

STUDY GUIDE



HEBREWS

teaching series
eastside CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

GREATER...

INTRODUCTION

GREATER

Do you love the backstory? It adds a dimension when watching the Olympics and learning the backstory of the individual athletes. In the NFL, Michael Oher is a great offensive tackle regardless of his backstory. But we know his backstory as *“The Blind Side”* and it provides a richness to his accomplishments.

It’s important that we understand the backstories involved with the book of Hebrews, and they are many. The author routinely draws on the backstory that the readers commonly share. It’s what draws them into the message itself. The writer of Hebrews from beginning to end knits one idea to the next and transitions to his next thought linking it both to previous ideas in his letter and linking it to Old Testament stories very familiar to his audience.

The readers of Hebrews are experiencing a crisis of their faith. Words like weak, weary, and drifting begin to paint the picture of these people like you and me who often begin to question our faith, often coming to the conclusion expressed in terms like, ‘is it all worth it?’ Edward Fudge put it this way, *“They had begun to entertain second thoughts about their commitment to Jesus, and they were thinking seriously about returning to their comfortable and familiar past.”* As a church we will explore what that past was and the conclusions that the author of Hebrews was encouraging them to draw.

If you are a devoted follower and believer in Jesus then this study will energize your faith and put an exclamation point on what you believe. If you are tired and weary and need a reminder of what this is even all about, then you are in for a jolting and energizing reminder of the “Greater” things. If you are seeking to start a relationship with Jesus this may be just what you need to bridge the gap of faith and unbelief. No matter who you are, step back and look at the big picture with us because it is a beautiful picture of hope and purpose for your life. We are excited for all of you and your journey.

WEEK 1: THINGS TO CONSIDER DURING THIS STUDY

HELPFUL HINTS

The author and audience of Hebrews is unknown and has been debated for centuries. Perhaps that’s why many call it “the mystery book of the New Testament. While it would be easy to get into the speculation game, we would urge you to focus instead on those things that we do know about this amazing book filled with truths relating to the good news of Jesus Christ. What we do know about the audience is key to understanding Hebrews. They are weary and disillusioned with their faith in Jesus due to all the persecution, hardships and well, just the broken events of a fallen world. That simple piece of information will make the motives and intentions of this Spirit inspired author come alive as he pleads the case for Jesus, the GREATER.

In addition to the Overviews, application, and questions provided by our ECF collaboration team, we offer the following as just a few thoughts to keep in mind as you enter into this study. We encourage you to dig in, read and study for yourself and join in on the vibrant discussions of one of the ECF small groups.

EDWARD FUDGE’S SUMMARY OF THE MESSAGE OF HEBREWS:

KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN FOR SOME “KEY PHRASES”

“LET US”...

Draw Near 4:16, 10:22

Leave Elementary Teachings 6:1

Go On To Maturity 6:1

Be Thankful 12:28

Go To Him Outside The Camp 13:13

Strive To Enter 4:11

Hold Fast The Confession 3:1, 4:14, 10:23

Consider How to Stir One Another On 10:24

“WE HAVE”...

A Great High Priest 4:14-15

Salvation, Confidence in 6:9

An Anchor 6:19

High Priest at right hand of the throne 8:1

Better Lasting Possessions 10:34

An Altar 13:10

Confidence 10:19

HEBREWS 1:1-4

Week #2/A Writer's Purpose/Primary Collaborator: Bill Fletcher

BIG IDEA

We received the "final word" from the Son....the Greater one!

ILLUSTRATION

Authors are very intentional about how they write their work. When developing a mystery, the writer reveals details in a puzzle-like format to engage the reader in discovery. Biographers share intimate details from childhood and beyond that help readers relate to an individual on a personal level. When exploring any text, it's important to consider the manner in which the author is writing in order to fully comprehend what is being read. Although the author of the book of Hebrews is unknown, we can read it through the eyes of someone who sought to connect the (most likely Jewish Christian) audience with their Savior.

