

Church Theme Learning Series - Session #10

DRAW NEAR TO GOD, ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

Belong & Serve



Connect & Grow

Remarks:

- The purpose of this study material is to develop a deeper relational and spiritual connection between believers at different ages for walking together and progressing along the growth journey of being disciples of Christ.
- For Personal Devotion, please refer to pages 1 - 6. With a dual purpose of preparing for group gathering, the questions are the same as for Group Discussion.
- For Group Discussion, please refer to pages 1, 7 & 8. Depending on the situations of different groups, group leaders may choose and pick the questions suitable for their groups. Group members are also encouraged to share their experiences related to this bible passage for helping others regarding its application.

Bible Verse

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

Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV)

Introduction

The Book of Hebrews is a must-read for anyone who wants to understand what the Bible teaches about Jesus Christ. Almost every chapter point to His unique identity, and each description helps us know our Savior more deeply. In the very first chapter alone, the author introduces Jesus in six ways: He is the Son of God, the heir of all things, the radiance of God's glory, the exact likeness of God's being; He is greater than the angels; and the Bible even calls Him God.

From chapter 2 through chapter 13, the author goes further, showing us even more about who Jesus is. Our Lord is crowned with glory and honor. He is the pioneer of salvation, God's sent one, the Son of God, the anchor for our souls, the mediator of a better covenant, the sacrifice for sin, the Lord who is coming soon, and the great Shepherd of the sheep. Jesus is the one who begins and completes our faith. His nature is holy, blameless, and pure. He is seated in heaven. And He never changes — He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

The message of Hebrews is not just about knowing these truths in our heads. Starting in chapter 10, the author urges believers that because Jesus' work is so complete and perfect, we must hold firmly to our faith to the very end. If we turn away, we dishonor His work. That is why **the Book of Hebrews not only shows us how Jesus fulfills God's plan of salvation from the Old Testament to the New, but also gives us a strong foundation to live out our faith every day.**

With 10:19–25, the author of Hebrews demonstrates the important connection between the truths concerning Christ and the implications of those truths for the Christian life. In this study, we are going to learn what we should do to put our faith into action.

- *New Testament (Contemporary Chinese Version) – Introduction to the Book of Hebrews. [1]*

PART ONE

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, (Hebrews 10:19-21, NIV)

Two Foundations of Bold Access to God's Presence

With 10:19–25, the author of Hebrews gives us clear statements of what we should do to put our faith into action. We are exhorted to (1) draw near to God, seeking intimacy with him, (2) to hold unswervingly to our hope, and (3) to encourage one another consistently. Before that, the author begins with two bases for his exhortation.

(a) **The Bold and Living Way Opened by Jesus:** The word “confidence” (*parresia*), a rare word in Greek literature, has to do with free and open expression or conduct and, in an ancient Jewish context, relates especially to approaching God in prayer. This is a “reasoned confidence” or boldness with which a believer approaches God, the worshiper being emboldened by the work of Christ. Just as the older covenant high priest was able to enter the earthly Most Holy Place by the blood of animals, **the blood (i.e., death) of Jesus has won us confident entrance to the Divine Presence.**

The word translated as “new” (*prosphaton*) can also carry the meaning “previously unavailable”. Jesus has opened a path for us, a path unknown and inaccessible to people before the completion of his high-priestly work. Moreover, this way is “living” because we walk it in association with our resurrected Lord. **The “way” into God’s presence, therefore, is no longer characterized by death but by following the path of the Living One,** who has opened, or inaugurated, a route for us “through the curtain, His body.” - George Guthrie, *NIV Application Commentary on Hebrews* [2]

(b) **Jesus the Superior High Priest:** Jesus became the superior high priest by his work on the cross and in His resurrection, which established a new covenant. The old covenant was organized around a priesthood that allowed one man to enter the holy of holies once a year to make atonement for the people. Jesus entered the holiest place and sat down at the right hand of God after making the once for all sacrifice that makes the entrance to God available to all believers. **Christians have free access to God in the heavenly sanctuary, privileged relationship to God and freedom for a worshipful approach to God - all because of the priesthood of Christ.** - Luke Morrison, *Liberty University* [3]

The author of Hebrews makes the connection explicit; Jesus is over the house of God and he himself is the builder (Heb. 3:1-6). The house of God should be understood as the “worshiping community” or more simply put, the true church. Jesus’ greatness as the High Priest manifested in his administration over the house of God. **As our High Priest, Jesus not only intercedes on our behalf but also faithfully oversees and administers the household of God.** - Ben Solensky, *Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary* [4]

1. **When you approach God in prayer, do you come with confidence, or with hesitation and fear?**
What does this reveal about how deeply you trust in Christ’s finished work?
2. **How often do I truly treasure the privilege of direct access to God’s presence through Jesus?**
Have I become too casual or distracted in my approach to Him? How might my prayer life, worship, or daily decisions change if I truly treasured this privilege?

