

I Love My Church #2
Crash Your Fence!
Hebrews 10:19-25
10/15/17

- Fences. They come in all shapes, sizes, and styles. Some are short, small, and transparent; others are walls of fortress. In every case, what is a fence designed to do? Keep something in or keep something out, right?
 - o When I was growing up, there was another family who lived on the next street over. Our families knew each other. They had three kids. Their daughter was a year older than me. They sometimes came to our church. I, and my friend from across the street, would spend time at their house. Lots of the neighborhood kids would kind of congregate there. Plus, the best sledding hill in the neighborhood was right beside their house.
 - o They had a big privacy fence that went around the perimeter of their backyard. It was the fence you would smack into if you were going down the sledding hill too fast! Now, their front yard was always kept really nice. The grass was always neatly cut and they had big nice flower beds in the front. If any of the kids left any of their toys or bikes in the front yard, there would be a prompt yelling for them to get their stuff and put it in the back.
 - o See, in the back, on the other side of the privacy fence, things were slightly different. The grass was cut, but not as often as the front yard. All of their kids' toys and bikes were in the back. Often, there was a tent set up back there. When the neighborhood kids were over there, the parents preferred us playing back there. There was a picnic table there to eat outside. They had a dog, and try as hard as they could, you still had to watch where you stepped. This was the backyard.
 - o The fence was the separation between the two spaces. It was the barrier between the front, which everyone was allowed to see, and the back, which is where people actually lived.

- Well, today we are continuing our series *I Love My Church* and this concept of fencing things off is going to play a big part in what we'll see today as we compare the concept of separating things to one of God's plans for the church that we would live connected lives. God wants us to live connected with Him and connected with one another. God wants us to know true community.
 - o What do fences have to do with that? That's what we're going to talk about.
 - o Let's look at **Hebrews 10:19-25** and read it together.

- Before I unpack this passage, let's go back to our fence. Let's picture our lives as a yard. If a lot of us were honest, we'd admit that we like a good privacy fence around certain parts of our lives. In the front yard of our lives is what we are comfortable showing people and letting people know about us. we try keeping a pristine front yard to our lives. Nicely

manicured. Beautiful grass. A nice welcome mat at the front door—for decorative purposes only – because we might not really want people coming inside...let's keep it real. The front yard is what we show people.

- But the backyard ... that's different. That's the real us, and getting in there is by invite only. In fact, I'm going to build a fence because I'm not sure I want you to know what's going on with the real me. I don't want you to see the parts of my life that aren't so pristine. I don't want you to step in the dog piles. I'm not sure if we can have a meal together. The backyard is private, the backyard is me, the real me.
 - Everything in the front of the house is perfectly presented, but the back of the house ... behind this fence ... is where the true us resides; the real us. This is the yard of our lives.
- Here's the deal about fences: God isn't a big fan of fences in our lives. I'm not talking literally, okay. He doesn't have a problem with us having a literal fence around our literal house. Please don't leave here today and tear down your actual fence if you have one. But, as far as being in relationship with Him and being in community with each other, God wants us to rethink our fences.
- This passage that we just read in Hebrews is going to show us what we have to do if we intend to love our church the way God wants us to. So, let's take a deeper look.
- First, we have to know that Jesus crashed the fence for us. See, before we even talk about the fence that we put between us and people, we have to realize the barrier that exists between God and us.
- The first part of our Hebrews passage tells us this. Let's **read verses 19-22** again so we get it.
- The author is talking about the fact that because of Jesus we now have a way to come back to God. See, before Jesus, in the temple there were fences, there were separations. And, if you were just a normal, real person, you couldn't just go in any room in the temple.
- There was a room for regular folk who were coming to worship and who were coming to repent through their sacrifices of a lamb or a dove or a goat. Then, there was a separation that led to a room where only the priests could go. The priest went in there to present the sacrifices on behalf of the people.
 - Then, there was another room called the Holy of Holies where God's presence was and only the high priest could enter this room. There was a huge, thick, heavy curtain (think of those stage curtains in a theater) that hung from the top of the ceiling to the bottom of the floor. You could not go through that curtain. The Holy of Holies was off limits. Because of sin, no one could just enter into the presence of God. Sin separated us from God.
- Then, Jesus came! When he died as the perfect sacrifice for our sins, the ground shook and that huge, monstrous curtain that separated us from God was torn in two from top to bottom. Oh I love that!!! That's a hallelujah moment!!!! It's one sentence in the whole

crucifixion story, but it is a moment that is absolutely crucial to our relationship with God. In fact, it's what gives us a real reconciled relationship with God.

