



A Closer Relationship with God-Part 2

Motivated by Real Christian Friends

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14 days into the new year. Any of you make any New Year's resolutions to lose weight? Me neither. I know it's a good idea, and, you know, I should, but it's such hard work. It really is.

My wife always says, when we hear those news stories of these movie stars, these gals that have babies and they lose all their weight, they look great about three or four weeks after they have a baby, she always says, but remember, they have a personal trainer, right? It's always somebody there pressing them and prodding them and policing their meals. And so, you know, that's just, that's how they live.

So I thought of that yesterday. I was having lunch, stuffing my face. I was watching TV on my lunch break, and I saw Richard Simmons being interviewed on television. You remember him? Little curly-haired, skinny guy, you know, just a loud, gym-short-wearing little guy who's lost like 120 pounds, and he's yelling at everybody else to lose weight. How irritating must that guy be? I mean, really annoying. Can you imagine? I thought about him just kind of following me around for a couple of days, following me to lunch. He'd have something to say. Watching me plop on the couch, he'd be yelling at me to get up and do something. And I thought, wow, what a guy that is. And then it dawned on me as I was watching. I thought, that's why he's on television. That's why he's being interviewed. He's being interviewed because he's irritated a lot of fatties to get off the couch and lose weight, right? I mean, he's there, and he's the guy they seek out to say, talk to us about nutrition and health and being fit, because he successfully prompted people to lose a lot of weight.

Now, guys like me look at him, that guy's irritating. And a lot of other people look at him and go, you know what? I'm so thankful for him because he has helped me lose a lot of weight, and now I'm healthy and I'm skinny and I'm fit and all that.

When it comes to your walk with Christ and your spiritual health, and thankfully we're talking about that this morning and not our physical health, God says you need some irritating people in your life. And I'm not kidding. I'm not making this up. As a matter of fact, if you have your Bibles, I want you to open to Hebrews chapter 10 as we continue in our series.

And the Bible says, when it comes to the reason you were made, and that is to know your creator and have an intimate, real, personal relationship with him, what you need is some people that irritate you. Literally, and I mean this, this particular word is only used once in the Bible in a positive way. The rest of the times you see this, not only in the Bible but outside in ancient Greek writings and extra-biblical writings, it's a negative word, like the crowd was incited to riot. This is the word here. The people were... I found one ancient extra-biblical manuscript that took this word that's translated to spur one another on, it's translated to pester. That doesn't sound positive. But the Bible says in this text that when it comes to our need to know God, we need some people in our lives that are going to... look at it, verse 24... consider how to spur us on to love and good deeds.

I know sometimes I'm preaching, I'll throw out a Greek word, usually in frustration because I can't find a nice, tight, simple, terse equivalent in English. And one word I throw out a lot is the word teleos. Have you heard me say that word, teleos? Teleos. And I say that word because so often the English translations just don't do it justice. It's usually translated perfect or perfection. And that



brings up in our minds this idea of someone who's got a perfect record or something that's flawless or something that doesn't have anything wrong with it. It's spotless. And that's not what the word teleos means.

As a matter of fact, I've been thinking of that word repeatedly as I've studied in Hebrews chapter 10, though it never appears in this context, because what he's trying to get us to recognize is that we were made for God. And as Augustine said, our hearts will be restless until we find rest in him. And last week we saw that great exhortation that we are called to draw near to God, and because of Christ we now can. And that word teleos, just right, that we are made in our hearts to connect with God. And when we have that, we start to get that sense of teleos, just right.

It's that feeling that I get when I'm fumbling through my toolbox for 10 minutes trying to find just the right tool for the problem that I'm trying to fix. You know, you finally find that wrench and it fits perfectly on that bolt. And you say, well, it's like it's made for it. Ah, it fits. That's the word teleos. And it doesn't mean that that wrench or that socket, it doesn't have any scratches on it. It just means that they fit together perfectly.

And the Bible says we need to strive for that, to have that perfection. And he knows that we're all scratched and dented and we got our flaws. But the point is he wants to get us to a place where we're fulfilling our purpose, where we see our lives and God's life start to go click, and that ah, it fits, it's right, it's teleos, it's just perfect.

