

# Battling Unbelief Together

by John Piper

---

*We are called to battle unbelief and fight the fight of faith together, through intentional small groups that target love and faith.*

**Duration:** 29:01

**Scripture:** Hebrews 3:12

**Topics:** "Faith And Works", "Overcoming Unbelief"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of intentional and purposeful gatherings among believers. He encourages the audience to meet more often and with a sense of urgency, specifically targeting love and empowering one another to love through good works. The speaker highlights the need for thoughtful intentionality in small group settings, rather than simply coasting into fellowship without a clear purpose. The sermon is rooted in the concept of battling unbelief and emphasizes the faithfulness of God's promises in overcoming challenges.

---

## Transcript

Please turn with me to the text for this morning's sermon, Hebrews chapter 10, verses 19 through 25. Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which 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 and 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 in 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. Let's pray together briefly before we speak. As the day of the Lord approaches, Father, everything we do together as brothers and sisters in Christ becomes more urgent and more precious.

As the clouds gather of sin, of satanic oppression, of delusion, it becomes harder and harder to keep the faith, and more and more important that we stir one another up to love and good works. And so I pray that this message would not be delivered in vain, that the 2020 vision would not be established in vain, but that by the power of your Holy Spirit, you would incline the hearts of your people to see the urgency of these kinds of groups and give themselves wholly to you in the fight of faith. I ask it for the glory of Jesus Christ and in his name.

Amen. I survive in the ministry and thrive as a Christian because I'm surrounded by people who pray for me and who give me personal, regular exhortation and encouragement from the Word of God. And if you don't feel supported like that, if you sit there and say, well, sure, you're a pastor or you're a professional, and don't feel yourself surrounded by some people who hold you up, who can eyeball it with you and say, be careful now, or be encouraged, or rejoice, or look at this passage of Scripture, who will talk to you personally about your need and the Word, then our desire in this service is that that be changed so that by the time these weeks of inaugurating the 2020 vision are passed, you will have formed a new habit and found yourself in a new kind of gathering that perhaps is not your ordinary custom.

Without intentional faith-building togetherness, we lose zeal, we begin to drift away from God, our hearts become harder to spiritual things, and if somebody doesn't snatch us, like it says in James 5, 19, if somebody doesn't snatch us and pull us back, we will make shipwreck of faith and perish in unbelief. I got a postcard two weeks ago from a pastor who ministered to me and strengthened my faith. Let me use it as an example of the kind of thing that can happen both through the mail and, more importantly, face-to-face.

He didn't even address it to me except on the front side of the postcard, so it would arrive at the church. It was, Dear Lord, and it was a prayer for me to read. I'll read you part of it.

Dear Lord, glorify Yourself, our Savior, by moving us as a family of believers to pray as never before. May we find delight and enrichment in new intimacy of conversation with You. May our churches experience new health and vitality.

And grant us, by a fuller liberation of Your power through mighty multiplied intercession, to capture the strongholds of darkness in our country and around the world, that Your name will everywhere be esteemed and revered. Give special guidance to Your servant John as he wrestles with the discernment of urgent issues for Bethlehem's future. Even in uncertainty, provide such inner confidence of Your ultimate leading that his peace will be unspeakable and unshakable.

Your servant, Bill. So it can happen through the mail and it can happen face-to-face. It ought to happen face-to-face regularly.

Last week, what we saw was that the name of the game or the top priority in Christian living is to battle unbelief. That is the most important job we have. Battling unbelief, that's the negative way of saying it, or fighting the fight of faith, that's the positive way of saying it.

Now the Apostle Paul lived his life this way. One of the most important texts that I'm going to come back to probably dozens of times in the next 13 weeks is 2 Timothy 4-7. Let me just read it to you.

Paul is at the end of his life. This is probably the last letter he wrote. He said, I have fought the good fight.

I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. Fought the good fight.

Kept the faith. What is the fight? It's the good fight of faith. Paul's life was one long life of battling unbelief and fighting to hold fast to faith.

And here's what I want to stress this morning. He didn't do it alone. He never did it alone.

