

**SPRING 2015  
HIGH SCHOOL SMALL GROUP  
LEADER GUIDE**

**THE BOOK OF  
HEBREWS**

**JESUS IS GREATER**

**BBC**  
**STUDENTS**

# 2015 STUDY SCHEDULE

**January 11 -- Night of Worship (no small group)**

**January 18 -- Session 1**

**January 25 -- Session 2**

**February 1 -- Session 3**

**February 8 -- Session 4**

**February 15 -- Night of Worship (no small group)**

**February 22 -- DNOW Weekend (no small group)**

**March 1 -- Session 5**

**March 8 -- Session 6**

**March 15 -- Session 7**

**March 22 -- Night of Worship (no small group)**

**March 29 -- Session 8**

**April 5 -- Easter (no small group)**

**April 12 -- Session 9**

**April 19 -- Session 10**

**April 26 -- Night of Worship (no small group)**

**May 3 -- Session 11**

**May 10 -- Mother's Day (no small group)**

**May 17 -- Session 12**

**May 24 -- Memorial Day Weekend (no small group)**

**May 31 -- Session 13**



# 1

# Who is Jesus?

Hebrews 1:1-4

**1** Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, **2** but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. **3** He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, **4** having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.



# Exploration

Using the following context information, begin your group time by setting the stage for this study of the Book of Hebrews. Help your group understand why it is important to know about the book, the author, the original audience, and other historical and cultural information before you begin to study.

## › HISTORICAL CONTEXT

When was it written? The exact date is not mentioned, but the use of Hebrews in 1 Clement (Heb. 36:1-6), a document usually dated around A.D. 95 or 96, shows that it was written before that time. Because the author and his readers belonged to the second generation of Christians, it had to have been written after A.D. 60. So, the book could have been written anytime between A.D. 60 and A.D. 95. Most scholars agree on a date before A.D. 70 and the destruction of Jerusalem.

Who wrote it? The author is unknown. What we do know is that the author was well known to his original recipients. Origen, an early church father said it best, “Only God knows who wrote Hebrews.”

To whom was it written? Throughout the book, the author makes reference to the Old Testament and assumed his readers knew Jewish sacrificial rituals and the priesthood of the Old Testament. This would show the original audience to be Jewish Christians.

## › CULTURAL CONTEXT

These Jewish believers had been persecuted for their new religion. They were now, however, considering giving up on Christianity and returning to Judaism, which was legally recognized, unlike Christianity. The author composed his letter about the superiority of Christ and Christianity and the danger of turning away to something that was clearly inferior because he knew their situation well.

## › LITERARY CONTEXT

The genre of this book is a long, formal letter. It was written in excellent Koine Greek. The letter has sermon-like features, including a rhetorical statement of thesis (Heb. 1:1-3) and develops step-by-step arguments. The farewell shows that in its present form, it was sent as a letter.

## TRANSITION TO INDIVIDUAL STUDY

After you have set the context, move your students into the Exploration time in their Personal Study Guides. There are several different ways that you can lead your students to explore the Scripture.

1. Lead your students to work through all of the Scripture and questions, then discuss their responses together as a group.
2. Guide your students to work through the Scripture and questions one question at a time. Pause for group discussion after each question.

Whichever method you choose, make sure that the students have an opportunity to explore the Scripture for themselves.

# Conversation

After students have completed the Explore section of their Personal Study Guides. Discuss what they discovered as they explored the Scripture. Their quick response questions were:

› Verse 3 uses the word “radiance” or “brightness” to describe Jesus. What do you think those words mean?

› What is one thing these verses say about Jesus?

These were just first glance questions, so don’t spend too much time here, but begin teaching your students what types of things to look for as they study a new passage. Their answers may alert you to specific areas to focus on later as you dig into those particular verses.

## HEBREWS 1:1

Call on a volunteer to read Hebrews 1:1. At the top of page 6 in the Personal Study Guide, there is a list of different ways God revealed Himself in the Old Testament. The prophets are directly mentioned in this passage, but help your students think through other ways God communicated and possibly why God used that method for that person. You can even call on different students to read the stories listed. Ask if anyone can recall any other ways God revealed Himself.

› List 3 different people and the main ways you communicate with them. Why do you use different methods with different people?

The point here is to help your group understand and process why we communicate differently with different people. Generally speaking, we know which method will work best because we know the people we are communicating with. Allow this to move into the next question:

› What does it say about God that He chooses different ways to speak to different people?

One thought we want students to take away from these verses is that God is a personal God. Not only does He reveal Himself, but He knows us better than we know ourselves and He always chooses the best way to communicate to us.



# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 1:1-2

The Book of Hebrews begins with these words: “In many times and in many ways, God spoke.” By saying this, the writer refers to the times of the Old Testament when God spoke to his people through the prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah. They faithfully spoke God’s words to Israel. Now the Messiah has come and filled in the blanks left by the prophets as God’s perfect spokesman. Jesus is the Prophet—the one who declares the Word of God like none other (Deut. 18:15).

Our God is the God who speaks. This concept is carried throughout Scripture. God created by speaking. Genesis tells us that the world was made from nothing by His word (Gen. 1:1). God delivered to Moses the “Ten Commandments” or the “Ten Words.” His voice thundered at Sinai (Heb. 12:19-20), and it calls to the ends of the earth (Isa. 41:1-4; Ps. 50:1-6). It is God’s Word that we hide in our hearts and is a lamp unto our feet (Ps. 119). He has saved us, proclaimed His holy Word (Is. 43:11-12), and declares the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10).

The New Testament teaches that Jesus is the Word who explains the Father (John 1:1, 18). In Acts 1, we see that Jesus has given His disciples the authority to speak and teach the word of God’s kingdom, which is seen in the tongues of fire and inspired speech at Pentecost. The God of the Bible speaks; false “gods” do not speak.

There are two distinct eras of God speaking: the Old and New Testaments. The first pointed to what would come in the second. Consider 1 Peter 1:10-12: In the Old Testament, believers were given God’s Word little by little. The revelation from God was progressive. “Little by little” is what the very first term in Hebrews means. Little by little, and in many ways (such as through direct revelation, dreams, etc.), God spoke long ago. Now God has spoken in the person and work of Jesus.



While the author of this book is not named, the evidence points to the fact that he was known by the original recipients of his letter. The evidence also points to the fact that the original audience was Jewish Christians. Throughout the book references are made to the Old Testament, Jewish sacrificial rituals, and warnings against relying on rituals that only point to Christ but are not Christ Himself.

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No other book in the New Testament so masterfully combines teaching from both the old and new covenant. This shows the original audience would have been knowledgeable with both covenants.

# Conversation

## HEBREWS 1:2

Read verse 2 and begin your conversation by explaining the words “last days.” Jesus inaugurated the “last days,” which stretches from His first coming to His second coming. This is to make sure students aren’t confused thinking “last days” is referring to Revelation and the end times.

Ask your group to list ways God communicates to us today. This entire passage teaches us about the superiority of Christ. Ask your students how they responded to:

### › How is Christ a better form of revelation than a prophet or a burning bush?

Today, God has revealed Himself through His Son. Jesus is a better form of revelation because He is God. While the prophets were given a message and then shared that message; Jesus reveals so much more. No longer do we rely on messengers or signs, but we have Jesus, God’s Son and creator of the universe.

The second part of this verse moves from God speaking to His people to God revealing Himself to the world through His Son.

Ask your group to identify a couple of famous young people that are heirs to a wealthy family. There are many culturally popular people whose claim to fame is they were born into a wealthy family. Spend a few minutes talking about the differences in the way those people live and the way most of us live. Carrying a last name or being from a certain family carries weight. There is often a responsibility that comes with it, whether or not the heir lives up to it is another story.

### › What does being an heir mean? Why is this significant?

Often times in our culture, an heir benefits from the work done before they were born. This isn’t the case with Christ. Not only is He the appointed heir of all things, He is also the creator of all things.

## HEBREWS 1:3-4

Call on a volunteer to read the last two verses, 3 and 4. Begin your conversation with the first Explore question from verse 3.

### › What event do you think the writer is referring to in reference to Jesus dealing with our sins?

This is the first time the writer references the work of the priest and the finished work of Jesus. While a priest performed the sacrifice, he was never the actual sacrifice. This statement describes the what and the why for Christ dying on the cross. His life wasn’t taken from Him by Roman soldiers; it was offered on behalf of His people. His crucifixion was payment for man’s sin, our sin. No longer would blood sacrifices be required. Christ’s blood was spilled once and forever paid for sin.



# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 1:2-4

In these next 3 verses, the writer of Hebrews tells us seven things about the Son that explain His greatness and superiority.

First, Christ is the “appointed heir of all things.” This alludes to Psalm 2:8 where the psalmist writes that the Son of David will be given the ends of the earth. Christ is the Davidic king whose inheritance is “all things,” which was a common way of saying “everything that is.” He is seated at the right hand of God, ruling and reigning as the one who bears the divine name as the heir of all that exists!

Second, Christ is the one “through whom He (God) made the world.” He is the divine agent of both revelation (Heb. 1:2a) and creation (Heb. 1:2b). In other words, Jesus is the one through whom God the Father has spoken, as well as the one through whom God the Father has created.

Third, the Son is the “radiance of God’s glory.” This means that to see Christ is to see the glory of God. Radiance is not the same thing as the light (think of the sun’s light versus the sun itself). Yet through Christ, God is known. Just as the sun illuminates the earth, so also Christ radiates the glory of God.

Fourth, the Son is the exact representation of God’s very nature. We may be tempted to compare the resemblance between ourselves and our parents to understand this passage. Yet here we see much more between the Father and Son than a close resemblance. The key term here is hypostasis, an uncommon word that means God the Son has the same divine nature as God the Father.

Fifth, the writer says that the Son upholds all things by His powerful word. He does not just create the universe (v. 2), He also controls and sustains it. All planets, solar systems, stars, galaxies, and quasars are under His sovereign command. He is not the fabled Atlas, merely holding up the world; He is its Creator and Commander, as well as the One who will bring about its redemption.



There may not be another single verse that says so much about both the person and the work of Christ than verse 3. In just 30 Greek words, we learn more about Christ’s nature, deity, sustaining power over the universe, what He accomplished as the perfect sacrifice, and the fact that He is seated in glory, ruling over all—all in one verse.



“Exact representation of God’s nature and being.” In ancient times, coins were made by pressing a die onto softened, heated metal to make a coin. As the die for a coin presses into metal, it leaves the “exact representation” of the image on the die, so also the Son is the exact representation of the Father. They are identical, but they are not the same thing. The die is not the same thing as the coin just as the Son is not the same person as the Father. To see the coin is to see the die.



# Conversation

Spend time making sure your group understands that while this statement may only be a half a verse, the implications are life altering. The sacrificial system was necessary in the Old Testament and was done continuously. The beauty of Christ's sacrifice is that it was permanent. Transition here into the next question:

## › Why would the writer record that Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Majesty?

Remind your group that the audience this book was originally intended, Jewish Christians, would have been very familiar with the sacrificial system. They would have been accustomed to the regular offering of sacrifices. The fact that Jesus sat down is important to signify the finality of what He did. The location of where He sat down is also of great significance. The writer is constantly teaching the supremacy of Christ. His sacrifice was supreme over all other sacrifices and His position is supreme. The right hand signifies a position of power. Christ rules and intercedes at the right hand of the Father.

As you move into verse 4, allow your group to share their answers to:

## › Look back through the entire passage and record each description of Jesus.

There are seven major descriptors listed and all seven can be found in the commentary section. Some of you have already discussed these, but work back through the list again, highlighting each. As a group, think through the implications of each descriptor. Do not just tell your students; help them process the information on their own.

Ask your group the final question from their Exploration time:

## › What makes the name of Jesus higher than all other names?

Using the commentary, help your group understand why His name is greater and why He is compared to the angels. As messengers, they are created beings; Christ has always existed. Their message was given; Christ was the message. As heavenly beings, they are close to the Father; but as Son, Christ reigns beside the Father.

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**GO DEEPER OPTION:** Four additional passages were listed for your group to explore: Matthew 22:41-45, Mark 9:2-8, Luke 5:17-26, John 1:1-18. You can read these together as a group or divide into groups and have them work together to see how these verses illustrate and affirm the descriptors of Christ used by the writer of Hebrews.

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# Application

## CENTRAL TRUTH

*Jesus Christ is God and reigns supreme over all things in the universe.*

Allow your group to discuss and try to sum up the main truth coming from this passage in Hebrews. It is important to see how God is speaking to the students in your group. After they have shared their thoughts, walk through the **Central Truth** and ask how that truth impacts their daily lives.

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➤ **ITEM 1 (LEADER PACK)** Display the **Central Truths** poster where the students will be able to see it and reflect on each session's central truth throughout your study of Hebrews.

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## NOW WHAT?

Lead students through a discussion of the following questions to help them understand the implication of the **Central Truth** and how that truth applies to their lives. These questions should help your students examine how well their lives display their belief in the superiority of Christ. The second question will likely be a "yes" for most of the students in your group. Spend some time helping them place their actions beside their beliefs to see if they match up. Our actions are the true test of what we believe. It is easy to say you believe in Jesus, or you trust Jesus, but the reality of our actions do not always support what we say.

- › Why do you think the writer spent these verses explaining the greatness and superiority of Jesus?
- › Do you personally believe these things to be true?
- › Do your actions agree with that?
- › If Jesus is superior, if He is truly God's Son, what keeps us from trusting Him completely with our lives?

Encourage students to use the last statement to list action steps they need to take in light of the **Central Truth**. Invite them to share their answers. The goal is to help students begin thinking through this on their own so they can read and apply the Bible on their own. God speaks powerfully through His Word, and helping your students understand that and see the implications will help them more than simply telling them what they should do next.

- › List 3 areas of your life where you aren't trusting Jesus completely and explain how you can begin moving in that direction.

## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Finish your group time with these thoughts and encourage your students to memorize the verse listed this week. Memorizing God's Word allows it to dwell in us and allows Him to speak through His Word in our times of need. Also encourage your group to take advantage of the **Keep on Digging** section in their Personal Study Guides and spend some time this week studying other passages that describe Jesus.

- › **Dwell:** Jesus isn't simply another good man, good teacher, or religious figure. He is God in flesh. He is also our Redeemer. Spend time this week thinking about that one thought—Jesus is both God and Redeemer.
- › **Memorize:** Hebrews 1:2
- › **Pray:** Ask God to reveal Himself to you this week. As you seek Him daily, ask for ears to listen and strength to obey. Trust that His way truly is the best way.
- › **Keep on Digging:** Read the following verses and note how Jesus is described:
  - › Matthew 22:41-45
  - › Mark 9:2-8
  - › Luke 5:17-26
  - › John 1:1-18



# 2

# Stay Focused

Hebrews 2:1-4

**1** Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. **2** For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, **3** how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, **4** while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.



# Exploration

## CONTEXT

Begin your session by setting the context for Hebrews 2:1-4. Read through the material below and use what you think will help your students best understand the background of the passages.

Hebrews 2 in the Greek text begins with a phrase that means “for this reason,” or “therefore.” In other words, the writer of Hebrews makes an application or conclusion based on all the truth he wrote in chapter 1. Based on the reality of God’s full and final revelation of His message of salvation in the Son, the writer issues a warning to his readers: As followers of Christ, we must not neglect our salvation. Instead we must pay even more attention to the Word of Christ every day.

Keep in mind that the Letter to the Hebrews was written by an inspired Christian leader to believers who were struggling in their faith. We have only hints in the letter of why the readers were struggling, but those hints point to opposition and hostility the believers were facing. Their public confession of faith in Christ was proving costly, and at least some appeared to be ready to retreat from Christianity back into Judaism. They needed to endure and stand strong under the fire of persecution and trials. The writer of Hebrews wrote the letter because he loved his fellow believers and wanted them to endure in their faith.

The first four verses of Hebrews 2 directly address spiritual drifters. The writer of Hebrews issued an early warning alert to himself and his readers who were in danger of drifting. His warning applies as much to us today as it did back then. It is not enough to simply appreciate who Christ is. We were never intended to hear a list of great truths about Jesus and merely nod in affirmation. Rather, the writer urges us to embrace the Son of God in faith and boldly confess Jesus no matter what pressures or persecutions the storms of life send our way.

## TRANSITION TO INDIVIDUAL STUDY

After you have set the context, move your students into the Exploration time in their Personal Study Guides. There are several different ways that you can lead your students to explore the Scripture.

1. Lead your students to work through all of the Scripture and questions, then discuss their responses together as a group.
2. Guide your students to work through the Scripture and questions one question at a time. Pause for group discussion after each question.

Whichever method you choose, make sure that the students have an opportunity to explore the Scripture for themselves.



# Conversation

After students have completed the Explore section of their Personal Study Guides. Discuss what they discovered as they explored the Scriptures. Their questions were: Their quick response questions were:

› **Explore all the instances of the word “we” in these verses. Why do you think that word is used so often here?**

› **How would you describe the one major warning being made in these verses?**

Help your group understand that the writer uses “we” because the temptation to drift applies to all followers of Christ. He is including himself in the warning to show we are all susceptible to the distractions and difficulties life sends our way.

## HEBREWS 2:1

Call on a volunteer from each group to share their answers to the first activity:

› **List 5 situations that had a negative outcome because someone wasn’t paying attention or they were distracted.**

After each group has shared their five, discuss how some of the situations could have been avoided if the people were only paying attention. Allow the discussion to help move into the next question:

› **Why is paying attention so important and being distracted so dangerous?**

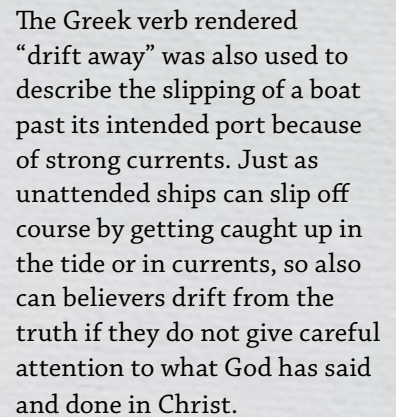
Talk with your students about the consequences of being distracted. Even simple moments at school can cause harm when you don’t hear the assignment or the question. In the same way, it only takes a second of distraction while driving a car to end up in a life-altering crash.

› **What is the writer warning against drifting away from?**

We must keep our spiritual focus on Christ. Taking our eyes off of Him, even if only for a moment can have long-lasting consequences. So, not only is it important to pay attention and avoid distraction, but who and what we are paying attention to matters.

## HEBREWS 2:1

A crucial feature of the gospel message of salvation is that Christ is our Anchor (See Heb. 6:19). For those who love and trust in Christ, He keeps the ship of our faith from being carried away by the currents of unbelief and sin. We hold fast to our faith in Him, because doubt and unbelief constantly pull at us. There is an enemy who wants to deceive and destroy us, yet we are assured that Jesus will not lose even one of those given to Him by the Father (See John 10:28-29).