OVERVIEW

The first paragraph of Hebrews (1:1-4) could be considered a synopsis of the entire treatise. Virtually all commentators speak of these few verses as "elaborate", "striking announcement", "extra ordinary" because so much is said in such a short space. This opening paragraph is designed to grip a person's attention. This is especially important from the writer's perspective if what he has to say is to accomplish its purpose; that is, encouragement in perseverance to a weary audience. The original language would cause the reader to have a sense of completeness and finality. All God intended to accomplish has been accomplished. This is it! "And so when he had accomplished cleansing for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb 1:3). The writer's emphasis in this opening paragraph is to make sure his readers have a full knowledge and understanding of the elevated position of Jesus, the man because of what he accomplished in his life on this earth and his crucifixion on a Roman Cross.

SEVEN TRUTHS

PART I: The Son's cosmic nature-As God, the Son He always existed.

Verse 2: Appointed heir of all things.

Verse 2: Through His Son He created the world. Colossians 1:16; John 1:3; Proverbs 8:22-31.

Verse 3: The Son is the radiance of God's Glory. Exodus 34:29-35

Verse 3: The Son is the representation of God's essence. John 10:30; John 14:9

Verse 3: The Son sustains all things by his powerful word.

Part II: The Son's incarnate nature.

6. Verse 3: The Son accomplished the cleansing for sin once for all time.

7. Verse 3: The work is finished; The Son sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High. John 17:1-5; John 19:30

APPLICATION

In this first paragraph of Hebrews we see the Son, high and lifted up in the bosom of the Father; deity unfathomable. But we also see the incarnate son begotten of the Father, the man, Jesus of Nazareth living a life of humble submission as a human being to perfection. When he had accomplished the purpose of his sojourn on this earth, the man Jesus was exalted and sat down at the right hand of God. These are amazing declarations of truth. The practical and pragmatic implications and considerations of all of this is that each of us has been given a life to live. The question then becomes: "How Now Shall We live."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Discuss different ways and times that God spoke in the ages before Christ.
2. How does God speak today?
3. What are the last days?
4. What impression do you get when reading Hebrews 1:1-4?
5. When you think of Jesus returning to Heaven (Acts 1:9-11) do you think of him as Deity or man?
6. If you personally take to heart these seven truths about the Son, how do they influence the way that you live?

HEBREWS 1:5-2:4

Week #3/Greater Than/Primary Collaborator: Aaron Woodall

BIG IDEA

Jesus has equal status to the Father and has fulfilled the old law, therefore he is greater than any angel or created being in existence. God has spoken through the greatest messenger, his Son, Jesus Christ who is superior to any previous messenger and means to the Father.

ILLUSTRATION

Have you ever been out on the water, and drifted off course much faster than you realized? Then, it takes a surprising amount of effort to get back on the right path. The thing about drifting is that it is very hard to notice. After all, you are drifting with the tide, so unless you have an anchor keeping you grounded, it looks like everything is moving with you. Sometimes we let ourselves drift toward things that tempt us to replace Christ as the head of our lives. Is your anchor in him?

OVERVIEW

It may seem strange that the author of Hebrews compares and contrasts angels and Jesus, but when Hebrews was written, angels played a large part in the Jewish belief system. Additionally, Jewish tradition says that Old Testament law was dictated to Moses through angels, rather than directly by God, on Mount Sinai (see Acts 7:53). These things led to people overstating the importance of angels, and incorrectly adding God's divine characteristics to beings that solely exist as messengers of God's will and plans. In this passage, the writer of Hebrews goes to great lengths to prove that Jesus shares equal authority with the Father, making Jesus superior to anything in creation. He has the honored throne at the Father's right hand. Therefore, the message delivered through His life on earth necessarily outweighs any law delivered through angels. Still, Jesus *fulfilled* the law; he did not make it obsolete. The law showed God's power and expectations for his people, and if they disobeyed it there were dire consequences. The author compares this to our salvation found in Jesus. God spoke secondhand through the prophets,

But, as always with Jesus, there is very good news. We have inherited a "great salvation" (Hebrews 2:3), and "The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some regard slowness, but is being patient toward you, because he does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9). Our God truly and genuinely loves us. He very much wants to be in relationship with everyone, and His word reveals this over and over again. Stand firm and persevere, because there is nothing better in this world than having Jesus as your anchor.