He had his Barnabas, his Silas, his Timothy, his Mark, his Luke, his Aristarchus, his Epaphras, and others. He always traveled in team. Do you remember in the book of Acts the one time he was forced not to travel

in team? He was driven out of Thessalonica, had to flee to Athens by himself, left Timothy and Silas behind, and he almost was done in by the evil of Athens.

And he wrote in 1 Thessalonians, get Timothy here fast. Now that's the Apostle Paul talking. Mr. Spiritual motto, all strength as you read his epistles.

Let me read you a word from his second letter to the Corinthians to show you the reality of being a spiritual leader. I've had many people say as they see me here and they only see me here with my black suit and my prepared sermons that I have no problems and I have it all together and there are no struggles in the ministry. Let me read Paul as a just sample testimony for what it means to be in the ministry.

2 Corinthians 7 verse 5 says, For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn, fighting without and fear within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus. I read a book last week.

In it, there was a section called the Titus touch. That's a good phrase. We were comforted by the coming of Titus, not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you as he told us of your longing.

You see the ripple effect of eyeball to eyeball comforting of another believer. Titus comes a little distressed and worried about the church at Corinth. The Corinthians rise to the occasion and comfort Titus, send him back.

Here's Paul. He cannot sleep, insomnia. His body has no rest.

He is afflicted, whatever that implies. He has fightings without and fear within and no comfort. And then comes Titus and gives him a hug and an eyeball to eyeball assurance.

They're hanging on in Corinth and his life returns and his fear goes. Paul needed the partnership of close friends. You need it.

I need it. That's what the 2020 vision is about. Everybody needs it.

Now, let's go to the text. Hebrews 10. We're going to look at verses 24 and 25.

Now, I want to make five brief points before we sing and David comes to present the 2020 vision. Let's read those last two verses. 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.

Five points. Number one, we are commanded in this text to meet together, to meet together. And the kind of meeting that is spoken of in this verse is probably not merely this kind of meeting that we're in right now, where if you want to, you can sneak in among these almost 400 people probably that are here and sneak out again and feel, I've done it.

I've done it. I've been to church. I've been among God's people, in and out, kind of anonymous.

That's not what this text is talking about. This text is talking about a kind of mutuality in meeting, isn't it? Look at it. Stir one another, not just preachers stir up people, but stir one another up to love and good works and encourage one another.

So, some kind of meeting, probably a smaller one, where you say something to somebody that stirs them up to love and good works. So, the first point is we are called in this text to get together more or differently than this big sort of one-way preaching service where you sing and you pray and you meditate, but I'm mainly the exhorter in this room right now. You need another kind of smaller gathering where this text, each other principle can be lived out.

Point number two, don't get into the habit of not meeting together. Now, you might say, well, that's the same point. Not quite.

Look at verse 25. It says in the middle there, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some. Now, that's the word that caught me, habit, as is the habit of some.

Some people in that church had gotten into the habit. Now, what is a habit? A habit is something you do without thinking about it and you're comfortable with it. It's just sort of second nature.

Now, that's a danger because some of you are in the habit of not meeting in any group to exhort one another and to stir one another up. And what that means is you've grown comfortable with that so that as I begin to talk this morning, you're feeling threatened. You're feeling he's backing me into a corner.

I don't feel comfortable in that kind of group. That's not me. And you're right because of long years of habit that haven't been good.

In other words, you can't justify not doing something because it's become habitual and therefore comfortable. You have to go back to the word and say, well, even though I have formed the habit over decades or years of not meeting together in a group where we exhort one another and stir each other up to love and good works, this text says I ought to be in that kind of a group and so I've got to break a habit. I hope that's the way obedient, humble Christians respond to this second point.

There's a warning in this text about forming bad habits which then are used to justify themselves by how comfortable they make us feel. We call it a personality trait when, in fact, it's a long-shaped habit that this text says ought to be broken and better not even formed. So the second point is if you're in the habit of not meeting together with other believers, let this fall be the fall in which you take aim at that habit and break it.