And the Bible says if you're going to experience that, after we had this great exhortation in the preceding verses, verse 22, draw near to God, and all that great verbiage, now all of a sudden it's like a brand-new topic, verse 24. But it's not a new topic. The point is, if you're going to get to this place of real genuine gratification and fulfillment in your relationship with God, you need some people that are going to push you, prompt you. They're going to even pester you a little bit to get to the place where you need to be in terms of love. And I don't think we're talking about love for each other. We're talking about our love for God, that connection with God, and good deeds, that service for God. And if you're going to get there, you need some trainers. You need some spiritual trainers in your life. And they're going to be the kind of people that are going to push you forward.

And then, verse 25, it says you don't need to push those people away. As a matter of fact, you need to get together with those kind of people a lot. Don't give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let's encourage each other. Let's really get in there and encourage each other, and we need it more, not less, and all the more as you see the day approaching.

If you found your worksheet, pull it out of the worship packet and just jot this down. You and I, as it relates to our relationship with God, the ultimate reason that we were created, we need to, number one, get motivated. And the thing that's going to motivate us is some people around us that have the same passion and concern to know and serve God, to love him and to serve him more perfectly. And those are going to be the kinds of people that start to challenge our Christian life. And that isn't always going to feel good.

It's just like us as parents. We look at our kids growing up, and it's interesting how the older they get, and we watch them grow up, and the more they get to make their own independent choices, one of the concerns we really have in their lives is that they choose good friends, right? We're so concerned that they get to hang with the right people. And it's not just, by the way, a teenage concern. It needs to be an adult concern because our Heavenly Father is looking at us and he's

saying, you know, the people you choose to hang out with, the people you pull into your life, the people that you let into your sphere of influence are people that are either going to help your walk with God or they're going to hinder it. They're either going to help move you to what God has created you for or they're really going to be a roadblock and a stumbling block for you.

And that great passage, and I know you quote it to your teenagers, but it's a good one for God to quote to you this morning as you think about this text. It's Proverbs chapter 13, verse 20. Do you remember that Bible verse? It says, he who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools suffers harm. And though it's not as dramatic as us grown-up adults, I know it's not as dramatic, but we can choose friends that really are, for us, foolish choices that will be a detriment to our spiritual walk. And it comes in a very benign package. It comes with people that just like to put their arm around us and tell us everything's fine.

And when it comes to our relationship with God, they say, oh, you know what? God is a God of grace and a God of love, and so, you know what? You don't have to work too hard at this. You're okay. I'm okay. And the bar, you know what I'm talking about, is always nice and low for them. And they get around you, and they want the bar to be low for you. And they want you to think, well, you know, it's really... you don't have to work so hard. You don't have to pray so hard. You don't have to go to church. You don't have to do those things. I mean, come on. God loves us. It's fine. It's about grace. And they're always lowering the bar for us.

Caution. Be careful. You and I need to, letter A, we need to find and seek out challenging Christian relationships. Challenging Christian relationships. You've got to have some. You've got to have some people that unfortunately feel a little bit like Richard Simmons. When it comes to your diet and your exercise, you need people that you're going to find are always going to say something when they watch you choose something that is less than conducive for your spiritual growth. And you know what? And I know the habit is, as it is in verse 25, that those are the kinds of people we sometimes say, I don't know, there's a lot of work to be a friend of that person. They're always talking about growing and God and evangelism and, oh, you know, and we want to push them... Don't. You need those people. You need those folks in your life.

You need to have people that are concerned for you like the Apostle Paul is concerned for you. Here's a couple of great texts that you should jot down. 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 58. I love that verse. It's the pinnacle of the writing of the first letter of 1 Corinthians. And Paul says this. It's a great prayer for these people. And I wonder how many friends pray this kind of prayer and say these kinds of things to you.

Paul says this: hey, brothers, he says, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Listen to this. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord. Now listen to that. A lot of our friends say, hey, you need to always work to give yourself a break. You know, you need to slow down. You need to relax a little bit. You just need to, you know, give yourself a little time off. Paul says this, you know, you need to stand firm. Don't let anything... be totally resolved. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord.

You got friends that say that kind of stuff to you? Do you have people in your life that are always kind of pushing you in the right direction? How about this? I love this statement as Paul writes the Romans in Romans chapter 12, verse 11. He says, never be lacking in zeal. Always be zealous, he says. He says, keep your spiritual fervor. He says, serve the Lord, be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer. You can hear him. He's just cheering these people on.