# Conversation

## HEBREWS 2:2-3

Read verses 2-3 and begin the conversation by asking for answers to this question:

› **What was the message spoken through angels? (See Gal. 3:19 for help.)**

Use the information in the **Leader Prep** section to help you explain and possibly clarify your group's answers to what the writer was saying. Spend some time talking about the consequences of breaking the law. The Old Testament is full of stories of people who were held accountable for the law delivered through angels. One doesn't need to look far from their delivery to find an example. As Moses was on Mt. Sinai, the Hebrews grew anxious and rebellious. They enticed Aaron to form a calf out of gold that could be the focus of their worship. Doing so was in direct rebellion to the law being received by Moses. God held all the assembly responsible with many losing their lives as a result (See Ex. 32). For additional examples, either have your students form groups again and assign each group a passage to explore together and report back what they found, or read a few together and discuss the common elements of each story.

- › Exodus 32:31-35
- › Judges 3:7-8
- › 2 Samuel 12:9-14
- › 2 Kings 10:31-32

After reading some of these passages, ask your group how they answered this question:

› **Breaking the law of the Old Testament was sin. What are the consequences of sin? See Romans 6:23.**

God is holy and hates sin. Sin is repulsive to God because His creation is choosing to trust something other than Him. Sin is going against God. That is a very serious offense and the consequences are immense. Knowing we are all sinners, how do we escape the eternal consequences of our sin? Ask your group the following question:

› **The writer uses the word "escape." How can you escape the consequences of sin?**

Using **Leader Prep** for verse 3, explain how the writer moves from the consequences of breaking the law to neglecting the salvation in Christ. Every transgression against God's Word carries punishment, even if that Word was delivered through the agency of an angel. The Word of revelation that came through the Son is better and more complete when compared to the Word given through angels. If someone was punished for violating God's Word given through angels, how much greater will the punishment be for those who had heard God's salvation spoken through His Son?

# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 2:2

The writer of Hebrews pointed again to the Old Testament and, in particular, to the law. God gave the law to Moses on Mount Sinai. By the first century A.D., both Jewish and early Christian writers, including the writer of Hebrews, understood that God had used angels in the process of giving the law (see Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19). The fact that God spoke through the agency of angels does not negate the fact that God was still the One speaking.

The point is, in the law given through angels, every sin of every type carried a just punishment. The Old Testament contains numerous stories of people breaking the covenant law and being held accountable.

## HEBREWS 2:3

With the previous verse plus the first part of verse 3, the writer of Hebrews presented a “lesser to greater” argument. In other words, if overstepping or neglecting God’s law given through angels in Old Testament times resulted in divine punishment, how much more would God hold accountable those who neglect their salvation in Christ? The writer wasn’t saying the Old Testament should now be ignored by Christians. All Scripture gives wisdom for salvation in Christ by teaching, correcting, and training us in righteousness (see 2 Tim. 3:15-17). Because the Savior to whom all Scripture points has come and has accomplished the way of salvation, our accountability is greater for receiving salvation by faith and obeying Christ throughout our lives.

Notice the writer didn’t warn here of rejecting salvation in Christ, but of neglecting it—that is, failing to give careful attention to the great reality of hope, forgiveness of sin, and new life in Christ. The warning was for believers who had begun the journey of faith but now were faltering along the way. They were neglecting to live as the followers of Christ they professed to be.

The final part of the warning in this section describes the faithful transmission of the gospel and the Holy Spirit’s verification of it. The writer and his readers were second generation Christians. The gospel was first declared in word and deed by Jesus during His earthly ministry. Then, the apostles who had seen and heard Jesus proclaimed the gospel to people who had not seen or heard Him.



The law was a legally binding message from God. It defined the right ways to relate to God, to fellow Israelites, and even to non-Israelites who lived as sojourners in the land.



The writer didn’t specify the consequences of neglecting their salvation, only the certainty of consequences. God alone has the authority to decide just punishment for believers’ disobedience. As a loving Heavenly Father, however, He will not fail to discipline His children because this is how they will grow in their faith (See Heb. 12:7,11).



# Conversation

## HEBREWS 2:4

- › **We should not neglect or be distracted from the salvation offered to us through Christ. What proof does the writer use to show that Christ is our salvation?**

Allow your group some time to share how they answered this question. Use the following list to highlight any areas your group may have missed. Use the **Leader Prep** section to elaborate on these ways God testified the truth of Jesus.

- › God (“the Lord”) spoke first. The second generation of believers (or “those who heard Him”) confirmed the truth.
- › Signs, wonders, and miracles help people understand that God has worked. The Holy Spirit demonstrates Christ’s presence and His power. See Galatians 3:5.
- › When we see God at work, we are aware of His presence. Being aware of God’s presence can help us stay focused on Him.
- › The Holy Spirit in a believer’s heart is evidence of the living, loving Lord. Believers can speak with confidence about their personal experience with Christ.

Begin helping your group make the transition from **Conversation** to **Application** using the following question. The **Application** section is going to help your students process on a personal level, but begin that process by allowing them to share the different ways they have seen others get distracted as well as some ways they have gotten distracted personally. As a leader, you should be prepared to share personally at times during the conversation too.

- › **What are some ways you have seen others become distracted, or personally been distracted from following Christ?**

After discussing their answers, ask a follow-up question about some of the outcomes from the situations they just described. In most of these instances, negative outcomes flowed from being distracted. Help your group to one last time connect the importance of staying focused and the dangers of being distracted.

One of Satan’s main weapons against a follower of Christ is distraction. He doesn’t have the power to take us away from our Heavenly Father, but he can prevent us from living with purpose and joy. When we—as followers of Christ—take our focus off of Him, we are removing ourselves from the source of power and joy He offers. Satan can never steal our identity once we are adopted into the family, but he can keep us from the privileges of living as an heir, which we discussed last week in Hebrews 1:2.

# Leader Prep

God gave the law through the agency of His angels, but He declared the gospel of salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ. Christ's first followers faithfully shared the gospel message. Based on the testimonies of that first generation of believers, the writer of Hebrews and his readers had responded by trusting Christ for their salvation. Early Christians took seriously Jesus' command to evangelize (see Matt. 28:19-20). So should we who follow Christ today.

## HEBREWS 2:4

God verified the gospel as His truth when Jesus declared it, and again later when the first followers of Christ proclaimed it. The phrase “God also testified” carries the idea of His endorsement of the gospel in ways that were visible and tangible. First, He gave accompanying signs and wonders, various miracles. Such signs provided indisputable evidence that God was bearing witness to the truth and power of the gospel message (See John 9:1-7; Acts 2:22,43; 14:3). The entire Book of Acts gives evidence of how God verified His Word as Christ’s followers proclaimed the gospel. He corroborated their evangelism through miraculous signs and acts of power.

Finally, there were also distributions of the Holy Spirit, a reference to the power of the Spirit working through spiritual gifts that He gives to believers. He gives these gifts to all believers both then and now, distributing them among them (and us) according to the will of God. Each time that we as believers use our spiritual gifts, God is testifying in and through us about the truth of His Word.

In summary, God paved the way for salvation in Christ throughout Old Testament times. He revealed His Word to the people of Israel through the prophets. He taught the Israelites about sin and its consequences, pointing them forward in anticipation of the Messiah to come. When the Son took on human flesh and came into the world, He was without sin yet made a full atonement for sin once and for all. Such a great salvation is received by grace through faith, and must not be neglected. We must not turn a deaf ear to Him. With great revelation comes great accountability.



# Application

## CENTRAL TRUTH

*The gift of salvation is only offered through Christ. We must not neglect that relationship or be distracted from it.*

Allow your group to discuss and try to sum up the main truth coming from this passage in Hebrews. It is important to see how God is speaking to the students in your group. After they have shared their thoughts, walk through the **Central Truth** and use the **Now What?** questions to help them process how the truth affects their daily lives.

## NOW WHAT?

Lead your students through a discussion of the following questions to help them understand the implication of the **Central Truth** and how that truth applies to their lives. These questions should help your students examine how prepared they are to face the distractions aimed at moving them away from their relationship with Christ. After working together as a group to compile a list of practices in response to the third question, encourage each student to seriously consider which two would be most beneficial for them to focus on this week. Your goal is to make sure students walk away from this time understanding the **Central Truth** and also with a couple of concrete examples of how it impacts their daily lives.

- › What areas of your life are competing with Christ for top spot?
- › Why is it dangerous to give something other than Jesus that spot, even if only for a season?

These last questions are similar, but they are both very important. Ask the first as a group and make a list either on a white board or piece of paper where everyone can see it. This will help the group as they move into the last question. There may be some unique ideas others in your group aren't thinking about that may be helpful for them to see.

Encourage each student in your group to seriously consider which two to select actually share those with a friend. As always, one of the goals of this Bible study is to embrace biblical information that leads to life transformation. Help your group do that this week.

- › What are some practices that would help you be more focused on Christ?
- › Of the list you just made, which two can you commit to doing this week? Share these 2 with a friend and hold each other accountable.

## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Finish your group time with these thoughts and encourage your students to memorize the verse listed this week. Memorizing God's Word allows it to dwell in us and allows Him to speak through His Word in our times of need. Also encourage your group to take advantage of the **Keep on Digging** section and take the truths of this session and apply them in their lives.

› **Dwell:** What in your life really matters? What relationships are you building that will last beyond this year? Five years? Ten? It is easy for us to focus too much on temporary things and give them too much influence over our life. This could be a sport, school, or a guy/girl. None of these things are bad, but they can distract us from Jesus Christ. Focus your thoughts on Him this week and give Him your affection. Christ deserves your best.

› **Memorize:** Hebrews 2:1

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›› **ITEM 2 (LEADER PACK)** Use **Hebrews 2:1** poster as a visual reminder for students of the memory verse. Display this poster somewhere for students to see and challenge them to use their Bibles to memorize this verse. Let it be a reminder for them to keep their focus on Christ.

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› **Pray:** Ask God to change your perspective this week. Too often we get caught up and distracted by the ordinary day-to-day events in our lives, and we can take our eyes off of what matters. When we see Christ as He truly is, and keep our eyes fixed on Him, the other areas of our lives will take their rightful place.

› **Keep on Digging:** Ask a trusted friend for some help this week. Ask these three questions and be open and willing to hear what they have to tell you:

- › What would you say is the most important thing in your life?
- › What would you list as your top potential distractions?
- › What can we do to watch each other's back and guard against these distractions together?



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# 3

# The Only One Able

Hebrews 2:14-18

**14** Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, **15** and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. **16** For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. **17** Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. **18** For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.



# Exploration

## CONTEXT

Begin your session by setting the context for Hebrews 2:14-18. Read through the material below and use what you think will help your students best understand the background of the passages.

Hebrews 2 begins with a warning to believers to pay closer attention to God's Word. In 2:5-9 he applies Psalm 8 to Jesus and explains that for a little while the Son of God came to earth to be one of us—He was “lower” than the angels for a short time (He was “below” while they were still “above”). These verses also remind us of what mankind was created to be in Genesis 1:26-28. When Christ became man, He was the perfect and ideal man—sinless and ruling over all things. This is what Adam and Eve were intended to be. Jesus is what we one day will be like. Verse 8 tells us that all things are subject to Him, though the day has not yet come when that is fully realized. But it will be so when He returns.

Further, He became a man to endure suffering and death and purchase salvation for us (v. 9). Jesus was “perfected” by sufferings, which means that when He took on flesh, he “became uniquely qualified” to be our substitute as one of us. It does not mean that there ever was fault with God the Son. The issue is that in order to save humanity—God's image-bearers—He had to become a man to be able to save man. God cannot die, but the God-Man did.

And He did so as “one of us.” Though all of us have surely given Him reasons to be ashamed, He is not ashamed of His family. Verses 10-13 tell us that God the Son identifies with us, and does so unashamedly! We are His family due to the fact that He purifies His people from sin by offering His own blood (1:3). He sets us apart to belong to Him, and believers are called His “brothers” and “children.” Despite our many sins, we are His family because of who He is (the God-Man) and what He has done (suffered death). This makes Christianity different than any other world religion.

## TRANSITION TO INDIVIDUAL STUDY

After you have set the context, move your students into the Exploration time in their Personal Study Guides. There are several different ways that you can lead your students to explore the Scripture.

1. Lead your students to work through all of the Scripture and questions, then discuss their responses together as a group.
2. Guide your students to work through the Scripture and questions one question at a time. Pause for group discussion after each question.

Whichever method you choose, make sure that the students have an opportunity to explore the Scripture for themselves.



# Conversation

After students have completed the Explore section of their Personal Study Guides. Discuss what they discovered as they explored the Scriptures. Their quick response questions were:

› **This is the third time in three weeks the writer references angels. What do you think this reference means? What is the significance of angels being mentioned so much?**

› **Why did Jesus have to be like us?**

The answers to these questions may be varied, but that is alright at this point in the study. Briefly explain that salvation isn't available for angels. There is more information regarding this in your **Leader Prep** section. Hopefully your students will have some answers for the second question and we will spend the rest of this session answering that one. Take note of any incorrect answers you may hear as they are talking so you can address those specifically later.

## HEBREWS 2:14-15

Call on a volunteer to read Hebrews 2:14-15.

› **List several characteristics all humans have in common.**

As you compile this list, instruct your students get into groups in which they have similarities. You can even talk about how some of the characteristics may be shared with animals and some that are solely common to humans. Things like breathing air, having legs and hair all humans share, but so do animals. After working on this list for a bit, move into the next question by talking about Jesus being the same as we are, without sin obviously. Many times we forget how human he truly was.

Ask your students how they would respond to this question:

› **Which is easier for you to understand, Jesus being a human or Jesus being divine? Why?**

Because Jesus was God's Son, it is easy to picture Him as God. It isn't always as easy to imagine Him stubbing His toes or making jokes with the disciples. Spend as much time as you need here to help your students understand that Jesus was as human as every one of us. This is important because if He wasn't human, He wouldn't be able to pay our debt.

Direct students to the biblical fact found in their Personal Study Guide:

Our sin debt created a unique situation. It required a human to pay it, but the cost could only be covered through divine means. Therefore, one of us had to make the payment but none of us would ever have the ability to do so ... until Jesus came.

Read this truth aloud and make sure your group is connecting how Jesus was the only one able to do what He did, and why we so desperately need to come to salvation through Him.





# Conversation

› Describe your understanding of what the death of Christ did for people in general and what it accomplished for you personally.

The goal is for your students to be able to explain what they believe. This may be difficult for some students. The first part may prove easier, but the second part is where it becomes personal. Work with your students to make sure you understand why they are struggling. It may be they are struggling to put their thoughts into words, or they may not know what Christ has done for them personally. This would be a great time to challenge students who are struggling to examine their hearts and ask God to open their eyes to what He has done for them.

## HEBREWS 2:16-18

The second part of this session examines verses 16-18. The first question is:

› Why doesn't Jesus need to reach out and help the angels?

First Peter 1:12 talks about the desire the angels have to "look upon these things." "These things" is referring to redemption. Redemption isn't something the angels know anything about. Christ laid down His life to redeem us. His death paid our debt, not the angels. Make sure your students understand there is a difference between the relationship we have with God through Jesus and the angels have with God. Angels are messengers for God. We are His sons and daughters.

Ask your group for their responses to this question:

› How would you describe the terms "merciful" and "faithful" to one of your friends?

As you work through these studies each week, allow time to make sure your group understands different words and phrases. Always ask them to explain it in terms they would use when talking to a friend. Explain that mercy is not getting something you deserve, rather it is withheld punishment. With Christ serving as our merciful and faithful High Priest, He has made the sacrifice we couldn't and accepted the punishment aimed at us.

Use the information in your **Leader Prep** section to explain to your group the role of the high priest. Remember that this book was originally written to Jewish believers, so they would have been very familiar with the role of the high priest.

# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 2:16-18

The death of Christ removed the sting from death itself (1 Cor. 15:55), so for the believer, there is no reason to fear death. That's the promise of verses 14-15. Through His death, He has removed the "sting" of our death. For His children, death is not truly death; it is life. By His death, the Author of Life renders powerless the author of death, the devil. As our Great Shepherd (Heb. 13:20), He leads us where He Himself has gone—and the only way for Christ to die was to become human. God the Son had to become a man so that He might die and be raised to life. The resurrection proves that death is not the end, and that sin has not struck the final blow. Jesus has. And who is this for? All created things? No. Not even for the angels. When they sinned, they were given no chance for forgiveness. This is a promise made to humans who are willing to follow Christ as Savior and Lord.

These verses introduce in greater detail the issue of priesthood. To the first century Jewish Christian reading Hebrews, there is no need to explain priesthood. For us, though, it is helpful to remind ourselves (and those we teach) why this is so important. This is particularly important for the Book of Hebrews.

More than anything, a priest is a go-between. It is someone who represents the people before God. Once a year, the high priest went before the Lord on the Day of Atonement to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people, taking a bull (for his own sins) and two goats for the sins of the people. One goat would be sent away as the scapegoat (symbolizing the removal of sins from the people of Israel), and the other goat would be killed on behalf of the people, with its blood taken into the holy of holies to atone for the sin of the people. Only the high priest could do this; none other was allowed to go into the holy of holies. Only a priest from the right tribe could do this. Priests played a critical role in the Old Testament. This is why it is so important when we refer to Jesus as our great High Priest. He has done what none of the sons of Levi could do. Verses 14-18 tell us that Jesus is our High Priest.

Therefore, what? Unless Jesus became just like us, in every way—except sin—then He would not have been able to be our High Priest and represent us before God. That is the logic of the “therefore” in verse 17. We would have no High Priest and Advocate before God if Jesus had not been made like us in all things.



In the Old Testament, priests were from the specific tribe of Levi (see Ex. 40:15 and Deut. 18:5). This is why it is sometimes called the “Levitical Priesthood.” The tribe of Levi performed the priestly duties before God, on behalf of the people.

[illegible]



# Conversation

Here are a few highlights about the role of the high priest:

- › In the Old Testament, Jesus had not come yet, so the people had to deal with their sin problem in an ongoing way. Sacrifices had to be made. These sacrifices didn't fully satisfy God's wrath, so sacrifices had to be continually offered. Priests accepted the offerings from the people and made the sacrifices on behalf of the people.
- › The high priest had an even more specific role. Once a year, the high priest went before the Lord on the Day of Atonement to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people, taking a bull (for his own sins) and two goats for the sins of the people. One goat would be sent away as the scapegoat (symbolizing the removal of sins from the people of Israel), and the other goat would be killed on behalf of the people, with its blood taken into the holy of holies to atone for the sin of the people.
- › Only the high priest could do this; no one else was allowed to go into the holy of holies which contained the presence of God. The high priest was the only one that could enter God's presence and do so on behalf of the people.

After spending some time explaining what the high priest did yearly, use the following question to help your students understand his role and why Christ in that role is essential for our salvation.

