend because your ride forgot to bring you.
[13:36] It could be that you have anxiety about being in big groups. It could be a fear that, once again, no one's going to talk to you this week and you're going to walk in. And you're going to walk out.

And you're going to be alone. We all have something that can take the place of vital gospel relationships. The problem is the dwelling in these things ends up devastatingly empty.
The pastor writing to these Hebrews knows this. And this is a fact that he points out as the main point of what he's getting at here is the eternal reality that meeting together has great impact on our souls.
It's a primary means by which God has given us to not only come to a setting like this and hear his word preached, but also to go into a setting like Connect Communities and hear each other talk about these things, hear how the Holy Spirit's worked inside of other people to see how he's working amongst us as a group.

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It's why we can go to table talk groups or to women's small groups and what the necessity of all of that type of meeting together is.
[15:04] It's not about checking off boxes. It's about understanding how desperately we need our Savior and how desperately we need each other to remind ourselves of that need for our Savior.

Much like these Hebrews, you and I have a desperate need for each other. We have a desperate need to witness the work of the Holy Spirit in each other's lives as well as amongst us as a group. We need to remind each other of God's faithfulness. And we need to push each other toward Christ. Gospel communities need to be with each other in order to defend against the practice of sin and also to remember that King Jesus has earned our identities as his sons and daughters for our Heavenly Father.
So let's look at this in a couple of different ways. As much as this might seem like a theology of Al Green, it's not. It all just happened to work this way. Let's get together being the title.
So what does good gospel community look like? So good is the goodness of God's design for gospel community.
[16:24] Let's read it right here in verses 23 and 24 of chapter 10. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for he who promises faithful.

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and to good works. Not neglecting to meet together is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.
And all the more as you see the day drawing near. We get a couple of simple commands here. First in verse 23, let's hold fast. Hold fast. Hold fast to that confession.
Do you remember confessing King Jesus as your Lord and Savior? For some of us that came in a time when you were knocked to the ground in a fetal position, almost saying, my Lord and my God, and you knew who he was.
Undoubted. For some of us, and this is no less amazing if you were raised inside of a family that professes and now you hold that faith to yourself. That's no less amazing than someone who was drawn to God from other incredible circumstances.
[17:30] What should amaze us is that we each have this confession. There are other people that confess and hold to that as well. These are people you need to be around.

Then in verse 24, let us consider how to stir up one another to love and to good works. Not neglecting to meet together, but encouraging one another all the more as you see the day coming. See, that confession is a bond that goes deeper than any promise of health and wealth and any ideas of temporal happiness or any ideas at perfection.
That hope tells a deeper story than anything that I've ever experienced, and it's at the core of who I am, and it drips from my fingertips as I live in desperation every day. And based upon that, I must consider how to stir one another up.
Do you remember Will talking about this last week? Hearing from someone else, I struggle with that too. We need to pray for each other.
[18:46] We need to be around each other. We need to see that desperation on other people so that we can be reminded of the love that our God has shown us in his son. We need to run to the king who knows about our angry outbursts.

We need to run to the king who knows about our lust. We need to run to the king who knows about our poor reactions to our children. We need to run to the king who knows about our disdain for our co-worker.
Let's run to the king and consider how we might show love in difficult situations. Let's run to the king and consider how we might do good in the face of being tired or being oppressed or being marginalized or being forgotten about.
We need to run to our king. It's easy to talk about these things because simply this is a command to be together and encourage one another to run to our king.
Not too long ago, I believe it was Easter Sunday morning. In fact, it was Easter Sunday morning. I should have had that worked out before I started talking about it. But Easter Sunday morning, not strange for us to have a bunch of visitors here.
[19:57] Some of you might time, if you're coming to the main service, you might time getting here, you know, like at 930 as opposed to 935, right? Because you need to make sure you have a seat. And for others of us, we're just not even going to fight that battle.

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We want to come early to the sunrise service. And at the sunrise service, there was a visiting father and son. It's really weird to have visitors at the sunrise service.
And we found out that this father and son were here as the son was participating in a travel hockey tournament over at the Iceplex. And it was just really important to the dad that they find somewhere where they can be around believers and worship.
And if he didn't say this, but if you've been to hockey tournaments, especially teenage hockey tournaments, not the most uplifting places in the world, in the stands or on the ice.
And I just thought, man, this guy's really doing it well. He doesn't know why he's doing this. He just knew that it was really important to get his family here so that they could be around other believers, they could sing to Jesus, and they could celebrate his death and his resurrection.
[21:13] It was a really simple act that spoke volumes to me. That's the goodness of God's community. That's the goodness of being together in gospel community.