Or how about Philippians chapter 1, verse 9. He says, guys, I'm praying for you that your love would abound more and more in knowledge and in depth of insight. Are there people in your life that are constantly saying those kinds of things to you? I mean, that's the kind of people that we need to say, yeah, I need to seek out that kind of relationship. Because when those people are in my life, they're constantly trying to direct me, push me, and even pester me a little bit to be a little bit more what God created me to be. And I tell you, you'll never look back at those relationships and say, well, I never should have invested in that relationship, because you'll see how their lives have helped to sharpen you, right? As iron sharpens iron, Scripture says, so one man sharpens another. We need those people in our lives to sharpen us, to help us grow in our walk with God.

And we need it on three levels. This is a biblical model, and I just want to go outside of Hebrews chapter 10 real quick. But if you turn with me to Acts chapter 2, and if you would jot this down once you get there, we need to develop this kind of challenge on three levels in our lives, on three separate levels. And we'll bullet point those real quick. But let's turn to Acts chapter 2, and we'll see a great example of this.

I want friends. I want people around me that are not content with the status quo. They recognize that we as followers of Christ need to go a little farther, need to dig a little deeper, need to serve a little bit more fervently, that we need to always be abounding in the work of the Lord. Those are people I need around me, and those are people that you need around you.

And Acts chapter 2 shows us it happens on a few different levels. Look at verse number 46. Acts chapter 2, verse 46, it says, the early church was every day continuing to meet in the temple courts. Now you remember the picture in Acts 2. They're there early on. There's preaching, and Peter's preaching, and all these people are coming to Christ. Matter of fact, look up at verse number 41. We know that on that day, after Peter's sermon, there were 3,000 people added to their number. So we got 3,000 plus the group that started out. And by chapter 5, we have over 5,000 people meeting regularly on the temple courts. That's a big group setting. And it says in verse 42, they were devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching. So some apostle would stand up and teach about Christ and direct people to trust in Christ and draw near to God. And there was someone up there preaching to them, and it was happening in a big-group context.

Let's just bullet point that as a subpoint there to letter B. Let's just say this. It needs to happen in a challenging kind of relationship as it relates to a church. So let's just call it this. We all need to seek out a challenging church. You need that. You got to have one. And in a day when a lot of people are trying to create and foster and promote churches that never challenge you, I think it's important for us to recognize that's not the call of Scripture.

Your church should feel a little irritating sometimes. Does that ever happen? It happens. In a good church, it should happen. You should go out going, wow, I kind of felt like I kind of got, you know, that was tough. That was rough. He kind of pestered me this morning. I got pestered too. And instead of turning it into, you know, barbecued pastor for lunch, which often happens... you've had that, haven't you? Instead of doing that, maybe you should stand back like I should and say, you know what, that's exactly what church should be. Something to spur me on, incite me, invoke me, push me, pester me to love God more and do more good deeds.

That's the point of church. That's what the apostles' teaching was all about. They weren't up there giving suggestions to people. They were up proclaiming with authority the teaching of Jesus Christ



and the call for all of us to draw near to God. And so we need a challenging church. And I know I'm kind of preaching to the choir because most of you here, you're already committed to our church. And I trust it's irritating enough for you. But there are a lot of people out there that are looking for churches. They're shopping for churches that make them feel good. Pat me on the back. Make me feel good. Affirm the things that I already know and already do. See, that's not the kind of church they need to be looking for. As a matter of fact, if you don't have a church that's pushing you forward, you're wasting your time there.

And if you're listening on the radio or watching this on television, or maybe somebody gave you this CD, you need to find a place where someone is there committed to God's word who is trying to push you a little bit further every single week that he preaches to you. Okay? So that's a bottom-line, baseline commitment.