- › **What do you think the high priest was responsible for? Why should that be significant to us today?**

This definition of the word "propitiation" is listed at the bottom of the Personal Study Guide. Read this with your group and help them understand how this whole session has been leading to this point.

Propitiation means to make amends in a relationship where someone has become offended or angry. In this case, it speaks of how Jesus' sacrifice appeased God's anger toward us because of sin.

Christ became like us so He would be able to be our propitiation. Death has been defeated and has been replaced with mercy and grace, for all who are sons and daughters of God.

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➤➤ **ITEM 5** (LEADER PACK) Consider displaying the **Jesus Descriptors** chart for students to see the verse references and descriptors of Jesus from the Book of Hebrews. Have students note where Jesus is our propitiation is listed on the chart. (Keep this chart, as it will be helpful throughout your time exploring the Book of Hebrews.)

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# Application

## CENTRAL TRUTH

*Jesus Christ became one of us to defeat our enemy and restore our relationship with the Father.*

Allow your group to discuss and try to sum up the main truth coming from this passage in Hebrews. It is important to see how God is speaking to the students in your group. After they have shared their thoughts, walk through the **Central Truth** listed above.

## NOW WHAT?

Use the following information to briefly recap today's session:

Jesus Christ is our Savior. The eternal Son of God took on human nature—real flesh and blood—so that He could save us from sin and death. The writer of Hebrews urged his readers to cling to their confession of Christ. He explained why it was necessary for the Son of God to become like us so that He could provide the salvation we need.

Jesus took on flesh without ceasing to be God. That's an amazing thought, and is a fact that makes Jesus Christ different than any other man to walk the earth. He did not give up being God when He became man. He is not just God or just man. There has never been one like Him. He is the God-Man.

Lead students through a discussion using the following questions to help them process the implication of the **Central Truth** and how that truth applies to their lives.

- › What are you battling in life right now that you need to give over to Jesus?
- › What is it that might keep you from trusting His help in your situation?
- › List 4 people you know who need to be told that Jesus became one of us so He could be our Savior. Ask others in your Bible study group to pray with you for opportunities to share Christ with those on your list.

## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Finish your group time with these thoughts and encourage your students to memorize the verse listed this week. Memorizing God's Word allows it to dwell in us and allows Him to speak through His Word in our times of need. Also encourage your group to take advantage of the **Keep on Digging** section and spend some time this week studying other passages that describe Jesus.

- › **Dwell:** There is a saying that something is only worth what someone is willing to pay for it. There is a lot of truth in that statement. Spend time this week thinking how valuable you are to God since He was willing to pay for your life with the blood of His Son. No greater payment could ever be made. Your life has value—great value.
- › **Memorize:** Hebrews 2:18
- › **Pray:** Christ displayed His love for us by offering His life in place of ours. Ask God to give you opportunities to show that love to someone around you this week.
- › **Keep on Digging:** When Christ walked the earth, He faced every temptation we face today. Think about a major temptation you are constantly facing. Spend some time everyday this week praying to God for help in this specific area. This temptation doesn't have to have victory in your life because Jesus has already won the battle. Trust Him to help you as you seek to follow Him with your life.



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# Don't Give Up

Hebrews 3:7-15

**7** Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice, **8** do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, **9** where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. **10** Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.’ **11** As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’”

**12** Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. **13** 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. **14** For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. **15** As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”



# Exploration

## CONTEXT

Begin your session by setting the context for Hebrews 3:7-15. Read through the material below and use what you think will help your students best understand the background of the passages.

Some of the first readers of Hebrews were believers who came to Christ out of a background of Judaism. They were steeped in Old Testament understanding and when they heard the gospel, they believed in Jesus as Messiah and Lord. When they encountered hostility and suffered hardships because of their faith, some of them stopped gathering for worship for fear of being identified as Christians. They even gave up and retreated from their confession of Christ. People who seemed to have so much love for Jesus began turning their back on Him and other believers.

Unfortunately, our churches are filled with similar individuals today. Some follow Christ faithfully (yet imperfectly) their whole lives, while others seem to give up at some point. Yet we know that all who trust in Christ alone will be preserved to the end, and will do so because of the power of the gospel. Jesus plainly said, "... the one who endures to the end will be delivered" (Mark 13:13). Hebrews 3:6 tells us that we are His "if we hold on to the courage and the confidence of our hope."

In fact, the main point of our passage this week is that we must persevere in faithfulness to God by listening to His voice and obeying His words. The writer of Hebrews makes this point by first noting the faithfulness of Moses and Christ (who is superior) in verses 1-6, and the faithlessness of the exodus generation in verses 7-19. Though this generation claimed to know God, they did not truly believe His words (Heb. 3:19; 4:2,6). Unbelief is demonstrated by disobedience to the Word of the Lord, while true belief in Christ is demonstrated by a life of obedience. Therefore, the writer of Hebrews sternly warns his readers to examine the status of their hearts. This passage reflects Hebrews' overriding pastoral purpose to exhort the readers to not back away from their commitment to Jesus Christ. Many of us at times have grown weak just like the original audience of Hebrews. These verses tell us not to go back to the former way.

## TRANSITION TO INDIVIDUAL STUDY

After you have set the context, move your students into the Exploration time in their Personal Study Guides. There are several different ways that you can lead your students to explore the Scripture.

1. Lead your students to work through all of the Scripture and questions, then discuss their responses together as a group.
2. Guide your students to work through the Scripture and questions one question at a time. Pause for group discussion after each question.

Whichever method you choose, make sure that the students have an opportunity to explore the Scripture for themselves.



# Conversation

After students have completed the Explore section of their Personal Study Guides. Discuss what they discovered as they explored the Scripture. Their quick response questions were:

› **What do these verses say is the outcome of not listening to His voice?**

› **What do these verses say caused God's anger?**

After sharing their answers to these questions, ask them if anything else they read was significant to them. It is important to note how certain verses speak to different students in your group. These answers may alert you to specific areas to focus on later as you dig into Scripture.

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› **ITEM 2 (LEADER PACK)** If it isn't already on display, consider using the **Hebrews timeline** to help students better understand the order of events in the Book of Hebrews.

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## HEBREWS 3:7-9

› **Read the following passages about how God worked among His people and then see how they responded. In each passage, try to identify what happened before and after each incident.**

› Numbers 11:1-9

› Numbers 14:1-4

› Numbers 21:1-6

Divide your students into three smaller groups and assign each group one of the passages. Lead them to work together to identify the events that happened before and after each incident. In all three, God did something amazing and the people responded to His miraculous events with complaints and rebellion. It is important for your group to understand how God's people rebelled and why that caused God's anger. After a few minutes, allow the groups to report their findings to the large group.

## HEBREWS 3:10-11

Once you have spent time exploring the past rebellious nature of God's people, turn the focus back to your students' lives today. Discuss what they can learn from the Israelites cycle of rebellion, blessing, rebellion, etc. Discuss how your students answered the following question:

› **What does it say about the people that no matter how much God blessed them, they always ended up complaining and turning from Him?**

# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 3:7-9

The point of verses 1-6 is found in verse 1. We are commanded to “consider Jesus,” which reminds us of Hebrews 2:1 (“We must, therefore, pay even more attention to what we have heard”) and anticipates 12:2-3 (“keeping our eyes on Jesus . . . consider Him”).

Moses led the people out of Egypt’s slavery, while Jesus leads us out of spiritual slavery. Both were faithful to God, though Christ is greater than Moses since He is the Son over “God’s household” and Moses was the servant in “God’s household.” God’s household is His people, and we know that we are God’s “household” because we are holding fast and persevering in faith. Holding fast and being faithful are what the Old Testament wilderness generation did not do. They are the topic of verses 7-11. They repeatedly accepted God’s gifts and blessings, then turned from Him at the first sign of difficulty. It would appear they only followed God to receive from Him. They wanted to live however they chose, but wanted God to bless those choices rather than them living as God commanded them to.

Verse 6 ends by saying that we are His “if we hold on to the courage and the confidence of our hope.” Holding fast does not cause our salvation, but it is a sign of genuine conversion. We show that we are God’s people if we are holding firmly to our confidence and hope. Jesus has blazed the trail before us as our great Shepherd (Heb. 13:20).

Next, verses 7-11 quote from Psalm 95:7-11, which refers to those who wandered for 40 years. They were not allowed to enter the promised land since they did not trust God. Though they heard the Word of the Lord, it was not united with faith (Heb. 4:2). They did not believe, and as a result God cursed that generation to die outside the land (v. 11).

## HEBREWS 3:10-11

When the people did not believe, God’s verdict was “They always go astray in their hearts.” All that God did for them was met with unfaithfulness. Their hearts were hardened, despite His being gracious to them in so many ways. He delivered them from Egypt and gave them His Word and made a covenant with them. The direction of their lives was not trust in the Lord, but hard hearts and disobedience. In Acts 7:39, Stephen says of that generation, “Our ancestors were unwilling to obey him, but pushed him away, and in their hearts turned back to Egypt.” This is a consistent pattern of rebellion, not a believer stumbling in his or her daily walk with God.



# Conversation

Briefly walk your group back through the passages from the Book of Numbers listed and highlight the blessings and miracles the people had received. Here are a few:

- › They had been delivered from slavery in Egypt.
- › They crossed the Red Sea on dry ground.
- › God led His people by a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night.
- › Each morning manna covered the ground and fed the entire nation.
- › Even though they complained, God sent quail too numerous to count to feed them.
- › Rulers and nations in their way were defeated.

These are just a few of the things God did for the people, and yet they still didn't trust Him or obey Him. Even when they arrived at the promised land, they didn't believe He could deliver it.

It is easy to look at them with a judgemental eye and wonder how they could have acted that way. The truth is, we do the same thing today. Discuss the following question:

› **How can you keep from falling into a similar pattern today?**

This is the warning the writer is talking about. We need to be careful that we don't end up like the Israelites, staring at the promised land and not allowed to enter.

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➤ **ITEM 3 (LEADER PACK)** Consider displaying or referring to the **First-Century Roman World** map here as you're mentioning Egypt, the Red Sea, and all of the other blessings and miracles mentioned in the Book of Numbers.

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## HEBREWS 3:12-15

Now that your group has a better understanding of the past, they can better understand the warning the writer is issuing. No one in your group wants to have an unbelieving heart, but that is where we are headed if we fail to pay attention to this warning. Discuss the following question:

› **Can you identify from these verses any progressive steps that would lead to an unbelieving heart?**

Make sure your students realize these verses are talking about a process of continual rebellion and failure to obey God's voice. We are all going to sin, and Christ has already paid for those sins with His blood. The symptoms we see in the Israelite people, and the symptoms we need to be on the lookout for personally, are larger than a one-time mistake. We need to be constantly checking our heart for any signs of rebellion and be ready to act when we hear Him speak.

# Leader Prep

# HEBREWS 3:12

Verse 12 grabs our attention by giving us the main point of the warning. First, in light of verses 7-11, they are to “watch out” for unbelief in their lives. This is the same idea found in Hebrews 12:25, “Make sure that you do not reject the One who speaks.” In Luke 21:8, Jesus warned His disciples about being misled by a false Messiah with the same expression, as does Paul in his warning against false teachers in Philippians 3:2. Here, the writer speaks to the whole congregation to tell them that each should examine themselves so that none of them would possess an “evil, unbelieving heart.” Unbelief is precisely the reason why the wilderness generation was not allowed to enter the promised land (Heb. 3:19), and the warning here is obvious: Do not be like them!

The writer warns to “be on the lookout” for something that actually cannot be seen with the eye—an evil, unbelieving heart. While we cannot look at someone immediately and tell if they have such a spiritual condition, we certainly can tell over time. That is precisely the point. In the context of the passage, unbelief was the central issue, sadly. They constantly rebelled against God over a period of 40 years. Over time, we are marked by faithfulness and belief or disobedience and unbelief. That’s the heart of the matter. A life of faith that is briefly interrupted by a moment of disobedience does not mean that a person’s faith is not genuine. Conversely, a life of consistent unbelief briefly interrupted by a moment of spontaneous faith does not mean that a person’s faith is genuine. This is why Hebrews so focuses on the importance of grace-fueled perseverance. The condition of one’s heart is revealed over time.

## HEBREWS 3:13-15

Verse 13 tells us how to carry out the command of verse 12. We come alongside one another to exhort and encourage each other, day after day. We come alongside one another in a way that is similar to both Jesus and the Holy Spirit who comfort and help. Each of us are to be a means of grace to one another so that each of us perseveres. We endure in community and as a community. God has designed it this way. We very much need one another so that we will endure, and not be hardened by the slow poison of sin. We have a responsibility to one another; in a very real sense we are "our brother's keeper."



An “evil, unbelieving heart” is not the heart of a believer. What does an evil heart of unbelief do? It turns away from the living God. It is dead and unresponsive to Him (3:12) and His Word (4:12). Paul said the same thing in 2 Corinthians 13:5 when he told the people of the Corinthian church to examine themselves to see if they were truly in the faith. This refers to a specific focus on each person’s own heart.

[illegible]



# Conversation

## › How does a person keep his or her heart turned to the Lord, walking in His ways? How can you check your heart for spiritual life?

Ask your group how they responded to this question. Help them think through ways we can stay close to Christ. Point out there are things we need to be actively doing: praying, listening, trusting, and obeying. And there are also things we need to be avoiding: complaining, doubting, giving up, and turning away from Him.

Verse 13 moves things from a personal warning to a community challenge. We are supposed to be living as brothers and sisters. We have been adopted into God's family. The Christian life was never intended to be lived in isolation.

## › What does daily encouragement in the faith look like? Why do you think it is important for it to be daily?

This verse calls us to lift each other up daily. Life is difficult and sometimes we need someone to pick us up when we fall and possibly prevent us from falling at times. Help your group understand different ways believers can encourage each other. Lead students to describe a time they needed some encouragement and a friend was there to help. We are a community of believers pursuing the same thing—Jesus.

Ask your group how they answered this question:

## › Why do you think the writer would repeat what he said in verse 7 again in verse 15?

Repetition is another way to remind us and point out an important truth. The writer wants us to understand that the process of rebellion begins the moment we hear His voice and decide to do nothing. Those moments of disobedience turn into a pattern of behavior that leads to a hardened heart, which leads us to our last question:

## › What is important about the word "today"?

There is no time like the present to turn back to Christ. I imagine that the Israelites would have said they trusted God as they crossed the Red Sea on dry ground. Yet days later we see them questioning and complaining. Every moment of disobedience is a seed, that if given time, will lead us further from Christ than we want to be.

Christ has done so much for us and we should never give up just because our circumstances change. We need to persevere and we need to minister to and encourage each other as we go.

# Leader Prep

None of us are called to walk the road of the Christian life alone. We are sure to fail if we try! Haven't we all been carried along by others at times when we were at our weakest? We live out our faith together, not alone. This is why Hebrews 10:25 commands believers not to neglect meeting together. We need one another because sin is subtle and deceitful (verse 14). Remember the garden of Eden? The serpent told Eve a mixture of truth and error—this is deceit at its core. It can slowly erode our faith and callous our hearts, and will most certainly do so if the church is not being the church for one another.

Verse 14 is much like verse 6, arguing backward from the present to the past: If we persevere now and until the end, then we know (now in the present) that we have (in the past) become “partakers of Christ.” Our present walk with Christ is proof that our past confession of Him as Lord and Savior was true. The phrase “partakers of Christ” or “those who share in Christ” is also in 3:1, where believers partake or are “sharers” in a holy calling. The past action of believing in Christ for salvation has ongoing effects in the present and the future. Our profession of faith in the past is proven to be valid by the fact that we persevere until the end of life.

Practically speaking, believers come to know a greater and greater confidence in our faith as we continue to walk with the Lord, because we see how God's grace carries us through the difficult seasons of life. When we are pressed because of the trials that God sovereignly brings into our lives, we can know that He has brought these to us, and that as His children He fully intends to carry us through them. It strengthens our hope and builds our faith when we see how He sustains us by His grace through such days. He works out perseverance in us, and from this we come to know an even greater assurance. It is His work in us. Paul puts it this way, "I am sure of this, that He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6). Therefore we can only boast in Him and He alone gets the praise and glory when He works out perseverance and faithfulness in our lives, as He has in all believers' lives who have gone on before us.



# Application

## CENTRAL TRUTH

*Following Jesus is a lifelong commitment and we all need to constantly encourage one another to stay strong in Him.*

Allow your group time to discuss and sum up the main truth from this passage in Hebrews. This will help you to see how God is speaking to the students in your group. After they have shared their thoughts, walk through the **Central Truth** and ask how that truth impacts their daily lives.

## NOW WHAT?

Lead students through a discussion of the following questions to help them understand the implication of the **Central Truth** and how that truth applies to their lives. Summarize this session by discussing our need to learn from both the positive and negative examples found in Scripture. The Scriptures “speak” to believers of every generation. They call us to be fully devoted followers of Christ and to encourage one another daily in the faith. Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow is out of reach. Today is the day to hear His voice and obey the Lord.

- › Who do you know that might need some encouragement this week? List at least 2 names.
- › Think of at least two ways that you can encourage each person in their faith this week. Write those ways below.
- › Now you know who to encourage and how to encourage them. What needs to be your next step?
- › What is one thing you can do this week to search your own heart for any rebellious attitudes or actions?

## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Finish your group time by encouraging your students to memorize the verse listed this week. Memorizing God's Word allows it to dwell in us and allows Him to speak through His Word in our times of need. Also encourage your group to take advantage of the **Keep on Digging** section.

- › **Dwell:** Spend some time this week thinking through the times Christ has been faithful to you. Think about times of hurt and pain where His love got you through. Think also about times of blessing where He provided for you beyond what you deserved. We need to remember the past, learn from it and allow it to propel us into the future holding strong to the hand that is reaching out to us.
- › **Memorize:** Hebrews 3:13
- › **Pray:** Ask God for strength this week to not give up on what He is doing in your life and to help you to encourage those around you to do the same.
- › **Keep on Digging:** Sometimes we encourage others through our actions and other times all we need to do is use our words. Be intentional this week to do both. Your task this week is simple:
  - › Do something for someone without them asking
  - › Say something encouraging to someone you think may need a lift



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# 5

# Secured With Confidence

Hebrews 4:14-5:6

**14** Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. **15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. **16** Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

**5:1** For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. **2** He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. **3** Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. **4** And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. **5** So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”; **6** as he says also in another place, “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”



# Exploration

## CONTEXT

Begin your session by setting the context for Hebrews 4:14–5:6. Read through the material below and use what you think will help your students best understand the background of the passages.

More than any other book of the Bible, Hebrews teaches us about Jesus' priesthood. The Book of Hebrews also encourages believers to hold fast and endure to the end. These two things are connected, so it is no accident that both of these issues are expressed repeatedly in this divinely-inspired Epistle. Hebrews 4:1-13 teaches us that believers in Christ are on a journey, making their way together to the heavenly place of eternal rest and celebration. Christians have heard the good news of God's rest just like the rebellious wilderness generation did. The difference is that Christians have united the good news with faith, while those who rebelled in the wilderness did not (Heb. 4:2,6).

