

# Encouraging Each Other at the End of the Age

by John Piper

---

*God's commandments are designed to bring us joy and happiness, and we are to encourage one another and meet together in small groups to stay safe in Jesus as the day of judgment draws near.*

**Duration:** 43:04

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 10:12, Psalm 100:2, Isaiah 35:10, Matthew 5:11, Matthew 13:44, 2 Corinthians 9:7, 1 Thessalonians 4:13

**Topics:** "Christian Community", "Mutual Encouragement"

---

## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of believers coming together in small groups for mutual ministry, encouragement, and prayer. It highlights the need for Christians to stir up one another to love and good works, recognizing that God's commandments are always for our good. The speaker urges the congregation to embrace the joy and blessings found in community, where spiritual gifts are discovered and supernatural blessings are channeled through one another.

---

## Transcript

Father, it's a strange thing to be told that as the day, the day of judgment, the last day draws near, the need will be, meet, meet, meet together. We're so individualistic in America, we think the fight at the end of the day will be you, me, and the devil, and the beast, and we'll win. And it won't be like that.

I pray, O God, that you would give us a seriousness about what this text says in Bethlehem, that we would live with a sense of urgency, and that we would forsake our self-reliances, and our solitudes, and our retreats into aloneness, that we would move toward others to bless them and be blessed by them. Lord, there is so much to be had from You through each other by virtue of their gifts. We sell ourselves, I fear, sometimes suicidally short by not putting ourselves in the way of a brother's prayer or a sister's gifts.

So help me to make this plain. Grant me the gift of motivation to get people moving in the right direction. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

So what I want to do is try to awaken in you a deep, joyful, confident sense that being in a small group of Christians for mutual ministry and prayer for each other would be very good for you, and good for those around you, and a glory to Christ. And many of you, hundreds of you, know that already and have acted on it, and you may sit there and bask in the approval of God that you have chosen the good way. However, other hundreds of you perhaps grew up in homes and churches where to be with a group of

believers regularly, like weekly say, where you prayed for each other, shared your lives together, exercised gifts towards each other, brought grace down and funneled it to each other, were there for each other, rebuked and exhorted each other, was not normal Christianity.

That was maybe what missionaries did, or really high-powered spiritual people did, but wasn't part of my background, and my oh my, that would be new. And for you, I would like to, in this message, introduce you to normal Christianity as the New Testament sees it, and encourage you that there is a joyful, deep sense that I want you to have that to be with a dozen, or ten, or eight, or fifteen other believers praying for each other, exhorting each other, asking God to give you gifts for each other would be really good for you, and would be a blessing to people around you, including the people at your work, and would be an honor to Christ. That's my goal.

So let's start by knocking the props out from under a very bad idea. The bad idea, the wrong idea, the false idea, is to think that the commands of God make people miserable. That the imperatives of the Bible, like the Ten Commandments, or the Sermon on the Mount, or Romans 12, these commandments in the Bible from God are calculated to make us miserable, or sad.

So many people think about commandments, just let the words sink in, and see how you feel about it, commandments represent authority, and the appropriate human counterpart to authority is submit, obey, do, with no connotation of any kind of appropriate affections that might make that a very good thing, glad thing, wonderful thing. It doesn't feel like that to most people. Commandment connotes authority, connotes submission, connotes... And I would like to knock the props out from under that very bad idea that commandments are in the Bible to make you feel oppressed.

That's not why they're there. Here's what the Bible says. The Bible says that God's commandments are for our good.

Everything He tells us to do is good for us to do. It's good for us to do. Everything He tells us to do.

God doesn't need your service in order to improve upon His abilities or His attitudes. God gives commandments not because He has needs, but because we have needs. He has no needs that you can meet.

His commandments are not designed to put you in His service to improve upon His life. He's totally self-sufficient and brimming with eternal joy in the fellowship of the Trinity. His commandments are not designed to put you to work to get Him out of any fix or problem.

So what should we think? Well, let's just think Bible verses. Let me give you a few that knock the props out from under this bad idea that God's design in His commandments is to make you oppressed and miserable. Deuteronomy 10, 12.

Now Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? But to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, to keep His commandments and statutes of the Lord which I am commanding you this day for your good. All the commandments are for our good. God knows you and me better than we know ourselves.

