

Impact: Priorities as the Day Draws Near

Hebrews 10:19-25

Mark Vroegop

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 in 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, for he who promised is faithful. 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 (Heb. 10:19-25, ESV).

I'm so grateful for last weekend and our 15th annual THINK conference. Our plenary speaker and Sunday morning preacher was Dr. Trevin Wax. And beyond all the amazing content that he delivered, I asked him to give me some feedback on his experience at our church.

When we have an outside speaker at our church, I often ask this question to get a sense of our church culture. Here's what he said:

"College Park is a church that is able to combine the best of the Bible-focused, gospel-centered elements of a 'higher-shelf' theological posture, while being extraordinarily passionate in worship, with emotions and affections on display, and an unabashed focus on God's closeness to us in times of trial. I sometimes find these elements to be separated, with more reformed churches leaving off the experiential 'God is always with me' side of things for a headier side of Christianity, or vice versa with non-denominational churches that are more charismatic. College Park stood out to me because both were evident."

The last three words are particularly important: "both were evident."

Do you know why that's noteworthy? It's something to celebrate because that is exactly what we want our church culture to be about. At the beginning of the year, I shared something that we call our identity compass. It captures our mission, Core Values, discipleship pathway, and culture.

We believe and want our church culture to live out the Great Commission and our expression of that (igniting a passion to follow Jesus) through depth, creativity, care, and impact. All four are important, and they are linked together. In other words, we want depth AND creativity AND care AND impact. We want to be a church of all four. A church of "both."

On Sunday night, March 24, the members of our church will meet for a congregational meeting to consider several important proposals including:

- Our fiscal year budget which is \$12.9 million
- Hiring Dr. Charles Ware for a part-time role called “Leader in Residence”
- Hiring Garlando Lewis as one of our pastors on the Care & Connection Team
- The self-governance of Luma Counseling

We’re taking a one-week break from our series in 1 Samuel today to talk about the vision of our pastors and elders for where we’re headed in 2024 and 2025. I want to take some time to unpack where we are and where we’re headed.

The month of March concludes our fiscal year, and I want to commend our church for your faithful generosity. As of January, our giving has exceeded our budget by one million dollars, and the months of February and March are looking exceptionally strong. This is on top of a record Christmas Offering of \$1.7 million. You may remember that our budget plan involved taking some pretty big steps of faith by giving away \$100,000 and \$125,000 earlier this budget year.

I’m pleased to announce that we are giving away another \$255,000 of revenue over budget. The more you give, the more we give away. Candidly, this was something we’ve never tried before, and it’s been incredible to see the blessing of the Lord. So, we are ending the year on a financial high note.

Numbers don’t mean everything. I don’t look at them very often. But after some really hard years where God called us to rejoice in hardship, it’s good to be in a place where we are rejoicing in blessing.

That, however, raises the bar for us to consider what the Holy Spirit is placing on our hearts for the next few years. So, let’s talk about that along with Hebrews 10.

The book was written to a church that could sense the looming clouds of difficulty. It’s one of the most rhetorically beautiful books in the entire New Testament. It sings with deep truth. And the writer of Hebrews is exhorting the people of God about how to remain faithful in uncertain and potentially challenging times. Last week you heard Trevin Wax use Hebrews 12 as a great encouragement:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:1-2).

That’s the big-picture goal. But there’s also an instruction in Hebrews 10 about how they should think about the gathering together. Churches need a clear and big vision. But they also need to be consistent and faithful. It’s instructive that the book of Hebrews says this to a church that is a little nervous about the future:

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 in 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, for he who promised is faithful. 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 (Heb. 10:19-25).

1. Believe

The church is the church because of what we believe. The church confession (what we believe) and the church covenant (how we live) are what make a church different from any other group of people who happen to be meeting on a Sunday.

It's out of that belief that we live our lives. Biblical truth informs daily life. There are three things that the writer of Hebrews mentions. Each of them has deep connections to the Old Testament:

- ***Since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus*** – Believers in Jesus have access to intimacy and fellowship with God through the blood of Jesus. We're able to enter "the holy places." The holy place is no longer off limits and restricted to the priests. Instead of fear or trepidation, we can have confidence. This means we have courageous, bold worship.
- ***By the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh*** – Believers in Jesus have a new access because of a new way opened to us through the sacrifice of Christ. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we have a living sacrifice. By his suffering and death, he removed any barrier between us and God.
- ***Since we have a great high priest over the house of God*** – We now have a great high priest, one who intercedes for us and who sympathizes with us. We believe that Jesus is alive. He sits at the right hand of the throne of God. And this belief is what defines us.

Last week I was interviewing a couple for church membership, and they asked me if we ever turn people down. I said that we do if they don't believe the gospel or if they don't live out the gospel. I said something like, "Our church is a church because of what we believe and how we live."