It's a faith thing. God calls us to be together. God calls us to be together. If your motivation is that when you drill into it and you understand that your heart motivation is, hey, you know what?
I need to be around people who call me to my Savior. And I don't know why, but somehow they need to be around me too. That's usually a good enough reason.
That's a safe place to go. And there's something really beautiful in trusting in the promises of God and gathering together. So if that's the good, what is the opposite of that?
Well, it's the bad. In both of these texts we read today, there are some pretty stark consequences laid out for forsaking gospel community.
[22:22] Let me go back to chapter 3, verses 12 and 13. Take care, brothers, lest any of you be, excuse me, lest there be any of you, in any of you, an evil and unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God.

Wow. An evil and unbelieving heart might be the reason you don't want to meet with other people, why you don't want to see your sin in the mirror of the reality of Scripture.
And that leads you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, listening to other people talk about that sin and how it's not okay.
exhort one another every day, as long as it's called today, so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. What a terrible experience.
What a terrible experience to know sin so well that you don't call it sin anymore. That it hardens your heart. It changes your perspective.
[23:44] It makes you unmalleable. There's something about sovereignty that works well with responsibility. And all that I know is that I've turned my face toward things that I shouldn't have before and walked down that road, and that's not okay.

Now, through God's grace, I've been called back by brothers and sisters who love me and are faithful. But I know what it feels like to go down that road. It's not a magical thing that suddenly happens.
It's a commitment in your heart to walk away from King Jesus. And that's terrifying, and it's sobering. And going back to chapter 10, verses 26 and 27, if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.
That's not saying what you might think it's saying. It's not saying that Jesus no longer died for sins. It's simply saying that your sins are still on your head.
the wrath of God is still coming for you because of your active choice to go after these things.
[25:15] And so if there's no longer a sacrifice, what is there? There's a fearful expectation of judgment. We come here today, most of us are very hopeful and we love the grace of King Jesus.

The opposite of the grace of King Jesus is a fearful expectation of judgment. When it comes to eternity and to judgment, God outside of Jesus is terrible.
His wrath is real, and his wrath will be satiated. And sometimes I know I don't take that fully into account when I love, man, I don't want to scare the hell out of people.
I want to scare them into living a life for King Jesus and understanding what he's done for us. But the reality outside of Jesus is that you only have yourself to hope in.
And that's terrifying. That's a terrifying place to be. And in the end, there's only really one ending to that. It seemed like this was going to be a better segue in my head.
[26:49] Fleetwood Mac. So, Lindsey Buckingham and Stevie Nicks. Lindsey Buckingham was lead guitarist, and Stevie Nicks was one of the singers for Fleetwood Mac.

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And there are rumors about what happened inside of the band. That was a pun. But it's hard to really know what happened inside of the band.
But the most famous, probably, of what happened was between Stevie and Lindsey because they both were chief songwriters in the band, and they wrote songs about each other. Recently, You Can Go Your Own Way has been on a car commercial or a truck commercial, and that's why this got in my head, thinking about the two of them.
But the bottom line of what really happened with them is that they decided they didn't want to be together anymore, so they stopped. Like I said, there are stories about how that came about, but that's what happened.
Even though they remained in the same band, and they toured until Lindsey was fired a couple years ago, I think. They never talked. They never collaborated on music.
[28:10] They just completely fell away from each other. They decided they weren't going to be a part of whatever they were prior to that.

Twenty years into this ministry thing, that's what I see a lot happening in churches when people leave. It seems to be a simple decision to just not be a part of it anymore.
They just don't want to be there. They don't want to commit. They don't want anything. It's incredibly sad for me to see that. It's also really difficult because it creates some kind of a complicated reality for us to navigate because it really falls back on the root of what I said in the introduction.
Do our reasons to forsake gospel communities stand against the necessity of holding every thought captive to Christ? I'm not going to go through a litany of reasons why people have left churches I've been around.
I don't always know what was going on in their hearts or in their minds, but that question's a question I can ask you and we should be able to ask each other. Are you leaving because you're holding every thought captive to Christ and you are now convinced you need to go?
[29:29] Or is it something else? Are you replacing what God has ordained and commanded with something else? How can we know if and when we live in a vacuum absent of other voices?