The promise of entering God's eternal rest is still out in front of us, therefore we need the grace of God (Heb. 4:14-16) and the encouragement and accountability of other believers (Heb. 3:12-14) to help us finish the race that is set before us (Heb. 12:1-2). The good news is that all who truly know Christ will endure to the end. God has ordained for us to have everything we need in order to persevere, but this isn't accomplished in our own personal strength. Nothing could be more opposed to the free message of the gospel. Our great High Priest has offered His own blood for us as a sacrifice once and for all. Since our sins have been fully paid for by His blood and we have been made God's new covenant people of faith, then there is great assurance that we will finish the race.

## TRANSITION TO INDIVIDUAL STUDY

Once you have spent time setting the context, move your students into their Exploration time. There are several different ways that you can lead your students to explore the Scripture.

1. Lead your students to work through all of the Scriptures and questions, then discuss them together as a group.
2. Lead your students to work through the Scriptures and questions one at a time with group discussion after each question.

Whichever method you choose, make sure that the students have an opportunity to explore the Scripture for themselves.



# Conversation

After students have completed the Explore section of their Personal Study Guides, discuss what they discovered as they explored the Scriptures. Their questions were:

› **Verse 14 refers to a confession. What confession do you think the writer is referring to and how would you hold fast to that confession?**

› **What do these verses tell you about a specific role that Jesus plays in your life?**

Point out that the believers the writer was addressing were becoming weary in their faith and needed some encouragement for their journey. The writer will explain how Jesus has become our great High Priest and that it is only because of Him that we can stand with confidence.

## HEBREWS 4:14-15

Call on a student to read verses fourteen and fifteen. Point students to the top of the Explore section on page 30 of their Personal Study Guides where there is an explanation of what the role of the high priest was in the Israelite culture. Explain that the primary role of the high priest was to serve as a mediator or representative between the people and God. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, he would enter the holy of holies and sprinkle blood on the mercy seat to atone for his sins and the sins of his people. He became the go-between for the people. Without him, there would have been no access to God.

Allow students to answer the following question from their Personal Study Guide:

› **Based on your understanding of the role of the high priest, what does it mean that Jesus has become our great High Priest?**

Help your students understand that while the role of the high priest was important in the life of the Israelites, it was incomplete. The priest would offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people, but the sacrifice was never sufficient. While the sacrifice covered their sin, it never changed their hearts. In Christ, we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens and came to make a once and for all sacrifice for sin.

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➤ **ITEM 6 (LEADER PACK)** Direct students to the **High Priest** poster and give them a few minutes to look at it closely and ask any questions they might have.

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# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 4:14-15

The writer of Hebrews is like any other pastor; he desperately wants every one of his readers to endure to the end. Yet he knows that it is possible to appear to begin well and yet not end well. The true evidence and assurance of genuine faith is grace-fueled and faith-filled endurance. And guess what? We persevere in His strength, according to His grace, showered with the mercy and forgiveness of God who sent His Son to be our Pioneer and example.

We are able to hold fast our confession (v. 14) since our sinless and compassionate High Priest is interceding for us. Think about that! The one who knows our weaknesses and what it is like to be tempted in everything, is also the one who is our Advocate before God. He is perfect for the task because He is the God-Man. Verse 14 refers to "Jesus, Son of God." Remember that chapter 1 focuses on His deity. Chapter 2 focuses on Jesus the man who died (Heb. 2:9) and who was tempted just like we are (Heb. 2:17-18). Here, both His earthly name (Jesus) and His divine title (Son) are put together and therefore our perfect advocate.

Verse 15 makes three additional points that help us better understand verse 14, each of which have been mentioned before (Heb. 2:17-18). First, He sympathizes with our weaknesses. “Weaknesses” is plural, because they are many! He experienced what it was like to be tired, hungry, thirsty, and tempted. Second, He was tempted “in all things” just like us. Jesus experienced the full weight of temptation; He knows temptation more than we since He has felt its fullness. He has born it without giving way to it. That leads to verse 15. Third, He never gave way to it. In that way He is also unlike us. He has never yielded to temptation. He is therefore our perfect High Priest.

He intercedes for us, and knows our temptation to quit. At Gethsemane, He prayed for another way, and was asking to go around the cross (Heb. 5:7-9). Yet He saw past the awfulness of the cross to the glory that awaited Him (Heb. 12:2; Phil. 2:9-11). So also must we. Jesus endured the same temptation to fall short and endured till the end. So also must we. And it is all by God's grace! This is what every Christian wants for the people they love, including the writer of Hebrews.



The Greek word translated “sympathize” expresses not simply the compassion of one who regards suffering from without, but the feeling of one who enters into the suffering and makes it his own.

[illegible]



# Conversation

## › Identify 3 qualifying characteristics of Jesus to serve as our great High Priest.

The author gives us three specific qualifying characteristics of Jesus as our great High Priest. Help students recognize them in Scripture and begin to relate them to Jesus. The characteristics you want them to see are that Jesus is able to sympathize with our weakness, He has been tested in every way, and He was without sin.

Lead students to discuss these characteristics. It is very important that they grasp what the writer is saying in this verse to understand why we can have confidence in our great High Priest. Jesus can sympathize with our weakness because He knows how it feels to suffer what we suffer. In His humanity, He faced the same struggles that we do. The difference is that in all of those struggles He remained without sin! Not only does He know how we feel, but He has provided the victory that we need over sin. It is because of His victory that we can have confidence.

## HEBREWS 4:16

Call on a student to read verse 16. Draw attention to the “therefore” at the beginning of the verse. Explain that “therefore” is an indicator of a truth statement that follows a series of supporting statements. This will encourage your students to begin connecting truths that are stated in previous verses.

## › The author encourages us to approach the throne of grace with boldness. Based on what you discovered in verse 15, why is it possible for us to have boldness as we approach God’s throne?

Lead your students to look back at their answers to the last question. Help them see the significance of the “therefore” in verse sixteen. Jesus can sympathize with our weaknesses because Jesus was tested in every way that we are tested. He was victorious over sin, therefore we can approach the throne of grace with boldness.

## › What is the difference between mercy and grace? Why is it important for us to receive mercy and grace at the proper time?

Focus on the second half of the verse as you discuss this with your students. Share a personal story of when you needed mercy and grace in your life at a specific time. The proper time for us to receive mercy and grace is in the moment that we need it most!

# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 4:16

So, where do we go for grace? The answer is obvious in verse 16, but often in our lives we can find it difficult to go to Him. We are commanded to approach God continually. If you were a first century Jew reading this for the first time, you would think that the writer of Hebrews had a death wish. Draw near to the very presence of Yahweh? Only the high priest was allowed in the Holy of Holies once per year. His presence is not something we just go running into like little children into their dad's office at work. Right? In the Old Testament, this would get you killed.

The Oval Office of the President of the United States is one of the most difficult places on earth to access. Yet for a President's children, it is "Daddy's office" and a play land. In the early 1960's, President Kennedy and his young family moved into the White House. The Oval Office became a favorite place to play for young Caroline and John, the President's children. In fact, John Jr.'s favorite place to hide was under the President's desk.

How could such a place be so easily and freely accessed by a child? Has the nature of the Oval Office changed? Certainly not! But for the children of the President, access is available simply because this is where their father is. The same is true for believers and God's presence. How? Because Christ has led the way, and bids us to come into His presence. We are granted full, free, and continual access. This is stunning and turns all other world religions on their heads. This is not something that Hinduism, Buddhism, or Islam can offer to their followers.

Our first place to turn needs to be to our heavenly Father who promises mercy and grace to help. Specifically, we receive mercy. He is the God who cares and shows compassion to His sons and daughters at all times, and specifically when we are in our hour of greatest need. As the old hymn goes, what needless pain we bear because we do not carry it to Him in prayer! Also, we find grace to help. God's grace towards us is not simply for salvation and conversion. The Bible teaches that God provides grace at all times. Grace is His unmerited favor and goodwill towards us that strengthens us to overcome sin, repair relationships, and fight the fight of faith . . . in short, to persevere in faith to the end of our lives. The remedy for sin, doubts, and fear is found at God's throne of grace.



Mercy can present the ideas of forgiveness or of compassion and the benefits that flow from compassion. It can have the sense of kindness.



Because of Jesus' saving work, people can claim mercy before God. The sinless Savior provides perfect redemption. As a result of His sacrifice, believers can approach God with reverent confidence. Only through the grace and mercy He provides are we able to serve Him.



# Conversation

## HEBREWS 5:1-4

Call on a student to read Hebrews 5:1-4. Ask them to share their answers to the first Explore question in their Personal Study Guides.

### › In what ways is Jesus different than the other high priests?

Give your students time to share their answers. Hopefully they will begin to see how His characteristics differ from the other high priests.

### › Read Leviticus 10:8-11. How were the priests expected to live differently than the people they served?

The writer shares in verse two that the priests were able to deal gently with the people because they were also subject to weakness. The priests were able to deal gently with the people because they could relate. They were expected to live differently than the people they served and were called to a higher standard, but they were sinners too. Jesus is not subject to weakness but He sympathizes with our weakness. Jesus experienced the pain of our weakness, but never experienced the sin of our weakness.

## HEBREWS 5:5-6

### › Why do you think the writer made such a big deal about Jesus not exalting Himself to the role of high priest?

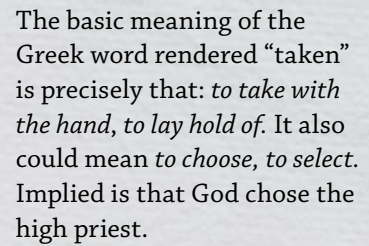
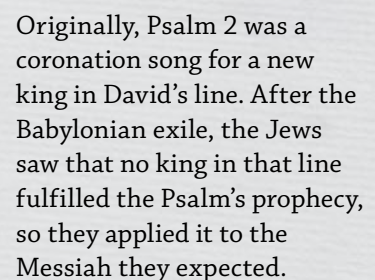
Challenge students to answer and explain why they believe Jesus humbled Himself, rather than exalting Himself to the role of High Priest. Levitical high priests were required to make a sin offering for themselves before they could intercede for the people. Jesus was without sin, and He did not have to make a sin offering for Himself, but rather He became the sin offering for us. The cross was the ultimate act of humility when He bore the sin of all mankind.

### › The writer references Jesus as the High Priest in the order of Melchizedek. Read verse 10. Why was Jesus referred to as a High Priest in the order of Melchizedek?

In Genesis 14:18-20, Melchizedek was introduced as the king of Salem, who was also a priest of Almighty God. In Psalm 110:4, he was portrayed as a priest who would have an identity with the Messiah. In fact, the coming Messiah would be in the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 7 gives us more insight on the significance of Jesus' being a priest in Melchizedek's line. Because no genealogy was given for Melchizedek and no mention was made of his death, he remained a priest "forever" (Heb. 7:3). As a priest in Melchizedek's line, Jesus also is eternal High Priest. In addition, as was Melchizedek, Jesus is King. Help your students see that in Genesis 14:18-20, God was establishing a "proto-type" that would point to the coming king. Melchizedek was not the messiah that would be promised, but a glimpse of what was to come—a better version!

## HEBREWS 5:1-6

Verses 5-6 draw from Psalm 2:7 and 110:4. Just like the OT priest did not seek the honor himself for the high priestly office, neither did Jesus. They were called out for this honor, and Jesus was the “Apostle” sent by God (3:1). Verse 5 teaches that God appointed His Son, and verse 6 teaches that this position is eternal. Verse 6 is the first time we have seen Psalm 110:4, so this is the first time Melchizedek enters the discussion. Who is Melchizedek? The only other place in the Bible he is mentioned is in Genesis 14:18-20. Without Hebrews, in fact, we would not know what to make of this “other priest.” At this point we can simply conclude that Psalm 110:4 (quoted in verse 6) pointed ahead to the fact that one day there would be an eternal High Priest, one whose sacrifice would be forever, and who would never die. In other words, it pointed ahead to Jesus.

[illegible]



# Application

## CENTRAL TRUTH

*We can approach God with confidence because of the work of Jesus as our great High Priest.*

Discuss the meaning and application of the **Central Truth**. Consider referring to **Pack Item 6**, the High Priest poster, if you have not referred to it yet this session. As you move into the **Now What?** section, ensure that the students are grasping what they have learned so they can apply it to their lives.

## NOW WHAT?

Lead your students through the questions below to help them apply the truths that they have learned.

› **List 3 problems that you are facing in your life.**

Do not let students avoid the question or respond that nothing is wrong or they have no problems. Instead, urge them to write down problems they have faced in the past.

› **Now list 3 people you know who you could trust to talk to about these problems.**

This response should come easier as students will write down people that they trust or people who they know would be there for them in their time of need. Be sensitive and make yourself available to any students who might not have anyone other than you to talk with about the problems they are currently facing in their lives.

› **Was Jesus on your list? Why or why not?**

More than likely your students did not include Jesus on their list. This is not a question to have them answer aloud, but one for them to reflect on personally.

› **What have you learned about Jesus in this session that would give you the desire to include Him on your list?**

Allow students to share what they have learned. Use their responses to gauge how well they understood the truths of the session. Review points that remain unclear. Encourage students to approach Christ with confidence because He understands and loves them.

## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Finish your group time with the information below and encourage your students to memorize the verse listed for this week. Memorizing God's word allows it to dwell in us and allows Him to speak through His word in our time of need. Also encourage your group to take advantage of the **Keep on Digging** section to spend more time this week unpacking what it means that Jesus is our great High Priest.

- › **Dwell:** Jesus is our great High Priest and He is interceding for us. Because of this we can approach the throne of grace with confidence. Spend some time this week thinking about situations where you are in desperate need of help or direction. Instead of going to a friend, first go to the throne of grace. Jesus has made the way for us to approach Him in our time of need.
- › **Memorize:** Hebrews 4:16
- › **Pray:** Ask Jesus to give you strength today to have the confidence that you need to approach the throne of grace with boldness. Thank Him for serving as your High Priest and understanding your weaknesses.
- › **Keep on Digging:** Read the following verses to understand more about the role of the High Priest and the priesthood of Melchizedek:
  - › Leviticus 8
  - › Hebrews 7
  - › Genesis 14:18-20
  - › Psalm 110:4



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# 6

# Don't Walk Away

Hebrews 6:1-8

**1** Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, **2** and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. **3** And this we will do if God permits. **4** For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, **5** and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, **6** and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. **7** For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. **8** But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.



# Exploration

## CONTEXT

Begin your session by setting the context for Hebrews 6:1-8. Read through the material below and use what you think will help your students best understand the background of the passages.

An infant diet is limited to milk in the first few months. As the baby grows, he needs more solid food to develop properly. Likewise, a growing Christian who only drank milk would grow spiritually hungry for nourishment to help him or her stand up to the challenges before them. Evidently, the spiritual diet of the Christians who first read the Epistle to the Hebrews seemed to be limited to baby food. They appeared to favor the spiritual nourishment that newborn believers needed (Heb. 5:11-14).

The time had come for them to move on toward maturity in Christ. That's the urgent message the writer of Hebrews wanted to impress upon the hearts of these wavering Christians. They gave the distinct impression that they were about to let go of their faith in Christ. If they decided to fall back intentionally to another religion, they needed to understand that they would be making a foolish choice. The Lord had directed these believers to give attention to spiritual growth. If they willfully disobeyed Him, they would not be permitted to press on toward maturity in Christ. Their cold-hearted rebellion against God would be an insult to Jesus, His Son. For that reason, they would be left with nothing but hopelessness (Heb. 6:1-8).

These Christians needed to choose which path they would take. If they took the path of obedience to Him, they would hold fast to their faith and continue to express their love for Him by caring for each other. Their diligence in service would add certainty to the hope they shared in Him (Heb. 6:9-12). But if they chose the path of disobedience, they could expect to be held accountable for their open rebellion against God. He would judge them because they trampled on the gift of salvation they had received and even insulted the Holy Spirit, who had been gracious to them.

## TRANSITION TO INDIVIDUAL STUDY

After you have set the context, move your students into the Exploration time in their Personal Study Guides. There are several different ways that you can lead your students to explore the Scripture.

1. Lead your students to work through all of the Scripture and questions, then discuss their responses together as a group.
2. Guide your students to work through the Scripture and questions one question at a time. Pause for group discussion after each question.

Whichever method you choose, make sure that the students have an opportunity to explore the Scripture for themselves.



# Conversation

After students have worked through the Explore section of the study, discuss what they discovered as they explored the Scriptures.

Call on a student to read Hebrews 6:1-8 from their Bible or their Personal Study Guide, then discuss their answers to the quick response questions:

› **As you read Hebrews 6:1-8, what words meant the most to you?**

› **Identify 2 strong encouragements that the writer is trying to communicate in this passage. (Hint: one is to do something and the other is to not do something.)**

Point out that the writer is going to turn up the heat a little bit with a strong encouragement to move from the elementary teachings of faith into maturity. He follows that with a strong warning against people who were walking away from the gospel and thus proving their position outside the gospel.

## HEBREWS 6:1-3

Call on a student to read verse 1. We are going to focus on the first part of this verse. At the top of the Explore section on page 36 of the Personal Study Guide, draw students attention to the results from the spiritual maturity research study. Direct students to review the list and discuss how many of the eight attributes are currently present in their lives. Ask for a student respond to the first Explore question.

› **What do you see in verse one as the path to moving toward spiritual maturity?**

Help your students realize that the eight attributes of maturity that are listed in their Personal Study Guides are all indicators of a believer who is growing in Christ. The writer of Hebrews was encouraging his people to move away from or leave the elementary teachings about Jesus. It wasn't that they were to forget them, but they needed to press on and move beyond them to a more mature faith.

› **When you think about spiritual maturity, what image comes to mind? Who do you think of as being spiritually mature?**

Reiterate to your students that maturity in Christ is not about them doing more religious things, but it is about them growing in a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. It's not about doing more, but loving deeper. Their tendency will be to list a lot of actions that they believe will prove their position with Christ. Maturity will lead to a changed life, but it will inevitably come as a result of a transforming relationship with Jesus Christ.

# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 6:1-3

Verses 1-3 is not telling us to forget what we have learned concerning the basics of the faith. But just as a baby moves on from milk to solid food, so also do we need to move on to mature food (5:12-14). Beginning in chapter 7 there will be much solid spiritual food: Melchizedek, priesthood, the new covenant, and Jesus' sacrifice. Believers must lay aside any spiritual dullness and press on to spiritual maturity.

