

And All the More (Hebrews 10:23-25)
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Looking back at this year's summer retreat, I thought it went quite well. During the retreat brothers and sisters of all ages engaged with each other in fellowship. Today's passage exhorts us to persist in this kind of fellowship, for the sake of holding on to and growing in our faith. Before going into the passage, we should first gain some context. Hebrews is a letter written during the days of the early church to Jewish converts to Christianity. So when we read this letter, we must look at it through the eyes of a Jew. At the time, Jews had a strong sense of community, which differs from today's strongly individualistic American society. It is not unlike the emphasis placed on community and family in Chinese culture. However, when these Jews became Christians, they left the community of the synagogue. Some missed the community so much that they went back to Judaism. The author of Hebrews writes this letter to show that Jesus is better than anything the Jews had under the Old Covenant. Jesus is better than angels and better than Moses. Jesus is the ultimate High Priest and King. And He is the ultimate sacrifice. So since Jesus is so much better, why downgrade by going back to the synagogue? Hebrews says that nothing compares to Jesus, so we must keep the faith. This perseverance is strengthened by meeting together, encouraging each other, and spurring each other on to follow Jesus.

Most of us would not think of abandoning Christianity for Judaism. But what types of things similarly draw us away from the faith? The summer after high school, I was told that college is a time that can make or break one's faith. After entering college, I found this statement to be true. Some grow tremendously in faith, and some abandon the faith during college. Sometime after college, I checked up on my old college fellowship and found that the attendance had dropped. At first I thought this meant people were going to other fellowships, but I soon learned that attendance at other fellowships was declining as well. It seems more students were turning away from the faith during college. So I was convicted to prepare the youth to stand firm in their faith as they entered college. I started up college fellowship again and invited the high school seniors to come and learn from those in college how to get plugged into a fellowship.

However, I eventually heard more about how it was also difficult to be engaged in fellowship after college, and about those who fell away from the faith during this time. I realized

that college is not the only time that makes or breaks your faith. Any life stage, whether it is college, working, marriage, or parenthood, can make or break your faith. There are always things that pull us away from Jesus. It shouldn't be a surprise that a fallen world that hates Jesus will try to pull His followers away from Him. This is why it's so important for us to be together and strengthen each other in faith. We saw this at the retreat, brothers and sisters of all generations sharing wisdom with each other and preparing each other to stand firm in faith during the next stage of life.

In v. 23 we see that the reason we should be strengthened in faith through fellowship is that God is faithful. He wants what is best for us, and He knows that fellowship will help us keep the faith. When I first started leading Oasis, I often felt too tired to come to Charis. I forgot the benefits that fellowship can have on my faith, but eventually I started coming more frequently after receiving encouragement. Staying strong in faith takes discipline, but we can help each other by encouraging one another. This happens when we spend time together during refreshments, Sunday school, and fellowship. This happens when we serve together and when we volunteer to guide the youth at Oasis, or teach the children at Sunday school. In all our interactions we should have the purpose of spiritual edification rather than just socialization. In Christ we are united, so let us continue to meet together to grow in Christ.

Finally, v. 25 tells us that we should keep doing this all the more as we see the Day approaching. This first tells us that the necessity for fellowship will increase as we see the world continue to separate from God. Second, it encourages us to share our lives and the wisdom God gives us all the more as we continue to grow amidst the trials and temptations of this world. We are flooded with the values of this world, but we belong to the kingdom of God. So it is best for us to strengthen each other to stand in faith. And fellowship not only enables us to persevere, but also to thrive. Through mutual encouragement, we can see God to great things among us and through us, for His glory. God blessed us with each other, so let us keep meeting together for the sake of following Jesus, with the knowledge that He is the best.