It's from that community. How can you know if you're holding every thought captive to Christ? And what about sin? What about the existence of sin and the reality of sin and the need to be called away from it and the reason Jesus came to die?
The whole story of the Bible, God's love for us covering up our sin. How can you have that spoken into when you leave? So that's one poll.
The goodness, I think, was another poll. But most of us probably don't exist over there or over there. We exist somewhere in the middle of this. So what is that middle ground?
Where is that place that most of us exist? So whether good or bad, happy or sad is our next point here.
[30:50] And what this is discussing is the reality of walking through life with one another in gospel community. And I'm going to go to the end of chapter 10 here because I want to end on a really encouraging note.

Let me read verses 32 and 33. Recall the former days after you were enlightened. You endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and to affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.
This is why we don't neglect to meet together. No man is an island. Peter Render cannot exist in this faith and be constantly pushed towards righteousness without my relationships here.
Render, kids. Render. All right. It's vitally important. I think one of the biggest jokes that God played on me is making me a pastor because I desperately need to be a pastor in order to do the faithful and dutiful work of a Christian.
He knew that about me. I needed my wife to push me toward righteousness in ways that I never would understand otherwise. I need my relationships with James and with Derek and with Will and with Ron and with Ty and Christine.
[32:34] I need these people forming who I am. I need George Mayer speaking into my life and Jeremy McCoy who would normally be there but he's forsaking meeting with us today.

Speaking into my life. This is my gospel community. Is it shaped and does it look like everything I want it to be?
Probably not but that's not why I'm in this gospel community. I'm in this gospel community because God's called me here and I need it.

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I need it desperately. I'm really not that different from you all when it comes to that and as we discuss small groups and different ways to be plugged in and to be prayerful with each other and to be in Christ-centered relationships and to be in Bible studies and to do all of these things, it's us as pastors and elders and church leaders and people who just are so desperate for each other and desperate for Jesus and we don't want you having the experience of coming in here and being the person who's alone.
We don't want you to think that you're not worthy to be here because you can listen to our stories and go, wow, I see a lot of myself in that and something of what was going on with the Hebrews, we don't want you to think that you're too good to be here either because the reality of the death and resurrection of King Jesus is that we're all cut down at the knees at the foot of the cross.
[34:26] We all need equally and no one is more prepared or more able to bring themselves to Jesus than another. That's not the way that it works.

I think for me, most importantly, gospel community has kept me from wallowing in my sin. It helps to keep us from being content in idolatry and in selfishness.
It forces us to rejoice with those who are rejoicing whether we're rejoicing or not and it forces us to lament with those who are lamenting whether we're lamenting or not.
It forces us to listen to brothers and sisters who are marginalized by the church. It forces us to look outside of ourselves and see the poor and the disenfranchised, the least, the lost, the loneliest, the littlest and the left out and to want to move toward them with the gospel.
It forces us to understand that this is not our gospel community defined by us. It's actually redefined every time someone comes into it because they're an equal player.
[35:55] It's a beautiful thing. I want to end today by reading the full passage that I just began there starting in verse 32.

I'm going to read all the way through 39 and then I'll pray. Recall the former days when after you were enlightened you endured a hard struggle with sufferings.
Sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.
Do you know that this morning? Therefore, don't throw away your confidence which has a great reward. Lord, for you have need of endurance so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.
For yet a little while and the coming one will come and will not delay. But my righteous one shall live by faith and if he shrinks back my soul has no pleasure in him.
[37:05] But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for your love and commitment to your children who have run astray and continue to run astray. Thank you for the means of grace that you've given us in your word in beautiful songs that remind us of who you are and of your faithfulness to us.
In prayer in gathering together to worship you and to acknowledge your reign over the universe your reign over our world your reign over our church and your reign over us individually.
And thank you for loving us and I pray that we would know more of that love tomorrow than we could even fathom today and that that serves to change us through the power of your Holy Spirit and to people who run after you and who encourage others to run after you all for the sake of King Jesus.
Amen. For more information visit us online at southwood.org or at Wilco of End of the Day and for your peace in Alaska and with us visit us and here halement and as well as in the good of thousands ofiento and to have a'll do that and as well let's wanna again onun

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