

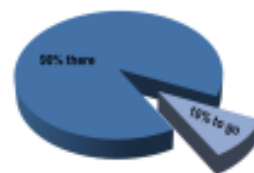
## I. Introduction

Good morning! Recently, I have been thinking and praying about **Hebrews 10:24**, **“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”** In my prayers, I have asked the Lord to show me a way to spur all of us on toward more love and more good deeds. In response to my prayers, I feel that the Lord has led me to bring a specific challenge to our OIC family. Here is the challenge: *“Fill the Hall!”*

Fill the hall. God has provided us with this beautiful hall with 300 seats. Let's fill this hall for the glory of God. My specific prayer is for us to grow in love and outreach so that next year, at 10:00 am on Easter Sunday, this hall will be full of people giving thanks and praising God for the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. Easter is on March 31st next year, so we have 329 days to work toward this goal.

This is a bold goal; for it to be achieved, we will need to improve our ministry in all areas. But I think it is also very doable. In fact, I believe that we are actually already 90% of the way there. In numbers we are only half-way there. But what I mean is this: we already have 90% of the things we need to reach a tipping point for growth that would allow OIC to grow to fill this hall very quickly. We have a wonderful, loving church family. We have many new people coming every month. We have ministries in place and trained and experienced leaders and more.

We already have 90% of what we need!



To reach a tipping point in our ministry that would bring rapid growth, I think we only need to stretch another 10% in our love and good deeds. A little more time in prayer. A little more effort at loving one another. A little more courage to share Jesus with others. With just a little more of such things, I believe, we might have the joy of seeing God respond in an amazing way. Ultimately, only God can make His church grow. But I also believe that God responds to our faith and efforts and I believe that if we bring this to Him in prayer daily, we can see this hall full for Easter of next year.

What is a tipping point? Basically, a tipping point is the point at which the buildup of minor changes reaches a level that triggers a big change. For example, if you want to cross a mountain and visit a friend on the other side, going uphill is hard, every step takes effort. But once you reach the top, going downhill is easy. By distance, at the top of the mountain, you are only halfway to your goal. But once you reach the top, the hard part of the journey is behind you and the rest of the trip is fast and easy.



This diagram is a fun illustration of a tipping point. Going uphill is very hard work. Even if you are 90% of the way to the top, it is still hard work. But if you know it is only a little further, then you push a little more. And, after you reach the top, everything suddenly changes and you can enjoy the rest of the trip. If OIC is, so to speak, 90% of the way up the hill, then with just a little more effort we can see a major change in our church.



The Good News of Jesus Christ is more valuable than any earthly treasure. We want to share this heavenly treasure with all of the people of the world, starting here in Osaka. This challenge to fill the hall is just a small step toward sharing the gospel with more and more people. Let's remind ourselves of some of the wonders of the Good News of Christ Jesus with the words of Hebrews 10:15-23.

## II. Scripture Reading: Hebrews 10:15-23, NIV 1984

15 The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: 16 "This is the covenant I will make

with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." 17 Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." 18 And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. 19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

### III. Teaching

In this short passage, we are reminded of some of the wonderful things that God has provided to us through the cross of our Lord Jesus. On the cross, Jesus gave His life as a ransom for ours so that we might be set free from sin and death. This is the great proof of God's love for us. As Jesus Himself said in **John 15:13**, **"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."**



The message of the love of God and of forgiveness of sins provided through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is Good News. When we hear this Good News and receive it by faith, the grace of God is given to us and our relationship with our Creator is restored so that we may enter boldly into the throne room of God through faith-filled prayer. The author of Hebrews affirms this and then says (**Hebrews 10:21-22**), **"and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water."**

When we believe in Jesus and draw near to God in faith, we are forgiven our sins through His great mercy, given at the cross, and we are transformed by His love and grace. For some people, this transformation is a sudden and dramatic experience, for others it happens more gradually. But whether it happens quickly or slowly, this change is real because God is real and His love is certain.