He knows what we need to be and to do in order to have maximum life, maximum joy, maximum flourishing, maximum fruitfulness and eternal everlasting happiness. He knows that. We don't.

Therefore, we must have it revealed to us in the book. So, when God tells us to do things, it's like a doctor telling you to take what will make you well. To do these back exercises that will keep you from having back pain.

Of course, while you're doing them, it takes time and effort. But after a few days, your back firms up and you don't spring it as often and that was really good. And so God has a thousand good ideas for your life and you don't.

Your ideas without God are all wrong. Give you short-term happiness and long-term pain. Whereas God's ideas might bring some short-term pain and will always bring long-term happiness.

Here's another one. So, what does the Bible say we should think about coming to Christ having renounced everything in order to have Him? How should we feel about that? Matthew 13, 44. The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up.

And then in his joy, he sold everything he had and bought that field. That's a picture of getting saved. You stub your toe on a treasure which is the kingdom of God, the rule of Christ, savingly in your life, and it looks so unspeakably valuable in the parable.

You sell everything you have and buy that field. That's what it means to get saved. It means to discover a treasure.

It's a command for joy. When Jesus beckons a man, he bids him come and die to fleeting pleasures that he may have eternal ones. Dying doesn't feel good in the short run.

It just opens the door to paradise. Another example. What does the Bible say about serving the Lord? Psalm 100, verse 2. Serve the Lord with gladness.

Come into his courts with singing. Serve the Lord with gladness. That's a command.

God's plan for being served is to make sure he provides everything it takes so that that's a glad experience. And if you're not having a glad experience in the service of the Lord, you just are missing something. You haven't got something fixed in your head.

You've got to figure something out that you haven't gotten right yet. Another question. What about giving? There's a command.

Give money to the poor, to the church. What does the Bible say about that command? It says this in 2 Corinthians 9, 7. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for the Lord loves a cheerful giver. God is not happy with you if you're not happy in giving.

If when you write your check to the church, it's a burden, he doesn't like that check. Keep it. I mean that.

Don't want this church built on begrudged checks. Happy checks. That's all.

Keep your burdened checks. Get your heart right. When your heart's right, we need your money.

But we don't need burdened checks. The Lord loves people to discover that his commands are good for them, including the command to give. Well, here's another question.

What about suffering? What about when the Lord ordains that we walk through the valley of the shadow of death and we're to keep the faith in there? What are we to think about that command? And we are to think this. Matthew 5, 11, Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice! Be glad! Your reward is great in heaven.

So, the outcome of our suffering will be so overwhelmingly great that the joy streams backward from the hope of the future and penetrates into the suffering so that we can say with the apostle, sorrowful yet always rejoicing. 2 Corinthians 6, 10 What about grief? What about loss? Sometimes his commands call us to walk through horrific loss. A child, a spouse.

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that is dead, that you may not grieve as those who have no hope. Even in our grief, He wants us to have hope. He wants to come to us even in our worst losses and say, I've got you, don't grieve like the world grieves.

I want you to be a hope-filled griever here. What about when it's all over and the end of the age comes? I add this one onto my list because in my devotions this week, I read Isaiah 35. I had written at the top of Isaiah 35 in my Bible, beautiful chapter.

That's what I wrote. Beautiful chapter. It ends with the words, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come with singing and everlasting joy will be upon their heads and they will know joy and gladness and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

That's what's coming to you in Jesus. If you're a believer, that's coming. Everlasting joy will be upon your head.

All sorrow, all sighing will fly away and will come back no more. How could we ever think that a God who plans that for us has given us His commandments to make us miserable? Unthinkable. It's absolutely unthinkable.

So, I am in the business of knocking the props out from under this very bad idea that when God tells us to do things, it's oppressive. It's sad. It's gloomy.

It's miserable. Wrong. It's not.

If we experience it that way, we're not understanding what His purpose is. That's my first point. I'm trying to knock the props out from under God's... You're treating God's thou shalt as a cause of misery.

Now, here's the reason that's relevant to our text. One of God's commands is that every church should have elders who watch over and care for the souls of the people in their churches. Acts 20, 28, Paul talking to the elders of Ephesus.

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock. Now, this is a command given to elders. I'm one of 32 at Bethlehem.

