



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Follow Me

February 4, 2018

Part Five – Our Community **Dr. Steve Walker**

That was a great time of worship and communion together. While you're preparing to give, I'm going to ask you to get your Bibles open to Hebrews, chapter 3. If you don't have a Bible with you, you can open one of those fake Bibles on your app or your tablet. Just get to Hebrews, chapter 3, please.

Just by way of context... I know many of you have been here over the last several weeks, but some of you are either new or you've been out of town, so let's kind of all get together on where we are on Sunday mornings. Today is part five of a six-part series we've called *Follow Me*. I want to open with a quote that is an actual response to a 2017 (just last year) Harvard research study that actually says that in the US, Christianity is growing, not shrinking as the secularists would like us to believe.

Here's the response to this study, which was quite impressive. The response was, "People are making theological statements with their feet, shuffling to certain churches because they offer what people come seeking: clear, faithful, practical teaching of the scriptures, help in living intimately with and obediently to God, and making friends with people who will challenge and encourage them in their faith."

The respondent said, "'Either you believe the [Bible] or you don't. If you do, it makes sense to go for the real thing, which takes a firm stand against godlessness.' If your Christianity is reconstituted [redefined] to the day's fashion, don't be surprised if people lose interest in it. Few are seeking 2 Percent Christianity. They want the genuine deal, and the demographics on religion of the last few decades unmistakably support the fact."

You see, Harvard found that many Christians are leaving churches in droves. They are piling out of churches like crazy, but what they found specifically was that people are leaving the theologically-liberal and the secularized congregations and denominations and they're migrating to churches that teach the Bible with seriousness, call its people to real discipleship, and encourage daily intimacy with God.

That's exactly what this series of messages is about. It's teaching the Bible with seriousness. It's calling us to real discipleship. It's encouraging us to be personal and real with God. You see, people are actually navigating toward substantive Christianity, and the research shows that these churches continue to grow, decade after decade, while the other churches are slowly going extinct.

I believe Harvard, of all people, confirms what we've been talking about for the last four weeks. In other words, cultural Christianity or "2 Percent Christianity..." That was a play on milk, you know...1 percent or 2 percent versus whole milk. What we know and what we've been saying is that cultural Christianity doesn't work, and it has led many believers into a frustrating crisis of faith.

So, several weeks back, in part one of this series, we talked about *Our Conversion*. Jesus says unless you are born again, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. In other words, unless there is this radical, supernatural change of heart toward God and my sin, I cannot claim to be a follower of Jesus.

We must repent of our sin and receive the grace of God by trusting in the death and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life, and then we confirm our repentance and our trust in Jesus by our baptism. That Sunday, the call to action was to repent and be baptized, and 30 of you walked forward at the conclusion of the message to give your hearts to Jesus and to be baptized.

In part two, we talked about the *cost* of following Jesus. Absolutely, the gift of God's grace is free, but we talked about the fact that it doesn't come cheap. See, Jesus said unless we deny ourselves and pick up our cross every day and follow him, we cannot be his disciples. So, the call to action that Sunday was to come forward, lay down our sovereignty and surrender everything over to Jesus.

At the conclusion of that message, 75 people came forward and said, "I'm going all-in. Everything I have is his. I'm giving complete ownership of my life to Jesus. I'm going to lay down my ownership and I'm going to allow Jesus, my Lord and Master, to rule my life. That includes my time, money, career, family, stuff, dreams, goals, and hopes. All of it is his, for his glory. Not just bits and pieces of it, but all of it." Seventy-five of you said, "Okay. That's the step I need to take.

In part three, we talked about *Our Commitment*. Jesus said, "**...where I am, there will my servant be also.**" The call to action was this: Followers of Jesus, serve Jesus! That Sunday, 120 of you made a decision that you were going to start serving Jesus for his glory and his church.

Last week, we talked about *Our Consecration*. The call to action last Sunday was to live a holy life. The call was that if we're followers of Jesus we need to love what God loves more and we need to hate what God hates more. We need to actually fear God more than we fear what man thinks about our desire to be a genuine follower of Jesus Christ. Last Sunday, we all bowed our

heads and we just did business with God as we needed to individually, laying down our sin and, once and for all, saying, "You know what? I need to be holy because God is holy."

Today, the goal is to show all of us that following Jesus in this sin-broken world is only getting more and more difficult. That's why it has to be a relational project. We're going to talk about making friends with people who will challenge us and encourage us in our faith. So, we're calling part five *Our Community*. If your Bibles are ready, you're open to Hebrews, chapter 3. Let's stand for the reading of God's Word just out of sheer respect and regard that God is about to speak to all of us through his Word. We're going to pick it up in verse 12.

"Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. As it is said, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.'" What rebellion? Well, it's in the next verse.

"For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief."

Father, we are so grateful, all of us who call you our Father and Jesus our Savior, that we are sealed and secure by the presence of your Holy Spirit. Father, we're thankful for the blood of Jesus, for your grace that is completely sufficient every day, for your grace that makes us acceptable in your sight, even when we don't feel like it.

God, today we're grateful that in you, we have great strength, great hope, and confidence that every day we wake up your mercies are new and we get to try again. God, we stand before the authority of your Word humble and open to how we can better love you and glorify you with our lives. In Jesus' name, amen.

Today is part five, and the main idea is simple. *Life in this fallen world is hard, so our need for spiritual help is very great.* That's the main idea of this passage. The writer of Hebrews wants us to know it's not getting any easier. Let's just take that main idea and just make them our points of application today.

1. *Life in this fallen world is hard.* Now, I don't think most of you would disagree with that. It's obvious that on a global scale, the battle between good and evil is being lost, but what's most important for us today is that we agree on why the battle between good and evil is being lost. We need to agree that Christianity offers the only logical explanation for the existence of evil and evil people in our world.

Let's just get right to it. Satan rules the world in darkness. Sometimes we forget that the Devil is very real and he is waging a spiritual war for people's souls. Church, that's not just some melodramatic thing pastors like to say. That is actually what God says. That is actually what Jesus says.

Satan rules this world in darkness. In John, chapter 10, verse 10, Jesus warns us that Satan, the ruler of this world, comes to kill, steal, and destroy our hope, joy, peace, faith, and love. That's what Satan's main target is. He wants to destroy any hope and peace we have in this world. In 1 Peter, chapter 5, the apostle tells us the Devil is like a roaring lion, prowling around, looking for those he can devour. That sounds really serious, and it is, but what does a roaring, prowling-around Devil do? What does that look like?

Again, we don't have to guess and make it up. Scripture tells us what's happening in the spiritual world. In Revelation, chapter 12, verse 9, the Devil is called the deceiver of the world. How does he deceive? Well, his first strategy is to make evil things look good, right, and normal and to make good things look abnormal and evil. That's what he's best at.

Jesus calls the Devil, in John 8:44, the father of all lies. Lying was invented by the Devil. It goes all the way back to Genesis, chapter 2. His specialty is to make God's loving laws seem hateful and intolerable. His goal is to lie and to make people think God is actually unloving. So, when you agree upon this explanation for the existence of evil, it starts to make sense, doesn't it?

You take away the Ten Commandments, God's laws for peaceful, righteous living... You make the Bible and talking about the Bible and Jesus a crime, and what you have is all insanity breaking loose. This is what we see: the unhinged evil of mass shootings and suicidal bombings. We see the increasing brutality, violence, and murders in our cities. We see this out-of-control epidemic of death by addiction. We see the complete disregard for any and all authority in our culture.

We have watched the eliminating of the existence of objective and absolute truth, and now we live in a world where the only truth is making the tolerance of everything and anything the only truth. There's no real truth you can defend except that everything and anything is true. We're watching political correctness in our culture become a synonym for insanity. We've seen and are watching the erasing of all boundaries of sexual perversion. Nothing is off-limits anymore.

Again, while it should concern us, it shouldn't surprise us. The Bible warns in 1 John, chapter 2, that this world is slowly passing away, along with all of its godless desires, and there's nothing we can do about it. Church, no amount of economic stimulation, racial reconciliation, gun control, climate control, or population control is going to turn the tide of evil. No amount of environmental protection, and certainly no amount of border protection is going to turn the tide of evil in our world. It can't.

Our world is broken because Satan is deceiving the hearts and minds of unbelieving people. Satan is an expert at blinding people to the fact that the cross of Jesus Christ is the only hope for the evil that is in man's heart. The cross of Jesus Christ is the only hope we have for grace and

forgiveness. The cross of Jesus Christ is the only hope for us to have a new heart and a new life and to be saved from God's coming wrath and fury, which he promises to be poured out in judgment on the wickedness of sinful, unbelieving man.

Let me ask you a question. Don't shout out the answer. I don't want you to embarrass yourself. If I were to ask you this question, what answer comes to your mind? *What is the biggest sin in the universe?* What's the biggest sin? What's the worst sin? Don't say anything. What is the worst sin? Our passage today gives us a little hint. The worst sin in the universe is *unbelief*. It's the greatest offense against God and it brings the greatest harm to ourselves. That's why God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17).