PART TWO

let us draw near to God, (Hebrews 10:22a, NIV)

For What Do We Yearn?

God calls us to draw near and then directs the call to our hearts. Yet we have a problem, perhaps the focal challenge of life, for our hearts are not always what or where they should be. We go seeking to find our hearts and are led to treasure troves hidden in dark caverns shunned by God (Matt. 6:21). We find there hearts in need of cleansing (Ps. 51:10) and surgery (Deut. 30:6), which are deceitful (Jer. 17:9). We yearn for the wrong things in life, things that crowd out God's voice and love for him (Mark 4:19). **I must ask myself daily, "For what am I yearning today? To what are my energies and efforts being drawn?"** Am I, like Moses, drawing near to God in a "face-to-face" intimacy, crying out to God, "Teach me your ways so that I may know you and continue to find favor with you" (cf. Ex. 33:11, 13)? Or am I like Solomon, whose heart was divided as he turned after other gods (1 Kings 11:1–6)?

To come to God, to draw near to him, must be done with a "sincere heart," one that has been sprinkled clean from a guilty conscience. This cleansing is only possible if one has a right understanding, a right belief in who Jesus is and in what he has accomplished on our behalf. Even for those who have new covenant hearts, to persevere in this drawing near we must keep right thinking in place and yearning hearts engaged in the pursuit of God. We should cultivate lives in which we practice the daily presence of God through prayer and the reading of his Word. **To yearn to know him means that we will set aside planned times of fellowship with God and pray continually in the midst of demands of each day** (1 Thess. 5:17). – *George Guthrie, NIV Application Commentary on Hebrews [5]*

The consistent message is clear: God wants us close. He calls us to come near — not staying at a distance, but entering into real fellowship with him. The command is simple but profound: draw near. Don't settle for a faith where God feels far away, a vague idea or occasional thought. Instead, experience God as a living reality, present and personal. And this "drawing near" is not about geography or ritual. It's not climbing up to heaven with our good works, nor merely attending a service or walking down an aisle. **It is an inward act of the heart** — something you can do whether sitting still, lying in a hospital bed, or listening in church. **To draw near is to direct your heart into the presence of the God who is both exalted in heaven and yet immediately accessible through faith.** He is inviting us — commanding us — to come closer, to approach him, to live in communion with him.

At the heart of the gospel lies this truth: everything about Gethsemane and Good Friday points to God's astonishing and costly work to bring us near to Himself. He gave His own Son to suffer and die so that, through Him, we could come into His presence. The goal of it all is that we might draw near — our joy and His glory. **God does not depend on us; if we remain distant, He is not impoverished, for His joy is complete within the fellowship of the Trinity. Yet He magnifies His mercy and love by opening the way for us to freely approach Him through His Son.** – *John Piper [6]*

3. **What do my thoughts, time, and energy most naturally drift toward during the week?** What does that reveal about what my heart is truly yearning for?
4. **What rhythms (prayer, Scripture meditation, solitude, confession) help me stay aware of God's presence through the day?** What is one next step I can take to deepen those rhythms?

PART THREE

let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:22, NIV)

How to Draw Near to God?

Two manners:

(a) We must come “with a sincere heart”. In the Scriptures the heart often represents the inner life of a person, which may involve one’s thoughts, will, emotions, or character. Thus, it is significant that the new covenant, with which our author has been greatly occupied, involves the writing of God’s laws on the human heart (8:10). As the reservoir of inner resources (e.g., Prov. 4:23), the heart determines outward behavior. **God sees the motivations and commitments of the human heart and requires that the worshiper’s heart be in the right condition.** Thus, we must come with a “true” (*alethine*) heart, the word connoting the idea of being “real, genuine, loyal.” Therefore, if we are to draw near to God, we must do so with hearts genuinely committed to him.