God gives power to break bad habits. Second, if you don't have that bad habit, just let this text be a warning not to form it. Don't drop out this fall and say I've been in groups like that for years and I don't think I need it anymore.

I can make it on my own with a little hypo on Sunday morning. Point number three, let the frequency and seriousness of your meetings increase as the day of the Lord draws near. You see that at the end of verse 25? And all the more, that's all the more meetings and all the more serious as you see the day drawing near.

That's the day of the Lord, the day of Christ's coming, the day of the close of this age. Now why is that? Why would he say meet regularly, but if you sense that the end is near, if you sense that the Lord is drawing near, if you look at our culture and the world and you see evidences that the time is ripening and that evil is in avalanche proportions and that maybe floods in Bangladesh and earthquakes in Nepal and Hurricane Gilberts are something of the birth pangs of the new age, and I've got to think of a new word to use now because that's an awful phrase, the age to come, then you will want to meet all the more frequently and all the more urgently. Now why is that? Let me read a text from Jesus in Matthew 24, verse

11.

Many false prophets will arise and lead many astray, and because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold. In other words, one of the marks of the closing of the era is the cooling off of love in the church. Does that make sense out of verse 25 for you? In verse 24, meet together to stir each other up to love and all the more as the age closes because Satan is going to run rampant at the end of the age, and he hates loving Christians.

He loves dissension, disunity, hardness of heart, bitterness, bickering, strife. That's the name of the game for Satan. It's all rooted in unbelief, which is what he specializes in, and therefore, we can't play games anymore.

I mean, the day is closing in on us. You can read it out of the culture and out of the word, and the text says, if that's true, meet more often and more urgently. Point number four, when you meet, target love.

That is, meet to empower each other to love. Meet to empower each other to love one another. It says, stir one another up to love and good works.

And all I want to stress here is intentionality, thoughtful intentionality. So many of us believe in small groups. We believe in, quote, fellowship, and we just kind of coast into our times of fellowship with other believers.

We just kind of coast in. We've been working hard all day. We wolf down our supper.

We hop in the car and run off, and we walk in, and there's no intentionality. Why am I here? What's my mission tonight? And this text clarifies and sharpens the mission. As you're in the car and you're heading off to your small group or they're heading to your house or wherever you're going over lunch or something, you're saying, Lord, help me.

When I meet with David, say, Randall, help me to consider them, how to stir them up to love and good works. What words of mine might be helpful for them? You see that word consider there? Literally, the translation is, in verse 24, consider one another in order to stir each other up to love and good works. And that's just a little bit awkward, so they change it around to consider how to stir one another up, but they miss something when they do that because technically it's consider one another.

When you get into the small group, look at the eyes. Look at the body language. Look at the fretfulness or the distress.

Look at the hands. Look, look, look, and make your whole heart be, I am here tonight to stir up, to sustain, to help, to bear. That's point number four.

Be intentional. Aim at stirring another person up to love. And then the fourth or the fifth point, the last point is, well, first of all, let me ask a question before I make this point, because the point is the answer to this question.

How do you empower another person to love? I've said you should do it and that should be your target, your goal, your intention, but how do you do it? What kinds of things do you say or do to a person so that when they leave the group that night, they have more resources inside, more wisdom, more motivation to love that hard husband at home or that teenager or that colleague at work or roommate, more strength

after this meeting than they had when they came? Now, my answer before I show you it in the text is from last week's message. Unbelief is the root of all sin and unlove. Belief in the promises of God is the root of all love.

Therefore, beneath the target of love is the target of faith. We must gather together to strengthen each other's confidence in the promises of God. We must stir up hope in the promises of God.

We must help each other fight unbelief so that if you detect the marks of unbelief in somebody's heart, you develop strategies and weapons and warfares of love to help them beat back the unbelief of their heart and stir up belief. Because out of that belief is going to grow the love that we want to happen, which according to Jesus in Matthew 5, 16 is the light of the world, which men will see and bring glory to our Father in heaven. So, now let me try to show you where I see this in the text and then one other place in chapter 3. In the text, I get it from verse 23 where it says, let us hold fast the confession of our hope.