APPLICATION

We all feel as if we are drifting away at times. Our God designed us as free creatures, and we can go against His will if we choose. However, if we truly examine our lives and think of the times we have drifted away and neglected Him for other things, it is clear that those paths have led to emptiness. This is a blessing, as it clearly shows that we are created to be in relationship with God, and nothing else will do. Remember, Jesus is superior to every created thing on earth and in heaven. If we are intentional about turning back to Him, He is right there to receive us with great joy. Just read the story of prodigal in Luke 15:11-32, and see how He runs to us. God will never drift away from you!

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. *What causes you to drift away? How can this passage help you to stand firm in Christ?*
2. *Think of a time that you were drifting away, and then you came back to God. What did this teach you about Him?*
3. *What current examples can you think of where society is trying to bring false idols/ideas to the same level as Jesus? Why is this harmful?*
4. *What have you learned from this passage? Or, what familiar concept has become clearer?*
5. *How specifically has this passage encouraged you? What do you see as the most encouraging statements?*

HEBREWS 2:5-18

Week #4/Made like us/Primary Collaborator: Tim Minton

“Resolve to be tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the weak and the wrong. Sometime in life you will have been all of these.”

— Lloyd Shearer

BIG IDEA

Jesus was made like us in every way.

ILLUSTRATION

Long ago, there ruled in Persia a wise and good king. He loved his people. He wanted to know how they lived. He wanted to know about their hardships. Often he dressed in the clothes of a working man or a beggar, and went to the homes of the poor. No one whom he visited thought that he was their ruler. One time he visited a very poor man who lived in a cellar. He ate the coarse food the poor man ate. He spoke cheerful, kind words to him. Then he left. Later he visited the poor man again and disclosed his identity by saying, "I am your king!" The king thought the man would surely ask for some gift or favor, but he didn't. Instead he said, "You left your palace and your glory to visit me in this dark, dreary place. You ate the course food I ate. You brought gladness to my heart! To others you have given your rich gifts. To me you have given yourself!"

OVERVIEW

Text in Context...In chapter one, we saw how Jesus Christ is far superior to the angels. In fact we saw that actually He is God the Son, heir of all things, creator of the universe, the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of His essence. He is fully God, but Jesus was also fully man. How could Jesus be superior to angels in all the ways we have seen and still be a man? And how could He be superior to angels and die? How can such a being ever become a substitution for us and how can we ever relate to Him? Although we have seen that Jesus was fully God, we now see that He was also fully human. Jesus had a body like us, a mind like us, emotions like us and a will of

and points out that Jesus was made lower than the angels for a little while. He was made like us and is now crowned with glory because he suffered death on our behalf. Jesus is called the pioneer or Captain of our salvation. He leads the way to heaven. He is the trail blazer, going before us. And, it is said that it was fitting for God to perfect him through suffering. In suffering, Jesus demonstrates obedience and trust. In Jesus's suffering we see the love of God, the mercy of God, the compassion of God, the grace of God, the judgement of God, the wrath of God, and the glory of God. We see God's great plan of redemption, bringing many sons and daughters to glory and thus He is not ashamed to call us brothers. Since He was made like us, suffered like us and was tempted like us He knows exactly what we are going through in this life. He knows what it is like to be mocked, betrayed, exhausted, hungry, hated and experience great pain. He knows, and can help in our times of need.

APPLICATION

We can take comfort in knowing that Jesus was tempted in every way that we are, so He can, not only relate, but give us strength to endure it. Hebrews is filled with examples of those who have followed the Lord through many trials and suffering in life. Jesus even said we would have difficulties in life. How will you endure then and who or what will you fix your eyes on as you journey through life?

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. *Christ being fully God and Christ being fully human, which one do you struggle with the most? Explain*
2. *Jesus says He is not ashamed to call us brothers. Have there been times in your Christian life that you found yourself ashamed of Him? Share some of these with your group.*
3. *The same word translated as "tempted" is also used as "tested" in other passages. How is temptation a test? Do you view it that way? How does James 1 help your understanding of this?*
4. *Do you see temptation as suffering? And is there temptation that comes from other types of suffering? Explain.*
5. *It's easy to become frustrated or angry with our suffering, hard times etc. in this Fallen world. Remember that these are the moments that are causing the drifting of these people of faith. How do the truths about Christ found in this passage help re-direct the course of those drifting away?*

HEBREWS 3:1-6

Week #5/God's Moved to a New House/Primary Collaborator:

Kerry Lowery

BIG IDEAS

We are called into the family of God to abide in the House of God through Jesus, fix your thoughts on Him, the Greater One.

