

I LOVE MY CHURCH – WEEK 2 – COMMUNITY – Hebrews 10:19-25

Fences. They come in all shapes, sizes, and styles. Some are short, small, and transparent; others are walls of fortress. In every case, what is a fence designed to do? Keep something in or keep something out, right?

I never grew up with fences as a kid, but I remember visiting my Aunt & Uncle's place in Dearborn, MI a couple of times a year. Front yard – pristine, manicured, flowers...Back yard w/fence – toys, bikes, grill, picnic table, dog spots – watch where you step...

The fence was the separation between the two spaces. It was the barrier between the front, which everyone was allowed to see, and the back, which is where they lived.

We are continuing our series *I Love My Church* and this concept is going to play a big part in what we'll see today as one of God's plans for the church: that we would live connected lives. God wants us to live connected with Him and connected with one another. God wants us to know true community. What do fences have to do with that? That's what we're going to talk about.

Today we will look at Hebrews 10:19-25. Before I unpack this, let's go back to our fence. Let's picture our lives as a yard. If a lot of us were honest, we'd admit that we like a good fence. What we are comfortable showing people and letting people know about us is our front lawn—and we try keeping a pristine front lawn. Nicely manicured. Beautiful grass. A nice welcome mat at the front door—for decorative purposes only. The front yard is what we show people.

But the backyard ... that's different. That's the real us, and getting in there is by invite only. In fact, I'm going to build a fence because I'm not sure I want you to know what's going on with the real me. I don't want you to see the parts of my life that aren't so pristine. I don't want you to step in the dog piles. I'm not sure if we can have a meal together. The backyard is private, the backyard is me.

Everything in the front of the house is perfectly presented, but the back of the house ... behind this fence ... is where the true us resides. This is the yard of our lives.

Here's the deal about fences: God isn't a big fan of them. Okay, He doesn't have a problem with us having a literal fence around our literal house. But as far as being in relationship with Him and being in community with each other, God wants us to rethink our fences.

If we intend to love our church the way God wants us to, then we have to do 3 things:

1. Know that Jesus crashed the fence.

Before we even talk about the fence that we put between us and people, we have to realize the barrier that exists between God and us. The 1st part of our Hebrews passage tells us: **Read vs 19-22.**

The author is talking about the fact that because of Jesus we now have a way to come back to God. ***Explain the Old Testament imagery here of the priests and the Holy of Holies, of the high priest only being able to enter in, and that Jesus is now our High Priest.***

Because Jesus is our Great High Priest and has crashed the fence, the veil separating us from God, we are able to confidently draw near to Him. Crashing the fence is as easy as admitting we need Him—we can't live life on our own—we'll never make it into His presence with a fence separating us. The Romans letter gives us more of the details behind our Hebrews passage:

- **Romans 3:23**—All have sinned & fall short - We all have a giant fence.
- **Romans 6:23**—The wages of sin is death-Because of that fence, we'll never get to God.
- **Romans 5:8**—God shows His love for us – while we were sinners, Christ died for us - God knew we'd have a big fence before we even had a yard!
- **Romans 10:9-10**—If we confess Jesus and what He did, we will be saved. - If we just admit we have a fence and we need it torn down, Jesus crashes the fence for us.
- **Romans 10:13**—Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. He never denies a fence-crashing job ... ever.

We're born building fences—walls, structures designed to hide, protect, or confine who we really are—to keep us separated from God. We're born into sin—our first fence—which keeps us from true community with Him. And it's only when we admit our failing, realize and accept that Jesus on the cross has crashed the fence of sin, and only because of that can we have relationship with God, can we truly be in community with Him. Have you ever truly drawn near to God? Have you ever acknowledged what Jesus has done on the cross and allowed Him into your life—all of it, the front and back? ***Gospel presentation here.*** Realize that the barrier between you and Jesus has been crashed by Him on the cross. Surrender your life to Him, drawing near to Him in relationship, close to Him in community.

2. Allow others into your yard.

We come to this building, and we sing songs and sometimes we eat and we smile and say good morning ... but we do it all from behind the fence.

You might be thinking, "But I thought you said Jesus broke down the fence?" He did. For every single one of us Jesus has broken down the fence and made a way possible for us to be with God. How does that impact us as people ... people meaning us plural, as a community?

Imagine all of mankind standing before a fence of sin and it just comes tumbling down when Jesus died on the cross. So when I draw near to God to become His follower, there's not a fence anymore, which means there's no fence in existence in the community of God! There shouldn't be ... *but* what we do is we start taking wood and building up a fence between others and ourselves anyway.