In spite of all this, we still can't blame it all on the Devil, can we? It's very easy for us to sit in here in our nice, cozy little church building, and say the Devil is just wreaking havoc. Yes, he is, but that's not the only problem we have. See, following Jesus in this broken world is also hard because our hearts are still vulnerable to serious sin and temptation.

As followers of Jesus, our sanctification is a process that can be painfully slow, isn't it? The truth is that my heart and your heart are still susceptible to serious, sinful temptations every day. That's where the passage starts. Go back to Hebrews, chapter 3, verse 12. Put your eyes on it. He says, "**Take care, brothers...**" Be really careful, brothers! He's talking to professing followers of Jesus. It could be better read, "Take care, brothers and sisters in Christ!"

Then, he says, "**...lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart...**" Notice how unbelief and evil are so closely related. He's saying, "Make sure, brothers and sisters, that you are who you say you are, because your heart may actually be growing in unbelief as evidenced by unrepentant sin in your life."

See, Scripture talks about and teaches that there are two kinds of unbelief. The first one is *the rejection of the truth when it's first heard*. The second kind of unbelief is *the renouncing of the truth after having once professed it*. That's what the author of Hebrews is talking about. It's the second one: renouncing the truth after saying we've believed it and accepted it. It's that type of unbelief that John Calvin said is the most heinous of sin.

You might be thinking, "How are you getting that out of this? How do you know it's the second one and not the first one?" Good question. I hope you asked yourself that. He gives an illustration at the end of the passage. If you look at verse 15, he says, "**Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.**" What rebellion?

Then, he starts talking about Moses and the people of God. God called Moses out to go into Egypt to rescue, deliver, and lead God's people he had been multiplying to create a nation for himself. He said, "Moses, I want you to go in there and get them. It has taken 400 years. I have who I want now. We are going to take them out."

You know the story. You saw the DreamWorks movie, *The Prince of Egypt*, with your children, right? God sends all these plagues to convince Pharaoh. "You'd better listen up! This is real!"

Then, God parts the Red Sea and brings manna from heaven and water from a rock. They saw it and they heard it and they believed and followed.

It looked like everybody who was going with Moses was all-in until God said, "Now, let's go into the land I have prepared for you, my people, to multiply so you can be a blessing to all nations, because I'm going to raise up the Messiah from you." As soon as God said, "Let's go," they said, "No, thanks." You know the story. They send some spies. They came back and said, "That place is too mean. It's too scary. Those people are too big. We're not going." Then, in verse 19, the writer of Hebrews says God says, "**...they were unable to enter because of unbelief.**"

Look at verses 12 and 13. At the end of verse 13 is really the completion of the thought. "**Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God...that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.**" You see, living in unrepentant sin only hardens the spiritual arteries. Living in unrepentant sin begins to convince us that wrong actually starts to feel right again and things we were calling good all along start to seem like a nuisance, and even wrong, now.

That's because sin is never satisfied. Sin is deceitful. This is what we know about sin. You've heard us say this many times in this church. Sin will always take us farther than we ever intended to stray, it will always keep us longer than we ever intended to stay, and it will always cost us more than we ever intended to pay.

That is what the writer of Hebrews is talking about. He says, "Take care. Be sure none of you are becoming hardened by the sinful, evil temptations of the world, because there is an incredible, dangerous end to that trail." At the end of verse 12, he says, "Make sure your heart isn't leading you to fall away from the living God." That's the danger.

He's not talking about a person losing their salvation. We do not believe that is true. We do not believe someone who has genuinely repented and turned over their life by faith to Jesus Christ can all of a sudden wake up one day and sin too much to lose their salvation. We don't believe that.

You might be saying, "Wait a minute. What *do* you believe?" I'm so glad you keep asking these questions. You just keep my sermon going longer and longer. I want to teach you a little doctrine. I want to teach you a little theology here. The writer of Hebrews is saying if my heart is totally deceived and hardened to my sin, I will ultimately prove I was never saved and following Jesus to begin with.

You might be thinking, "Keep going." Look at verse 14. Look at it. This is why you should bring your Bible to church, okay? I'm not going to do the work for you. You have to actually open a book and look at the Word. Look at verse 14. "**For we have come to share in Christ, if...**" *If*. In that little two-letter word, we find all the doctrine I've just been talking about.