ILLUSTRATION

Do you love the backstory? In the NFL, Michael Oher is a great offensive tackle regardless of his backstory. But we know his backstory as “The Blind Side” and it provides a richness to his accomplishments. The writer of Hebrews often draws on the backstory familiar to his recipients’ makes his case and draws the reader into his message. From the beginning to end the author knits one idea to the next and transitions to his next thought linking it to previous ideas. He also links these ideas to Old Testament stories familiar to his audience. These six verses are no exception. You will often find double meaning when you understand the backstory and cultural context. We will try to provide some tools to unpack the backstory as part of your study.

OVERVIEW

With a bit of effort on our part these six sentences can also blossom with meaning, counsel and guidance for us today as we also share in this heavenly calling. Starting with “Therefore” we know we are being called to reference a previous idea. Review the previous thought and then focus on the four key statements that follow the “therefore”.

1. **Holy Brothers and Sisters** points back to Heb 2:11. The only time this phrase is used in the New Testament.
2. **Partners in the Heavenly calling:** The word Partners is often translated “who share”. It is the same Greek word “share” we see in 1 Cor 10:14-17. “Calling” is considered covenantal language. God is in pursuit of mankind and our calling is from God and to God. It is in fact, an invitation to have relationship with Him.

The Apostle and High Priest – the is Jesus, whom we confess. Only Hebrews refers to him as High Priest and does so 12 times.

In referring to Moses in the following verses, the backstory envisioned by the writer is Exodus 32-33 and Numbers 12. Having placed Jesus at the center of our Calling, the writer takes on an important discussion for the Jewish Christian. Moses was much viewed as their covenant mediator with God and the writer takes on this comparison by turning their minds to an interesting story in Numbers 12 where Aaron and Miriam were speaking against Moses because of his wife. Who came to Moses defense but God?

APPLICATION

As you read through the remaining five verses you see a powerful piece of imagery surfacing. *We have a covenant calling from God to enter into relationship with Him and Jesus is pictured as both Apostle (message bearer/ Ambassador) for God and High Priest (or bridge builder) for mankind to God. **The Writer in one statement places Jesus at the center of our relationship with God. There are none greater, not even Moses.** It's important for us to continually be reminded of our calling to be in relationship with God through Jesus and to embrace the blessing that comes through being part of the family of God.*

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. *How often do you find yourself really contemplating Jesus, learning from Him and being changed by Him? How can we be more intentional with this in our spiritual journey?*
2. *How does the writer compare and contrast Moses and Jesus as he makes his case that Jesus is superior?*
3. *For the Jew the law and its manifestation were all physical and the writer is making the case that through Jesus there is now a spiritual reality of relationship with God.*
4. *Ravi Zacharias wrote: “The Author of time, who lived in the eternal was made incarnate within time...that we might live with the eternal in view”. Hebrews was written to assist Christians in keeping the eternal in view through Jesus. How are your Eternal View Glasses?*
5. *What are the distractions that can blind you from the Eternal?*

HEBREWS 3:7-19

Week #6/Enjoying God's Rest Today/Primary Collaborator: Kye Harris

BIG IDEA

By being faithful and obedient, Today we may enjoy God's rest.

ILLUSTRATION

Summer school sounds like the worst kind of punishment for poor grades or misbehavior. I was never assigned to summer classes during my public school days, but I imagine the only thing worse than being in class on summer break is being in class while everyone else is on summer break. From the first week of September until June, nearly every student is looking forward to the promise of summer. It's easy, throughout the school year, to get distracted from the goals of passing your tests and diving into those sun-blessed months of release. Fortunately we have each weekend as a reminder, a small fore-taste of the vacation to come. Likewise, it's easy for us as maturing Christians to get distracted from our diligence in faith to Christ's calling. Paradise is so far away and oftentimes our daily toils can seem so rote. When will there be rest, we wonder. Will it always be this hard, we ask. But God promises us rest. We get a snapshot of this every Sunday when we remind ourselves of his sovereignty and Jesus's victory. We can refresh ourselves and encourage one another to go another week—and remember that the Promised Land is still coming. If we're faithful in our small tasks today, there will be rest for us.

