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Life Together: Daily Chapel As the Cornerstone of Campus Community

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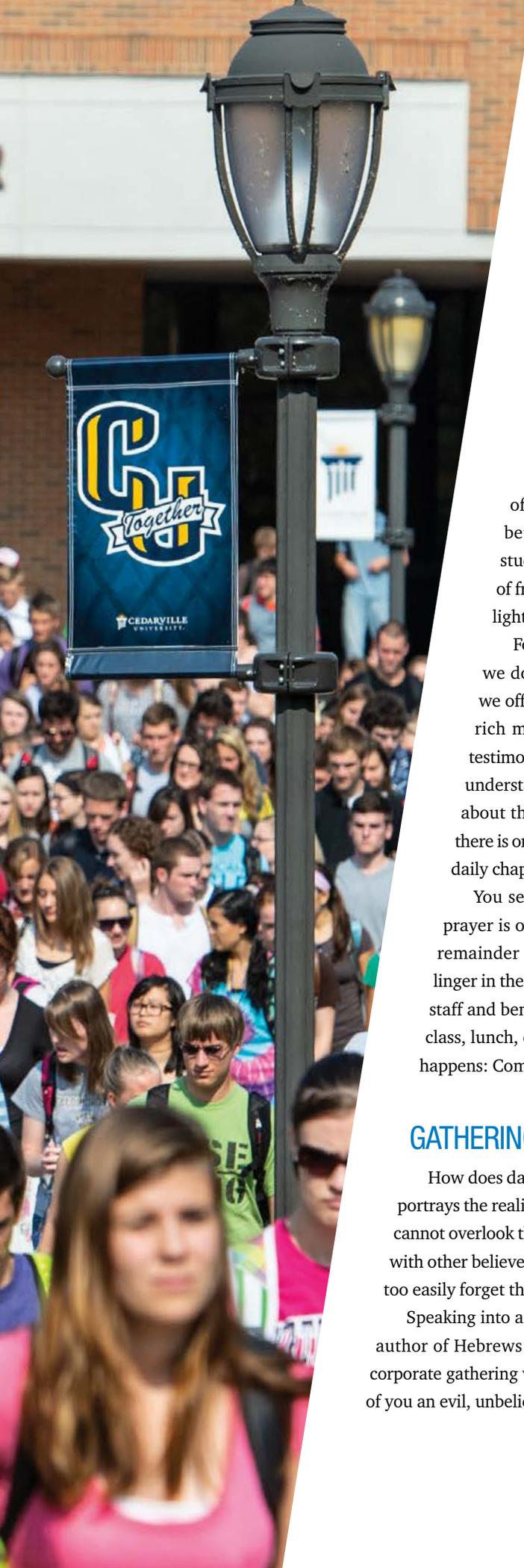
A large crowd of students is walking on a paved path in front of a brick building. The building has a white sign that reads "DIXON MINISTRY CENTER". The students are diverse in age and appearance, and many are wearing backpacks. The scene is bright and sunny, suggesting a clear day. The path is lined with green grass and some yellow flowers on the left side. A street lamp is visible in the middle ground.

DIXON MINISTRY CENTER

LIFE TOGETHER

DAILY CHAPEL AS THE CORNERSTONE OF CAMPUS COMMUNITY

BY JON WOOD



The clock strikes 9:40 a.m., and all across campus professors begin wrapping up their lectures, introducing final points and preparing to transition students toward one of the most important experiences in their 1,000 days on campus.

As students file out of classes and pour onto sidewalks, the pulse of campus starts to beat a little faster. Once inside Jeremiah Chapel, between 9:50 and 10 a.m., the energy level rises by the minute as students find their seats. The buzz of conversation is fueled by the joy of friends connecting with each other yet again. The clock strikes 10, the lights transition, and chapel is on.

For anyone who has joined us for chapel, in person or online (and we do encourage you to do both as much as you can), you know that we offer faculty, staff, and students a steady nourishment of theologically rich musical worship, expositional preaching from God's Word, and testimonies of faithful living. Throughout this 45 minutes, the focal point is understanding and living out the Word of God. While there is much I love about the biblical and theological heartbeat of our chapel programming, there is one other vitally important outcome: the community nurtured through daily chapel.

You see, the many fruits of chapel last far beyond the moment a final prayer is offered, and the students flow out of the auditorium to pursue the remainder of their day. Shortly after chapel, the clock strikes 11. Some will linger in the auditorium, visiting with friends, while others talk with faculty and staff and benefit from life-on-life discipleship moments. Yet, most will be off to class, lunch, or some other pursuit. In this daily rhythm, something remarkable happens: Community is cultivated through gathering and scattering.

GATHERING

How does daily chapel form community on campus? Simply, the act of gathering portrays the reality of community we share in Christ. While it may seem obvious, one cannot overlook the basic nature of community and the treasure of gathering together with other believers. Perhaps those of us who gather in settings of religious liberty can too easily forget the simple benefit of gathering.

Speaking into a cultural context where opposition to the Church was expected, the author of Hebrews recognizes the correlation between individual perseverance and corporate gathering when he calls his readers to "take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort



one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:12–13, ESV; for further reading on this subject, see Hebrews 10:25).

Required to meet underground amidst persecution in the corroded atmosphere of the Third Reich, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's approach to Christian community emphasized the privilege of gathering. "It is not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians ... The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer," he wrote in his book *Life Together*.

The English poet John Donne famously wrote, "No Man Is an Island." Reflecting on the nature of 17th-century European society, Donne expressed his reflections regarding the nature of life and humanity in an increasingly individualistic society.

Birthered out of a season of intense sickness, Donne's recognition of the unreasonableness of individual isolation and the inherent interdependence of humanity has struck a nerve through the ensuing centuries. Yet, Christian community possesses deeper roots than solidarity because of a shared cause or sanguine calls for unity. What Donne tells us we already know from Scripture.

There is a profound reason the physical gathering of believers carries the effect that all humanity longs for but finds so elusive. This is not something that humanity can fabricate, because it isn't a unity grounded in humanity, but it is a spiritual reality rooted in the person of Christ: individual believers united with Christ in salvation and indwelt by the same Holy Spirit, all bearing a common corporate identity.

The New Testament is filled with the teaching of this common union in its fullest expression in local churches, whether the images of the body, a building, the temple, or a society (1 Cor. 12:25–27; Eph. 2:18–21). Community is not merely a relational goal but a particular approach to relationships built on the reality of union with Christ. Bonhoeffer says it this way in *Life Together*, "Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this ... We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ."

Even with remarkable individual diversity, as we belong to one another in gathering, just like everything else at Cedarville University, we live out community "for the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus Christ."

SCATTERING

The story of community does not stop when chapel dismisses. The community initiated by gathering in Christ at 10 a.m. propels the entire campus experience as we scatter. The goal of community is Christlikeness through discipleship. As Greg Ogden reminds us in his book *Transforming Discipleship*, "The scriptural context for growing disciples is through relationships. Jesus called the Twelve to be with him ... Proximity produces disciples."

Proximity starts by gathering and permeates the entire course of a week. Students walk alongside faculty, staff, and each other out of the same type of experiences. In this setting of relationship within a common context, transformation