But in verse number 46, they do more than just meet together on the temple courts. There's another level of intimacy where there's good things going on that's driving people closer to Christ. It says they broke bread together, this is the middle of verse 46, in their, what's the word? Homes. They got to a smaller level. Now, nobody had a home big enough to fit 5,000 people. So the temple courts, you had a lot of people there and someone standing up and booming, without a microphone, his voice out and preaching at people to draw near to God. But then there was another level where they got together, they ate together with glad and sincere hearts. They were doing things like this in verse 47, praising God together and enjoying the favor of all the people. And God was so pleased with that, he was adding to their number daily those who were being saved. And this was a good pattern, and God affirms it right there in verse 47.

So secondly, let's just bullet point it this way. We need to not only have a challenging church, we need some kind of challenging small group in my life. There ought to be a group where they know your name, and when you're not there, they know you're gone, and they know something of you, and taking your walls down enough for them to know something about how you can and should respond to God's word. And there's some kind of group accountability there where you're moving forward in the Christian life. There ought to be some level of that. We see that all throughout the Scripture.

Big group, that's church, great. Easy to get lost on the temple mount, right? Easy to be lost on the temple court. But when you get into someone's home or you get in a small group, now you've got an opportunity where people know you and all the chairs aren't facing one direction. They're all facing each other. And we have some kind of dynamic of spiritual prodding and promoting and inciting and spurring on that you're not going to get in church. And that's effective and it's important.

And unfortunately, 70% of the people that attend church on a Sunday, that's all they do. They get lost in the temple courts. They listen to some guy preach. They go home, oftentimes eat barbecued pastor. They think about what they heard, and that's it. No accountability, no follow-up, no what did you think about that, no what are we going to do about that. That's what the small group is all about.

And here at Compass what we've done is created a men's Bible study and a women's Bible study. We have four different opportunities through the week for these, two for men and two for women, where we come and not only have a study, we break into small groups, and a lot of you are part of that, right? One of the most important parts of that is getting in that table discussion and having that



kind of response and reciprocity in that circle where now we start to think about the application of God's word.

And some of you go, well, I don't know. I can't make it in the schedule, and it's early morning or it's late at night. And you know, what's this men and women? Are you guys Quakers trying to keep us all apart? I don't know. Can I go to something with my wife? Great, I got another option for you. We have something here that some of you may not know about. It's called our home fellowship groups.

You need a church that challenges you. You need some kind of small group that challenges you. And thirdly, if you jot this down, 2 Timothy 2, verse number 2, it is the pattern of Scripture that we also see throughout the Bible, two people pairing up and connecting on a level that's more than just friendship. It's a challenging friendship. Let's bullet point that. A challenging friendship. You need a friendship in your life that just doesn't chop together or go golfing together or go fishing together or hanging out. You need a relationship that when you hang out, you've got something there between you that helps to provoke and incite a conversation about your spiritual growth.

And 2 Timothy 2, verse 2 says that we ought to be just like the Apostle Paul, following this great pattern. And that is that Paul says to Timothy, the things that I've entrusted to you in the presence of many witnesses, he says, these things entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also, and to see that chain of taking these transferable concepts of spiritual growth and to hand them off to someone else.

And we know that's... well, where do I start with that? We've created a program. It's called Partners, One-on-One Discipleship. It's a 10-week program to help you grow in your Christian faith.

You know friends that are so committed to whatever their hobby is, or maybe it's weight loss, and they're carrying chips around, and they've got meal plans, and they've got a person that meets them at the gym, and all that, and they're really serious about it. And you may look at this, man, it sounds like a lot. Not only come to church, you want me to be in a group, you want me to meet with someone individually. Listen, if we want to be spiritually healthy, if we want to connect with the living God, which really is the whole purpose and point of our life, that when we get there and get a taste of that, we start to recognize this is what I was made for, see, then you'll realize this isn't just some kind of superfluous kind of structure around my life and scaffolding that I don't need. You'll recognize this is exactly what I need. It's the kind of thing that moves me into a place where I realize the whole purpose for my being here on earth.

And I highly recommend that you find challenging Christian relationships on all three levels. You got a challenging church, you got a challenging small group, and you have a challenging friendship, a one-on-one connection with somebody who's helping keeping you accountable for memorizing Scripture, sharing your faith, fighting temptation, and all the issues that show up in our Partners manual. And even if you don't use that, at least have something, some kind of one-on-one relationship where you're talking about your spiritual life and helping one another grow.