- Because in that moment, Jesus became our High Priest and through him, we have access to the very presence of God. We have access to the most Holy Place of heaven. As the passage says, "Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place." Thank you, Jesus!!
 - Because Jesus is our Great High Priest and has crashed the fence, the veil separating us from God, we are able to confidently draw near to Him. Nothing can keep us from getting to God. Sin will separate us, but when we call on the name of Jesus, our Great High Priest, that sin can't hold us and through Jesus we enter into the throne room of God Most High, the Creator of all, the Almighty, the Beginning and the End, the Everlasting, the Everything!
- Crashing the fence is as easy as admitting we need Him—we can't live life on our own—we'll never make it into His presence with a fence separating us. The book of Romans gives us more of the details behind that Hebrews passage and lays out The Great Fence Crashing Strategy. Others call it the Romans Road. You can actually use these verses to help someone find salvation in Jesus.
- *Romans 3:23* says "For everyone has sinned. We all fall short of God's glorious standard." In other words, we all have a giant fence that is separating us from God.
 - *Romans 6:23* says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord." Because of that fence, we'll never get to God. Instead, that fence, that sin, will only lead to death.
 - *Romans 5:8* – "But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners." So, God knew we'd have a big fence before we even had a yard, before we were even alive! And, he loved us so much that he did something about it!
 - *Romans 10:9-10* tells us what to do. "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved." So, if we just admit we have a fence and we need it torn down, Jesus crashes the fence for us and saves us.
 - And, finally, *Romans 10:13* says "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved!" Jesus never denies a fence-crashing job ... ever. Anyone who calls on him can have their sin-fence crashed!
- We're born building fences—walls, structures designed to hide, protect, or confine who we really are—to keep us separated from God. We're born into sin—our first fence—which keeps us from true community with Him. And it's only when we admit our failing, realize and accept that Jesus on the cross has crashed the fence of sin, that can we have relationship with God, and can we truly be in community with Him.
- Further, we will never be able to be open to having true community with each other in the church if we have not opened our back yards up to Jesus first! In fact, I would say that if you have issues with people in the church or if you have negative views of

the church, the root of those issues and views may well be that you have not opened yourself completely to God. Is it possible that you haven't allowed Jesus into the back yard of your life. Is it possible that you haven't been willing to give him access to the deep recesses of your heart. Is it possible that you haven't really drawn near to God.

- Have you ever drawn near to God? Have you ever acknowledged what Jesus has done on the cross and allowed Him into your life—all of it, the front and back? If not, may this be the day that you do that.
- Then, the second thing the Hebrews passage tells us if we intend on loving the church as God intends for us to is that we must allow others into your yard. And, not just the front yard, but the back yard, too.
 - o We come to this building, and we sing songs and we play games with children, and sometimes we eat and we smile and say good morning and spend 5 minutes hugging each other ... but we do it all from behind the fence.
- You might be thinking, "But I thought you said Jesus broke down the fence?" He did. Yet, it's our choice whether to keep the fence down or not.
 - o Imagine all of mankind standing before a fence of sin and it just comes tumbling down when Jesus died on the cross. So when I draw near to God to become His follower, there's not a fence anymore, and when you draw near to God to become His follower, there's not a fence anymore ... which means there's no fence in existence in the community of God!
 - o There shouldn't be. Jesus crashed the fence not only between us and God, but between us and other. But, what we do is we start taking wood and building up a fence between others and ourselves.
 - o Even though Jesus has crashed our fence, we still want people to see only the pretty parts of our yard. We don't want them to see our laundry—clean or dirty—hanging on the clothesline in the back. So we keep building those walls. We keep very careful tabs on what parts of our estate people are allowed to walk. We are so good at building fences.
- Yet don't forget what we said last week: If we are going to truly experience loving our church, then that means intentionally loving our church. That is not loving our building and that's not loving our programs. If we intentionally love our *church*, that means loving each other. And loving each other is impossible to do from behind a fence.
 - o So what do we do? With the fences all of us have erected, myself included, it's hard to truly know *how* to love each other. Thank goodness Paul gives us the perfect prescription in **Hebrews 10:25**. Let's read it again.
- This is a passage that preachers have used for years to guilt their congregants into coming to church every Sunday. But, in reality, the author was talking about something bigger.