(b) This genuine commitment is closely associated in this passage with a second thought on how we are to approach God: “in full assurance [*plerophoria*] of faith”, a phrase that can also be translated “conviction” or “certainty of faith.” *Plerophoria* describes the clear-headed confidence and stability generated in true believers as a result of Christ’s work on their behalf. To many in modern culture the concepts of “faith” and “full assurance” seem contradictory since faith, especially in the context of religion, communicates a blind leap. Yet in the biblical literature, **faith suggests a firm trust placed in God, who has shown himself faithful in his dealings with his people.**

Two means:

The discussion now follows with the means by which the heart is prepared for drawing near to God. The two concepts of “hearts sprinkled” and “bodies washed” must be understood against the backdrop of the old covenant purification rituals. The author alludes to the ceremonies for the establishment of the covenant and the purification under that covenant for one who would approach God. What we do have in Hebrews are uses of the washing imagery in connection with the purification rites found in the Pentateuch (e.g., Heb. 9:13). The writer continues his use of OT imagery to communicate that the work of Christ has prepared believers to enter the presence of God. **Such sprinkling and washing are pictures the author uses to point to the greater and more perfect cleansing from sins found in the sacrifice of Christ.**

- *George Guthrie, NIV Application Commentary on Hebrews [7]*

Some commentaries prefer to interpret this phrase in light of Ezekiel 36:25-26: “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you will be clean [...] I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.” This view identifies the “pure water” with the Spirit of God on the basis of the prophecy in Ezekiel. Thus, **the sprinkling of hearts and the washing of bodies both express the same idea: “the effective power of the death of Jesus that has been brought about by the eternal Spirit (9:14).”**

- *Joshua P. Steele, Cedarville University, [8]*

5. **What distractions, motives, or hidden sins in my heart might be keeping me from fully and genuinely seeking God?**
6. **How does the imagery of being “washed with pure water” remind me of my daily need for renewal?**

PART FOUR

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. (Hebrews 10:23, NIV)

The Call to Hold Fast in Faith

The writer's use of the present tense in 10:23 perhaps emphasizes the hearers' call to "hold on" as an ongoing call. In extrabiblical sources students could be said to "retain" a body of teaching, which calls to mind early Christian exhortations to hold onto the traditions of the faith (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:2; 15:2). The author of Hebrews uses *katecho* to speak of keeping a tight grip on the Christian faith, keeping it from slipping away.

At 10:23, the writer intensifies the concept of "holding on" with the adverb *akline*, which the NIV renders as "unswervingly." This rich word literally means "that which does not bend" or "that which is straight," which communicates the concept of stability or immutability. Philo employs the word to speak of God's immutability — creatures are fickle, vacillating back and forth between various directions and positions, but God does not change his will or his ways. Thus in 10:23 the believer is challenged to hold onto the Christian hope, which the author so clearly has depicted as grounded in the person and work of Christ, without being moved by changing circumstances.

It takes resolve to live a "long obedience" to the call of God. To "hold unswervingly to the hope we profess" demands a mature response to the obstacles and oppositions built into the warp and woof of a fallen world rebelling against God. To "hold unswervingly" demands a choice to be faithful, but our hope is well-grounded in the faithfulness of God.

Here rests our ultimate basis for perseverance. Ultimately, we do not have the resources within ourselves to stay with the goal God has set before us. We must choose. We must tighten down our resolve. We must hold. But at the end of the day, **we must rest in the goodness, the resolve, and the faithfulness of God, who has promised an inheritance to his children. We hold on even as he holds us and takes us all the way to the end of the path.**

— George Guthrie, *NIV Application Commentary on Hebrews* [9]

The ground for this exhortation is the faithfulness of God. The audience is to hold unwaveringly to the confession of hope because the one who made the promise is trustworthy. Calvin rightly notes that **"our faith rests on the foundation that God is true [...] if God makes no promises, no one can believe."** — Joshua P. Steele, *Cedarville University*, [10]

7. **The word "unswervingly" describes something unbending and steadfast. What are the biggest pressures in our world today that can cause Christians to bend or compromise in their hope?**
How do you personally guard against drifting in faith when life gets difficult or confusing?
8. **Share a time when you felt like letting go but experienced God holding you steady. What did you learn about His faithfulness.**

PART FIVE

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24-25, NIV)

With Whom Will I Walk?