We know we are who we say we are "**...if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.**" The ultimate proof that we're genuine believers and followers of Jesus is that we persevere

to the end, unhardened by the deceitfulness of sin. The proof that a person never genuinely shared in Christ to begin with is when they continue in a life of unrepentant sin, renouncing what they say they once believed.

You see, the author of Hebrews is giving us permission, this morning, to humbly admit that our not-yet-fully-sanctified hearts are still susceptible to the corrupt desires and temptations of the world, but he doesn't just drop us on our spiritual faces and leave us there. He points out the remedy. He calls us to rise up and do something about it. It's interesting. He doesn't call us to rise up and fix the world. He's telling us...

2. *Our need for spiritual help is great.* The world isn't going to just all of a sudden get better or easier to live in, and our hearts are still susceptible to sin. The Christian life has to be a community project. Intentional, meaningful Christian friendships are for faith-building and persevering. Because of all that, here's our application.

A. *We need the holy intrusion of godly people.* As followers of Jesus, we're saved to the community of God's family to thrive in the midst of personal, supportive, faith-building relationships with other real followers of Jesus requires us to be intrusive with each other.

I chose that word very purposely. It sounds kind of weird. I'm saying we need to be intrusive with each other if we are going to live as genuine followers of Jesus firm to the end. Why did I choose that word? It's because there's nothing passive about verse 12. Look at verse 12. "**Take care, brothers...**" He's writing to followers of Jesus about following Jesus. Some of your Bibles say, "**...pay close attention...**" Others of you have a translation that says, "**See to it...**" He's saying, "Don't be naïve."

Then, he says, "**...lest there be in any of you...**" That's all-inclusive. No exceptions. What he's about to say applies to every person who is a follower of Jesus. He's assuming here every believer who claims to have a share in Jesus' salvation. He's saying, "Be careful. See to it. Don't be naïve, lest any of you have an evil, unbelieving heart growing inside you."

No matter how mature we are, no matter how busy we are, no matter our marital status, children or no children, no matter how long you've been going to church, this is a flashing warning light. We need the intrusion of each other in each other's lives. What are we supposed to do when we intrude? Judge each other? Condemn each other? Just be nasty to each other? No. Hold grudges? No. We come to the pinnacle of the passage in verse 13.

B. *We need the personal encouragement of godly people.* This is because, Christians, we can experience devastation. We can be discouraged. We can experience sadness in our hearts. We could start to doubt what we believe. We can fail at this thing from time to time. Without genuine community, we are vulnerable to the corrupt desires of the world and of our not-yet-totally-sanctified flesh. Those corrupt desires like isolating ourselves, becoming bitter at those who hurt us, or seeking revenge on those who hurt us...

We can be susceptible to things like gossip, hatred, and selfishness with our time and our resources. We can become self-righteous, and that's just to name a few of Pastor Koby's sins. I haven't even gotten to the whole list yet. No, I'm just too proud to tell you mine. I thought I'd tell you his.

Look at verse 13. "**But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today...'**" The root meaning of exhorting one another has to do with coming alongside someone to help them, to give help. It means to encourage with a sense of urgency. Paul is not just casually recommending here. He is saying, "Get up and do something. Intrude into each other's lives. The dangers are real, living in this world."

He says, "**...every day...**" Translation: all the time, not just on Sundays. That's 2-percent Christianity. If this is the extent of your intentional, faith-building Christian fellowship, you are living in 2-percent Christianity and you are going to be frustrated and ultimately come to a crisis of faith because you're going to find out that life in this world is really hard.

The assumption is that we're personal enough and around each other enough that we can recognize if and when we're becoming vulnerable to the deceitfulness of sin, the temptations of the Devil, or discouragement of life in a broken world. You see, to be personal would mean we would relate to each other about personal things, not just professional things.

I want to tell you and I want to testify for you to hear that over the past 19 years, Tammi and I have desperately needed our Life Group. We've needed them at times to help us fight off sinful temptations and responses. We've needed these people in our lives for the last 19 years to remain strong in the face of discouragement and failure. We've needed the people in our lives, these friendships, to remain hopeful in the seasons of loss. In love, they have spoken the truth to us.

Solomon wrote, "It's better for us to be wounded by our friends than to be kissed by our enemies." Paul is saying we need the personal intrusion of each other. Followers of Jesus are called to relationships that are intentional, not just casual. We need friendships that are deepening, not just remaining superficial. Supportive, not just sympathetic. Truthful, not just peaceful.

You see, it's in these kinds of intentional friendships that we find the warmth, the affection of the church. Without these kinds of relationships, church is just a calendar item for the most part. In my and Tammi's experience, our Life Group has been... Through each other, we have received God's love when we have felt unlovable. It's through each other that we see and feel God's grace and mercy when we don't deserve it.