In the Old Testament, there is a place where God speaks of this transformation with these words, **Ezekiel 36:26**, **"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."** In the gospel of John, there is a place where Jesus was speaking with a man named Nicodemus. Let's look at what Jesus said in **John 3:3**, **"In reply Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.'"**

A new heart. A new spirit. A new birth. These are words that speak of transformation. In the Book of Acts, we see this dramatic transformation in the lives of men like Peter and Paul. Peter was a fisherman who followed Jesus, denied Jesus three times, and then afterward was restored, filled with the Holy Spirit, and transformed to become an apostle, a miracle-worker, and the leader of the church. Paul was originally Saul, a persecutor of Christians, but through an encounter with Jesus, Saul was transformed and he became the Apostle Paul, the great evangelist and preacher who proclaimed the Good News of Jesus throughout the Roman Empire. God transformed lives in Bible times. God has continued to change lives dramatically throughout church history. And God is still transforming lives today.



Many of us here have experienced changed lives through faith in Jesus, for some of us the change was dramatic and sudden, for others the change is more gradual, but if you have truly trusted in Jesus you will soon see a clear difference between your old life and your new life. The Lord is not finished with me yet, I am sure that I am only part-way through the transformation He plans for me. But, when I believed in Jesus, there was a big change in my life; I was set free from addiction to alcohol and the direction of my life was changed dramatically. This morning when you came in, you received copies of testimonies about what God is doing in the lives of two of our newest members here at OIC. Shin and Ayako shared these testimonies at

their baptism. Please read them. I think you will be greatly encouraged in your own faith.

As another example of a changed life, I want to share a video testimony called, “Ayako’s Story.” As it happens, the girl in this video is also named Ayako, but this Ayako goes to a different church; she attends Jesus Lifehouse Tokyo. God is working through many churches, so we rejoice in the testimonies of our brothers and sisters in Christ everywhere. Let’s take a look at Ayako’s Story. [Show video from <http://vimeo.com/41131828> ]

God changes lives when people believe in Jesus. This is Good News, because we live in a fallen world filled with people who struggle with sadness, loneliness, and depression. God provides forgiveness of sins and eternal life when we believe in Jesus and His completed work on the cross and resurrection. This is Good News because without Jesus, we are all sinners separated from God and we are slaves to sin and death. But in Christ Jesus we are made one and we are set free.

The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ goes on and on: forgiveness of sins, eternal life in heaven, peace of heart, living hope, glorious joy, an inheritance in heaven, adoption as sons and daughters of God, made to be friends of Jesus, restored relationship with our heavenly Father, unity and oneness with one another as brothers and sisters in the family of God, healing, meaning and purpose for life, and more.

Jesus loves each and every person in His creation. If you do not yet know Jesus, then He is waiting for you to come to Him. He invites you into a loving relationship. Look at the invitation Jesus gives in **Matthew 11:28**, “**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.**” It is a simple and beautiful invitation and all we have to do to accept His invitation is to turn to Him in prayer, confess our sins and repent of wrongdoing, and ask Him to come into our hearts and give us a new life.



We still have a few more things to talk about today, but since we have just seen a powerful testimony and have listened to Jesus’ invitation to come to Him, I want to provide an opportunity to respond to that invitation by saying, “Yes,” to Jesus. There may be a person, or several people, who feel God leading them to make a decision to trust in Jesus now. This prayer is especially for them. This prayer is also for Christians who already believe in Jesus, but want to renew, affirm, or deepen their relationship with Him. Let’s pray together.

Dear Heavenly Father, God Almighty. You created this world and everything in it. You created us, men and women, so that we might live in a loving relationship with You. But we did not love You. We were not thankful for the things You gave us. We rebelled against You and followed our own pride into many sins. We have done wrong in our words and actions. We have also done wrong in silence and inaction, failing to speak what is right and to do what is pleasing in your site. We are sinners. It would have been just for You to abandon us to sin and death. But Lord, instead of abandoning us, You had mercy on us. In the person of Jesus Christ, You came into this world and died for us, taking the death penalty we deserved. You died to purchase forgiveness of sins and new life for us. And on the third day, You rose from the grave, proving that sin and death are defeated and that Your promise of eternal life is certain and sure. Loving Lord, we are sorry for the things we have done, we confess that we are sinners and we repent of our sins. Help us to turn away from everything that does not honor You. Thank you for providing salvation for us through the cross of Jesus. Please come into our hearts and lives so that we can be born again. Please give us Your Holy Spirit to sustain us in our faith and to show us how to walk with Jesus. Give us the full assurance of salvation that is promised in Your Word. Thank You for Your wonderful grace, Your deep mercy, and Your unending love. In the Name of Jesus we pray, amen!