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock of Bethlehem. We've got about 2,100 covenant members here. Then about 2,500 regular attenders or visitors.

Kind of a strange setup, but that's the way it is right now. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God which He obtained with His own blood. Now, when God commands the elders, take careful attention to the flock and be sure

you're caring for their souls.

You're going to have to give an account for them someday. The elders should experience that as this is really good for us to be commanded to do this. This is good for us.

And you should read it in your Bibles and say, that's really good for us that He's telling the elders to do that. Every command in the Bible should have the Christian response, this is good for us. This is really good for us.

God has our best at interest here when He commands elders to oversee the church and love the church and care for the church and hold the church accountable and structure the church for mutual ministries. Here's another one, another text in this regard. 1 Peter 5, So I exhort the elders among you, shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly as God would have you, not for shameful gain, woe to pastors who do their work for money, but eagerly, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

But there it is, shepherd the flock of God. And then He tells us how to do it. Don't do it this way, do it this way.

And if He tells me that, John Piper, that's good for me. Stay up late, get up early, this is good for me. And when you read it as part of the flock, you should say, this is good for us, really good for us.

Oh, let's pray for our elders that they'd be obedient to these texts and we would benefit from their obedience. Now, when you get to our text, chapter 10 of Hebrews, here we are, you realize that God has ordained that the elders don't do all the shepherding themselves. You may remember, I won't go there with you, but just to quote it, Ephesians 4.12, where God has given apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry.

So, elders are to do the work of the ministry, but part of their work in the ministry is to help others do the work of the ministry. So, here we are in Hebrews 10, but before I read verses 23 to 25 to draw out a few observations about this, keep in mind that behind chapter 10 is the reality of chapter 13, verse 17. I'll read it to you.

Here's Hebrews 13.17. It says to the church that this letter is written to, and I think by implication all the churches, including today's, obey your leaders, that is your elders, and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account let them do this with joy, not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. There it is, so clear. The commandment that elders do watch care over their people should be done with joy, because if we don't do it with joy, you're not benefited.

I mean, just picture it. Picture 25 staff members and 33 elders all slogging it out, miserable day by day, dutifully doing the work of the ministry of Bethlehem. You'd all get sick.

Actually, you'd leave. Sick churches are produced by sad pastors. Christianity becomes a pretty ugly thing when it's organized and led by burdened down, bored, wish they were doing something else kind of pastors and elders.

So clearly, chapter 13, verse 17 says there are leaders in this church. We're to submit to them, and that submission should be joyful, and they should be joyful. Everybody should be pursuing joy in this

relationship of leadership and submission.

Now we're at chapter 10. And what's surprising, what's added in chapter 10, verses 23 to 25, is that evidently, the leaders of the churches are not the end point of the shepherding of the people, but rather a means to the church shepherding the church. So let's read verses 24 and 25.

Hebrews 10, 24. Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works. So you get this mutuality thing going on.

One another, 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. Now let me draw out four things from those two verses.

Number one, Christians are told to encourage one another. So of course, elders should do that, but my main job in this church is not to call every one of you on the phone and say an encouraging word to you. That's not my main job.

My main job is to preach from this pulpit so that there's kind of a shotgun scattering of truth so that there is a rising tide in the church of capacity to do Christ exalting encouragement. And I succeed or fail by whether or not that's happening. So the first one is encouraging one another.

Here's number two. That encouragement has a point, namely to help people do good deeds and acts of love. Verse 24.

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works. So when Christians say encouraging things or do encouraging things to each other, the aim of encouragement, increased faith, enlarging of hope, clarifying of vision through talking with one another, the aim of that is to release lovers in the world. Good deed.

Let your light so shine that may we see your good deeds and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. The aim of our one another life is to heighten the prevalence of love here and there. Love is the aim.

That's number two. Number three. This happens, it says, when we meet together.

Verse 25. Not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some. So evidently there were some in this church that were starting to feel like we don't need this.

Now, let me make something clear. This gathering here, I don't think, was mainly the large gathering like this one. And the reason I don't think that's what it means, even though I grew up hearing sermons from this text that you ought to go to church on the weekend, I think this text means the kind of group where encouraging one another happens.

Because that's what it says. Not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another. So it's the kind of meeting where I'm not doing all the encouraging.