Verse 1 expresses the main idea, "Let us press on towards maturity." Like all godly pastors, the writer believes that thorough, biblical, doctrinal, and theological teaching is the answer for those who are immature and wavering. He has great confidence in the Word of God! There are no gimmicks that will ever convert a dull heart. What they needed in their day, and what our churches need now, is God's Word taught clearly and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Verses 1-2 list six things that encompass the Christian's life. First, "repentance from dead works" and "faith in God" refers to the first steps in the Christian life—turning from sin and to God in faith. Second, "ritual washings" does not refer to a believer's baptism, but to the Jewish cleansing rituals that pointed to the true spiritual cleansing accomplished by the Holy Spirit (Ezek. 36:25-27). Those washings prepared them to understand the true cleansing of the heart that is at the center of the new covenant (Heb 8:8-12). "Laying on of hands" refers to the confirmation of the gift of the Spirit and the Spirit's anointing for ministry.

The final pair is the "resurrection from the dead and eternal judgment." There will be righteous judgment at the end of the age. Those who are in Christ will be raised to be with Him for eternity. Since God is righteous, unbelievers have to be punished. On the one hand God delights in His justice, but on the other He takes no delight in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11).



In the New Testament, laying on hands not only was associated with blessing (Matt.19:13) and commissioning (Acts 13:3) but also with healing (Mark 7:32-33), separating for special service (Acts 6:6), imparting the Spirit to believers (Acts 8:17), and affirming spiritual gifts (1 Tim. 4:14).



Spiritual growth is not a matter of self-effort; God's presence and power will enable Christians to grow, but only if they are open to receive His help.



# Conversation

Call on a volunteer to read verses 1-3. Point out the writer listed the elementary teachings that we should move on from. The list begins with an exhortation to not again build a foundation of repentance from dead works. Illustrate the point by describing the foolishness of builders continually laying the foundation of a building. As important as a good foundation is, we must move on to the next phase of building to complete the structure. The Hebrew Christians were being encouraged to move on from repentance and faith. While essential, they couldn't stay there if they wanted to grow in Christ.

**In these verses, the writer lists six concepts that we should move forward from. See if you can find and list the 6 concepts.**

As mentioned in verses 1-2, it is important that we know what our foundation is built with and what it is built upon. The writer lists six concepts that the Hebrew Christians were to move forward from. Encourage students to share the six that were listed. They are repentance from dead works, faith in God, ritual washings, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. Read your **Leader Prep** for further explanation about these six concepts. Since these are foundational, briefly discuss each one with your students.

## HEBREWS 6:4-6

Read verses 4-6 aloud. Point out the strong warning to the church. This is not a warning about something that has already happened, but a warning about something that could happen. This is a difficult passage to understand so spend some time delving into the **Leader Prep** section to help you prepare to teach and answer questions students might have.

**› The writer claims that something is impossible. What do you think the writer is stating is impossible?**

Your students could have a wide variety of answers to this question. This is where you have the opportunity to shed some light on a difficult passage. The writer refers to a group of people who were exposed to the gospel message, saw the work of the Holy Spirit, and even experienced the goodness of God's Word, yet they chose to walk away from the gospel. From outward appearance, it would seem that these people were believers, but their actions proved otherwise. By walking away from the gospel, they moved away from the only thing that could save them.

# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 6:4-6

There are five phrases to consider: 1) having been enlightened, 2) having tasted the heavenly gift, 3) having become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 4) having tasted the goodness of God's word and power, and 5) having fallen away.

First, they have been enlightened. Enlightened means "to make known something in reference to the inner life," and here it is God who does the enlightening. We do not enlighten ourselves; such a person has been enlightened. This is a reference to conversion. This is confirmed by the only other time this word is used, in Hebrews 10:32, "But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings." Some have thought that the person here has merely heard the truth without embracing it. But a comparison to Hebrews 10:32 makes this difficult.

Second, they have tasted the heavenly gift. "Tasted" in Hebrews means to experience fully, not "sample." In Hebrews 2:9, Jesus "tasted death," but no one could say that Jesus merely sampled death. In our culture we may think of "taste" merely as "sample," but this was not the case in first century. Jesus came to know death, just as those here have come to know the "heavenly gift." "Gift" most likely refers to the blessings that are given by God to the believer, especially the Holy Spirit and His gifts (Heb. 2:4).

Third, they have been made "sharers," "partners," or "partakers" of the Holy Spirit (See also Heb 1:9; 3:1, 14; 12:8). "Have been made" means that God has made them to be partakers of the Spirit. God has given them the gift of His personal Spirit. As with the previous terms, a genuine believer is meant.

Fourth, they have tasted the Word of God and of the powers of the coming age. The "powers of the age to come" are the signs and miracles in Hebrews 2:4 that accompanied the preaching of the Gospel. The promised "coming age" of the Messiah has already come, but we also await its consummation. The presence and power of the Holy Spirit are proof that the "coming age" has already dawned. As believers, we long for its fullness when our glorious King returns.



Contentment with stunted levels of spiritual development and profession without perseverance were dangerous. Those attitudes could cause spiritually lethargic Christians and people who had not made genuine commitments to Christ to assume they were OK spiritually to the point they had no desire to repent.

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Professed believers who demonstrated casual indifference to their salvation instead of striving to grow spiritually and who gave no evidence their faith-commitment to Christ was genuine were holding Him up to contempt ("put him to an open shame," KJV; "subjecting him to public disgrace," NIV).



# Conversation

The statement made in your **Leader Prep** says it this way, “If Christ is rejected, then salvation and repentance are impossible since there is no salvation outside of Christ.”

Ask your students to share their responses from the Explore question that follows. The writer shares that the people who have been exposed to the truth, yet walk away from it are sharing with the world that the crucifixion of Christ was a lie. It was not sufficient for their salvation and they continue to search for salvation elsewhere. Thus, they hold Jesus in public contempt.

› **How would turning away from Jesus bring Him into public contempt?**

## HEBREWS 6:7-8

The writer ends this section of Scripture with an agricultural illustration to state the point made in verses 4-6.

› **The writer uses an agricultural story to further illustrate the point made in verses 4-6. What do you see are the similarities and the differences in both scenarios?**

As students share their answers, help them to see that the similarities found in both instances focus on the ground and the same rain water feeding the ground. The differences revolve around the product that is produced. There will be people in our churches that go to the same events we attend, hear the same gospel that we hear, and possibly even respond to the same message that we respond to, but that doesn't mean that they are truly converted.

› **What would cause the different results from the same rain falling on the same ground?**

The point of this final question is to help students understand what really produces the fruit of our lives. The writer shared that the same rain fell on the ground and it produced two different types of vegetation. One ground produced useful vegetation and the other ground produced worthless thorns and thistles. The only implied difference would be the condition of the ground. If the ground is “good,” then the result will be useful vegetation. If the ground is “bad,” then the result will be useless vegetation that will be cursed and burned in the end.

This can be a difficult passage to understand and your students may not understand it all. Don't worry about having all the answers. Pray for your students and allow the Holy Spirit to work during the week to teach and instill this truth in the minds and hearts of your students.





# Application

## CENTRAL TRUTH

*Rejecting Christ leads to hopelessness.*

Discuss the application of the **Central Truth**. Remind your students that the encouragement the writer was conveying to the early church was to keep pressing on in their faith journey. The writer of Hebrews was warning them to move away from the elementary teachings of the Word and continue to grow in faith. There will be some who depart from the faith, but those of us who are in the faith need to continue to press on.

## NOW WHAT?

Lead your students through the **Now What?** questions to help them begin to apply the truths that they have learned. Consider sharing your personal testimony of how you came to faith in the Lord and how He's walked with you since then.

› **Write down your age when you became a believer (If you have not yet accepted Jesus as Lord, talk with your student minister or someone on staff at your church).**

Walk around the room to work with your students as they answer this question. They may have a hard time writing down the age of their conversion experience, but don't get hung up on whether or not they know their age. Focus more on whether they have a relationship with Him, and be sensitive to an evangelistic opportunity.

› **In the time between when you first accepted Christ as your Lord and now, would you consider the product of your life to be useful vegetation or thorns and thistles?**

Follow up by asking students to explain their answer. Hopefully this prompts them to think about their actions and the kind of fruit they are producing.

› **What does the product of your life say about your walk with the Lord?**

This question is not intended to make students doubt their faith, but to challenge them to evaluate their lives and how they should reflect Jesus Christ in everything they do and say.

› **What do you need to do to move forward into maturity?**

If you have a smaller group of students, try to spend some one-on-one time giving them practical steps to move forward into maturity. If you have a larger group, address this with more general steps that would apply to students in different places in their walk with the Lord.

## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

End your group time with the following challenges encourage your students to memorize the verse listed for this session. Memorizing God's Word allows it to dwell in us and allows Him to speak through His word in our time of need. Also encourage your group to take advantage of the **Keep on Digging** section to spend some time this week unpacking what it means to persevere in Christ.

› **Dwell:** As Christians, we must be diligent to demonstrate our salvation, and our path toward maturity. Maturing believers must be willing to warn others of the dangers of immaturity and disobedience. We should help others understand that Christianity is a lifelong faith commitment that requires growth and spiritual maturity. Make sure that you are on the right path to spiritual maturity.

› **Memorize:** Hebrews 6:10

› **Pray:** Pray that Christ would give you the strength to move forward in maturity. Ask Jesus to give you the boldness to encourage others to be a great example of Christ's love. Pray that you would never set Jesus up as a public disgrace, but always as the Savior of the world.

› **Keep on Digging:** Read the following verses to continue to study the issue of perseverance.

- › Matthew 7:15-23
- › Luke 9:62
- › Mark 13:13
- › 2 Timothy 4:10
- › 1 John 2:19



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# 7

# Only Jesus Saves

Hebrews 7:23-28

**23** The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, **24** but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. **25** Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

**26** For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. **27** He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. **28** For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.



# Exploration

## CONTEXT

Begin your session by setting the context for Hebrews 7:23-28. Read through the material below and use what you think will help your students best understand the background of the passages.

The main point of Hebrews 7 is that Christ is supreme. The verses note a change in priesthood and the covenant (Heb. 7:22). This new priesthood does everything and is everything that the old priesthood could never do or be. Jesus Christ is the Perfect Priest, flawless in every way, and so His ministry.

The old way of relating to God through sinful priests and repeated sacrifices could never bring about complete and lasting forgiveness for God's people. Earthly priests, as good as their ministry was under the old covenant, could not provide what was most desperately needed. The people were deeply sinful. That sin and because of God's holiness, there way no way for them to have an intimate relationship with God. Sacrifice had to be made and the old covenant sacrifices weren't enough. They weren't permanent and did nothing to truly cleanse their hearts. That permanent and internal sacrifice is only possible through Jesus Christ. All of the Old Testament sacrifices prepared the way for Jesus' sacrifice, but could not atone for sin. If they had, Jesus' death on the cross would not have been necessary. Without Christ, we could never hope to "draw near to God" in order to find grace, mercy, and help. Only the High Priest could draw near, and even then, he could only do so on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). Yet now, in the new covenant, we are summoned to do so confidently and without fear! This is all because of who is there to intercede for us—the Son of God and our eternal High Priest, the Lord Jesus Himself! His sacrifice—His own body and blood—is everything that the Old Testament priests' animal sacrifices could not be, since the "blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin."

## TRANSITION TO INDIVIDUAL STUDY

After you have set the context, move your students into the Exploration time in their Personal Study Guides. There are several different ways that you can lead your students to explore the Scripture.

1. Lead your students to work through all of the Scripture and questions, then discuss their responses together as a group.
2. Guide your students to work through the Scripture and questions one question at a time. Pause for group discussion after each question.

Whichever method you choose, make sure that the students have an opportunity to explore the Scripture for themselves.



# Conversation

After students have completed the Explore section of their Personal Study Guides. Discuss what they discovered as they explored the Scriptures. Their quick response questions were:

› **After reading the passage above how are you encouraged by what Jesus has done for you?**

› **What does this passage tell you about Jesus that you did not know before you read it?**

Understand that these questions are designed to lead students to Jesus as our great High Priest. This shouldn't be an unfamiliar concept, because we've studied it previously, but today's session should push students to go a little deeper and discover what it means for Jesus to serve in this role. Today your students will learn about the eternal nature of His priesthood and what it means that He intercedes for us. Because of these truths, we can know He is the only one who is able to save!

## HEBREWS 7:23-24

Challenge a student to recount verses 23-24 in his or her own words. Start the conversation, by asking them to respond to the first Explore question:

› **Why is it necessary for us to have a great High Priest?**

This question will give your students the opportunity to express what they have been learning throughout the Hebrews study. Below, you'll find several reasons that your students should refer to. If they don't, mention what they've missed and stress these points:

- › The Levitical priests were insufficient because of their own sin.
- › The sacrifice was never going to be enough because it did not change the heart.
- › Jesus became the perfect sacrifice because He lived a sinless life.
- › The priests had to offer the sacrifice regularly, while Jesus' sacrifice is a once-and-for-all sacrifice.

Emphasize our dire need for a great High Priest. It is crucial that students understand their need for Christ, especially as we continue to look at the roles that Jesus plays in our life as our great High Priest. We must understand our need for Him and grow to appreciate and embrace His sufficiency.

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›› **ITEM 5 (LEADER PACK)** Consider displaying the **Jesus Descriptors** chart for students to see. This will serve as a visual for them and will reemphasize their need for a Savior.

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# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 7:23-24

There are still nations today that have kings who rule them. Free access to these earthly kings is not possible. There is a process to get to the king, and even then, there are many who do not gain access. Were citizens to rush into the king's presence, they would likely be killed. Yet Hebrews 7:23-24 explains that believers have free, unlimited access to the ruler of the universe, not simply the ruler of one small part of the planet! We have this access because of our "go-between," Jesus. Jesus' perfect righteousness covers and clothes us, so that when God sees us, He sees us as perfectly righteous and welcomes us as sons and daughters!

The writer of Hebrews builds on this high priest role by comparing Jesus to the old priests. First, there were large numbers of them, but there is only one perfect High Priest. Why were they so many? Because they all died. These earthly priests were only men, while Jesus is the eternal Son of God—fully God, yet fully man. Since they died, the priests had to be replaced with another from the tribe of Levi. One after another, year after year, priests continued to minister imperfectly, yet in obedience to the Lord. They offered daily sacrifices, brought in the showbread (1 Chron. 23:29), and sacrificed countless animals as a way to show that sin brings death. The ministry of the Old Testament priests never ended. There were not even places to sit down in the tabernacle or the temple, so they never rested. Their never-ending ministry showed that there was a need for something greater, something that would fully and finally atone for the sins of God's people.

In the midst of this ministry, God prophesied in Psalm 110:4 that one day there would be a priest of a different kind. Yet it would take another 1,000 years until the Lord Jesus would be born, live a perfect life, and offer His own body and blood on the cross for our sins.

Because Jesus is eternal, His priesthood and ministry are eternal. Therefore, there never needs to be another sacrifice! The many priests all died, while Christ lives forever. He "continues forever, and holds His priesthood permanently" (Heb. 7:24). This is exactly what God had sworn with an oath in Psalm 110:4 (Heb. 7:20-21).



Through the centuries of Hebrew history, innumerable Levitical priests served in the sacrificial system. The officiating priests in the tabernacle and temple were Aaron's descendants from the tribe of Levi.



A Jewish priest was required to be a direct descendant of Aaron. Being a direct descendant automatically made a man a priest.



Until relatively shortly before the Letter to the Hebrews was written, Jewish law required that a descendant of Aaron be the high priest. That did not guarantee a successor would have the qualifications to represent the people to God.



# Conversation

## › What is the significance of the many priests needed in the Old Testament and Jesus being our only High Priest?

Guide students to compare Jesus to the earthly priests. Help them to see that Jesus Christ stood in stark contrast to the Levitical priests who served and died. Jesus Christ is the only eternal High Priest. That unique distinction made Him superior to any other high priest. Therefore, His relationship with believers as their great High Priest would last forever because His priesthood would never end. It was permanent and would never be passed on to anyone else. Call attention to this quote:

"Since Jesus is our High Priest and He never goes away and He never changes, He's able to shepherd us all the way home to glory. No other priest will ever be necessary."  
—David Jeremiah

## HEBREWS 7:25

Enlist a volunteer to read verse 25 aloud. Point out the word "therefore" in this verse and remind your students that the truth stated in verse 25 is supported by verses 23-24.

## › What makes it possible for Jesus to always be able to save those who come to God through Him?

Jesus stands out as our eternal High Priest. Stress that truth and talk with students about what it means for their lives. Point out that because that is true, we can always live in complete confidence that the way to a personal relationship with God will never change. No matter how many centuries pass or how many shifts in culture take place across the years, Jesus Christ will always stand alone as the centerpiece of the gospel message. Because He died on the cross and rose from the dead to live eternally, He's able to save anyone who turns to Him. No one else can make this claim.

## › What does it mean that Jesus lives to intercede for us?

Make sure your students understand what the word *intercede* means. The Greek definition of the word *intercede* is to *confer with* or to *entreat in favor of*. It also carries the idea of going up to meet with or to consult with. Because of Jesus we have a High Priest who stands before the Father and speaks in favor of us. Jesus pleads our case to the Father and stands as our Intercessor. Make sure that students understand that Jesus does not intercede for us simply based on our actions or efforts, but because of His completed work on the cross. We continue to fail and stray from righteousness, but God sees us through His righteousness. Remind your students that the writer of Hebrews said that Jesus finds joy in and lives to intercede for us.

# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 7:25

Verse 25 is the writer's deduction ("therefore") based upon verses 23-24. Since Christ is forever our High Priest, Hebrews concludes that He is also "able to save forever those who approach God through Him." Because of what He has done and because of what He is doing, He is the "one able to save" forever those who "draw near to God." He saves us "completely" and "wholly." That is part of His work as High Priest, and since it is Jesus who is doing this, would it even be possible that He would save partially and not fully and forever? Has He ever failed in this? Absolutely not.

Further, when it says that He is “able to save,” it means that He does. What it doesn’t mean is that there might be a situation where He is not able to do so. It is unthinkable that He would fail in His work as our Intercessor. How weak His intercession would be were He to fail in this task! The reason that no child of God can be lost is because Jesus is always interceding for us. He is in the presence of God right now, speaking to God about you and on your behalf.

Is Christ Jesus' intercession so weak that it will allow for one of His sheep to be lost? For if even one child can be lost, that means that Christ's intercession just isn't strong enough and the conversion of our hearts that Jesus purchased just wasn't deep enough! It is an affront to the on-going mediation of our Lord.

Paul says the same thing concerning Jesus' intercession in Romans 8:34, "Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us." He then goes on to list all manner of things that might oppose the eternal, saving love of God for us. Nothing can separate us. God is even more committed to our endurance and assurance than we are, even to the extent that He has given His Son to be our sacrifice and our eternal High Priest. This is such a cause for worship and thankfulness! He deserves our worship and allegiance for the pardon for all of our transgressions. Jesus paid it all. He has given us a "pardon for sin and a peace that endureth ... Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!"