OVERVIEW

It may sound like there's a lot of warning in this passage (which there is) but the key feature is a call to daily encouragement: "exhort one another each day, as long as it is called 'Today.'" This requires community and fellowship; it also requires honesty and trust. Without Christian community, or without other maturing Christians in our lives, we're left to ourselves and immediately disadvantaged in our plight against sin. Furthermore, how can you be obedient in encouraging other Christians if you're not regularly fellowshiping with them?

In this passage the author is quoting Psalm 95—an exciting poem inviting its listeners to join in praise of the Creator for his great works. At the end of this

it, too, with the word "Today." The authors of both Psalm 95 and Hebrews do not mention the past, the future, or even "every day." They simply implore us to be obedient and to encourage one another against sin Today.

Psalm 95 references the Promised Land (Canaan) when it mentions God's rest. This is where Israel would be free from wandering and have peace. Instead, they allowed themselves to become distracted by what may come tomorrow and failed to remind one another of what God had done for them yesterday. They lost sight of Today and lost faith in God's promises (see Deuteronomy 8) Now, in the present, God has promised us that we will enter into his rest. We can depend on Scripture to remind us of God's character, his goodness, and his promises. We have the Gospel to anchor us each day against the waves of doubt, so that we may enjoy his rest: joy and peace amidst struggles; celebration in the finality of Christ's work every Sunday; and most importantly communion with our Creator for all eternity.

APPLICATION

You can't put off Today. Each morning when you wake up you resolve what you are going to do, then you go and do it. Resolve to encourage others. Remind yourself of God's promises and the work Christ has accomplished on your behalf. Seek God's rest. Enjoy who he is. Trust in his goodness and his provision. Pray for the Holy Spirit to help you be faithful in the small things as you look forward to the day when you will be with Jesus forever. And when the day is closing and the work is done: rest! Rest well. Thank God for all that he helped you to accomplish today, and don't fret about what may come tomorrow.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. *In what ways did Israel rebel? What warnings does their story give us?*
2. *If we are redeemed and saved by grace, why does the author spend so much energy warning against disobedience?*
3. *How can we prepare ourselves for daily obedience?*
4. *What does exhorting look like? What does that word mean? Can we exhort anyone we meet? Give some practical ways to exhort others this coming week.*
5. *What does it mean to be in God's rest? Is it a place, a mindset, an emotion?*
6. *From the Application section above, what will you strive to be obedient in this week? This might be a good subject matter for your small group prayer time.*

HEBREWS 4:1-13

Week #7/ Can You Hear Me Now?/Primary Collaborator: Sam Morris

BIG IDEA

Obedience has a lot to do with how well you listen to God.

ILLUSTRATION

What does it mean to listen to someone? I mean really listen. It has a lot to do with the person speaking. And obedience (or the lack thereof) has a lot to do with how well you listen to God. Being a good listener to a friend, family member, or someone you've only just met is quite a bit different than being a good listener to our Creator, but there are some parallels.

In an article on Lifehack.org, "How To Be A Good Listener That Others Want To Talk To" (<http://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/how-good-listener-that-others-want-talk.html>) the following tips are offered.

- **Find the "Why" and the "What"** (why are they talking to you? what are they sharing?)
- **Focus on the other person** (wait until they've finished before thinking about your response)
- **Engage** (respond to their message, affirm you are hearing them)

Limit distractions (avoid the things that keep you from hearing the speaker)

As you read this passage, look for the ways that the reader is encouraged to listen and follow up on that listening with obedience.

OVERVIEW

Hebrews 4:1-13 begins with a warning to believers, telling us to be wary that none of us fall short of God's rest (4:1). It would be a good place to remind you of the emotional and spiritual condition of the audience of Hebrews... weary, weak, hope dwindling, drifting! A parallel is made with the Israelites on exodus away from their former bondage in Egypt. It started off well with them hearing a message of good news (4:2) but things quickly fell apart because they failed to hear the message in faith. As a result, they failed to obey God's message (4:6) and lost the opportunity to enter God's rest (4:3).

The author of Hebrews then calls out that David appropriately pulled this story forward into Psalm 95, urging the hearer of the psalm to listen "Today" and not harden their hearts (4:7). Finally, the Hebrews author pulls Today into the here and now, by saying the word of God is living and active (4:12) and has the power to expose our desires, our hearts, and anything we try to hide from others and ourselves (4:13).

