



THE CHURCH OF  
Jesus  
Christ

## Longing for the Gathering

There are a million virtual ways to stay connected in our world, so does your physical presence at Church really matter?



By Brother Jerry Valenti

### Introduction (that has nothing to do with this article)

A young newlywed couple arose from bed the first day in their new home and had the first disagreement of their married life. Each felt that the other should be responsible for making the morning coffee. After they went back and forth a few times, the wife finally told her husband that the Bible said it was the husband's responsibility to brew the coffee. To prove her point, she grabbed the Bible, flipped about halfway through the New Testament and there it was in large letters: HEBREWS.

Now that I have you on the right page, let's continue with the scripture for this article, which is taken from Hebrews 10:24-25.

**And let us consider one another to**

***provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.***

The above statement was included in a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the Hebrews about 2,000 years ago; however, it wouldn't take much rewording to make it seem like it was written today. How about this?

***Let's think about one another and the things we can do to foster a loving close-knit group where everybody is motivated to do things that please the Lord. Let's make the effort to physically get together even though modern conveniences make it unnecessary. Let's accept responsibility within the Church and***

***be open to grow into workers for the Lord as we look forward to the glorious days ahead.***

### Evaluate Your Friends List

If you're a Facebook user and you look on the left side of your profile page (or is it the top of the profile page now?), you'll see the number of "friends" that you're connected with. While it may be fun to watch this number grow, it's good to remember that each of those little profile pictures represents a real flesh-and-blood person with real struggles, challenges and concerns in a life that's lived in between Facebook sessions.

How many of these people are truly your friends (as opposed to sources of likes and comments)? Anybody who you have no interest in

chilling with (did I use that word right? If not, I guess I'm beat) can't be much of a friend.

I'd like you to form a mental picture of the people who are really your friends — people who you like spending time with (in person), people who are there for you (and you are there for them). How many are members of the Church?

If you need someone to encourage you spiritually and help you to serve God better, which of your friends would you turn to? Conversely, if you want to be used by God to help someone grow spiritually, which of your friends would be open to that kind of help? It's so important to spend time with people who are trying to serve God — in Church meetings (that's why we have them) as well as in other settings.

*We need to be careful that we don't get caught up in a society that is moving in a very anti-social direction. Getting together with people is becoming less and less "necessary." What does that mean for the future of our Church?*

### **Our Anti-Social Society**

As I hinted above, some of the biggest barriers to spending quality time with each other are the incredible array of advanced communication tools we have available to us today. The capabilities are so powerful and so easy to use that many of the things we used to have to do to connect with people are hardly necessary anymore. From a Church perspective, consider the chart at the top of the next column:

In order to	You used to have to	Now you can
Watch/Hear a sermon	Go to Church	Watch a video on Facebook
Participate in a committee meeting	Travel to a designated location	Participate via conference call
Have a face-to-face conversation with someone	Visit them	Skype or video chat
Speak to someone who lives far away	Call them on the phone	Text message (and hold multiple conversations simultaneously)
Catch up with many Church friends	Go to conference or campout	Go on Facebook

While all of these are wonderful innovations (I use them all myself), we need to be careful that we don't get caught up in a society that is moving in a very anti-social direction. Getting together with people is becoming less and less "necessary." What does that mean for the future of our Church? Will the day come when everyone wants to stay home and watch Church on TV? If so, who will be able to show love to people who are seeking Christ? How will we stay connected as part of the body of Christ? In short, if we "forsake the assembling of ourselves together," our Church ceases to exist.

### **When Did We Become They?**

When I was younger, I used to get together with my friends and talk about things the Church was doing with phrases like, "I wonder why they did that," or "When are they going to do this?" or "I think they should do that."

As we became more involved with what the Church was doing, even taking ownership of certain activities, we suddenly came to the realization that we were now part of "they." That's the place we need you as a young person to get to.

For many people, coming to Church will always be just that — coming to Church. However, the Church needs people who are willing to go beyond just "coming to Church," people who are also willing to take responsibility (I like to call it ownership) of the Church in this period of time.

Are you willing to be one of these people? Can you devote some of your thoughts and emotions and creativity toward helping people become (or stay) connected to the Church? Are you willing to stand up for the concept that gathering with the people of God is worthwhile?

Considering that the things we look forward to in the glorious days ahead (Zion, Heaven) are in fact gatherings, somebody needs to keep this concept alive, regardless of the direction society may be going.

Can you be part of this "somebody" or will you leave it to somebody else?

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