The Greek word translated “save” means *to rescue from danger or destruction, to keep safe and sound*. In its physical sense, it means *to make well, to heal, to restore to health*.

[illegible]



# Conversation

## HEBREWS 7:26-27

Enlist one of your students to read verses 26-27. Ask them to give their answers to the first Explore listing for this section.

### › List the character qualities of our great High Priest found in verse 26.

Allow time for students to discuss their answers. Make sure students discuss these five qualities: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. Mention the list found in session 5, too, if necessary. This is a great way to show the continuing thread of truth that the writer of Hebrews is conveyed about Jesus. Move on to the second question for this section.

### › What are the differences between the sacrifices the priests made and the personal sacrifice that Jesus made?

Stress that there are two major differences that you want to point out found in verse 27. One is that Jesus did not have to make daily sacrifices for His sin because He knew no sin. The priests had to make daily sacrifices for their sins, as well as the people's, because the old covenant sacrifice was insufficient and temporary. The other significant difference is that the priests sacrificed the blood of animals as their sacrifice to God. Jesus sacrificed Himself! Jesus gave of Himself and shed His blood for the remission of our sin.

## HEBREWS 7:28

In the Explore section of their Personal Study Guides, students were directed to read Psalm 110. Use this passage to further explain the oath that is referenced in verse 28. This will give some context for the verse, but you may still have to further explain the oath that the writer was talking about.

### › Read Psalm 110. What is the oath that the writer is referring to?

Point out that this is the oath that God made declaring Jesus as our great High Priest. The contrast is that the Levitical priests were appointed by the law. Jesus was appointed by an oath. A law could be repealed, but an oath could never be erased or altered. Jesus' status as our great High Priest is eternal because of the oath God made on our behalf.

### › How did the coming of Christ eliminate the need for the old priesthood?

Jesus' coming did not replace the old priesthood, but fulfilled it! Jesus even said in the Sermon on the Mount that He did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it.





# Conversation

## CENTRAL TRUTH

*Jesus is our Holy undefiled Savior who lives to intercede for us.*

Allow your group some time to discuss application of the **Central Truth**. What did they learn throughout the lesson that helps them to validate the **Central Truth**? As you move into the next section, make sure that the students are grasping what they have learned so they can apply it as they work through the **Now What?** section.

## NOW WHAT?

Lead your students through the **Now What?** questions to help them begin to apply the truth that they have learned. At this point, what they have learned is knowledge and we need to help them apply that knowledge so it will turn into wisdom in their lives.

› **List 3 friends who would have your back no matter of the situation.**

The point of our **Now What?** section is to help your students to understand the reliability of the Intercessor that we have in Jesus. Encourage them to list three friends that they think would stick with them through the trials of life.

› **What would you have to do for one of the friends you listed above to get upset and turn on you?**

This question should lead students to consider how devoted their friends are to them, and guide them to realize that God is the only One they can trust to be there for them at all times.

› **Is there anything that you could do as a believer in Christ for Jesus to turn His back on you?**

This is where you want to help your students understand the unfailing love of our Savior. He differs from all others because there is nothing we could do that would cause Jesus to love us any less.

› **Jesus lives to intercede for you and He stands in the gap for you. He deserves your all. Does your life reflect your full devotion to Him? What is the evidence?**

If Jesus has done so much for us, why are we sometimes hesitant to live our lives in complete devotion to Him? Reiterate that our actions and any attempts to gain His love or favor are in vain. God stands in the gap for us regardless of our actions, but we should strive to live out of complete and overwhelming love for our Advocate and Intercessor.

## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Conclude your group time with these thoughts and encourage your students to memorize the verse listed this week. Memorizing God's Word allows it to dwell in us and allows Him to speak through His Word in our time of need. Also encourage your group to take advantage of the **Keep on Digging** section and spend some time this week unpacking more of what it means that Jesus is our great High Priest.

› **Dwell:** Only Jesus can provide us salvation. Our salvation depends on Him and Him alone. Since salvation is based on Jesus and His character, we can live faithfully and share the gospel with confidence.

If you have committed your life to Christ, who do you need to tell about Jesus? How can you use what you've learned to help them understand that only Jesus saves?

› **Memorize:** Hebrews 7:25

› **Pray:** Ask Jesus to help you understand the price that was paid for your sin. Pray for Him to give you understanding about His role of Interceder in your life, and the boldness to share with others how they can only receive salvation through Jesus that only Jesus can save them.

› **Keep on Digging:** Jesus has provided our once-and-for-all sacrifice for sin. But there are places in the Scripture that ask for us to make sacrifices. Study these verses below about sacrifices we are to make.

- › Romans 12:1-2
- › Hebrews 13:15-16
- › Psalm 40:6
- › 1 Peter 2:4-10
- › Psalm 51:16-17



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# 8

# A Promise Fulfilled

Hebrews 8:1-13

**1** Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, **2** a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. **3** For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. **4** Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. **5** They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.” **6** But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. **7** For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. **8** For he finds fault with them when he says: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, **9** not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. **10** For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. **11** And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. **12** For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” **13** In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.



# Exploration

## CONTEXT

Begin your session by setting the context for Hebrews 8:1-13. Read through the material below and use what you think will help your students best understand the background of the passages.

In chapter 7, the writer of Hebrews highlighted the connection between Jesus and Melchizedek. A king as well as a priest, Melchizedek offered a helpful way for the writer to discuss the superiority of Jesus as a Christian's High Priest. After providing helpful details about the connection, the writer went on to describe Jesus as a believer's High Priest who put in place God's new covenant with His people.

The writer began his description of Jesus by portraying Him as a king and a priest. As a king, Christ ascended to heaven and is seated at God's right hand. As a priest, Jesus made His way to the tabernacle in heaven that God had established with His own hands. It was the true and original tabernacle that God told Moses to use as a pattern. In heaven, Jesus surpassed all other high priests who served God because of the offering He made once and for all. Jesus opened the door for a perfect priesthood and paved the way for a new covenant.

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God proclaimed the promise of a new covenant between Him and His people. In His proclamation, He asserted that the old covenant had been inadequate, and He placed the fault on the shoulders of His people. They disobeyed Him and ignored the covenant. In response to their disobedience, God allowed them to follow the rebellious path they had chosen for themselves.

But the day would come when God would establish a new covenant with His people. In the new covenant, He would place His laws inside them. They would be transformed spiritually so they could know Him personally. Furthermore, His covenant would not be restricted. Everyone would have an opportunity to walk with Him and experience His tender mercy and complete forgiveness.

## TRANSITION TO INDIVIDUAL STUDY

After you have set the context, move your students into the Exploration time in their Personal Study Guides. There are several different ways that you can lead your students to explore the Scripture.

1. Lead your students to work through all of the Scripture and questions, then discuss their responses together as a group.
2. Guide your students to work through the Scripture and questions one question at a time. Pause for group discussion after each question.

Whichever method you choose, make sure that the students have an opportunity to explore the Scripture for themselves.



# Conversation

After students have completed the Explore section of their Personal Study Guides. Discuss what they discovered as they explored the Scripture. Their quick response questions were:

› **How many times is the word “covenant” used in these verses?**

› **The new covenant that is referenced in verse 8 is from Jeremiah 31:31-34. How was this fulfilled in the New Testament?**

In chapter 8, the writer of Hebrews was focused on helping the people understand how much better the new covenant is in comparison to the old covenant. Make sure your students do not get lost or confused about what the old covenant was and why we needed a new covenant. Take some time to clarify the old and new covenant if there is any confusion among your students.

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➤➤ **ITEM 7 (LEADER PACK)** Use the **Tabernacle** poster for this session and Session 9 if you desire. It will be helpful for students, especially for those who are visual learners. This is also a good transition to talking about the ministry of Jesus in the heavenly tabernacle.

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## HEBREWS 8:1-5

Invite a student to read aloud verses 1-5. Because of the complexity of the verses and the probability that students could get caught up in the words, the questions will focus on Jesus and His ministry for us.

› **Where do these verses say Jesus is right now and what is He doing?**

Use this question to lead into a discussion about where Jesus is and what He is doing. Your students will have a lot of different answers, so do not feel obligated to correct every incorrect response, but allow the Scripture to direct them to the truth. The writer clearly said that Jesus is in heaven sitting at the right hand of the Majesty. This is an incredible word picture! Stress that Jesus is ministering in the holy sanctuary built by the Lord Himself.

Guide students to see that what was commanded and practiced on the earth was a picture of what was going to happen in heaven. Stress that the writer was trying to help his readers see that from the beginning of Scripture, God was pointing to what was to come. The roles that the priests fulfilled in imperfection, Jesus would ultimately fulfill in perfection.

# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 8:1-5

The ministry of the Old Testament priests was very important. With every sacrifice for sin, every drop of blood sprinkled on the altar, every Day of Atonement, every reading of the law, every closing of the curtain, and with the inevitable death of every priest in Israel, the people were to understand that sin demands death, that God is holy, that sin separates, and that something better would come one day. Many godly men and women in the Old Testament wondered for centuries, when would the new covenant come? When would God keep His promises?"

Verses 1-2 remind us that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God (Heb. 1:3). He not only is our High Priest at the right hand of God, but His ministry is also carried out in the heavenly sanctuary. It is unlike the earthly tabernacle in the wilderness and the temple in Jerusalem. Those were only pictures of the true presence of God itself. Whereas Old Testament priests ministered in the earthly tabernacle, Jesus ministers in the full presence of God.

One of the most important things that a priest did was present gifts and offerings of various kinds to God. There were five major offerings: burnt offerings (Lev. 1), grain offerings (Lev. 2), peace offerings (Lev. 3), sin offerings (Lev. 4:1-5:13), and guilt offerings (Lev. 5:14-6:7). Hebrews 8:3-5 teaches us that since Jesus is a priest, then He too must also have something to present to God in the true tabernacle. His ministry is in heaven. If His ministry was earthly (v. 4), then it would not be necessary "since there are already priests who offer gifts according to the Law." This indicates that Hebrews was written before Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70, while the earthly sacrifices were still being offered. There cannot be two divinely appointed priesthoods at the same time. Therefore, since Jesus is the ultimate and perfect High Priest, His ministry is not in the earthly tabernacle, but the true heavenly tabernacle.

Verse 5 quotes Exodus 25:40, in which God told Moses to make the earthly tabernacle exactly as he had been shown on Mt. Sinai. The Old Testament priests served a copy and sketch of the true tabernacle, and their labors pointed beyond themselves and anticipated something greater that would come one day.



The Greek term rendered "minister" means *servant* and initially was used of a person serving in public office. In the New Testament it regularly refers to priestly service to God and service to people.



Levitical high priests continually officiated at a wide variety of offerings; Jesus made one all-sufficient offering. Also, the singular something points to one sacrifice, not many.



The writer quoted God's instructions to Moses concerning the wilderness tabernacle's furnishings to emphasize the Levitical system's function as a figure or outline of heavenly realities.



# Conversation

## › What was Moses warned about as he was completing the tabernacle? Why was that so important?

Guide students to understand that Moses was given strict instructions on how to build the tabernacle on Mt. Sinai. God instructed Moses to build it as a copy of what was already in heaven! It was important because God was showing the Israelites exactly what was going to take place through Jesus over a thousand years later.

## HEBREWS 8:6

Enlist a student to read aloud verse 6. The writer summarized the point of the last five verses and showed us how Jesus' ministry is superior to the high priests and that it has been legally enacted by God Himself.

## › Why is the ministry of Jesus superior to the ministry of the priests?

Explain that the writer is not saying that the ministry of the priests was insignificant or unnecessary. On the contrary, the ministry of the priests was established to give the people a picture of what was to come. When Jesus came as the great High Priest, His ministry was superior because it did what the ministry of the high priests couldn't do: satisfy God's requirement for the reconciliation of sin. Only Jesus could make a once-and-for-all sacrifice for sin and stand in the heavens as the mediator of a better covenant.

## › What do you think it means that the covenant that Jesus is mediating has been legally enacted?

Point out that the new covenant has been put in place through a legal process that carries with it the authority of the One who enacted it. Jesus had the authority to act on our behalf as the sacrifice for sin, which put Him in the place as the mediator of the new covenant. The new covenant is as legally binding as the old. One major difference is that while the old covenant covered our sin, it did not have the power to change hearts. The new covenant would not only change our hearts, but it would also be written on our hearts! The promise of the new covenant was the promise of a relationship with the almighty God that was made possible through Jesus Christ.

# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 8:6

Verse 6 tells us that Jesus' ministry is better in every way, since He is the Priest and Mediator of a better covenant. The new covenant was prophesied of long ago in Jeremiah 31:31-34, and is better than the old covenant because the promises that underlie it are better. That is the point of verses 7-13. God had not forgotten the promise that He made through Jeremiah more than 600 years before Jesus was born. Though it was a mystery exactly how God would do all He'd promised, He said that He would.

## HEBREWS 8:7-13

After reading verse 7, you might wonder why there is a new covenant. Did God make a mistake with the old covenant? This is not the case. Verses 6-8 tell us three things: 1) This new work is a better covenant with better promises, 2) the old covenant through Moses was not without its faults, and yet, 3) the fault did not lie with God, but with the people. God made the old covenant knowing that it would not be eternal.

The old covenant was weak and unable to atone for sin (Heb. 7:18-19; 10:1-4). Yet it was very gracious of God to establish such a covenant in order to teach His people about His holiness, that sin brings death, one's need for atonement, and the need for mediation. We also learn that God is gracious when He provides a way for us to know Him. Further, we see His deep love for us. Throughout the time of the Old Testament, the people came to realize that something more was needed—something perfect and eternal. God provided by giving us the gift of the new covenant and all of its blessings.

Verses 8-12 quote Jeremiah 31:31-34, and is the longest Old Testament quotation in the New Testament, in which the Lord promises that one day there would be a new covenant. Though Jeremiah specifically addressed Israel and Judah, the new covenant is for all who are of “God’s house” (Heb. 3:6). Verse 8 makes clear that the problem was the people’s sin and unbelief (v. 9). We saw this back in Hebrews 3-4.

A radical transformation of both heart and mind is necessary. Our very nature needs to be changed if we are to be God's people. We can't just change by our own strength or effort. God saves us by His grace and we are kept and persevere by His grace. God says that this is His work, and it is not conditional upon whether or not we first get our lives sorted out and cleaned up.



Note the writer's emphasis that God's people were at fault, not His covenant. They were flawed, not the covenant. In light of the people's failure to keep the first covenant, God promised a new one—through the prophet Jeremiah.

[illegible]

The new covenant would be internal, not external. It would not be based on a code of laws, but on transformation of character.



# Conversation

## HEBREWS 8:7-12

The majority of this Scripture comes out of an Old Testament passage found in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Mention that this is the longest Old Testament quote found in the New Testament. The questions focus on the benefits found in the Jeremiah passage and should help students understand how they affect their lives and their personal relationships with Jesus Christ.

› **In this passage, several benefits of the new covenant are listed. Write down at least 2 benefits that the writer references.**

Your students may struggle through this question, but they should be able to pick out at least two benefits. The first benefit is that in the new covenant there will be a heart change. God said that He will write His laws in our hearts. The problem with the old covenant was that it could not change the heart. The new covenant would do what was impossible for the old covenant. Second is the fact that God will never again remember our sins. This will be a hard concept for your students to grasp but it is an vital one for them to understand.

› **Of the benefits that you listed, which one is the hardest for you to grasp and understand? Why?**

Invite a few volunteers to share their answers, then direct them to the promise about God remembering our sins no more. This will give you more time to dig into this important benefit. The phrase *never again remember* means much more than God's not calling to mind believers' sins. Our sins are erased completely. God exercises divine forgetfulness.

## HEBREWS 8:13

› **Write down several demands of the old covenant.**

To ensure that your students understand and comprehend what they are learning, allow a few volunteers to share several demands that they remember from the old covenant.

› **The writer refers to the old covenant as old and about to disappear. What implications come to mind when you think of that language?**

Emphasize that the old covenant served its purpose. The old covenant was never established to save us, but to point to the One who was coming to save us.

# Leader Prep

Verses 10-12 explain the “better promises” on which the new covenant is based (Heb. 8:6). This new work of God transforms each of us by changing our hearts and our very natures, and it provides true atonement and forgiveness for sin. Neither of these things could be accomplished in the old covenant, though they were longed for. The sins of Old Testament believers are atoned for the same way as ours today, by the perfect and once-for-all sacrifice of Christ.

The first promise that God made was to put His laws into our minds and to write them on our hearts. In the old covenant, the laws were written on tablets of stones. In the new covenant, God writes His laws upon our heart (See Deut. 6:6; 10:18; Ps. 40:8.) Therefore, we can obey His will because our hearts have been transformed.

In Jeremiah, the heart is a key concept. In fact, Jeremiah 17:1 says that the sins of the people are engraved on their hearts. Sin runs so deep that it is as if it is chiseled there. Our only hope is the powerful transformation that only Jesus Christ brings. Only the Holy Spirit can “rewrite” the heart of man, by erasing what is written on our hearts, and replacing it with the Word of God. Verse 11 teaches that all new covenant people know God as Lord and Savior. The knowledge of the Lord in Hebrews 8:11 refers to the instruction taught by God for entering the covenant relationship of salvation; it does not eliminate the need for teachers.

The second promise of the new covenant is the assurance of forgiveness (v. 12). God promises mercy, even though punishment is deserved. On the Day of Atonement, sins were supposed to be remembered, year after year, with every sacrifice (Heb. 10:3). Each animal killed was a reminder of sin and its consequences. But now, God has completely forgiven the sins of His people. We may struggle at times to forgive ourselves for something we have said or done, but God faces no such struggle. Verse 12 says that it is as if God “forgets” them—He remembers them no more. Once sins are forgiven, there is no way God’s people will ever be charged with them again. This is a great assurance of salvation—God’s forgiveness is complete and cannot be undone.

Since Jesus is the new covenant sacrifice, then there is no ongoing purpose for the old covenant, but it has been rendered obsolete. In fact, within a few years of when the Book of Hebrews was written, the city of Jerusalem was captured by Rome and the temple was destroyed, thereby putting an end to the sacrifices in A.D. 70.



On the night Jesus was betrayed and arrested, in the context of the Passover meal He instituted a new meal we call the Lord’s Supper. In the course of doing so, He took a cup and said to His disciples: “This cup is the new covenant established by my blood” (Luke 22:20).



# Application

## CENTRAL TRUTH

*Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the new covenant.*

Allow time for your students to discuss the application of the **Central Truth**. What did they learn throughout the lesson that helps them to validate the **Central Truth**? As you move into the **Now What?** section you want to make sure that the students are grasping what they have learned so they can apply it as they work through the **Now What?** section.

## NOW WHAT?

Lead your students through the **Now What?** questions to help them begin to apply the truth that they have learned. At this point what they have learned is knowledge, and we want to help them apply that knowledge so it will turn into wisdom in their lives.