Now, in verse 22, it said faith. I think they're almost the same in Hebrews. The confession of our hope without wavering.

So, that's what you want to do is help people get over their wavering. For he who promised, there's the key, is faithful. So, what do you want to do in these small groups? If you stir people up to love and good works, you've got to get beneath love and ask where does love come from? Well, love comes from a heart that when it looks into the future, it starts to be frightened, it starts to be discouraged, it starts to be anxious or bitter or angry or depressed or disillusioned.

And you see that all of them traits of unbelief in the promises of God and you take that person perhaps with an arm or a hug or just an eyeball to eyeball word and remind them of a promise. And you might just say these words right here, God who promised is faithful. He won't let you down this week.

And then you might ask what is that particular thing that you're dealing with in your life? And everybody in this room's got one right now. I wish I knew what each one was because there are promises tailor-made for everything you face. That's why I'm going to preach 14 messages on this because I'm going to try to get enough of those promises out on the table that we will have formed habit over these 14 weeks of how to fight the fight of faith and battle back unbelief.

So, the fifth point is when you come together, make it your aim to battle for each other unbelief or to put it positively, to fight for each other the fight of faith by directing attention toward the promises of God and reminding people that he who promised is faithful. Now, one quick glance back at chapter 3. Would you go back there with me before David comes in just a minute? Chapter 3, verses 12 and 13 are the texts, the verses from which this sermon series was born. If you want to know where did you get the idea for preaching on battling unbelief for 15 weeks, the answer is these two verses.

Let me read them and you'll be asking yourself, where is small groups in these two verses and what are the goals of small groups according to these two verses? Take care, brethren, lest there be in you an evil, unbelieving, mark the word, unbelieving heart. Literally, it's an evil heart of unbelief, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another, there are the small groups, exhort one another every day.

So, I hope that in these small groups, relationships are forged, which not only can minister biweekly, but over the phone and by notes and by paths crossing daily. Every day, as long as it is called today, that's the

same reference to the coming of the Lord, time is limited. As long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Now, notice what the target of small groups are in these two verses. There are two targets, one in verse 12, one in verse 13, and I want you to see how they're related. What is the target which we are trying to overcome and avoid in verse 12? A heart of unbelief.

Take care, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief. So, when we get together, we are to have the kind of antennas that can detect the creeping nature of unbelief in a believer's heart. Yes, a believer's heart can have creeping unbelief, and we're to fight it for each other.

And then what's the target in verse 13? The target is the deceitfulness of sin. Beware about the hardening character of this deceitfulness of sin. So, now, how does the deceitfulness of sin relate to a heart of unbelief? And I think you'd agree that the heart of unbelief is the root that gives rise to all manner of sinning.

Unbelief allows the heart to begin to be lied to by Satan, lying about what sin is not. We don't think that's really sin. It's not so bad, Satan says.

And since we have stopped trusting in the Word and the promise of God, it becomes more attractive than what God has held out to us. So, let me just sum up this fifth point again. When we gather in smaller groups, our goal mainly, the name of the game, the top priority of our getting together is to help each other believe promises, help each other believe the promises of God and fight back the deceitfulness of Satan, unbelief, and sin.

And since sin is the opposite of love, that brings us back to chapter 10, verse 24 and 25, stir one another up to love and good works. So, the way to stir one another up to love and good works is to help each other fight the fight of faith because out of faith comes love. Galatians 5, 6, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail but faith working through love.

Now, God has made us a people. He hasn't made us scattered individuals. He's made us a family, a body, a comradeship, and He has not designed the church to lose.

Nothing will prevail against the church. We will be victorious. But one of the ways we will be victorious is by gathering in smaller platoons, if you like the military image, or family groupings, if you like the family imagery, to stir one another up.

I want us to affirm before David comes this great truth that we are the people of God, and I want us to do it with a song, number 546, We Are God's People. Number 546, we're going to sing this song, then we're going to be seated. David will briefly introduce the 2020 vision, and we will draw to a close.

Shall we stand to sing 546?

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/10/SID10492.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-piper/battling-unbelief-together/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**