It's through each other and these friendships that we get to experience God's forgiveness when we blew it and God's patience when we're slow to change. It's through these friendships and these intentional relationships where we receive God's strength when the burdens were too heavy and God's truth when we were starting to think wrongly about God or ourselves. The recipe to living for Christ in this broken world is to say no to isolation and yes to involvement.

Today, I have two calls to action. If we are going to continue to hold up the real thing and not just the 2-percent version of Christianity, two things have to happen for all of us.

First, *we have to connect to people in the church in meaningful, intentional friendships*. Right when I say that, for a whole bunch of you, the hair goes up on your neck. Your skin starts to crawl a little bit because, maybe, for some of you, you've tried that and it was a disaster. It ended poorly or you went to groups and the leadership of that group wasn't equipped, the curriculum was terrible, or there was someone in the group who was ruining it for everybody.

Whatever the excuse, you had a negative experience and you've written off passages like this and you've basically said, "That's it." I just want to say, "Hey, that happens to all of us. We have to be careful that we don't have expectations of sinners that are unrealistic. We still need each other, even with all the warts and faults. If we're just going to wait until we're all happily ever after in a little group, we're never going to get in a little group. We're never going to connect. I would say to you, you can try again.

Some of you have said to yourselves, "You know what? I'm just introverted. I'm not into groups. I'm not into people that much. I'm a little shier. I'm a little quieter." That could all be true, but listen. There's no exemption list here.

There are going to be people in a small group, in a Life Group, who are just like you who need you to be in the group. They need you to be in life with each other. You can't just say, "I'm not a group guy. I'm not a group girl. I just like to keep to myself." What do you do with passages like this? Do you just white them out in your Bible? You can't do that.

For some of you, it's just basically, "I don't need any more people in my life. I'm already busy. I already have a full plate. I have who I want. Truth be known, they're mostly casual acquaintances." You're basically saying, "You know what? I've got this. I've been doing it alone. I've not been in a group. Stop talking to me about Life Groups. I'm tired of hearing it."

Here's what I want to say to you. You're the one who's saying, "You know what? Enough. I wish I would've known you were preaching on this. I wouldn't have come." Here's my response. There's a little bit of arrogance and pride tied to that. If the great apostle Paul needed community, and if Jesus Christ prioritized community with 12 people, how do we stand before God and say, "I don't need it. It doesn't apply to me"? No way. It applies to all of us.

Some of you in the room are saying, "I'm so new. I don't know anybody. We just started coming here. How do you do that?" Let me just wrap this call to action up by saying for the last few weeks, we've been telling you it's time. We are getting ready to launch new groups. It's scary. It's a little bit awkward, but we're going to do everything possible...

We have a team and a staff in this department that have tried to remove every obstacle and hurdle and as much awkwardness as possible to help you take a baby step in moving toward connecting in Life Groups. Out in the lobby today, hundreds of you should be out there saying,

"Hey, help me get started." You have in your bulletin a big card that says, "Launch." Go to the website. Figure out what the next step is.

The second call today is personal between you and me. I'm going to call many of you out of this service today to *plant your flag at Canyon Hills*. I'm going to call you to make this not just your church building, but your church family. I'm going to call you to become a member of this church, to be able to say, "You can count on me and I need to count on you."

Next Saturday, I'm calling you to sacrifice four hours. Whatever you have planned next Saturday, I'm calling on you to change it and come to the Discover Canyon Hills class to find out what you can expect from your church, your fellow church family, and what your church family expects from you if you decide, "This is my church."

You may not be here forever, but this is where you are now, and we're calling you to say, "Enough. I am going to join arms, lock arms, and be a part of what God is doing here for however long he has me here." I'm going to call you. We're going to dismiss here in just a minute and I'm going to have people standing up here.

When you're dismissed, most of you are going to go out in the lobby. I'm going to call many of you to just walk forward. Walk up to one of these people and say, "I'm ready." They're just going to hand you a card. Just look at them and say, "Give me one of those cards." You can say it a little nicer, but just ask for a card. All they're going to do is hand it to you and it's my invitation to you to plant your flag in the ground and say, "This is it. I'm all-in." I hope you will.

Father in heaven, be glorified in this place right now. This is your place. This is your Word. These are your people. God, have your way. Grow us. Call us and keep calling us, God, to the real thing. We will trust you with the rest. In Jesus' name. And everyone said, "Amen."

God bless.