It's not 600 folks. It's six or three or 16. And they can talk.

They can hang out. They can hold food in their hands. Food helps.

People encourage each other. Take some of the edge off. The world uses cocktails.

We use bars. The other kind of bars. Or hot dish.

If you're in Minnesota, don't neglect to gather together in the kind of groupings where you can encourage each other. That's what it says. That's a command and it's good for us.

Fourth observation. Evidently, this is so important that toward the end of the age, when the day draws near, the day of judgment draws near, this will be essential increasingly. Have you ever thought about that? There's something about the, the Bible says that in the last day, there will be times of great difficulty.

The word translated stresses and hardships and calamities. It's not going to get easier to be a Christian. It's going to get harder to be a Christian.

So what's your plan for staying a Christian? Or do you have this cavalier, lackadaisical eternal security thing that you can just live like the devil and do whatever you want and you're going to go to heaven no matter what? That's not the biblical doctrine of eternal security. The biblical doctrine of eternal security is that the evidence that you're eternally secure is that you're following the biblical means to stay safe in Jesus. And he'll keep you.

Those whom he began a good work, he completes the good work. Yes, he will. And he'll do it by putting you into the kind of groups that will sustain your faith.

So, I take this real seriously that as the day comes, the need for being together in mutually praying, mutually ministering, mutually encouraging groups goes up, not down. Don't think, oh, the end's almost here. Quick, Lord Jesus come and I'm just holding up in my basement.

Wherever. Don't hold up unless you hold up with 8 or 10 other people. And of course, if 8 or 10 people are there, then the Holy Spirit's going to move and you will learn that you don't hold up.

You go out and risk your lives to testify to Jesus. So, in summary, here's what we see. God's commandments are always good for us.

He loves us. He never tells us to do anything that's bad for us, ever. It's always things that are good for us.

One of the things He does is to say, Elders, watch over this church. Care for their faith. Do a lot yourselves and put in place structures that will help people do this for each other.

He calls the saints, stir up one another to love and good works, encourage one another. The day is coming. Sharpen each other like iron on iron.

Be there. Use your spiritual gifts. Pray for each other.

Be there when the other is in crisis and need. That's good for us. So you remember what I said my goal was? My goal was to awaken in you a strong, deep, happy, confident sense that being together with other believers would be good for you, good for those around you, and a glory to Christ.

That's what I'm aiming at. Now let me close by relating this to the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. You may be newer at Bethlehem and not know where we are in the continuum of belief in what kinds of gifts and what kind of supernatural activity God is free and intending to do in our day.

So I'll just tell you, we're a church that believes in the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit to do whatever He pleases, including all the gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12, 8 to 10. To just pick out one list. There's no theology at Bethlehem that says God can't, won't, shouldn't give anybody a gift of faith, a gift of

miracles, a gift of healing, a gift of tongues, a gift of wisdom, a gift of knowledge.

There's nothing in this church that says, ooh, don't go there. People go crazy if they go there. Well, that may be true for some people, but it's okay.

So then the question comes is, okay, where's that? Where does that happen around Bethlehem? And when people ask me that, I say, well, I don't know how much is happening, but I know where I will pray that God moves in power. I'm happy for Him to do anything He wants in this service along those lines, but I'm expecting that He will do it when people get really serious about caring for each other in small groups. And I mean expectant prayer that when you ask God for things, He's going to come and do them.

And that our small groups should be the little hospitals of the church, the little deliverance points. People at Bethlehem shouldn't have to go to a deliverance ministry. They cross the country to go to a vineyard.

Now, I'm thrilled that that happens from time to time. I'm just saying, shouldn't have to go anywhere if you are oppressed by the devil for somebody to put their hands on you and ask God to deliver you. This is not Theology 301.

This is basic, do you love people? Are you willing to look at somebody in a small prayer group and see with the eyes of the Holy Spirit that something's wrong? And then to venture a question, are you okay? Is the marriage okay? Is the cancer back? Are you angry? You look angry. Can I pray for you before you go? Hand on the shoulder. Holy Spirit come, heal, deliver.

It just ought to be happening. So, I was in the group of small group leaders Sunday night, I'm closing with this. In the group of small group leaders Sunday night, and I said, help me with the sermon next Sunday.