› **Go back and read verses 10-12. Who seems to be the major player of the new covenant?**

Help students see the number of times “I” is used in reference to God in these verses. It is used five times in three verses. God is the initiator of the new covenant.

› **God said that He would write His law on our hearts. What does it mean that God desires to change us from the inside out?**

One of significant differences in the new covenant was that we would be changed from the inside out. It is not morality that makes us right with God, but a changed heart that’s surrendered to Him. Only Jesus can accomplish that in our lives.

› **Is it hard for you to accept that God says He will never again remember our sins? Why?**

This is where students will wrestle with their own humanity and unwillingness to forgive those who have wronged them. Talk to them about the familiar phrase that they may have heard, *I might forgive, but I will never forget*. How does that compare and differ from how God deals with us?

› **What are the sins in your life that God has forgotten about, but you cannot let go of?**

For some students, the act of forgiving themselves may be even more of a struggle than accepting God’s forgiveness. Be sensitive to your students and help them own the forgiveness that Christ has provided for them.

## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Conclude your group time with these thoughts and encourage your students to memorize the verse listed this week. Memorizing God's Word allows it to dwell in us and allows Him to speak through His Word in our times of need. Also, encourage your group to take advantage of the **Keep on Digging** section and spend some time this week unpacking the passage from Jeremiah about the new covenant.

- › **Dwell:** We are unable to keep God's law on our own. Only through faith in Christ can we be set free from sin to live a life that demonstrates righteousness.
- › What insights from this passage could you share with a friend who is trying to change his or her life apart from Christ? What might that person point out to you about your own efforts? What do you need to let Jesus change in your life by trusting in Him and not in yourself?
- › **Memorize:** Hebrews 8:12
- › **Pray:** Today's prayer needs to focus around thanksgiving. Thank God for promising a new covenant that would change your life. Thank God that He desired to write His law on your heart. Thank God that He promised to remember your sins no more. Thank God that all of this was made possible through our great High Priest, Jesus Christ.
- › **Keep on Digging:** Read Jeremiah 31:27-34. Jeremiah had been telling the people for 29 chapters that Babylon was coming to destroy the city and take them into captivity due to the many sins of Judah. But a day of salvation was going to come! The people would be restored to their homeland and God's mercy would triumph!
  - › How many times does God say "I will" in verses 31-34?
  - › List out the things God says that He will do.
  - › Explain how God has done each one of these things He promised to do.



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# The Perfect Sacrifice

Hebrews 9:11-15

**11** But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation)

**12** he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. **13** For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, **14** how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

**15** Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.



# Exploration

## CONTEXT

Begin your session by setting the context for Hebrews 9:11-15. Read through the material below and use what you think will help your students best understand the background of the passages.

The writer of Hebrews used the tabernacle as an illustration to explain the new covenant that centered in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice. To the original recipients, probably Jewish Christians, the tabernacle was a helpful illustration because it was a respected place of worship for God's people. The writer showed that the animal sacrifices offered at the tabernacle could not rid anyone of sin. Only the precious blood of Christ makes the removal of sin possible (Heb. 9:1-15).

In Hebrews 9:16-18, the writer turned to the analogy of a last will and testament to show that Christ had to die in order for believers to receive the inheritance God had promised them. The writer followed the same line of reasoning when he insisted that blood had to be shed in order for sins to be forgiven. That's why only Jesus' blood makes a person right with God. Christ's blood sacrifice on our behalf has removed our sin once and for all (Heb. 9:16-28).

Pointing to the tabernacle once more, the writer warned believers again that their sins could not be removed by sacrificing animals. Christ's death on the cross was the only sufficient sacrifice. God, in His holiness, required that atonement be made for sin, and animal sacrifices couldn't provide it, only Christ's perfect sacrifice on the cross could. The writer went on to validate his assertion about Jesus with Old Testament passages that clearly affirmed God's way of forgiveness (Heb. 10:1-18).

## TRANSITION TO INDIVIDUAL STUDY

After you have set the context, move your students into the Exploration time in their Personal Study Guides. There are several different ways that you can lead your students to explore the Scripture.

1. Lead your students to work through all of the Scripture and questions, then discuss their responses together as a group.
2. Guide your students to work through the Scripture and questions one question at a time. Pause for group discussion after each question.

Whichever method you choose, make sure that the students have an opportunity to explore the Scripture for themselves.



# Conversation

Direct one of your students to read Hebrews 9:11-5 aloud. Allow time for your students to discuss some of their thoughts about the passage. Their quick response questions were:

- › **Go back and read verses 1-10. This will give you a good foundation to understand the verses we are going to study.**
- › **After reading the previous verses, what did you see was necessary for the priests to have to perform the sacrifice?**

As a group skim over Hebrews 9:1-10. Lead students to discuss how those verses relate to today's passage. Have your students respond to the second question. There will be several possible answers that they could give after reading, but guide them to the answer of blood. Verse 7 refers to the priest never entering the holy of holies without blood. This will be important as you talk about Jesus entering the heavenly holy of holies with His blood.

## HEBREWS 9:11

Enlist a student to read verse 11 aloud. The writer of Hebrews is going to begin his conversation around the comparison of the earthly tabernacle that was discussed in verses 1-10 and the new heavenly tabernacle.

- › **The writer says that Jesus appeared as High Priest of the good things that have come. What do you think are the good things the writer is referring to?**

Guide your students to reflect back on last week's session. The good things the writer referred to are the promises that came with the new covenant. God promised that He would write His laws in our minds and in our hearts and that He would remember our sins no more.

- › **What was greater and more perfect about the new tabernacle as compared to the old?**

Help students understand that the Builder is what made the difference and caused the new tabernacle to be so much greater! The old tabernacle was built by the hands of sinful men, but the new tabernacle is built by the hands of God Himself!

# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 9:11-12

The differences between what Jesus has accomplished with His sacrifice and what the Old Testament priests did is evident in Hebrews 9:6-10. Their sacrifices were many, whereas His was just offered once. Their sacrifices cleansed externally, but while the blood of Jesus cleanses the believer internally down to the level of his or her conscience. The end result is service to the living God! Further, the redemption that comes in Jesus Christ also leads to the promise of the future inheritance. As sons and daughters of God, we have received an eternal inheritance.

Hebrews 9:8-9 tell us that the Holy Spirit had a great purpose in all of these Old Testament practices and priestly duties. The regulations of the sanctuary have a profound meaning! The sacrifices were symbolic of something far greater. These things were commanded in the Old Testament so that in the fullness of time the people of God would understand the point of the sacrificial system. The old sacrifices could offer nothing for the mind and heart, but were merely external and temporary symbols. Only Jesus supplies what is internal, permanent, and the true atoning sacrifice.

This is the “time of reformation” (verse 10), now that Christ has appeared (verse 11). Why continue with something symbolic when the real thing has arrived? One is laid aside for the other. All of history has changed now that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, lived a perfect life, has died, and been raised to life.

This change is highlighted in verse 11 within the phrase, “But when Christ appeared.” Jesus came to earth and took on the form of a man (Phil. 2:5-11), which is what we refer to as the “incarnation.” In doing so, all of history changed. This divides the Old Testament and its practices (9:1-10) from the New (vv. 1-28). The “good things that have come,” refers to the better promises of the New Covenant (Heb. 8:6, Heb. 10-12). Some translations say “good things to come,” as if they are not already here, but the best rendering of this phrase is that the good things have already come.

The main idea of verses 11-12 is “Christ entered the holy place.” This holy place is the right hand of God, where Christ ministers (Heb. 1:2; Heb8:1-2). Christ entered the holy of holies (holy place) by means of His own sacrifice, not by means of the blood of animals like the Old Covenant priests. Also, He entered into the true Holy Place – the very presence of God. The earthly tabernacle and the sacrifices were designed to foreshadow the work of Christ.



Through His selfless ministry, atoning death, victorious resurrection, and exaltation to God’s right hand, Christ became high priest of the good things that have come (“good things to come,” KJV; “the good things that are already here,” NIV). The phrase, “the good things” could refer to cleansing from sin and access to God.

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In contrast to the Levitical high priests, Christ did not take sacrificial animals’ blood to sprinkle on a mercy seat. He offered His own blood. In New Testament usage, the word blood stood for life. Because “the blood is the life” (Deut. 12:23), animals or humans, to shed blood was to give life. For Christ to offer His blood meant He freely sacrificed His life on our behalf.



# Conversation

## HEBREWS 9:12

Ask for a volunteer to read verse 12 aloud. This is a pivotal verse in this session. Make sure that you spend sufficient time guiding students to understand what the writer wants us to see in this verse.

### › What was the purpose of Jesus entering the holy of holies?

The priests of the old covenant would enter the holy of holies once a year on the Day of Atonement. Their purpose was to offer the blood sacrifice that was required to atone for the sins of the people. Jesus entered the heavenly holy of holies once and for all. He did not enter with the blood of bulls and goats, but with His own precious blood. As He entered the most holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us, He made the ultimate sacrifice to satisfy God's wrath and deliver us from sin.

### › What image comes to mind when you think of Jesus entering the holy of holies with His own blood having obtained eternal redemption?

This is a great time to create some incredible images of what it must have been like for Jesus to enter the most holy of places having paid the ultimate price for the salvation of humanity. Use your imagination as you think about how you view Jesus entering the heavenly tabernacle. Do you see a worn warrior, or a triumphant conqueror? Lead your students to share their thoughts and guide them to see Jesus accomplishing an unbelievable feat for them.

## HEBREWS 9:13-14

Ask for a student to read verses 13-14. In these verses students will have the opportunity through these to really see the difference between the result of the animal sacrifice and the result of Jesus' sacrifice.

### › What does the writer of Hebrews say was the only thing that the sacrifice offered by the priests could accomplish?

In the sacrificial system, God's people participated in worship practices that involved blood and ashes. Through these rituals, they would be purified, but only on the outside. The blood and ashes cleansed the flesh, demonstrate that a person had been ceremonially cleansed. However, blood and ashes couldn't do anything to make a person clean on the inside. The person was still the sinful person before and after the ceremony. Something else had to be done in order for people to be made spiritually pure in their relationship with God.

# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 9:13-14

These two verses logically follow verses 11-12. If animal sacrifices could sanctify on an external level, how much deeper is Jesus' cleansing of the heart? In the Old Testament, there was an external element of cleansing that occurred each Day of Atonement, yet it cleansed only the flesh (Heb. 9:9-10). Yet in the new covenant, God cleanses and transforms our hearts and minds. This reminds us that salvation is only found in Christ. All other world religions fall short because they are not gracious—they require the person to do all kinds of things in order to be right with their god or gods. Only Jesus Christ can cleanse the very conscience and soul of anyone. Further, Jesus has secured eternal redemption for us, how can it ever be lost as some teach?

Hebrews 9:13 refers to a purification ritual in Numbers 19 involving the "ashes of a cow." God commanded the ritual instructing the Israelites to burn a red cow with no defect outside the camp. A ceremonially clean man would then gather the ashes and store them. Whenever someone became ceremonially unclean, the priest would sprinkle that person with some of the ashes mixed with water. This externally cleansed the defiled unclean person. As a result, it sanctified them as being pure from that sin.

Jesus' self sacrifice introduced a new kind of cleansing—internal and external. This cleansing calls believers to obedient service to God. Once there is an internal change, the tabernacle and its rituals are no longer necessary. Likewise when this transformation occurs at the point of salvation, we no longer strive to do something to earn eternal life.



The reference to "the blood of goats and bulls" in verse 12 likely referred to the sacrifices offered on the Day of Atonement.



Leviticus 16:7-16 gave instructions concerning two goats to be used in the ceremony. One goat was chosen by lot to be sacrificed as a sin offering. The other goat was sent into the wilderness, symbolizing the sending away of the people's sins.



The phrase *the ashes of a young cow* ("the ashes of an heifer," KJV; "the ashes of a heifer," NIV; ESV) referred to the ritual of cleansing outlined in Numbers 19. God instructed Moses and Aaron to have the people bring them a red cow that had no defect and that never had been yoked. It was to be slaughtered in a priest's presence and burned completely, with cedar wood, hyssop, and crimson yarn thrown into the fire.



# Conversation

› In verse 14, what does the writer say the sacrifice Jesus offered was able to accomplish?

Ceremonial cleansing fails to make us right with God. Such bad news sheds a gleaming light on the good news of Jesus the Messiah who came to earth in keeping with God's promise. The blood of Jesus Christ alone cleanses us on the inside. Christ came to offer Himself as a sacrifice in our place. By dying on the cross, He paid our ransom so that we could be set free from our slavery to sin. With His blood, He cleanses us on the inside and makes us spiritually pure before God.

## HEBREWS 9:15

The writer begins this verse with a "therefore" so we know that he is summing up the importance of the truth that has been taught in the preceding verses. Direct your students attention to the quick response questions for Hebrews 9:15 in their Personal Study Guide:

› What does this verse say we are qualified for if we are called by Christ into salvation?

Discuss with students what an eternal inheritance means to them and allow time for discussion. Use the **Leader Prep** information to guide and direct the conversation. Stress that because of what Christ has done for us we receive forgiveness, can live in His presence, know that He cares for us, and can be assured we will spend eternity with Him.

› What has to take place before an inheritance can be realized? How has this been accomplished through Christ?

Direct students attention to verses 16-17 in their Bibles. Use the information in **Leader Prep** to help them understand the verses. The writer created a picture of what took place so that we could benefit from our heavenly inheritance. For a will to be valid, the person who wrote the will has to die. Simply put, someone has to die for the will take effect. Jesus Christ died on our behalf and it was at His death that the will became valid. The difference between a relative who may die and leave you something in his\her will and Jesus is that Jesus died and rose again! Our heavenly Father died for us and is alive standing in the heavens, mediating on our behalf.

## HEBREWS 9:15

The new covenant has been made possible through Christ, our Mediator. God's people knew that a sacrifice had to be offered for their sins. For that reason, an animal had to be brought to the tabernacle and slain. Jesus' death on the cross serves as the perfect, final, and complete sacrifice for sin. No other sacrifice for sin will ever have to be made.



# Application

## CENTRAL TRUTH

*It is only through Jesus' perfect sacrifice that I am made right with God.*

Direct students to discuss the **Central Truth** and what it means in their daily lives. You may want to review the sacrifices of the old covenant and their accomplishments and discuss how Jesus' sacrifice is different. The goal of this session is that students gain a clear understanding of why Jesus' sacrifice was the only perfect sacrifice.

## NOW WHAT?

Lead your students through the **Now What?** questions to help them begin to apply the truth that they have learned. At this point, what they have learned is knowledge and we want to help them apply that knowledge so it will become wisdom in their lives.

- › What do you find yourself doing to try to earn the favor and forgiveness of Jesus?
- › Is there anything you can do to cause Jesus to love you any more than He does right now? Explain.
- › List a few things you are doing to try to earn the love and favor of God that you need to stop doing.
- › List a few steps you'll take to start living in freedom and His forgiveness this week.

This session's **Now What?** section is designed to help your students understand the application of the perfect sacrifice that Jesus provided. Walk through the questions with your students and allow them time to respond. These are questions and answers that need to be proclaimed and owned in our lives. Students, as well as adults, will continue to attempt to earn God's love and favor until they understand the overwhelming, life-changing power of Jesus' perfect sacrifice on our behalf.

## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Conclude your group time with these thoughts and encourage your students to memorize the verse listed below. Memorizing God's Word allows it to dwell in us and allows Him to speak through His Word in our times of need. Also, encourage your students to take advantage of the **Keep on Digging** section in the Personal Study Guide and spend some time this week unpacking more of what it means that Jesus is our perfect sacrifice.

› **Dwell:** Jesus has made our redemption possible through His death and resurrection. To redeem a slave means to pay the price necessary to set a him or her free from slavery. When Christ gave Himself for us, He liberated us from spiritual slavery to our transgressions. Transgressing involves crossing a line. We deserve to be punished for crossing the line and sinning against God. Instead of punishing us, God has chosen to forgive us if we put our trust in His Son. The first covenant can't address our sins in that way, and people still living under it need to be redeemed. Only the new covenant provides a way to be set free from sin's slavery.

› **Memorize:** Hebrews 9:15

› **Pray:** Ask Jesus to forgive you for your futile efforts to gain His love and favor. Thank Him for offering the perfect sacrifice for your sins and qualifying you for the eternal inheritance. Thank Him for serving as your heavenly mediator and commit yourself to be an ambassador for the gospel.

› **Keep on Digging:** How were the Old Testament believers saved by Jesus Christ if they did not know all that we know about Jesus at the time when they lived? Explore the following verses:

- › 1 Peter 1:10-12
- › Romans 3:25-26
- › Genesis 15:5-6
- › Hebrews 11:1-2,39-40



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# 10

# Faith is?

Hebrews 11:1-6

**1** Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. **2** For by it the people of old received their commendation. **3** By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. **4** By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. **5** By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. **6** And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.



# Exploration

## CONTEXT

Begin your session by setting the context for Hebrews 11:1-6. Read through the material below and use what you think will help your students best understand the background of the passages.

The blood of Jesus Christ guarantees believers personal access to God. Therefore, the only real choice was for them to give themselves to Christ with confidence. In light of such an incredible reality, the writer of Hebrews encouraged Christians to keep on trusting Jesus. He also urged them to promote love and persistence in their fellowship with other believers. If they kept on trusting the Lord, they would be able to endure. However, if they chose to walk away from a faith in Christ, they would suffer serious consequences. God does not tolerate evil actions of deliberate rebellion. If they took that path, He would hold them accountable, and His judgment would be severe (Heb. 10:19-31).

Persecution had obviously brought on tough times that had frightened believers who read the Epistle of Hebrews. Apparently, they were on the verge of deserting Christ. The writer reminded them that they had endured persecution in the past, and should continue to press on. Their enduring faith would compel them to keep on standing firm in Him as they faced the difficult days to come (Heb. 10:38-39).

Instead of focusing on the audience's painful circumstances, the writer encouraged them to focus on the value of trusting the Lord in all things. He began by defining faith in terms that would reveal why it would be wise for them to live by it. Next, he gave them some persuasive examples of people who trusted God in the face of challenging ordeals. Drawing from the Old Testament, he brought to mind three of their spiritual ancestors: Abel, Enoch, and Noah. Then, he recounted the faith of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Joseph. He reminded them that Moses and others after him trusted God as they guided His people into the promised land. Finally, the writer listed others whose faith in the Lord enabled them to experience victory. The writer wanted his audience to realize that faith in God strengthened others to stand firm as they endured extreme hardships (Heb. 11:1-40).

## TRANSITION TO INDIVIDUAL STUDY

After you have set the context, move your students into the Exploration time in their Personal Study Guides. There are several different ways that you can lead your students to explore the Scripture.

1. Lead your students to work through all of the Scripture and questions, then discuss their responses together as a group.
2. Guide your students to work through the Scripture and questions one question at a time. Pause for group discussion after each question.