Our text, Hebrews chapter 10, if you'd look at it, I think is very valuable for us just to look at it and ask ourselves the question, do I have that in place in my life? And that's what we've been doing for the last 20 minutes. Do I have that in place in my life? It's as if this text is saying to us, is it? I mean, it's not saying, hey, make sure you have people that do this to you. Look at the grammar of

verse 24. Look at the way these verbs are positioned and posited. It's not saying, hey, make sure that you have people that do that to you. The text is telling us specifically and directly, let us all, each of us, consider how we may spur one another on to love and good deeds.

The issue isn't just, am I being motivated? Put this down, number two on your outline. We need to start motivating. The real issue for us is God has called us, no matter if we're two weeks old in the faith, two months old, or 25 years old in the faith, we should be motivating others. We ought to be taking their faith from wherever it's at and doing whatever we can humbly, creatively, carefully, and helping them love God more and helping them serve God more perfectly. And that's the most important thing for us to do, is to say, God, this passage is telling me specifically, how can I be a motivation for someone else?

I want to make sure you've got the relationships in your life, but the real question here in this text is, am I doing this in someone else's life? Do I come to church with a purpose? Do I recognize it's not just about me? Do I realize that the small group that I'm a part of, that I attend, or the table that I'm a part of at Women's or Men's Bible Study is not just, what can I get out of it? Or the Partners Program, as Eric says, we got 250 people that have been through the program, and a lot of those people go through it, they take it, they go, that was great, I grew. But you know, the point is, particularly in this passage, is are you taking that stuff and investing that in someone else's life? Are you taking what God has invested in you and spurring people on by your life to love and good deeds?

That's going to take a few things. The first thing it's going to take in verse number 24 is that we start to think. Look at that word consider. That's not just the word to think about. There's a Greek word for think, but there's a preposition stuck in front of it that makes a little intensified compound word, and it's the Greek preposition kata, and kata means down. And the verb here is to think down on. And I love the way that kind of brings the imagery of kind of get your mind focused down on this. It's like sit down and think about it. Give some energy and attention to get your mind to really focus its sight down on this.

And the text is saying you consider it. Think about it. He doesn't tell us what to do. He says you need to think about what to do that might spur someone on to love God more and to good deeds. Because if you think about it simplistically, particularly in the first century, they're listening to a guy who's reading this letter from some preacher that's talking about how to love God more and draw near to God. And they think, well, if I'm supposed to do that to someone else, the simplistic thinker thinks, well, I guess I got to go around and preach to my friends and tell everybody I run into, well, you ought to draw near to God and you should love God more. He's saying, no, no, you think about it. Let's get creative.

That's letter A, pointy finger number one. Get creative and start thinking about how I might, in creative ways beyond just saying something like, hey, you need to be closer to God, you need a deeper relationship with God... what are the things that might help that? What are some of the ancillary issues that might be brought into your friend's life that might really assist in that? What today on the patio, as you hold that donut and drink that cup of coffee and you sit there and talk to people on the patio, what might be said there, what might be done there that might help someone draw near to God?

It's not just preaching to them. It may be pulling them aside after a conversation about what's going on in their life and saying, hey, can we just step over here and pray about this for a minute right



now? I'd like to pray for you. Do you think that might help someone? Encourage someone, which is, by the way, the other word in verse 25. Circle that word. It's the word encouraged translated into English. We've seen it many times in the book of Hebrews and elsewhere. It's the word para kaleo. Para, alongside of; kaleo, to call in alongside of. And when you've heard me exegete that word, I often use the illustration of the crutches. When my knee is all blown out, I need something that's strong to hold me up, to prop me up. That's what this word means.

And you know that that's not just preaching at someone, to hold someone up in the midst of their weakness or in their trial. A lot of times it's just being there with them. Think about the people that go to the hospital in a health crisis and they're afraid and they're anxious. Sometimes they just need somebody to be there with them. Sometimes they just need somebody to talk with them on the phone. We don't need a sermon maybe. We just need you to come alongside and help keep their focus on God. Help them to trust God and do good deeds while they're going through that trial.

There are so many creative ways. And if you need some help in that, all you got to do, if you've been a Christian for any amount of time, is think back in your Christian life and think, how have people done that for me? Beyond just sermons and preaching, what have people done for me that have assisted me, prompted me, even pestered me a little bit in a positive way that's moved me toward a more godly life? As a matter of fact, that's one of the questions on the back of your worksheet this week that you'll be discussing in a home fellowship group if you're a part of that.