It's one of the reasons that we love baptism Sundays, right? It shows us what we believe. We summarize our belief with "God is holy, I am not, Jesus saves, and Christ is my life." And anytime we gather together, we are celebrating what we believe. One of the things that our elders and pastors are working on is providing greater clarity on what we believe. We've evaluated our confession of faith, our covenant, and our internal documents to look for areas that need clarity. As we move forward together, we want to be sure that our doctrine is biblical and clear.

I heard a statement this week on a podcast that reminded me about why this is so important. The person said, "Our culture has moved from 'Is it true?' to 'Does it work?' to 'How does it make me feel?'"

And then I found a chartⁱ that connected the dots for me related to what we consume and do, and how it's connected to a "dopamine culture." What we believe is critical in this day and age.

2. Follow

What comes next in the text is an implication of what we believe. In other words, if what we believe is true, then what should we do? There are three "let us" commands in the remaining verses, but let's look at the first two here.

- ***Draw near with a true heart in full assurance*** – This command is related to personal devotion. It's an exhortation to keep coming to Jesus. There's a disposition or a leaning in as it relates to the posture of the believer. We'll talk more about this as it relates to Sundays later in the sermon.
- ***Hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering*** – This exhortation relates to faithful perseverance. It means to take hold of something firmly and not let go of it. The word is used three times in Hebrews. It's used here in reference to "our confession." And in chapter 3 it's used for holding fast to our confidence.

You could summarize these commands as passion and perseverance. This is what every generation of Christians needs. There's a danger of letting our passion lapse. And there's a danger of giving up. The writer exhorts this church with two "let us" statements. So, this is not only something to be embraced individually but also together. We must help each other with passion and perseverance.

That requires that we know each other. Passion and perseverance look different when you're in your twenties versus your sixties. To that end, we commissioned a survey to help us shepherd our congregation more effectively. We learned some important information about our church family:

- 48 percent of College Parkers are new within the last five years
- Our ethnic makeup is more diverse by 11 percent since 2017
- There has been a 19 percent increase of singles attending College Park since 2017
- The largest age groups at College Park are 30-39 year-olds and 40-49 year-olds

There's so much to be thankful for when we look at this information. And it presents us with new shepherding opportunities to help our entire church follow Jesus with passion and perseverance.

3. Care

The final "let us" statement is important enough to call out individually, and it connects directly to where we're headed over the next two years. Our theme is **impact: changing the world together for Jesus, one person at a time**. So how does Hebrews think about the Christian life?

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).

The idea is that as the “Day” gets closer, the church needs to increase its commitment to the mission of the church. We’ve got to “stir up one another” to love and good works. As we look at the next two years, here are four priorities that we’re leaning into.



Unreached People: We want to keep lifting our eyes to the 3.4 billion people around the world who are unreached. We want to keep deploying funds from the Christmas offering to move the needle. We want to keep praying, and we want even more of you to consider going on a Vision Trip.

Neighbors: We want to bring gospel wholeness to our neighbors. We dream of new bridges of grace that can bear the weight of truth. Along with Christmas Concert, Easter, Lunch on Us, and Trunk or Treat, we’re launching Luma Counseling and making long-term investments in College Park Elementary.

Relationships: We want to strengthen the relationships in our church family. Through deep connections in groups and classes, we want to create venues for people to know each other. We want to live out our Core Value of Redemptive Community. That was part of the vision of The Portico. It’s a place to connect for our church and the community.

Sundays: This might seem less than innovative, but there’s a danger with large churches that we lose our focus on the most important thing that we do. As we think about the challenges of 2024, our main strategy is that we are going to meet together every seven days. We’re going to sing together, pray together, study God’s Word together. We’re going to receive the Lord’s Supper, baptize believers, and welcome in new members.

Additionally, you may have noticed that it’s increasingly crowded on Sundays. Since the beginning of the year, we are averaging 3,500 people on Sunday which is 11 percent more than last year. Two weeks ago, we had a new post-Covid record with 3,800.

We’re going to need your help by coming a bit earlier and sitting closer. But whatever you do, please keep inviting people who need Jesus. Our hope is to stay at two services, so we’re going to be creative and we’re making plans to start planting churches again.

By God’s grace, we think 2024 and 2025 are going to be amazing years as we fulfill our mission of igniting a passion to follow Jesus through focusing on Sundays, relationships, neighbors, and the unreached.

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ⁱ https://www.honest-broker.com/p/the-state-of-the-culture-2024?fbclid=IwAR1Sxr0AVdo83Q_V9MbpzBQQLXZnBWIHLjZhe3NabR_Izf5oBXc8PQRkOQ