Christians have a high calling to care for one another and stimulate one another spiritually and morally. The word translated “let us consider” (*katanoëo*) means to “notice, consider, pay attention to, look closely at.” Believers are to rivet their attention on the need for conscious activities of encouragement among those in the Christian community. The author expresses this need with the word *paroxysmos*, which could be used negatively to connote a strong emotion of irritation (e.g., Acts 15:39) but here communicates positively stimulation or motivation. Believers are to motivate one another to love expressed in good works, by which the community has been characterized in the past (Heb. 6:10).

The author explains the context for stimulation toward love and good works in verse 25, using contrasting expressions that mark out what the hearers must not and must do. What they must not do is stop meeting together on a regular basis. The participle *enkataleipontes* carries the idea of “abandonment” or “forsaking” someone or something. This is the word that translates Jesus’ cry of dereliction from the cross (Matt. 27:46): “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Apparently, some in the community were abandoning their gathering together for worship. God would never forsake them (Heb. 13:5), but some of those who had been associated with the Christian community were forsaking him (6:4–8; 10:26–31) and his people. They may have been discouraged from Christian gatherings by the threat of persecution, by the delay of the Parousia, by continued connections with the Jewish synagogue, or by mere apathy.

Whatever the reason, the author sees their discontinuance of common fellowship and worship as fatal for perseverance in the faith. Encouragement cannot take place in isolation. Thus, what they must do is gather for mutual encouragement. **Christians are to display a deep care and concern for one another, expressed not only through positive support and reassurance, but also through reproof and warning.** Both consolation and encouragement to spiritual alertness are to be given in light of the great “Day”. – *George Guthrie, NIV Application Commentary on Hebrews. [11]*

The Day

The descriptions of the coming crisis throughout the epistle point the “Day” immediately to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple as predicted by Jesus. By rejecting their Messiah, the Jewish leaders of that generation had become the ‘adversaries’ of God and were therefore under his wrath. The author warns his readers not to shrink back into the destruction coming upon their ‘adversaries’ (i.e. those Jewish leaders who persecuted them) but to preserve their lives by persevering in their faith (10:39). We can apply this warning to the modern reader in a manner similar to the way that the ancient author applied OT examples to his NT audience. **Just as God physically judged his people when they lapsed into unbelief in both the OT and NT, he may likewise severely punish his people today when they disregard their confession of faith in Christ and drift away from his life sustaining presence.** – *Randall C. Gleason, Tyndale Bulletin. [12]*

9. **“Spur on” is a strong phrase — sometimes uncomfortable. How can we create a culture where we give and receive encouragement that is not just polite but truly challenging?** Can you recall a time when someone spoke truth to you in love and it changed the trajectory of your walk with God?
10. **How does remembering that “the Day” is approaching change the urgency of how we live and how we encourage others?**

Group Discussion

QUESTIONS

Two Foundations of Bold Access to God's Presence (Please read Hebrews 10:19-21)

In Hebrews 10:19–25, we are urged to draw near to God, hold firmly to hope, and encourage one another. This call is grounded in two truths: Jesus has opened a new and living way into God's presence through his death and resurrection, and he serves as our superior High Priest. Unlike the old covenant priests who entered the Most Holy Place only once a year, Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice gives every believer confident and permanent access to God. As the risen Lord and head of God's house—the true worshipping community—he sustains his people and invites us into a life of fellowship and worship with him.

1. When you approach God in prayer, do you come with confidence, or with hesitation and fear?

What does this reveal about how deeply you trust in Christ's finished work?

2. How often do I truly treasure the privilege of direct access to God's presence through Jesus?

Have I become too casual or distracted in my approach to Him? How might my prayer life, worship, or daily decisions change if I truly treasured this privilege?

For What Do We Yearn? (Please read Hebrews 10:22a)

The central call of Hebrews is simple yet profound: draw near to God. While our hearts are often divided, deceitful, and distracted by lesser desires, God calls us to seek him with sincerity, cleansed by Christ's work and renewed by faith. To draw near is not about rituals, places, or outward acts, but an inward turning of the heart toward God's presence, cultivated through prayer, Scripture, and daily fellowship with him. This nearness brings intimacy, confidence, and joy, as Christ intercedes for us and makes access to God possible. Ultimately, we must ask ourselves each day: what are we truly yearning for — the fleeting treasures of this world or the living God who invites us into communion with him?

3. What do my thoughts, time, and energy most naturally drift toward during the week? What does that reveal about what my heart is truly yearning for?

4. What rhythms (prayer, Scripture meditation, solitude, confession) help me stay aware of God's presence through the day? What is one next step I can take to deepen those rhythms?

