

Series: Healthy Rhythms for a Fruitful Life

Title: The Rhythm of Gathering Together Part 1

Passage: Hebrews 10:19-25

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Introduction:

- Last week, we saw the importance of seeking godliness in our lives.
 - Just like you can't get shredded, by merely getting a gym membership.
 - Pastor Greg reminded us, how we can't grow in godliness, by merely owning a Bible.
 - Instead, we need to practice, and progress, and persist in godliness.

- As we continue in our series on forming healthy spiritual rhythms, I want to speak to you today, about how you can draw strength from Christ, so you can serve without getting burned out.
 - I know the title of the message says, gathering together.
 - And next week, we'll get to that.
 - But, today is part 1 of gathering together, and next week, we'll get to part 2.
 - And the main focus of our sermon today, will be about serving in the strength of Christ.

- And this is important, because more and more, I'm meeting people who used to serve in church, but now, find it difficult to serve.
 - For some, they find it hard to serve, because of ministry disappointment.

- They poured out their heart, but their ministry didn't grow, and they're scared they'll be disappointed again.
 - For others, they find it hard to serve, because they've been hurt by others in the church.
 - For others, they feel insecure in their ability.
 - For others, they feel tired.
 - Still for others, they feel that God couldn't use a sinner like them.
- If you're finding it hard to serve, it may be, you're trying to serve in your own strength, and not the strength of Christ.
 - But through this passage, we'll see how you can serve in the power of Christ, so we can give ourselves, to a lifetime of ministry.
 - So, how can we serve, with the strength of Christ?

Point 1:

- First, we can serve in the strength of Christ, when we learn to rest in his finished work.
 - We need rest in the finished work of Christ.
- We can't know for sure, but most likely, the book of Hebrews was written for believers who forgot about their confidence in Christ.
 - Because of persecution, some people in the church wanted to give up fighting for the faith.
 - They were in danger of drifting away.
 - Some even gave up listening to God's word.
 - That's why the author says in chapter 5:

- **“You have become dull of hearing...you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God.”** Hebrews 5:11-12
- God’s people were in danger of moving backwards, and not forwards.
- And so, the author of Hebrews, wrote to encourage the church to persevere in faith.
- Listen to what the author says in chapter 10, verses 32 to 36.
 - **“But 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. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.”**
- Do you see what the author is saying?
 - He’s basically saying:
 - You guys persevered under suffering in the past.
 - You served God with your whole heart.
 - You were even joyful when you were robbed, because of the hope of heaven.
 - So, instead of wavering in your faith, go back to what you did.
 - Don’t give up.
 - Keep enduring.
 - Don’t throw away the confidence in Christ.

- Do you ever feel tempted to drift away from the church, to drift away from God when life gets hard?
 - Well, that's how these believers felt.
- And to restore their confidence in Christ, to help them endure, the author writes in Hebrews chapters 1 to 10, about the work of Christ.
 - I don't have time to unpack, 10 chapters in one sermon.
 - But thankfully, the writer's whole argument about Jesus, is summed up in chapter 10 verse 19.
 - In fact, many Bible scholars refer to verse 19, as the main theme of the whole book of Hebrews.
 - It says:
 - **"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..."**
Hebrews 10:19
 - Do you see how these verses help us endure?
- The Bible is telling us, because of Jesus, we have confidence to enter the holy places.
- By holy places, the author is referring to the presence of God.
 - In King Solomon's temple, there was the outer court, the inner court, the holy place, and the most holy place.
 - And the most holy place, was the dwelling place of God's presence.
- But the presence of God was blocked off from the people.

- It was covered with a curtain, and the high priest was the only person allowed to go in.
 - And even the high priest, went in only once a year.
 - You could even say the high priest, was blocked from the presence of God because of sin.
 - It was only after he made a sacrifice for his own sins, that he could enter.
 - Then he would enter, and make a sacrifice for the sins of God's people.
 - But even after the sacrifice, God's presence was still blocked off.
- But when Jesus shed his blood on the cross, do you remember what the Bible says?
 - It says the curtain in the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.
 - Jesus gave access to God's presence.
 - The presence of God was blocked off.
 - But now, all believers can enter the most holy place.
 - Not the physical temple, but the real, spiritual presence of God, on earth and in heaven.
 - Because Jesus opened the way.
- And the reason, we can enter God's presence with confidence, is because Jesus is the perfect sacrifice.
 - The blood of bulls and goats weren't able to take away sin.
 - They didn't truly cleanse.
 - That's why the curtain remained.
 - The Old Testament sacrifices, merely pointed to Christ.
 - Because Jesus is the perfect sacrifice, that truly takes away our sin.
 - And now, we can enter God's presence with confidence.