Sunday, yes, but also something more than Sunday. He's talking about an everyday assembling. He's talking about life together. He's talking about living in community.

- You may or may not remember the television show *Home Improvement* with Tim Allen. Tim's family had a next-door neighbor named Wilson. Nearly the entire series, this is all we ever saw. **(Show picture.)** The Taylors lived next door to Wilson for years, yet they never saw his face.
 - Sometimes it's like that for church folks. We sit in the pews with people. We serve on committees together. We may even share some prayer requests with one another, but we never see someone's whole face. We only get a glimpse of them from behind our fences.
 - John Church-goer is standing on the other side of this fence. Maybe we see his face. Maybe we don't. It doesn't matter at the end of the day; there's still a fence between us. I can't embrace him in a family tragedy. He can't really see what's happening over here when my husband and I are having an argument. This fence impedes our community. We have to get into the yard together to fully know someone.
- Community means we don't build fences. Community means we head below the surface. Community means authenticity—the sharing of ourselves with others—a deeper relationship than we can have sitting in our pews in this room while I or someone else speaks to you.
- Community means standing in someone's yard and allowing them to stand in mine. Both of our dirty, stinky, unkempt yards with all the toys strewn everywhere and weeds not pulled and the shed that desperately needs repainting and maybe some doggie doo-doo around. Let's admit that we all have some doggie doo-doo in the yards of our lives, right?
- Whose yard are you in? Who are you allowing into your yard? Maybe this takes place for you through our LIFE Groups. That's the perfect place for it to take place. That's why we have called them LIFE Groups – so we can do life together. Maybe you're a part of a ministry team, or Powerhouse ministry for teens, or possibly you've just allowed a few people to see past your fences—and it's not any formalized ministry of our church.
- Letting people in is why last week, we had people sign-up to go out to lunch together today. We have divided people into groups who signed up last week. As a group, you just need to decide where to go to eat.
 - If you weren't hear last week and would like to go out to lunch with a group, right after the service, we will everyone who wants to go meet in the back of the sanctuary so others can join the groups. I would encourage you to join a group where there might be the fewest people that you know so you can get to know someone else.
- Listen, I get that taking down your fences and letting people into the back yard of your life can be intimidating. It makes you vulnerable. What if someone sees the real you and

doesn't like it and rejects you or talks about it or breaks your trust in some way? Some maybe have been hurt by people in the church – deeply hurt.

