

Before You Say “Yes” to Jesus: Walking Together

August 30 & 31, 2025

“Good morning, family! I’m so glad you’re here. We’re in this amazing series, *Before You Say Yes to Jesus*. And if you’ve missed any of it, check out NHCOhawaii.org—you’ll want to catch up.”

“Now, throughout this series, you might’ve noticed a theme. Every presenter has brought up the ‘C’ word. And no, it’s not ‘concentrate.’ (That’s what we do at the freezer section in the market. Because the orange juice says concentrate.) The ‘C’ word is *covenant*.”

“Remember what P. Mark shared? Covenant is a God-ordained partnership—established by God—for the shared purpose of blessing the earth.

“Today’s message is called *Walking Together*. We’re going to talk about why church, spiritual ohana, and Christian relationships aren’t optional extras—they’re actually part of God’s covenant design for discipleship.”

Turn to your neighbor and say, “going to church is not just your parents’ idea.” Turn to your other neighbor and say, “walking together is a part of His covenant”.

Leviticus 23, Nehemiah 8, Genesis 49, Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 31,

- Psalm 50:5: God calls for His faithful ones, who made a covenant with Him through sacrifice, to gather together.

Some call it ekklesia (assembly or gathering), others call it temple, fellowship, we call it church, where it is the practice of coming together of the Lord’s church.

That will feel odd as we walk because it’s different. Coming in for the first time as P. Earl shared folks hugging him, welcoming him. Sure, it will feel odd. Because it is not what we are used to. We live in a culture that celebrates independence. “I can do it myself. I don’t need anyone.” But that’s not God’s design. From the beginning, God said, “It is not good for man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18).

Even in the garden of Eden—perfect, sinless, full of God’s presence—God still said Adam needed someone. Why? Because we were created for relationship. Relationship with Mighty God and each other.

Therefore, we are partnered with God to bless the earth in our obedience, our submission, and our fellowship. I would contend that individualistic independent approach to faith is insufficient. It’s just not enough. Rather, that God’s plan for believers is to embrace a “lifegiving interdependence,” where we actively participate in helping others, receive help in return, as we foster an environment of mutual growth and flourishing.

Each of us temple His Spirit. The collective body is the church.

God Designed Us for Connection

Paul paints a powerful picture in 1 Corinthians 12—the church as a body. “The body is not made up of one part but many.” The eye can’t say to the hand, “I don’t need you.” Every part matters. Every connection matters. Every part is necessary. Every part is needed.

Imagine trying to run a marathon with one leg tied down. Or trying to see with one eye shut. The body was designed to work together—and so was His church.

Fellowship Strengthens Our Faith

Hebrews 10:24–25 ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ 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.

This urges us not to neglect meeting together but to encourage one another. Why? Because life is heavy. Faith wavers. Fellowship carries us.

Think of a campfire. One log pulled out quickly dies. Logs together burn hotter and longer. That’s what fellowship does for faith.

Read the scripture again ... emphasis: “not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing. What is a HABIT? Bible references a habit as a settled, ingrained pattern of behavior or a disposition of the mind and character acquired through frequent repetition, which can be either righteous or sinful. These recurring actions become ingrained in one’s nature, shaping their overall life and relationship with God. Are we seeing this? This is HOPE Class 101, P. Theresa’s Battlefield of the Mind, Inner Healing.

The writer is contending for us to gather. Don’t stop believing.

Which brings me to my next question ... because if it was happening then, it’s happening now.

Why Do People Stop Attending or Getting Involved?

Before we go further, let’s be real—why do people stop connecting?

- Disappointment or Hurt: Someone let them down. Church didn’t meet expectations.
- Offense: A word, a look, or a misunderstanding pushes them away.
- Busyness: Life gets full—work, kids, schedules—and fellowship feels optional.
- Isolation from Struggle: Thinking, “I don’t want anyone to see me like this.”
- Enemy’s Lie: “You don’t belong. Nobody cares if you’re there.”

These are all reasons for folks NOT to attend. But I tell you these are the very reasons YOU SHOULD BE in fellowship. “Some say, ‘I can have faith without church.’ Sure, technically—you can believe in Jesus at home by yourself. You all know my testimony. After my season of failure, I isolated. I stayed away because I hurt people, they hurt me, God doesn’t want me, I was ashamed, downtrodden, call it what you will. I was running and breaking the covenant of not gathering. Isolation as folks spoke in earlier messages is the enemy’s best plan to step in so he can get you to step out. Remember our logs in the fire. Presence and fellowship is one of your first defenses.

“Maybe you’ve felt some of these reasons yourself. But what if the very place you’re tempted to pull away from is the place God wants to heal and strengthen you?”

Growth doesn’t happen in isolation.

Fellowship Is Where Growth Happens

Proverbs 27:17—“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”

When we’re connected, we receive discipleship, wisdom, encouragement, and correction. And just as importantly, we give those things back. That’s how maturity happens.

Think of a gym. No one gets stronger by watching others work out. You’ve got to step in, be challenged, sweat a little. Fellowship is our spiritual training ground.

Fellowship Is a Witness to the World

Jesus said, “By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 14:35)

Acts 2 shows the early church devoted to teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer—and the Lord added to their number daily. True community is a magnet to a lonely world.