- And when the writer of Hebrews, speaks about confidence.
 - He's not talking about mere feelings.
 - Rather, in the Bible, confidence is a standing before God.
 - That means, you can't lose your confidence to enter God's presence.
 - Why?
 - Because, it's secured by Christ.
 - It's true we may lose our sense of confidence.
 - But we need to remember, through faith in Christ, our confidence to enter, can never change.
- Do you see what this means for you?
 - It means, no matter how great your sin, you can enter God's presence with confidence, because of the blood of Christ.
 - No matter your failures, no matter your past, no matter your future sins.
 - You have confidence to enter, in the finished work of Jesus Christ.
- Not only that, but do you see what the work of Christ, means for your serving?
 - It means your serving doesn't begin with what you do for God, but with what Christ has done for you.
- The reason some people burn out in ministry, is because they feel they need to earn God's approval, or prove their worth, or make up for their failures, or produce results.
- But this passage is teaching us, that even before we do anything for Christ, we have access to God.

- Not because of our work, or our success, or our accomplishments, or our faithfulness.
- But because of the work, and faithfulness of Christ.
- And when we serve with this confidence, we can serve in the strength of Christ and not get burned out.
 - Because we'll begin to serve, not to BE accepted, but because we ARE accepted.
 - We'll begin to serve, not to EARN God's love, but because we HAVE God's love.
- Rest in the finished work of Christ, and you'll be able to sustain a lifetime of ministry, with love, and joy, and strength, and hope.

Point 2:

- Second, we can serve through the strength of Christ, when we draw near to God's presence.
- When we try to serve apart from the presence of God, we'll find that our strength is drained and not replenished.
 - But when we draw near to God, and seek his presence, we'll find that instead of being drained, we'll be filled.
 - Listen to this, it's not by trying harder, but by drawing nearer, that we find strength in Christ.
 - That's why Psalm 105 says:
 - **"Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually!"** Psalm 105:4
- I don't know about you, but I hate traveling alone.
 - Especially to a foreign country.

- I always feel better traveling with my family, or with a friend.
- I find comfort and strength, in the presence of people I love.
- Especially, in a foreign country.
- And it's even better with the presence of God.
 - Jesus Christ has given you access to the presence of God.
 - To the one who loves you
 - To the one who controls all things.
 - And if the presence of a family member can give you strength.
 - Can you imagine the strength and comfort you can have, in the presence of God, your heavenly Father?
- And so, the question we have to ask is this, how can we draw near to God?
 - How can we come closer to God's presence?
 - Well, the author of Hebrews tells us, right here, in verse 22.
 - He states:
 - **"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith..."** Hebrews 10:22
- In verse 22, the Bible says, to draw near, we need to seek God with a true heart.
 - This word, true, has the meaning of being sincere or genuine.
 - That means, you won't be able to draw near to God, if you seek, with selfish motives.
 - Rather, you need to seek God, to know him and worship him

- Do you remember the story of the rich young ruler?
 - He sought after God, but he didn't want to worship God, he just wanted to use God to get to heaven.
 - That's why, in the end, he couldn't draw near to God, because he loved money more than God.
- And in our verse, the Bible is telling us, that if we want to draw near to God, we need to seek him, not to use him, but to worship him.
 - That's what it means to seek God with a true heart.
- And so, when we pray, instead of beginning with, "God, I need this, and God, I need that."
 - Let's take time, to thank God for all he's given to us.
 - Let's take time, to truly worship God, for who he is.
- And when we come to church, instead of thinking, "God, I need you to bless me today."
 - Let's consider, "How we can honor God."
 - Let's focus our hearts on God, and not on us.
- When we seek God with a true heart, we'll see, that we can draw near, and find strength.
- We also need to seek God, not only with a true heart, but with full assurance of faith.
 - Verse 22 states:
 - **"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith..."**
 - The word assurance has the meaning of being certain.

