

This past Friday our small team arrived home from Morehouse, MO. Where we served the local First Baptist church and the pastor Jason Crow.

Jason is a bi-vocational pastor who is married to Amber. They have six children, some adopted and two special needs children. His life is full and challenging.

The church is struggling. Half of the congregation did not return after COVID and now they barely have thirty people in attendance.

The primary mission was to engage with the community and to see how the church could be better connected. The town of a little over 900 people was easy to get around, and very quiet. There is only one store and not much else going on. It seems the “porch-sitting” is the favorite pastime. There is a spirit of apathy that envelopes the town with little room for ambition.

We were saddened to learn that one of the local churches was responsible for a good number of the towns folk never wanting to attend church again. They had been hurt by something that was being taught or modelled by this particular church in town.

One of those hurt was a young lady we met. She claimed to know all about the Bible and the Gospel message, but that she was now a pagan and that she worshipped “deities”. I told her that she was worshipping demons and that they would surely be a bitter disappointment for her. She bluntly told me that she knew that she was going to hell, but that it didn’t bother her. In fact, she said she was okay with it.

In fact, we had interactions with two separate people who acknowledged that they were going to hell but were not worried at all about that eternal destination. Satan and his demons have deceived people into believing that Hell will be an acceptable alternative to heaven.

But that is not what Jesus said about Hell. Jesus said it was a place of eternal punishment and suffering (see Matthew 13:41-42, Matthew 5:22, Matthew 25:41-46, Mark 9:43).

This is why we go and tell people about what Jesus has done for them. This is why we proclaim the Gospel message. Hell is real, but we are created to know and live eternally with our Creator. Jesus made the only way for salvation. Sadly, this young woman even acknowledged that.

As I was thinking about the town and what has caused the churches to become so poorly attended and why the people seem to have such utter hopelessness, I was reminded of Hebrews 10:23-25, “*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.*”²⁴ *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,*²⁵ *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.”*

There are possibly many different reasons why churches decline and eventually close, but I believe that not prioritizing the regular gathering together as the Body of Christ must be high on the list.

Being a regular part of a church family is not an optional extra for a Christian, it is life and breath. Sunday is when we worship, pray, and hear the Word of God proclaimed to build us up and challenge us.

During the week, we gather in different settings to encourage one another, to grow together in love and unity. These could be life groups, Sunday school, prayer meetings or different church events.

Summer seems to be a time when people miss church attendance the most, but I challenge you to commit to getting more involved in our church family this summer. The reason I encourage you to get more involved is found in verse 24 of our text, *“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.”*

Notice that it is the responsibility of the church family to stir up the body of Christ, this is not the role of the Elders, Deacons or other leaders, it is everyone’s responsibility.

Who did you encourage today? Who did you stir up today?

2020-2021 caused many churches to close, because people neglected to meet together, people stopped encouraging one another.

The writer to the Hebrews uses the word “Habit”. The Dictionary explains habit as, *“a settled or regular tendency or practice, especially one that is hard to give up.”*

Life is about habits, we all develop them, some are good for us and others are destructive. Being active in a church family is a good habit that is guaranteed to bring life.

Commit to being an encourager, stirring one another on towards love and good works.

What is God inviting you to be a part of today?