- I hear that fear because I've lived that fear. Listen, as a pastor, I live in the reality that I'm one decision away from ticking someone off and when the pastor ticks someone off, they usually leave. I'm one sentence away from rubbing someone the wrong way and them taking it personally and they stop being involved in ministry or in the church altogether. Every pastor lives in that reality of rejection and that friendships might only be friendships when people agree with you.
 - It's happened to me several times in my 20 years of ministry. People who I've known and trusted. People who I invested a lot of time and energy into helping and talking with. People who I considered my friends who kicked our friendship to the curb because I made a ministry decision that they didn't like. It hurts. It still hurts my heart to this day.
 - So, I could either pastor at arms length of everyone and never be open to friendships with those in the church and never really trusting for fear of being hurt again. I could choose to share very little of my personal life or struggles or weaknesses because at times when I have, people have used that against me.
 - But, I've got to choose what God says. I choose to continue to do life together and not neglect being together. I choose to be a pastor who is transparent and who is willing to share where I struggle. I choose to allow Jesus to break down some fences. I choose to let people in and pray that in doing so, it sets the example for them and encourages them be able to do the same.
- See, I would rather choose to live the way and relate to others in the way Jesus intends, knowing that Jesus promises real life in doing that, than to live in fear of what might happen.
- I would rather choose to stand on verse 23 of the passage that we read which says, "Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm for God can be trusted to keep his promise." I will hold tightly to live Jesus' way of community.
 - If we are truly going to experience not only the church but also life as God intended, then we can't live behind a fence. To truly love your church, you have to love someone *in* your church – someone beyond your spouse and immediate family. This doesn't mean that everyone transforms into super social extroverts. What it means is that we don't live in isolation and fear of being rejected or hurt. It means you stand in someone else's yard.
- Finally, the Hebrews passage tells us another thing we must do to love the church as God intended. We need to enjoy the company.
- When you have people over to your house for a dinner or maybe for a birthday party, do you enjoy the company? Do your guests enjoy the company? Well, it depends on if you've planned anything or thought through your time with your guests before they get there.
 - Imagine being a kid going to a birthday party where the host didn't plan anything. There might be a bag of plain potato chips on the table and some watered-down

Kool-Aid, but that's it. No games, no desserts, no face painting, no piñata, nothing. That would be one boring, dull party, wouldn't it? You would leave that place thinking, "They didn't even try."

- Or, imagine going to someone's house for dinner and they hadn't even started cooking when you got there at the time they suggested you come over. In fact, they are just getting back from the grocery store because they just figured out what they were going to cook. So, they are frantically cooking something while you are sitting in the living room or dining room as they yell across the room or into the room where you are sitting some sentences of conversation. Then, during dinner, your host is just worn out from cooking and they just sit there quietly, so everyone just sits around in an awkward silence. You would leave not feeling like you connected at all. Like, "Did they really want me there?"
- Hebrews 10:24 says, "**Let us think us of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.**" This verse is referring to contemplating, strategizing how to motivate others to be in community. Think of building community and opening up yards as planning for a successful birthday party or dinner party.
 - Living life in one another's yards, without fences, is going to take not only intentionality but also strategy. We have to think about what we can do to motivate each other to love and good works. With the right motivation, people will open their yards. It doesn't happen automatically. It happens when we are intentional. It's intentionally building each other up.
- Community is finding ways to encourage one another to love and good deeds—beyond church programming and sermons. What we do outside of this time together on Sunday is as important as what happens in this sanctuary on Sunday morning. What we do for each other and how we connect outside here is where true community is built.
- That's when you know you have people you can count on. Who can you count on in this community of people who make up the church? And even more personal, who can count on you?
 - When Wil and I, along with three-month old Josiah flew here for the candidating weekend with the church we had that question and answer time with the congregation that lasted for a few hours. Some of you here were at that time. Someone, and I think it was Avis, asked how we were willing to leave our family and friend connections in the Midwest to come here.
 - My response was that this church of people had to commit to be our family, not just in word, but in deed. I said, "If you aren't willing to be our family and for us to be your family, don't ask us to come." Why should we come? Why would we leave those we hold dear behind to come here? If we had no one here to count on, why uproot everything and come here?
 - Those are the very same questions people are asking when they come into the church. Why should they change their life to come to church and to get to know a group of people? We've got to give them a reason why. That reason comes

through relationships. It comes if we enjoy the company of one another. It comes when we build each other up.

- When we were on vacation this past summer, we made a point to get together with a very special group of people from the church where I was serving in Indianapolis. I specifically contacted five families to have a get together. Four of them were able to come. One of the families opened up their home. We spent nearly five hours together and it flew by. We were all reluctant to go, but we had to because it was getting late and several of us had kids who needed to get to bed and work in the morning.
 - o These five families were like family to us when we were in Indiana and they still are. Even though we don't talk to or see each other near as much as we would like, they are so dear to us and time will never separate us. Four of these families volunteered in the youth ministry. So, since I was the youth pastor, we worked together a lot. We spent a lot of time together, spent a lot of weekends together, spent a lot of time praying for each other and for the students in the youth ministry.
 - o The other family had three girls who were in the youth ministry while I was there. This family just embraced us. I call their girls "my girls" even to this day when they are grown. When their girls couldn't talk to their parents, they could talk to me.