- This means we need to trust, instead of questioning God's word.
- In other words, we need to trust God's word, even when it's hard to obey, and especially when it goes against, the thinking of this world.
- Think about Abraham.
 - God commanded him to leave his home.
 - And instead of questioning God's word, with a full assurance of faith, Abraham obeyed.
 - Sure, there were times he faltered.
 - There were times he failed.
 - But through it all, he kept trusting God's word.
 - And because of that, he was able to draw near to God.
- In contrast, the Israelites, kept complaining, they kept questioning God's word.
 - They kept asking Moses to go back to Egypt.
 - And sadly, they weren't able to enter the promised land.
- And so, instead of questioning God's word, let's trust God's word.
 - Let's forgive others, let's keep doing good to others, let's show kindness to others, let's be patient when change is slow, let's be persistent in prayer, let's obey even when it's hard..
 - Because when you do, like Abraham, and Sarah, and Noah, and Abel, and Rahab, and Joseph, you'll be able to draw near to God, and find strength in him.
- And finally, to draw near to God, we need to come to him, with a clear conscience.

- Again verse 22 states:
 - **“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”**
Hebrews 10:22
- To draw near to God, with a heart sprinkled clean, from an evil conscience, means you understand the full extent of Christ’s forgiveness.
 - It means you truly believe in your conscience, that you’re cleansed by Christ.
 - This isn’t some emotional experience, but a true belief in the work of Christ.
 - In other words, to draw nearer to God, you need to remember that you’re forgiven of all your sins.
- Now, when you hear this, I know many of you will say, “Yes, Pastor Tom, I already know this. I know I’m forgiven.”
 - But I want to gently say, “I’m not sure if you do.”
 - Deep down, some of you may still be filled with guilt over your sin.
 - It may be, you don’t have a clear conscience.
 - It may be, you have a hard time approaching God with confidence.
 - And if that is you, you need ask the Lord, to show you the full extent of his forgiveness.
- Do you remember the movie, Good Will Hunting?
 - Matt Damon plays a character who’s been abused as a child, and he carries shame and pain.

- And Robin Williams, his therapist, says to him, in one scene, “Hey, it’s not your fault.”
- And do you remember how Matt Damon responds?
- He responds intellectually and says, “Yea, I know.”
- And again, Robin Williams says, “Hey, it’s not your fault.”
- And back and forth it goes, until finally Matt Damon breaks down.
- And he says, “Stop messing with me man!”
- And he starts crying.
- But finally, he sees and believes that his shame and pain wasn’t his fault.
- In a similar way, Jesus Christ says to us in the gospel, “It was your fault, but you’re completely forgiven.”
 - And hearing this, how would you respond today?
 - I think like this character, some of you would respond intellectually and say:
 - “Yea, I know.”
 - “No, you’re completely forgiven.”
 - “Yea, I know pastor.”
 - But I want to ask, do you truly believe, deep in your heart, that all your sins are forgiven?
 - I think the sad truth, is that, for some people in the church, this isn’t something that’s really sunk in.
- The way to God is completely open, but because of our seared conscience, we may feel, that we can’t draw near to God.
- Well, then what can we do, to have a clear conscience?
- I think one of the most important actions you can take, is that you need to sit under gospel preaching.

- If you join a ministry that's only focused on doing.
 - All you'll hear is, "You need to try harder."
 - "The reason you're in this situation is because you're not doing more."
 - And of course, you won't have a good conscience.
 - This kind of ministry will sear your conscience.
- But a ministry focused on Christ will say to you, "I know you're struggling with sin, but you can rest in what Christ has done for you."
 - "Look the cross, and remember what he's done for you."
 - This is the kind of ministry that will give you a clear conscience.
 - You'll be reminded of the work of Christ, and you'll be able to draw near to God.
- Another way you can have a clear conscious is by memorizing Scripture.
 - Memorize Romans 8:1, 1 John 1:9.
 - Memorize Psalm 103:12.
 - **"As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us."**
 - Instead of listening to your guilt, listen to God's promise to you, and you'll find strength in him.
- To draw strength from the presence of God:
 - We need draw near, with a true heart.
 - We need draw near with full assurance of faith.
 - And we need draw near, with a clear conscience, knowing that we've been completely cleansed.

- Here we see, how we can serve in the strength of Christ, when we draw near to the presence of God.