The world is full of loneliness and division. People are searching for belonging. When they see a church that truly loves one another—different ages, backgrounds, and stories standing together—it’s a witness more powerful than any sermon.

One of the ways He will partner with us to bless the earth is through fellowship. This idea of here I am versus there you are.

Testimony – Haylie Shinsato

I grew up going to church here and there, but not consistently until middle school or high school. Even then, it wasn’t really a priority for me. I only went because my mom told me I had to. So I knew of God, but I didn’t really know God, and to be honest, I wasn’t very interested in getting to know Him.

After I graduated high school and moved to the mainland for college, I had the freedom to make my own choices and pursuing a relationship with God wasn't high on my list. I would attend church when I came home for breaks, but only if I had nothing better to do or if I was "voluntold" to help.

It wasn't until around the summer after my junior year of college that I began to genuinely seek God because I watched my parents' begin to grow in their own relationship with God and started to get involved in an ohana group and serving at church, which led me to decide to get baptized with my cousins. But if I'm honest, I didn't feel any different afterwards. I was attending church regularly when I was home and even watched the recorded services online when I went back to the mainland, but I wasn't part of a community. I'd go to service, then slip out the door before Pastor Earl could catch me. I was being filled on Sundays, but during the week I was living the same way I always had, which left me feeling drained, burnt out, and irritable by the time Sunday rolled around again.

As an introvert, when I feel overwhelmed, I tend to withdraw and isolate myself. And since I hadn't built relationships at church, it was easy to slip into the background. On top of that, being away for school and only watching services online left me feeling disconnected from both God and people. In that loneliness, the enemy planted lies. The loudest one being that I had to figure out this walk with God on my own. That no one could help me learn how to pray, how to hear His voice, or how to grow in my faith. But the truth is, even Jesus didn't do life alone, even He had His disciples. God never intended for us to walk this journey by ourselves.

Ironically, it was while I was studying abroad in Scotland that I first began to find community at this church. Because of the time difference, I could watch the 8am service live, which meant I could actually interact in the online chat. Eventually, Pastor Rich asked if I wanted to help serve online, and that's where my sense of belonging started to grow.

When I came back home for good, I continued to serve in Spark ministries and later got plugged into an ohana group and attended transformation academy classes. Slowly, as I surrounded myself with people who encouraged me, kept me accountable, and spoke life into me, my relationship with God began to grow deeper.

Through community, I found the support, love, and accountability I didn't even know I was missing. And as I built real relationships with people in church, I also built a stronger foundation in my relationship with God.

"Thank you, Haylie. Maybe you're where Haylie was—on the edges, unconnected. I want to encourage you: step in. Don't just attend church. Be the church. Today, Haylie hosts young adults in small groups, helps in SPARK, helping to chair this year's Fall Fest. She is immersed in the Lord's work and blessing the body of Christ. Moreover, she gets to take the gems God places in her and share them at her workplace (HPD), as a soccer coach, and bless the earth.

Would you take a look at this? ... **WE WILL STAND (RUSS TAFF)**

Ending

“Family, what we just witnessed is a beautiful picture of the church in action. Each one brought their passion, their gifting, their courage, and their faith. For some, this is the first time they’ve ever danced together—yet here they are, each doing their part, in His Spirit, to share God’s love with the world for His glory.

Fellowship and gathering isn’t just a nice idea—it’s covenant living. It’s how we grow, how we stay strong, and how the world knows we belong to Jesus.

Maybe you’ve been where Haylie was—on the edges, slipping in and out, watching from a distance. And maybe today, God is whispering to your heart: ‘Step in. Don’t just attend. Belong.’

Because when you’re connected, you’re strengthened. When you’re connected, you grow. And when you’re connected, your life becomes a living witness of God’s love to the world around you.

So, as we close, I want to invite anyone who hasn’t yet made the decision to follow Jesus to step forward in prayer. This is your moment to say yes to Him. Let’s pray together.”

Prayer of Salvation

Would you give the Lord a clap offering for these hearts. If you said “YES” would you tell someone or see the prayer table. We have a next steps packet and we’d love to pray for you as you begin your journey. Let’s sing as we close and declare that we as His church will stand side by side, heart to heart, as one body in Christ.

Discussion Questions:

1. What did God say/highlight to you through this message?
2. What is the difference between just attending church and walking together in covenant?
3. Can you share a time when you realized you needed others in life or faith?
4. Hebrews 10:24-25 urges us not to give up on meeting together. What are some common reasons people stop attending or getting involved in church (hurt, busyness, offense, etc.)? Which of these might you relate to most? What helps you push past those barriers to connection?

5. Proverbs 27:17 says, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” How have others sharpened you in your walk with God? How has God used you to sharpen others?
6. Where in your own life (work, ohana, sports, etc.) can you reflect the strength of your church community to the world?
7. What part of Haylie’s testimony resonated with you? If you’re honest, where do you see yourself on that spectrum right now? Are you on the edges, halfway in, or fully connected? Consider why.
8. What is one practical step you can take this week to strengthen your connection to God’s people? Join an ohana group, serve, reach out to someone, pray with a friend?
9. Would God be asking you to invite someone into fellowship? Who would that be? Write their name down and pray for them. Have others pray also.