- We knew each other's back yards. They saw me at some low times. I could confide in them and know they would never hold it against me or look down on me for not being the perfect pastor. I saw them at some of their lowest times – family crisis, grief, struggle and even when a few were questioning their faith. And, we met each other's needs. We thought about how we could help each other.
 - o Let me give you an example of how they helped us. All of these families pitched in when Wil and I were planning our wedding. I should really re-state that. They planned our wedding. From getting a church big enough to have the wedding, to doing the preparations and all the decorations, to paying for so many things out of their own pockets, to playing the music that we wanted, to throwing the bridal shower, to spending hours setting up and hours cleaning up, to coordinating the entire reception, to finding our photographer – when I tell you we would not have had the wedding that we had without them, it is not an understatement.
 - o Wil and I planned the service and picked out our clothes. They made the service beautiful. I gave it over to them and they did everything that family members would do. I miss them dearly. I keep trying to tell them how great Rhode Island is to live.
 - o That's intentionally building others up. That's encouraging others to love. We went beyond Sunday morning standing together and got into each other's back yards.

- To enjoy the company, we have to build a community and be a church, be a people who see beyond the walls and fences that have been built and intentionally build relationships outside of Sunday morning so that we earn the right to get into the back yards of people's lives. Intentionally motivating each other can come by offering to help paint the shed or pull the weeds or babysit the kids for someone. It's bringing a meal in times of crisis.

- It's having those "go-to" numbers in your cell phone of people in the church that you can count on if your car breaks down on Route 1 and who would even be willing to go past the towers to help you if need! It's knowing who to call when you want to go on a double date.
 - It's knowing who can be the emergency contact for your kids' school and who besides you is authorized to pick your kids up from school in case you need them to. Thank you for being that for us, Heather and Holly!
 - It's inviting someone over for dinner. It's teaming up when we have a church service project and working alongside friends. It's enjoying one another—and helping each other to enjoy serving Jesus in the time we have left to serve. When you do that, you will earn the right into some back yards. And, we will be motivated to love and good deeds because we enjoy the company of those we are around.
- And the thing is, these things don't happen automatically. Good relationships with others, back yard kind of relationships and refrigerator rights kind of relationships don't just happen. We have to work at them. We have to do some things to ensure them. To close, let me just share a few things that will ensure good relationships
- First, Have healthy expectations. An unhealthy expectation is that we'll all know everyone, that every single person will be best friends with everyone in here. That's not realistic. A healthy expectation is that I can build some great connections throughout the family, great friendships with some, and deep relationships with a few. These will all take time, but we have to have a healthy goal in mind.
 - Second, Realize baby steps are okay. Let's be clear. Living without fences doesn't mean that you are going to let every single person into the more personal parts of your life the first day you meet everyone. When you go out to lunch in groups together today, no one is going to say, "So, let's everyone spill out their deepest, darkest sin and temptation." Nope. That's not the goal in any sense. At first, we'll be hanging out in the front yard with people, then we'll invite them into the living room, then for a meal in the back. It will take time and that's okay. You won't let everyone in, but you need to work toward letting someone in at some point.
 - Finally, Take some ownership. Realize this is everyone's job, not everyone else's job. We all need to work at it. If you are sitting down waiting for everyone to come to you, then you are sitting in the wrong spot. You've got to get up off your tail end! On a scale between 1 and 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 the highest, how much effort are you putting into connecting with others? What would you need to do to raise your number by one or two levels in the next few weeks?
- As we leave this morning, love your church. Know Jesus has crashed the fence. Allow someone into your yard. Enjoy the company. Start considering how you can be connected with others for encouragement and growth.
- Choose to trust that Jesus' way to live in community actually is the best way.