He's just thinking about how has God used people with creative things, creative avenues, to prompt me to grow. Just turn that around. Start doing that in other people's lives. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1, the things that he experiences that people do to him that help him should be part of his education in knowing how he should respond to others. And if you've been blessed by some Paul in your life that's come along your Timothy and said, hey, let me help you, and they've been effective in that, take notes. How did they do it? What did they say? What kinds of notes did they send? When did they show up? Study those kinds of people in your life and turn around and say, I just need to do the same thing. I need to start creatively getting involved in people's lives. It could be a note, an email, a text message. It could be spending time with them, just sitting and praying with them. Spend time thinking creatively, the Bible says, about how we might stimulate others, spur them on to love and good deeds.

So we need to get creative. If you're going to be a motivator, you've got to give it some thought. Secondly, look at verse number 25. It says, let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing. The problem is, this is never going to happen if we keep each other at arm's distance. This will never happen if we do not connect together. This word here is to be drawn together, to be together, to connect with one another. And we can't do it if we don't have that time, which is a priority issue for you and for me.

Jot this down. Let's put it this way. Letter B, we need to never stop getting together. We've got to get together. Not just on Sundays, which 70% of the people that go to church, that's all they do. They just come to the temple courts and mill around and hear a sermon. We need to get together on another level more often. We got to do it. We can't stop.

And the problem is you've got to know that Satan's number-one strategy for discouraging people or leading people to spiritual wipeout is getting them isolated from the crowd. You realize that, right? Jot this passage down. You don't need to turn there because many of you know it already. It's 1 Peter chapter 5, verses 8 and 9. 1 Peter chapter 5, verses 8 and 9 equates our spiritual enemy to a



lion. Now think back to the National Geographic Channel, right? You've seen those lions chase those funny animals, the wildebeests or whatever they are, and you recognize that what they're going after, even in the strategy of the lions, is to somehow get one isolated away from the herd, to cut him off, to keep him away from the rest of them. And that's the isolating strategy that gets them in a vulnerable place and they're ready for wipeout.

And if you read throughout the Scripture, that's exactly what you see. Whether it's a spiritual defector like Judas who hangs out with Christ and gets isolated from the crowd, or whether it's a godly prophet like Elijah who ends up getting isolated and by himself under a broom tree saying, woe is me, and leading him into this depression, it's always about separating them, getting them apart.

Ecclesiastes gives us a hand up. And then it says this, a cord of three strands is not easily broken. You need relationships, and it's Satan's strategy to keep you apart. Just remember this. God's will for you is to congregate. Satan's strategy in your life is to isolate. Just remember that. God wants you to congregate. Satan wants you to isolate. God wants you to get together, and Satan wants you to have some kind of other priority that's going to keep you from that.

And whatever you think about this message, if you try to put one thing into place, if you say, you know, I need to take the next step here, I guarantee you there will be a rival priority. There will be a reason. There will be some nagging problem with that, and it will try to prevent you from taking that next step. Just recognize that this is a spiritual battle. This is something that you need to recognize and be on the defense and realize that God is trying to pull you together face-to-face with other people, and Satan's trying to keep you apart. It's all a battle of priorities. It always is in the Christian life.

But make this resolved. The passage is telling us, do not give up meeting together. Let us not fall into that pattern. And some people get into that pattern. They put people at arm's length. They don't get involved in other people's lives. It's a bad thing.

Which, by the way, I might state for those that are tempted to be deluded, like a lot of people, who fancy themselves a real spiritual giant. And I've heard them say it, and they say it. They don't even understand the Scriptures when they say it, but they say, you know what? I've grown to a place in my Christian life where I really don't need church as much anymore. And I've heard some people who have said, I don't need it at all anymore. That's the most foolish, self-deluded thing I've ever heard. Because if you're really that godly and that spiritual, the church needs you more than ever. You need to be a motivator. You need to be interconnected with people's lives. There is never a place in the Christian life when you don't need to be connected with other Christians. Never.