If you prayed this prayer and accepted Jesus for the first time today, we welcome you as a new brother or sister in Christ. Congratulations and God bless you! If you prayed with me for a renewal and deepening of your faith; praise the Lord! God bless you! We always like to hear about decisions to believe in Jesus, so please use the, “My Voice,” card in your bulletin and write us a note saying something like, “Today

I believed in Jesus for the first time.” or, “Today I recommitted myself to trusting in Jesus as my Lord and Savior.” Prayer requests and comments of all kinds are also welcome. When we have the offering in a few minutes, please drop your card in the offering basket. We use these cards in the Tuesday prayer meeting and throughout the week as we pray for all of the prayer requests and the people who have responded.

#### IV. Conclusion

Today I have offered a specific challenge and prayer to our OIC family for the coming year. Let’s take a closer look for a moment. I want to make sure we notice a couple of things. Here is the challenge. **“Let’s Fill the Hall for the glory of God!”** This is the same slide I used a few minutes ago, except for one change. I moved the emphasis off of, “Fill the Hall,” and onto, “for the glory of God.” I want to make sure we remember this is not about us. It is not about our efforts. It is not about making OIC bigger. It is about God and His glory. The challenge is to, “Fill the Hall,” but the purpose is, “for the glory of God!” Amen? Amen!

Here is the prayer. *“My specific prayer is for us to grow in love and outreach so that at 10:00 am on Easter Sunday, March 31st, 2013, this hall will be full of people giving thanks and praising God for the resurrection of our Lord Jesus.”* There are several important things here, but for today, I want to draw special attention to the fact that there is not only a specific date; there is also a specific time, 10:00 am. The date means that we have about eleven months to work on this. But we don’t have to wait until Easter to work on the time, 10:00 am.

There is a famous saying that, *“A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.”* As one step in our journey toward a full hall next Easter, I would suggest that we all come to church at 10:00 am. Take a look at this photo that I took a few weeks ago. I’m sorry the photo is blurry; that is my fault. But, there is a bigger problem here than a blurry photo. Our average Sunday attendance is about 130 people, but there are only about 40 people in the photo. What does this mean? It means that only one third of our congregation came on time at 10:00 am. Two thirds of our OIC family came late, some a few minutes late, some an hour late.



Keith Green wrote a song called, *Asleep in the Light*, In the song I found these words: *“Jesus rose from the grave and you, you can’t even get out of bed, Jesus rose from the dead, come on, get out of your bed.”* Keith Green was a real truth-teller and it is a bit rough for me to use Keith Green lyrics on friends. But we need to hear it. I need to hear it too. I am usually here early on Sunday morning, but on some other days of the week I am sometimes snoozing when I should be up.

Please don’t misunderstand me though. Sometimes something unexpected happens and we end up running late, especially if you have small children. That’s okay. It is much better to come an hour late than to give up and stay home. So, I don’t want anyone to criticize people who are late next week, maybe something unexpected happened. But for the rest of us, let’s come on time, next week, and every week.



Let’s close with **Hebrews 10:25**, **“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”** If you are here, then obviously you have not given up on meeting together with your brothers and sisters in the Lord. But some of us have gotten in the habit of coming very late. Let’s change that. So, how about it? Next week, 10:00 am. Or better yet, a bit early. It will be a huge encouragement to the worship team and to all who come on time to stop having to feel lonely at 10:00 am. And it will bring glory to God as well. Coming to church on time is one small way that we can honor God as our Lord. Who can do it? As a first step toward the bigger challenge, can you come at 10:00 am next week? Raise your hand. Thank you! Let’s Fill the Hall for the glory of God! Praise the Lord! Let’s pray.

#### V. Prayer