Even though Jesus has crashed our fence, we still want people to see only the pretty parts of our yard. We don't want them to see our laundry—clean or dirty—hanging on the clothesline in the back. So we keep building those walls. We keep very careful tabs on what parts of our estate people are allowed to walk. We are so good at building fences.

Yet don't forget what we said last week: If we are going to truly experience loving our church, then that means intentionally loving our church. That's not loving our building and that's not loving our programs. If we intentionally love our *church*, that means intentionally loving each other. And loving each other is impossible to do from behind a fence. So what do we do? With the fences all of us have erected, myself included, it's hard to truly know *how* to love each other. Thank goodness our text gives us the perfect prescription!

Do not neglect meeting together. It's the passage preachers have used for years to guilt their congregants into coming to church every Sunday. But, in reality, the author was talking about something bigger. Sunday, yes, but also something more than Sunday. He's talking about an everyday assembling. He's talking about life together. He's talking about living in community.

Community means we don't build fences. Community means we head below the surface. Community means authenticity—the sharing of ourselves with others—a deeper relationship than we can have sitting in our pews in this large room while I or P Randy speaks to you. Community means standing in someone's yard and allowing them to stand in mine. Both of our dirty, stinky, unkempt yards with all the toys strewn everywhere and weeds not pulled and the shed that desperately needs repainting.

Do you remember the television show *Home Improvement* with Tim Allen. Tim's family had a next-door neighbor named Wilson. Nearly the entire series, this is all we ever saw. The Taylors lived next door to Wilson for years, yet they never saw his face. Sometimes it's like that for church folks. We sit in the pews with people. We serve on committees together. We may even enjoy Bible study with one another, but we never see someone's whole face. We only get a glimpse of them from behind our fences. John Doe is standing on the other side of this fence. Maybe we see his face. Maybe we don't. It doesn't matter at the end of the day; there's still a fence between us. I can't embrace him in a family tragedy. He can't really see what's happening over here when my wife and I are having a spat. This fence impedes our community. We have to get into the yard to fully know someone. **Read 10:25**

Whose yard are you in? Who are you allowing into your yard? Talk about Sunday school, small groups, youth groups, Bible study opportunities. Really push LIFE groups...

If we are truly going to experience not only the church but also life as God intended it, then we can't live behind a fence. To truly love your church, you have to love someone *in* your church. This doesn't mean that everyone transforms into super social extroverts. What it means is that we don't live in isolation – alone or in cliques. Community is standing in someone's yard. It means you stand in someone else's yard, and you ...

3. Enjoy the company.

Imagine being a kid going to a birthday party where the host didn't plan anything. There might be a bag of plain potato chips on the table and some weak Kool-Aid, but that's it. No games, no desserts, no face painting, no pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey, nothing. That would be one boring, dull party, wouldn't it? You would leave that place thinking, "They didn't even try."

Hebrews says, **"Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works" (v. 24).**

To "consider" is to contemplate, strategize. Think of it as planning for a successful birthday party. Living life in one another's yards, without fences, is going to take not only intentionality but also a strategy.

Community is finding ways to encourage one another to love and good deeds—beyond church programming and sermons. It's seeing beyond the walls and fences that have been built and offering to help paint the shed or pull the weeds or babysit the kids. It's bringing a meal in times of crisis. It's having those "go-to" numbers in your cell phone when you break down on Main St or Hwy 10. It's inviting someone over for dinner. It's teaming up when we have a church service project and working alongside friends. It's enjoying one another—and helping each other to enjoy serving Jesus.

And the thing is, these things don't happen automatically. They happen when we consider how to make them happen. Let me suggest some points of strategy for all of us as a church family:

- *Have healthy expectations.* An unhealthy expectation is that we'll all know everyone, that every single person will be best friends with everyone in here. That's not realistic. A healthy expectation is that I can build some great connections throughout the family, great friendships with some, and deep relationships with a few. These will all take time, but we have to have a healthy goal in mind.

- *Realize baby steps are okay.* Let's be clear. Living without fences doesn't mean that you are going to let every single person into the more personal parts of your life the first day you meet everyone. That's not the goal in any sense. At first we'll be hanging out in the front yard with people, and then we'll invite them into the living room, then for a meal in the back. It will take time and that's okay. You won't let everyone in, but you need to work toward letting someone in at some point.
- *Take some ownership.* Realize this is everyone's job, not everyone else's job. We all need to work at it. If you are sitting down waiting for everyone to come to you, then you are sitting in the wrong spot. On a scale between 1 and 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 the highest, how much effort are you putting into connecting with others? What would you need to do to raise your number by one or two levels in the next few weeks?

As we leave this evening/morning, love your church. Know Jesus has crashed the fence. Allow someone into your yard. Enjoy the company. Start considering how you can be connected with others for encouragement and growth. In Jesus. Amen.