As a matter of fact, the text goes on to say, bottom of verse number 25, that all of this needs to happen in our lives all the more, underline that word, as you see the day approaching. Is day capitalized? It's not tax day, right? That's the day of Christ's coming. And the only hints we have about the day of Christ's coming is that people like the Apostle Paul said to Timothy, things will go from bad to worse. And Jesus said, you know, in the last days, it'll be like it was in the days of Noah.

And all we know is that as life goes on on this planet, things will continually get more apostatized. It'll get more immoral. It will get more sinful. The technology will give people the ability to sin at the snap of their finger. It will get worse and it will get worse. And the more that we see our culture



getting worse, and I think it's getting worse, particularly in our culture, more than it's ever been in American society ever, the Bible says you need to get together with other Christians and spur them on to love and good deeds more than ever before.

So there's never a time when we can say, hey, you know, I need the church less. I need fellowship less. I need a small group less now because, you know, I don't need it. You need it. You need it not based on your spiritual growth. You need it based on the decay of society.

Letter C, or subpoint three, or whatever you want to call it, pointy finger number three, we need to connect, here it comes, more often. Not less and less, more often. You need more of it. You got to get involved more often.

Now I know what you're thinking, right? I got the people going, wow, you know, that church trying to get into my pocketbook, and now this church trying to get in my daytime or trying to capitalize... I guess... ah, stop pressuring me, right? Pestering me. Well, number one, that's my job. Number two, you will never, ever regret the investment in people's lives, strategically choosing to invest in people's lives for the purpose of spiritual growth. Never.

One of the things about my job is I often am called in when people are dying or on their deathbed, or I'm obviously doing funerals and preaching at people's funerals. And I always get that big perspective. That's really an advantage in my position because I'm probably, a lot more than you, exposed to kind of getting the big picture on what matters in life and what doesn't. And I'll tell you, when I've been at the deathbed and speaking to those people that are in their last days of life, I don't ever have any of them look at me and say, you know, Pastor Mike, I really wished I would have watched more TV, you know. I wish I would have organized my garage. I wish I would have been, you know, more organized. I wish I would have spent more time by myself on my hobbies. Never, never. There's never a regret about investing in people.

As a matter of fact, I hear just the opposite. I wish I would have invested in people more. I wish my relationship with God would have been closer. I wish that my relationship with people would have affected them to move them toward God more. And it's funny because I hear that from just about every Christian at the end of their lives. But I find us as Christians all the time losing that perspective and always kind of battling for our priorities, going, I don't know if I have time for that.

You know what? You will never, ever regret it. If you say no to some ancillary pursuit in your life, some superfluous hobby or whatever, and you say, you know what? That really is not as important as me connecting with other Christians, helping them grow, and having them encourage me to grow, you will never, ever regret it. As a matter of fact, a thousand years from now, as we sit around in the new kingdom, you will never say, wow, you know what, I'm sorry I took that advice and invested in people's lives.

Let us spend our time in this new year, and I know it still kind of feels like, you know, the new year, let us make it our passion and our purpose and our resolve to get a little bit more involved in people's lives for the sake of the kingdom and for the purpose of spiritual growth.

Let's pray.

God, I feel funny preaching this passage. It's so simple. It's so straightforward. I mean, we could just read it five times and it would really just preach itself. It's so clear. And yet, God, it's my job to



try and do my best to present it here to this group and say, this is what God is calling us to do. And yet I know we're all going to walk out of this place. We're all going to get into our cars, and we're all going to go to our busy lives this week. And we're going to have all these competing interests and things jockeying for our attention. And I know this will be something that if we're going to do it, it's going to have to be fought for. We're going to have to really get in there and scrap for this and make it happen.

God, I pray that even now in the sacred moment of this prayer, that some of us might make some decisions before you and say, God, that's true. I'm too isolated. I'm not involved, and I'm not involved as much as I ought to be. And my connections with people, they're superficial, or it's all about business or sports or weather. And God, I need to get something between us that will help us talk about things that last for eternity.

God, I pray there will be some people that get involved in home fellowship ministry here at the church, or get involved in our Partners program today, or whatever it is, whatever the means or mechanism, that they would go a few levels deeper with some people in their lives that would help to challenge them, and that they would have the guts and the fortitude to challenge others to be a little bit more in love with God this year and a little bit more useful in his service.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.