### Week 1 - Gather For Encouragement

**Big Idea -** Life is difficult, confusing, and frustrating. To know that you have a place to go and be lifted up or challenged to keep moving in faith every week is a gift.

**Prayer -** Bring us together, Lord. In a world filled with discouragement let us find encouragement in fellowship with other believers. Spur us on to love and good works.

**Main Scripture -** Hebrews 10:24-25

### Introduction

Today we begin a 4-week series on gathering together. So if you’re here today, you’re already heading in the right direction.

To begin, I want to ask you a question; *What do you know about solitary confinement?*

Yes, you heard me right, *What do you know about solitary confinement?*It’s interesting that solitary confinement or something called, administrative segregation, is often used in prisons as a way to further discipline unruly or dangerous inmates. In a study covering the effects of solitary confinement, a 2012 article published by the American Psychological Association reported that,

“Deprived of normal human interaction, many segregated prisoners reportedly suffer from mental health problems including anxiety, panic, insomnia, paranoia, aggression and depression.” The article goes on to say, “evidence of these effects comes as no surprise. It borders on being common sense, but it's common sense with a lot of empirical research that supports it...So much of what we do and who we are is rooted in a social context.” (<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/05/solitary>)

*So much of what we do and who we are is rooted in a social context.* You don’t need empirical research and longitudinal studies to understand that the adverse effects of being alone are severe enough that we impose them on criminals.

Think about that for a moment...We use solitary confinement to discipline criminals!

With that in mind, why have so many of us willingly chosen lives of isolation, cut off from others? What are we missing? If so much of *what we do and who are is rooted in our social contexts*, then who are we apart from those things?

What mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual benefits are we missing out on?

Over the next four weeks I hope to address some of these questions. I believe that gathering together is powerful, and even more importantly, *it's* *biblical.* I believe that one of the most important reasons we gather together is to encourage one another.

### Main Teaching

Encouragement is one of those things that we all need from time to time and some of us desperately need right now. The writer of Hebrews said it this way;

*“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”* (Hebrews 10:24-25)

You may have noticed from the passage that the way we encourage each other and spur one another on towards love and good deeds is by gathering together. Have you ever tried to encourage yourself when you’re alone? How difficult is it?

Some might call this self talk or positive thinking. There is a very real place for it when you don’t have access to others. But, there is something deeply transformative and powerful about being part of a group committed to encouraging one another towards a common goal.

Just think about your favorite sports team, or addiction recovery groups, or the youth group fundraiser for summer camp.

(Pastor - this could be a great place for a more personal story about your life or your community to further illuminate the power of encouragement. Is there a goal your church is trying to reach? Is there a testimony from years past of the congregation spurring one another on?)

**Spur One Another On.**

So, what exactly does it mean to *spur* one another on towards love and good deeds?

First of all, we need to deal with the word *spur*. The only other time you see this word used in the New Testament is in Acts 15:39 when Paul and Barnabas have *such a sharp disagreement* that they separate from each other in their missions **… [ sample over ]**

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