APPLICATION

In Hebrews (part of the original "lifehack" called the "New Testament") we are provided a similar set of listening tips focused on hearing God and living in trusting obedience.

- **Hear God's good news in faith** (4:2) – Consider the source of this message. Your heavenly Father, the same God that led Israel out of Egyptian bondage, who wants to lead you out of the bondage of sin. By putting your faith in God, you are placing your trust in his provision for righteousness and for living.
- **Obey it** (4:6) – The Israelites failed because they disobeyed His word. They heard it, they knew who it came from, but they chose not to trust it. Obedience says "I hear you, and I trust you to take care of me as I walk in step with your will." Hear God out fully by being obedient, and you'll see how He provides.
- **Hear it in the present tense** (4:7) – Today is now, and every day is Today. Listening to God's word and engaging with it is a daily activity that reminds us to trust in God to take care of us, to follow His leadership and His direction.
- **Do not harden your heart against it** (4:7) – Life is full of distractions, some chosen and some forced on us, that Satan uses to tempt us into distrusting God. Over time, and repeated reprioritization of those distractions over spiritual obedience, our hearts become calloused to disobedience, and a pattern emerges. Evaluate the distractions in your life and see if they have hardened your heart to disobedience.

Godly listening leads to trust. Trust leads to obedience. Obedience leads to God's rest.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *How important is revisiting the Gospel message to the ongoing spiritual development of the believer?*
2. *What role does the speaker of the gospel play in helping the hearer choose to believe God's message?*
3. *In what ways does obedience to God require trust? What is an example of a time that you didn't want to obey because you were concerned that obedience would risk a missed "need"?*
4. *Share any "tips or tricks" that you've developed to help prioritize reading and engaging with scripture on a daily basis.*
5. *How have you had your hard heart softened in the past? How do you know that your heart is starting to harden?*

HEBREWS 4:14-5:10

Week #8/Throne of Grace/Primary Collaborator: Seth Riley

ILLUSTRATION

Imagine your car brakes down and your initial plan to deal with it is to call a veterinarian. You may say, that's ridiculous to which I would strongly agree, but all too often our default reaction to situations where we woefully fall short of God's perfection is not to go to the source of that perfection, but rather try everything else under the sun, until we are reminded [v.16] that He's ready and more than able to help us. So next time you "breakdown" don't call a veterinarian, but call the mechanic that built you.

OVERVIEW

For the believer, the culmination of our faith rests in a number of paradoxes. For example, we, the image of God, are fallen. In fact, we were created in the image of God even though God knew that we would fall. This sense of unworthiness, this separation, marked the efforts of the Old Testament. Sinful humans, aching under the responsibility of bearing the image of God, tried in vain to make right what was broken and could not do so. Hebrews 4:14-5:10 finds the writer beginning to pivot into a new paradox. Christ, who has been fully established as greater than all, put aside glory and became so fully human that he sympathizes with every aspect of the human experience. He was made weak, and he understood the agony of death but, because of his obedience, he paved the way of salvation for all who will obey him. In effect, the paradox that was begun in Genesis is twisted further and, now, completed. We were fashioned to be the image of God, though God knew that we would fall. Christ, God himself, became the image and essence of humanity, humanity perfected, in order to perfect every person who follows him. In effect, the paradox that was begun in Genesis is twisted further and, now, completed. We were fashioned to be the image of God, though God knew that we would fall. Christ, God himself, became the image and essence of humanity, humanity perfected, in order to perfect every person who follows him. The writer of Hebrews writes that Christ is a high priest in the order of Melchizedek. Unfortunately, most of the details of Melchizedek have been lost to the ages, but we know this: Melchizedek was both a priest and a king. (Genesis 14:18) Christ, as God, is a king; Christ, as a man, is high priest; Christ, as sacrifice, was spotless and worthy—the first sacrifice, in fact, that was *truly* worthy for restitution to take place. Thus, with this fulcrum passage, we are left with the strange mystery of Hebrews: God is greater than all, infinite and all encompassing, yet he acts with subtlety and humility, never with condescension. Jesus Christ, at the right hand of the Father, *still* understands what it is to be human. The writer of Hebrews shows us that to leave this grace, to succumb to the pressures of the world around you, is to lapse back into the torment of the incomplete paradox.