How to Draw Near to God? (Please read Hebrews 10:22)

To draw near to God, we must come with a sincere heart and with full assurance of faith. The sincere heart reflects an inner life genuinely committed to God, not merely outward actions, and the full assurance of faith rests on firm trust in God's faithfulness and Christ's finished work. This approach is made possible through the cleansing God provides — symbolized by hearts sprinkled and bodies washed — imagery rooted in OT purification rituals but fulfilled in Christ's sacrifice. Some commentators also connect this

imagery with Ezekiel's promise of a new heart and Spirit, highlighting that true nearness to God is enabled by the Spirit's cleansing and the effective power of Christ's death.

5. **What distractions, motives, or hidden sins in my heart might be keeping me from fully and genuinely seeking God?**
6. **How does the imagery of being “washed with pure water” remind me of my daily need for renewal?**

The Call to Hold Fast in Faith (Please read Hebrews 10:23)

The call to “hold fast” in Hebrews 10:23 emphasizes an ongoing commitment to cling to the hope we profess, without wavering despite life's challenges. The word “unswervingly” conveys firmness and steadiness, reminding believers to remain faithful when circumstances shift. Perseverance requires both human resolve and reliance on God, whose unchanging character and promises provide ultimate security. Because God is faithful, believers can endure confidently, knowing He sustains us and will bring us to the promised inheritance.

7. The word “unswervingly” describes something unbending and steadfast. **What are the biggest pressures in our world today that can cause Christians to bend or compromise in their hope?** How do you personally guard against drifting in faith when life gets difficult or confusing?
8. **Share a time when you felt like letting go but experienced God holding you steady. What did you learn about His faithfulness?**

With Whom Will I Walk? (Please read Hebrews 10:24-25)

Christians are called to care for and actively encourage one another in love and good works, paying close attention to the spiritual needs of their community. The author of Hebrews emphasizes that encouragement requires regular fellowship, warning against abandoning gatherings, which can weaken faith and perseverance. Believers are to motivate one another through both support and correction, fostering spiritual alertness as they await the coming “Day,” which originally referred to the judgment on Jerusalem but also serves as a broader warning against drifting from faith. Sustained communal worship and mutual accountability are essential for enduring in faith and remaining close to God's presence.

9. “Spur on” is a strong phrase — sometimes uncomfortable. **How can we create a culture where we give and receive encouragement that is not just polite but truly challenging?** Can you recall a time when someone spoke truth to you in love and it changed the trajectory of your walk with God?
10. **How does remembering that “the Day” is approaching change the urgency of how we live and how we encourage others?**

References:

Introduction

Note 1: New Testament (Contemporary Chinese Version) – Introduction to the Book of Hebrews

Part 1

Note 2: Excerpted from “NIV Application Commentary - Hebrews”, George Guthrie, Zondervan, 2010, Kindle version, p.341.

Note 3: Excerpted & paraphrased from “Exegetical Paper Hebrews 10:19-25”, Luke Morrison, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University, 2022.

Note 4: Excerpted & paraphrased from “Exegetical Assignment on Hebrews 10:19-25”, Ben Solensky, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 2021, p.5.

Part 2

Note 5: Excerpted from “NIV Application Commentary - Hebrews”, George Guthrie, Zondervan, 2010, Kindle version, p.347-348

Note 6: Excerpted & paraphrased from “Let Us Draw Near to God”, John Piper, 1997-Mar-23, url=<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/let-us-draw-near-to-god>

Part 3

Note 7: Excerpted from “NIV Application Commentary - Hebrews”, George Guthrie, Zondervan, 2010, Kindle version, p.343 & 347.

Note 8: Excerpted & paraphrased from “Hebrews 10:19-25”, Joshua P. Steele, Cedarville University, 2012.

Part 4

Note 9: Excerpted from “NIV Application Commentary - Hebrews”, George Guthrie, Zondervan, 2010, Kindle version, p.344 & 351.

Note 10: Excerpted & paraphrased from “Hebrews 10:19-25”, Joshua P. Steele, Cedarville University, 2012.

Part 5

Note 11: Excerpted from “NIV Application Commentary - Hebrews”, George Guthrie, Zondervan, 2010, Kindle version, p. 345-346.

Note 12: Excerpted & paraphrased from “The Eschatology Of The Warning In Hebrews 10:26–31”, Randall C. Gleason, Tyndale Bulletin 53.1 (2002) 97-120.
