

A Warning to Leaders: Attendance Isn't the Goal

Why quoting Hebrews 10:25 won't fix empty chairs, and what God's pattern for making disciples looks like

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

2 TIMOTHY 2:2

AT A GLANCE

BIG IDEA	When attendance drops, leaders often reach for Hebrews 10:25. But God's answer to weak commitment isn't guilt; it's discipleship. Jesus gives gifted leaders who model the faith, teach step by step, and train others to do the same. When believers are truly being built up, they want to gather.
SCRIPTURE	Hebrews 10:24-25 · Ephesians 4:11-13 · 1 Timothy 4:12, 16 · Hebrews 13:17 · 2 Timothy 2:2; 4:2 · 1 Peter 5:1-4 · Colossians 1:28-29 · Luke 24:27 · Acts 8:35
LENGTH	A 10-minute read; about 30 minutes as a leadership-team discussion
BEST FOR	Youth pastors, small-group leaders, volunteers, and parents
USE IT	At a leaders' meeting or training night

Start here: the verse we reach for

Attendance is down, and someone quotes it: "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some" (Hebrews 10:25). It's true, and it matters. But all too often we use it as a stick. Students and families hear, "You should be here," and many of them don't sense any real need to be.

Read the whole sentence, starting with verse 24:

"And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." **HEBREWS 10:24-25**

The gathering has a purpose: to stir one another up to love and good works and to encourage one another. If our meetings aren't doing that, guilt won't fix it. The New Testament gives us a better pattern. Here it is in five steps.

1 Jesus gives leaders to equip His people

"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-12). The goal is maturity: "to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (4:13).

Gifted evangelists and pastor-teachers are Christ's gift to the church. The Spirit works through them, not to keep people busy or entertained, but to develop mature believers who do the ministry themselves.

2 Leaders pass on both truth and life

Paul told young Timothy, "Be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12), and "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine" (4:16). We pass on the content of the faith *and* the behavior of those who follow Jesus. Students learn as much from watching how we live as from what we say.

3 Believers learn from their leaders and follow them

"Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account" (Hebrews 13:17). God calls His people to receive teaching and follow faithful leaders.

A WORD OF BALANCE

Hebrews 13:17 is not a blank check. The same leaders "must give account," and Peter tells shepherds to lead "not as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). Our authority is to serve. We earn trust by caring for souls, and we never use Scripture to control, shame, or silence people. Students should always know they can go to another trusted adult if something feels wrong.

4 Leaders train, entrust, and send

Paul's pattern in 2 Timothy 2:2 covers four generations: Paul, Timothy, "faithful men," and "others also." Peter urges elders to "shepherd the flock of God which is among you... willingly... eagerly" (1 Peter 5:2). Out of those who are following Jesus, we actively train students, entrust them with real ministry, and send them out with the message. A student who is serving rarely needs to be told to show up.

5 Teach step by step, toward Jesus

Isaiah's phrase "precept upon precept, line upon line" (Isaiah 28:10) is often used to describe patient, step-by-step teaching. (In its context, scoffers were mocking Isaiah's simple teaching, but the phrase captures how people actually learn.) We take people from what they know to what they need to know and do.

Paul's goal was to "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Colossians 1:28-29). He told Timothy, "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2).

Look at the master Teacher. On the road to Emmaus, "beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). Philip did the same with the Ethiopian official: "beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him" (Acts 8:35). Start where people are, and lead them to Jesus.

The real warning

If attendance is weak, the first question isn't "Why aren't they coming?" but "Are we equipping the ones who are?" When students are being built up, cared for, trusted with ministry, and pointed to Jesus, gathering stops being an obligation. It becomes something they wouldn't want to miss.

FOR YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

1. When attendance drops, what is our first instinct as leaders? How does Hebrews 10:24 reframe it?
2. Are our gatherings "stirring up love and good works"? What evidence do we see?
3. Which students could we train and entrust with real ministry this semester?
4. How do we make sure our authority serves students and never controls or shames them?
5. What would "precept upon precept" look like in our teaching plan for the next three months?

TAKE IT HOME

Before your next leaders' meeting, each leader writes down the names of two students they will intentionally invest in this season: meeting with them, teaching them, and giving them a real way to serve. Pray for them by name every week, and report back in a month.

Don't just fill chairs. Make disciples who make disciples.

From fifty years of youth ministry by **Ron Whittam**. Share freely with your students and leaders. · The Youth Ministry Living Room · qrprogramming.com/livingroom

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