APPLICATION

Since our creation, we human beings have always tried to perfect ourselves. God knew we would never reach it on our own, which is why he had a plan from the beginning to send Jesus to be that perfection for us. Yet, even as we accept Christ as Savior, we find that we are still not as perfected as we hoped we would be. So often, when we are struggling with something, our initial reaction is to try to figure out what we need to do to fix it, and then berate ourselves when we do not see the results that we want. After all, we, as Christians, feel that we have been given the tools we need to achieve something like perfection. But even though Christ came to perfect us, we are still human and we live in a fallen world. We will not see perfection until we reach heaven. Instead, we should first turn to God and ask for the grace we need when we fail, the wisdom to know how to change and the strength to do so.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Despite the fact that our salvation comes through grace, we so often try to perfect ourselves, to better ourselves on our own. What are you still trying to perfect on your own?*
- 2. Christ's incarnation and the grace of salvation are, inherently, beautiful and mysterious concepts. Not every aspect is clear or understandable. Does this sense of mystery, of our smallness beside God's greatness, encourage you or frustrate you? Does this sense of utter completeness inform your confidence as you face a world that often claims that your faith is limited, old-timey, and unconsidered?*
- 3. Christ became the image of humanity to complete our incompleteness as the images of God. How does this completed paradox shape your view of your relationship with God?*
- 4. Beyond becoming the image of humanity, Christ became human. What sort of response should this give us, as followers of God? Does the fact that our faith centers on our shared humanity with our savior make our faith more concrete, more do-able?*

HEBREWS 5:11-6:12

Week #9/Growing Up/Primary Collaborator: Jessica Soltani

MAIN IDEA

There is meaningful fruit and blessings that result from a maturing faith that feasts on the meat of the Gospel rather than being content to living life on spiritual milk.

ILLUSTRATION

Imagine what life would be like if grown children and adults remained on milk diets. Although young infants receive nourishment from it as they begin their life journey, they live on milk because they are unable to digest solids. But as their bodies mature, so do their diets. They grow to embrace new flavors and textures, even creating settings in which they make, sell, gift, and devour their favorite foods. No one talks about going back to the "liquid dairy" diet. Why not? Their bodies are designed to chew with their teeth and use enzymes to break down food into nutrients necessary for good health and energy. All of that intentionally made design would be a waste. Moreover, milk pales in comparison to the endless experiences of crunchy, sweet, chewy, sour, and saltiness that only solid food provides.

OVERVIEW

Back to Hebrews. Hebrews 5:11-6:12 explains what it looks like when Christians don't grow up in their faith, describing them as those who go back to a diet of milk instead of consuming solid food. They're described as "sluggish in hearing," making it difficult for others to explain new topics to them. Instead of having knowledge to teach what they believe, they still need teachers to share the basics with them.

This section of scripture also highlights the strengths of believers who choose to grow their faith, relating them to those who consume a mature diet of solid food. Instead of settling with ingestion of early knowledge, they seek to feast on a greater understanding and they put it into practice. They mature in deciphering between good and evil. Envisioned as land that absorbs heaven's rain and produces a crop, they bear fruit and meaningful blessings.

Hebrews 6:4-6 and verse 8 as well portray those who have experienced God, but have rejected him as people who have had a "taste" of something great, but that's it. They never digested it, the message never sunk in. Having never fully accepted Christ, they are depicted as gardens that never fully absorbed the rain and therefore only produce thorns and thistles and are useless. Furthermore, this passage indicates that it is impossible for those who have experienced this taste of Christ and rejected Him to ever be drawn to repentance. This message appears disheartening, acknowledging that some people will not choose salvation, but it ends with affirmation for those who do embrace salvation-that God does see our work and love for him.

APPLICATION

We all have settled into the comfort of living on spiritual milk at different times in our faith journey. There is often some "significant" excuse for allowing others to teach, serve, and connect in the church community while we sit on the sidelines. Some of us feel all too inadequate and we fear failure or embarrassment as we take on new challenges. However, if we examine scripture for direction, we will discover many truths that empower us to engage with God and grow our faith:

- We are equipped to become mature and whole, demonstrating love and reflecting Christ himself (Ephesians 4:11-15).
- We are not alone. The Holy Spirit is our help in this faith journey (John 14:26).
- We need community to help sharpen our faith (Proverbs 27:17).