I want to preach on this and you're the leaders and give me some ideas about what to say. And oh my, there were so many good ideas. But I want to pick one to close with.

Somebody used this phrase. He used the phrase, we need to help our people see that if they don't move into some kind of small group relationship, they may be missing or denying others of the Esther moments of life. Esther moments.

Now, here's what I believe he meant. I didn't go deeper, but you remember, here's the situation with Esther. She becomes queen.

She's Jewish in the exile. She comes queen and Haman, this wicked Haman, has plotted to kill all the Jews. And he's gotten the king, her husband, to agree to release people to kill all the Jews in the empire.

And she's a Jew. Mordecai, her cousin, sort of father, raised her. He finds out about this and he sends her a message and says, could it be that you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this? In other words, an Esther moment.

You're there and nobody else can do this but you. That's why you're there. Now, she knows you can't go into the presence of the king unless he lifts the golden scepter.

You get killed, even queens. You don't mess with the king. So she writes back, you fast and pray and I will go.

And if I perish, I perish. Now, here's the relationship to small groups. There are Esther's and there are Mordecai's, namely all of you.

And God has ordained that at some moment in life, you're essential in this group. Actually, you're always essential somewhere, doing something that only you can do. But there are moments when God intends to bring a blessing into a small group precisely through you.

Don't have the notion that spiritual gifts are lifelong skills which get supercharged by the Holy Spirit. That is true. But that's not mainly what is meant in 1 Corinthians 12.

Mainly what is meant in 1 Corinthians 12 is when the church gathers together, God sovereignly gifts people to do things that need being done in the lives of others, to build them up and deliver them, strengthen them, Esther moments. Or if we want to be male and female, Mordecai moments and Esther moments. And so there are two things you're going to miss among others if you come away from this service saying, I just don't think I need that in my life.

You're going to miss, number one, a channeling of power and blessing to you that God only will give you through others. That's the way He's planned it. And secondly, you're going to miss the blessing of being one of those channelers to others because spiritual gifts are discovered in fellowship.

They're not discovered in the woods by yourself asking for a revelation of who you are. We find ourselves anointed and gifted in the moment when we make ourselves at the disposal of the King to bless His people. And so my plea is that you not run away from this.

For you to turn away from the summons of Hebrews 10 and 25 would be like saying to God, I know that you often give supernatural blessings to your people through the ministry of others, but I will get along without it. You don't want to talk that way to God even if He would tolerate it. You don't want to do that.

God loves this church way more than I do. That means that He has given elders to this church who are jealous to work for your good spiritually and physically. He also has taught the elders through His Word that they are to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry.

So David Livingston is charged as our staff member over the whole small group ministry. Amy is his sidekick. Bless God for Amy.

And this booklet here. And David works with other pastors who work with elders, who work with small group leaders, who work with you. That's the way it works.

That's our care plan for fulfilling our charge in Acts 20-28. And if you resist it, you make it very hard for us to do our work. But mainly, you cut yourself off from amazing blessing.

Let's ask the Lord in these coming days. We have 120 small groups. About 81 of them are listed here because these are all ready to welcome you.

If you don't have a small group, the others are foolish. And you go to the table back there with the book. All the campuses will have tables and books.

And there will be maps. There will be leaders. And you can ask all the questions you want.

And that little part right there is where you can ask to be a part of one. Or if you want to just call any of these people and say, is your group still open? I'd like to be a part of it. And we will try to help you find a place.

Let's pray. Father, I am deeply, deeply thankful for small group life in my life. When I was in seminary, I was in five small groups at once.

And I remember how powerful each one of them was. A couples group. And a men's group.

And a student group. And I praise You for this precious staff and the lead team that I meet with hours every week. And the prayer meetings I'm a part of.

And the neighborhood friends who get in my face. Lord God, I pray that this glorious dimension of mediated grace that doesn't come vertically straight from You, it comes at a right angle into others and then to us through prayer and the ministry of spiritual gifts. And so I ask, Lord, that You would help our people to feel this.

To grasp this. To live in this. And walk in this.

And grow in this. For the glory of Christ. And for the good of those that we are going to stir each other up to love.

I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

---

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/JP3KBTw6GnM.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-piper/encouraging-each-other-at-the-end-of-the-age/>

# *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)**