Point 3:

- We can serve in the strength of Christ, when we rest in his finished work.
 - We can serve in the strength of Christ, when we draw near to the presence of God.
 - And third and finally, we can serve in the strength of Christ, when we hold fast, to the hope we have in Jesus.
- Verse 23 states:
 - **“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”** Hebrews 10:23
- To hold fast to the hope we have, means that we look to the future that God is preparing for us.
 - It means that we don’t live, to build our lives in this world, but in the world to come.
 - Hope by definition is future looking.
 - And so, holding fast to the hope we have, means our heart is looking forward to God’s future city.
 - It means we’re looking forward to the heavenly reward, God has prepared for us.
- Not only that, but to hold on to hope also means that we trust God’s plan to get us to the end.
 - There are many circumstances in life that won’t make any sense to us.
 - In this world, we’ll face setbacks and trials.

- But to hold fast to the hope we have, means that we trust God's plan, even when there's pain and suffering.
 - Even when it's hard.
 - Hope is trust in God's plan.
- To hope is to look to the future, to hope is to trust God's plan.
 - And finally, to hold on to hope in Christ, means that we find our security, in what Christ has done for us, and not what others think of us.
 - It means that we put our hope in Christ's acceptance, and not man's acceptance.
 - Our hope doesn't come from what others think of us, it only comes, from what GOD has done for us.
- And so, as we serve the Lord, as we serve others.
 - Let's remember to serve with hope.
- No matter how hard and difficult it may be to serve, even when others don't recognize all we do, let's serve and put our hope in our future heavenly reward, that Jesus Christ has prepared for us.
- And no matter our trials, even when circumstances don't make sense, even with setbacks, let's keep serving, by putting our hope in God's plan, remembering that all things are working for our good, and his glory.
- And when we fail in this world, when others look down on us, when we feel rejected, when we didn't give a good presentation at work, let's keep serving, let's hope in God, remembering that our acceptance comes from God, and only God.

- How can we serve the Lord, and sustain a lifetime of ministry, and find strength in Christ, and not get burned out?
 - Rest in the finished work of Christ.
 - Draw strength, from the presence of God.
 - And hold fast, to the hope we have, because he who promised is faithful.

Conclusion:

- I'm grateful that God has blessed our ministry here at Vernon Hills.
 - But I wanted to share how 2025 has been a difficult year.
 - This past year, I began to wonder why, God wouldn't allow us to hire another pastor here at Vernon Hills.
 - Some of you may not know, but we've been searching for pastoral help, since the end of 2024.
 - We had interview after interview, and we weren't able to find the right person.
 - And my mentality throughout 2025 was, when the going gets tough, the tough get going.
 - And I know, our staff and volunteers, have been serving with all their heart.
 - But, I pushed myself, to do more, to work harder, to produce results.
 - And honestly, it was very tiring.
 - There were times, when I felt I had no more strength to give.
- And at the end of September of 2025, I felt a ray of hope, because we had a wonderful pastoral candidate, who I thought would be perfect for our campus.

- But sadly, things didn't work out, and honestly, my heart just sank, and I said to God, "I don't know what to do. Lord, I give it up to you."
 - I felt like Martha, being so busy, when Jesus was saying to me, "Tom, just sit at my feet."
 - And it was at that moment, I entrusted everything to God.
- It was right after that, I got a call in early October, from Joe Steiger, our executive director of ministries.
 - And he said, "What about Greg Lawerance from The Orchard Arlington Heights, for the pastoral position?"
 - And I said, "Joe, the job's been posted for a year, if Greg were interested, he'd have applied by now."
 - And Joe said, "Well, let me just ask."
 - Soon after, Joe said, "He's interested."
 - After that, I met with Greg a couple of times.
 - And in November, he said, "Tom, I'm in."
 - I didn't do a thing.
 - There were no interviews.
 - God was showing me, that I just need to trust in him.
 - And I have no doubt, that Pastor Greg Lawerence, is the one, that God wanted to be here.
- When we try to serve with our own strength, and in our own wisdom, and in our own ability, we're going to get tired, we're going to burn out.
 - But when we serve in the power of Christ, and rest in him, and draw near to him, and hope in him, we can sustain a lifetime of ministry, with joy, and love, and peace, and hope.
 - And so, in 2026, as we give ourselves to ministry, let's serve, not with our strength, but with the strength that comes from Christ.