These truths help us seek more "filling" faith experiences, knowing God has designed us to embrace them, He is with us when we need help, and He gives us friends to make the experience more fruitful.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Why do you think infants aren't designed to eat solid foods? How do you think it relates to new believers learning the foundations of faith (elementary teachings as mentioned in Hebrews 6:1-2)?*
2. *Who is someone you admire who seeks to learn beyond the basics in his/her faith journey? What are some things that person does to grow in his/her faith?*
3. *Hebrews 6:7 relates maturing believers to land that produces a useful crop. Galatians 5:22-23 defines some of this "fruit" that grows from faithful believers who choose to live maturely by the Spirit instead of living for themselves. Which of these fruits would you like to grow more in your life?*
4. *Hebrews 6:4-6 and verse 8 may raise some questions about who is saved or who is able to come back to Jesus after falling away from him. How do these verses compare with parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (Luke 15)?* 5. *In the application section above, there are three truths noted to inspire us to grow in our faith journey. Which truth would you like to embrace this week? What can you do to embrace this truth?*

HEBREWS 6:13-20

Unchangeable/Primary Collaborator: Kasra Soltani

“When our trials come, when we feel pain and suffering, when our tears flow again, it is our joy and comfort to lift our faces heavenward and to go on, standing on the promises of God.”

— W.A. Criswell

BIG IDEA

God’s promises we can STAND ON...

ILLUSTRATION

“Promises, promises...” When was the last time a promise made to you was broken? Unfortunately, all of us at some point will experience this in the relational context, but even in day to day life it’s a common occurrence. We all know it to be true about most politicians, but even instances that you feel assured can let you down. Many years back I purchased a used truck along with an extended warranty that the salesperson assured me was the greatest thing on earth. Well, after a while my truck began having issues and as you can guess, none of the repairs were covered due to the parts needing replacement being “non-moving” parts. Being let down is part of living in a broken world, which is why passages throughout the Bible like this are essential to our belief of the promises made to us by our creator.

OVERVIEW

The author is making the case of God’s power and sufficiency in chapters 1 and 2, attention to the deficiency of men in chapters 3 and 4 [Psalm 95/ drawing on their failures]. Concluding with the “Son is the Solution” to our dilemma by being the high priest in the order of Melchizedek...The reference to Melchizedek is another nod to the readers/students that the time for elementary teaching is over. No more fast food theology, but where this section in Hebrews camps on is the idea that our endurance has nothing to do with our own strengths. This would be turning from grace to works, the very

APPLICATION

Living a life of a believer, one must learn over time to place perseverance into the proper perspective. More times than we like to admit, we become discouraged through trials simply because of our neglect [conscience or unconscious] to view them through the proper perspective. This in no way minimizes the effect trials have on us, but the one overarching fact remains, that His promise will endure even through the bleakness; some of life’s seasons. By being reminded of that [His promises] and of the fact of the high priestly ministry of Jesus...we gain the proper perspective that we can persevere through.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Why does God need to promise, when he cannot lie? [Numbers 13:19/ Matthew 5:33-37/James 5:12]*
2. *How does the unchangeable purpose of God and His oath [vs. 17] become our refuge?*
3. *What are some experiences you have had with promises, good or bad?*
4. *Does this passage bring a renewal to your assurance?*
4. *What is your hope and why is it the anchor for our souls?*

HEBREWS

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HEBREWS OUTLINE

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JESUS COMPARED TO:

Angels & The Torah (Chapters 1 & 2)

Moses & The Promised Land (Chapters 3 & 4)

Priests & Melchizedek (Chapters 5, 6, 7)

Sacrifice & Covenant (Chapters 8, 9, 10)

Once Jesus is deemed *GREATER*, the final chapters are the big challenge to follow HIM!

IN JESUS, THEY HAVE FOUND...

God's Word

Hope for a New Creation

An Eternal Priest

The Perfect Sacrifice

CHALLENGE FOR US:

So, follow the great models of faith knowing that no matter what the level of persecution or challenges in life,

God will not abandon

His people.

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