Whichever method you choose, make sure that the students have an opportunity to explore the Scripture for themselves.



# Conversation

Direct one of your students to read verses 1-6 aloud, then work through the questions below, calling for a few volunteers to share their responses. As you discuss the student's definition of faith, write a few of them on a white board or larger sheet of paper.

› **Write down your definition of faith without looking at the verses.**

› **After reading the verses, how does your definition of faith differ from the definition of faith found in the Scriptures?**

Today's session covers some familiar passages of Scripture that your students have probably heard or studied before. To start the conversation, invite a few students to write their definition of faith on a large sheet of paper or on a white board. Engage them in a discussion of how their definitions differ from the scriptural definition. Encourage students to embrace the definition found in Scripture and challenge them to be reading God's Word for help in understanding what it means to live out a biblical faith.

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➤➤ **ITEM 8 (LEADER PACK)** Display the **Hebrews 11** poster somewhere everyone will be able to see it before your group meets. You may just use this as a visual reminder for them about faith, or you might want to hang it on a dry erase board and list the two main words from the activity below to the side of the poster. Think about what will work best for your group of students.

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## HEBREWS 11:1

Enlist a student to read verse 1. Chapter 11 begins with probably one of the most quoted verses in all of Hebrews. This verse will help guide the rest of our study.

› **The writer uses two main points in verse 1 to define faith. Write down those 2 points.**

The two points that you ideally want your students to write down are *reality* and *proof*. Faith is not the hope of things hoped for, but the *reality* of things hoped for. There is a big difference between reality and hope. Challenge students to discuss the differences. Most students will think that faith is divine hope or that we can rely on Jesus to become our Miracle Worker when things get tough. Faith is not hope, but it is reality! *Proof* is the other word that you want to emphasize in this section. The writer said that faith becomes the *proof* of those things we cannot see. Guide your students to recognize that faith does not reside in our ability to believe great things, but it rests in Jesus' reliability to accomplish what He promised. We are not faithful people, but Jesus is faithful. It is imperative that students understand this because if we are not careful, we will begin living in our strength rather than the all-powerful strength of Jesus.

# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 11:1

Faith is central to all of Hebrews, not just chapter 11. Chapter 11 is meant to encourage and challenge us. Because of our common faith, we are linked with those who believed before Christ came (Heb.11:1- 2, 39-40). All of us are saved the same way: by faith. In fact, as you read this chapter, you will notice that the phrase “by faith” is repeated throughout. Since those in Hebrews 11 have endured until the end, we can too! Their example encourages us to press on, since all of us are in need of endurance (Heb.10:36).

The main point of Hebrews is the supremacy of Christ. Because of the superiority of the person and work of Christ, the high priest of the New Covenant, true believers must—and certainly will—endure until the end. Chapter 11 was written to exhort believers to continue in faith until the end. Some were tempted to go back to the former way of life. As a pastor, the writer reminded them that their faith in Christ used to be strong. Some of them had been imprisoned for believing in Jesus, while others had their possessions and property seized (Heb.10:32-34). Hebrews 11 tells them, and us as well, that many others have also walked the hard road of faith.

Verse 1 includes a good definition of faith. Faith has always marked God's people and is the difference between a person receiving God's approval (salvation) or God's destruction (Heb.10:38-39). The writer of Hebrews offered a two part definition. First, faith is the confidence of what is hoped for. This is a firm conviction concerning the promises of God, knowing that He will do what He says He will do. Second, faith is confidence in God's promises, even though we cannot see them. For example, God promised Abraham that he would have countless descendants. He had faith in God's promise (Gen. 15:6), even though both he and Sarah were beyond childbearing age.



The Greek word rendered “faith” in 11:1 means *conviction, belief, trust, or confidence*.

[illegible]

The Greek word translated “reality” can mean a *placing under, foundation, firmness, or substance*.



# Conversation

› **How would you explain faith to someone who is not a Christian? If you are still unsure of your own faith, ask a minister at your church to discuss this with you.**

As you wrap up this point, remind students of the discussion you have just had about reality and proof. Help students think about their faith and how they would explain it to a friend or family member who has not trusted Jesus as their Savior. Jesus laid down His life for us and paid for the forgiveness of our sins, therefore we should believe Him! He is reliable and trustworthy, so our faith should reflect how we view Jesus, not how we view our ability to believe something could happen. Help your students be prepared to not only know what faith is, but also equip them to be prepared to explain their own faith in Jesus with someone who might not be a Christian.

## HEBREWS 11:2-3

Direct students attention to Hebrews 11:2-3. In these verses, the writer moved to the first of several illustrations used to describe what it means to live by faith. Challenge students to identify the first illustration in verse 3: creation. This may be a sensitive subject for some of your students because of their exposure to evolution, Big Bang theory, or some other view of creation. Be mindful of this as you're preparing and approach this session carefully, but also do not back away from the truth of God's Word.

› **Why do you think the writer uses the illustration of creation as the starting point for describing what it means to live by faith?**

Encourage your students to share their answers to this question. This will be a great way for them to begin thinking about what faith really is. The issue of creation gets at the heart of what we believe about God. Either God is trustworthy and true, or He is not. If we believe that God is trustworthy and true, then we will have no problem believing that He spoke everything into creation. If we question the biblical account of creation, then we question the trustworthiness of God.

› **How does creation serve as a great illustration for the definition of faith?**

What does believing in creation have to do with *reality* and *proof*? Guide students to understand that the truth of biblical creation resides in the fact that the reality of creation is not our ability to understand it, but our ability to believe in a God who is reliable. Explain that the proof of creation is not that we can discover enough scientific evidence to validate what the Bible says, but that we believe what the Bible says because we believe in the reliability of its Author. The proof that the creation account is true is that God said it happened that way!

# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 11:2-3

Verse 3 drives us back to creation itself. Although we cannot see how God created all things, we believe that He did. Genesis 1-2 teaches us that God spoke, and it was done. We cannot speak something into existence, yet this is the power of God. Hebrews 11 makes it clear that God created the world from nothing. He did not take parts and pieces that already existed and put them together like a giant, cosmic puzzle. God brought what is visible out of nothing. If God can do this, then is anything too difficult for Him?

Even so, many people deny that the universe could have been created by a God who is all-powerful, all-knowing, good, loving, holy, and kind. Some prefer to believe that another god or collection of gods were in control when the universe came into being, while many others simply believe that the world came to be as a result of a massive cosmic explosion. Yet, when we look at the complexity and wonder of the universe, we see that there is design and purpose. Such things cannot, by definition, just appear as a result of the Big Bang Design. Intention and purpose are marks of a Creator. God made what we see, and He did so simply by declaring it to be. Further, remember that Jesus upholds all things in the universe by His powerful Word (Heb. 1:2). In short, our God is in control, since He created and sustains it all! Eyes of faith look at the creation and respond with wonder, worship, and belief in the Creator.

Our faith is not blind—it stands on the very nature and person of God, and what He has done. It never stands on what we have done! Further, we do not have faith in faith. Faith has a specific content and object—truths that are real and not abstract. It is not biblical faith merely to have faith in something, so long as you have faith. No—we believe very specific things that God Himself has said through His prophets and His Son (Heb 1:1-2). God has spoken! God’s Word is to be trusted and relied upon. This is biblical faith, and this is what pleases God.



The writer of Hebrews described faith in terms of trusting God with the confident assurance the blessings He promised are real and the events He has announced are certain.

[illegible]



# Conversation

## HEBREWS 11:4-5

Explain to the students that after laying a basic foundation in verses 1-3, the writer of Hebrews began to move chronologically through the Old Testament, drawing out some of the greatest “heroes of the faith.” He wanted to encourage his original audience—and us—by highlighting examples of those who have endured faithfully throughout history. Direct attention to verses 4-5 and lead a discussion of the first question.

### › How does Abel’s faith still speak from the grave?

Explain that Cain and Abel are the first siblings mentioned in the Bible. It isn’t all that surprising that they did not get along with each other because Cain’s heart was turned against God, and Abel’s was turned toward obedience. Stress that each of the brothers’ actions revealed the conditions of their hearts. Abel’s heart caused him to give an acceptable sacrifice, while Cain’s rebellion ended in murder. Abel’s message to us is that God desires obedience more than sacrifice. God wants our hearts.

### › What information did Enoch have in his life to base his understanding of who God was? Do you think we have more or less information than Enoch had?

Point out that Enoch’s story is an incredible testimony of a faithful walk with God. Students find this story interesting because of the circumstances surrounding the end of Enoch’s life. The writer says that Enoch was walking one day, and then he was with God! The question for all of us is, how could he have been so close to God that he just walked into His presence? The only revelation that he would have had was oral tradition. Stories passed down from his parents about the faithfulness of God. Direct the conversation by asking: How much more do we have than Enoch? How does your walk with God compare to his?

## HEBREWS 11:6

### › Why do you think it is impossible to please God without faith?

Again, the writer ended this group of Scriptures with a declaration that something was impossible. He declared that it is impossible to please God without faith. Let students wrestle with that concept. Help students to understand that we begin our journey with God by believing in something we have never physically seen. It is the epitome of faith.

### › What two things must we believe if we are going to draw near to God?

State that verse 6 is very straight forward about what we must do to draw near to God. We must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 11:4-6

In obedience to God, Adam and Eve had two children, Cain and Abel. (Gen. 1:26-28). They each brought an offering to God. Abel brought an offering from his flock, while Cain brought some of his produce. Abel brought the very first portion of his flock, as well as the fat portions, which were considered to be the best (Gen. 4:4). Nothing is mentioned about Cain's offering, other than the Lord "had no regard for it" (Gen. 4:5). Therefore, Abel's offering was accepted by God while Cain's was rejected.

God had favor not just on Abel's offering, but on Abel himself (Gen. 4:4-5). The Lord knew Abel's heart was one of humble faith and obedience, thus Abel "received commendation" from the Lord (Heb. 12:2). In contrast, Cain, as well as his offering, was "rejected by God." In the same way that God looked on Abel's heart and lauded his faith and trust in Him, He also looked upon Cain and saw that such faith and trust were absent. Cain's actions were filled with a jealous rage that pushed him to slaughter his brother. Cain committed this murderous act despite the fact that God mercifully warned him (Gen. 4:6-7). Yet he ignored God's warning (Gen. 4:8). This act of violence displays the stark difference between a heart of faith and a faithless heart guided by sin. Abel's sacrificial offering was his outward expression of faith, while murder was the expression of Cain's lack of faith. Actions reveal the true condition of the heart. Abel was a righteous man, and the righteous live by faith (Heb. 10:38). His testimony of faithfulness still speaks to us today.

Next, we come to the example of Enoch in verse 5. Enoch is mentioned as one of the descendants of Adam in Genesis 5:19-24. He is the son of Jared, the father of Methuselah (who is the oldest man recorded in the Bible, 969 years old!) "walked with God" and he did not die. Instead, God "took him" at the age of 365 (Gen. 5:24).

Hebrews 11 helps us to understand that Enoch found favor with God. Twice in three verses Moses wrote that Enoch "walked with God" (Gen. 4:22, 24). Like Abel, Enoch's faith was demonstrated in a life characterized by righteousness. The examples of verses 4-5 bring to mind a general principle that all who live by faith know to be true. Since faith pleases God, not having faith makes pleasing God impossible! Logically, if we are to draw near to God, we must believe He actually exists! Biblical faith believes certain and specific things. God is the Everlasting God who has revealed Himself to us in His perfect Word.



The accounts in Genesis 4:1-10 and Hebrews 11:4 reminds us that each of us will leave a legacy that extends beyond death.

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The Greek term for "was taken away" means *was transferred, transported, translated out of the world, changed*.



People of faith can rise above the growing mediocrity that characterizes our time, as Enoch did in his day. A close, well-tended relationship with God will produce spiritual excellence that offers strong testimony concerning God's ability to give eternal life.



# Application

## CENTRAL TRUTH

*It is impossible to please God without faith.*

Allow time for your students to discuss the application of the **Central Truth**. During their discussion help them see that pleasing God isn't about doing something; it is about believing something. Don't let your students slip into a mentality that they have to earn God's favor. God is pleased when we believe Him and His word with faith.

## NOW WHAT?

Lead your students through the **Now What?** questions to help them begin to apply the truth that they have learned. At this point what they have learned is knowledge and we want to help them apply that knowledge so it will turn into wisdom in their lives.

- › **Go back to the definition of faith that you wrote down at the beginning of the session. How has your definition of faith changed based on what you have learned today?**
- › **In what area of your life do you struggle to believe that Jesus is enough?**
- › **What do you regularly find yourself doing that sabotages living a life of faith?**
- › **What do you need to do today to have faith that Jesus is all you need in every area of your life?**

The direction of the **Now What?** section today is to get your students to understand that living a life of faith is not just believing abstract theological concepts that they do not relate to every day. Instead it is about believing that Jesus is enough for every aspect of their lives. Whether your students are dealing with body image issues, relationship issues, or parental issues Jesus is enough!

## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Finish your group time with these thoughts and encourage your students to memorize the verse listed this week. Memorizing God's Word allows it to dwell in us and allows Him to speak through His Word in our times of need. Also, encourage your group to take advantage of the **Keep on Digging** section and spend some time this week unpacking more of what it means that Jesus is our perfect sacrifice.

› **Dwell:** Having faith in Jesus is not limited to salvation. So many times we believe that Jesus is enough for salvation, but we fail to believe that Jesus is enough for our struggle for identity. We tend to struggle and do not believe that Jesus is enough when we have a horrible relationship with our mom or dad. The truth is that faith in Jesus is the answer to all of those issues and more.

› **Memorize:** Hebrews 11:6

› **Pray:** Let your prayer focus around trusting in who Jesus says He is. Faith is about having a growing understanding of who He is. Ask Jesus to show you more of Him than He ever has before. Ask Him to give you a revelation of His glory that will cause you to become a person of great faith, not because you are a great person, but because He is a great Savior.

› **Keep on Digging:** The remainder of Hebrews 11 speaks of many other faithful ones who have gone on before us. In your spare time this week, choose several of the following examples of faith to read about in the Old Testament.

- › Abraham and Sarah – Genesis 12:1-9; 17:1-27; 22:1-10
- › Isaac – Genesis 27:1-45
- › Jacob – Genesis 48:8-22; 49:1-27
- › Joseph – Genesis 50:24-25
- › Moses – Exodus 2:11-14; 3:1-4:17; 12:1-32
- › Rahab – Joshua 2:9-11



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# 11

# Strength to Carry On

Hebrews 12:1-2

**1** Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **2** looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.



# Exploration

## CONTEXT

Begin your session by setting the context for Hebrews 12:1-2. Read through the material below and use what you think will help your students best understand the background of the passages.

Believers under persecution had to continue trusting Jesus. In order to reinforce that crucial mandate, the writer of Hebrews provided a list of individuals in the Old Testament who had been faithful to God in Hebrews 11. In Hebrews 12, he urged Christians to follow the example of those heroes of the faith. The writer of Hebrews was writing to encourage believers to keep trusting Christ. To do so, he compared trusting the Lord to running a race. The image highlighted the need for believers to get rid of anything that prevented them from pursuing Christ. Also, this passage instructed them to keep their eyes on Jesus as they ran. He alone deserved their undivided attention. He ran the race perfectly and took His rightful seat at God's throne (Heb. 12:1-3).

The writer also stressed that these believers should embrace God's perspective on their suffering. They could endure hardship because they belonged to Him. Calling attention to Proverbs 3:11-12, the writer reminded these believers that the Lord was like a father who wanted His sons to learn endurance. For that reason, He disciplined them. In the midst of trials and tough times, these Christians may have come to believe that the Lord didn't care about them, but He continued to love them in the midst of their suffering. His love for them moved Him to discipline them so they would grow toward spiritual maturity. While God's discipline was painful, it would have a positive effect on their maturity and strengthen their faith in Him (Heb. 12:4-11).

Therefore, Christians under fire had no better choice than to keep on moving ahead in their relationship with Jesus. Instead of being paralyzed by difficulty, they should be determined to keep trusting Him in all trials and difficult times (Heb. 12:12-13).

## TRANSITION TO INDIVIDUAL STUDY

After you have set the context, move your students into the Exploration time in their Personal Study Guides. There are several different ways that you can lead your students to explore the Scripture.

1. Lead your students to work through all of the Scripture and questions, then discuss their responses together as a group.
2. Guide your students to work through the Scripture and questions one question at a time. Pause for group discussion after each question.

Whichever method you choose, make sure that the students have an opportunity to explore the Scripture for themselves.



# Conversation

Invite a volunteer to read verses 1-2 aloud. Guide students to discuss their answers to the two quick response questions at the very beginning of the session in their Personal Study Guides:

› **What area of your life do you find that you need the most encouragement?**

› **What would you find the most difficult about running a marathon? Would you rather run a marathon or series of sprints? Why?**

The purpose of these group questions is to get your students to think about how the Christian life is like running a race. In running a race, we need encouragement to finish, a clear view of the finish line, and a motivation that is greater than our victory. In the Christian life, Jesus provides all of that for us. Your students should walk away from today's session with the encouragement they need to run the race with endurance.

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›› **ITEM 9** (LEADER PACK) Athletes used running stones to help improve their momentum. Briefly explain this concept to your students, then direct their attention to the **Running Stones** poster.

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## HEBREWS 12:1

Call for a volunteer to read verse 1. The first two questions will address the first half of the verse, while the last two will deal with the last half of the verse. Begin to debrief what students have learned by turning their attention to the great cloud of witnesses.

› **Who do you think the writer is referring to when he mentions the great cloud of witnesses?**

Allow your students some time to answer this question and discuss it together. It will be interesting to see if any of them remember what you talked about last session when you were looking at Hebrews 11.

Direct the conversation by pointing out the word “therefore” at the beginning of the verse. Remind students that this word was used to summarize the point of the previous verses. Explain that Hebrews 12:1 is the beginning of the summary of all of chapter 11. The “therefore” points back to all of the people of faith who have gone before us. Everyone that chapter 11 talks about is in the great cloud of witnesses noted in Hebrews 12:1. As the writer began to encourage the church, he basically said that because we have such a great group of people of faith who have gone before us, their example is a reminder we can live a victorious Christian life. It is an awesome thought and also humbling. Challenge students to look back at chapter 11 and note all the names mentioned there. Lead a discussion of why it's encouraging that Enoch, Noah, Abel, Abraham, and Joseph all stand as our examples in the faith.





# Conversation

## › What do you think the purpose of the great group of witnesses is in our lives?

Encourage students to discuss this great cloud of witnesses and you might have paper available for them to sketch what they imagine when they read this verse. Explain that the writer used figurative language to help us understand the purpose of this group of witnesses. It is as if the saints who have gone on before us, the heroes of the faith that have given their lives for the sake of Christ, are surrounding us and cheering us on! Their lives stand as a testimony of faith and encourage us to run the race with vigor and endurance. Specifically mention some of the people the Scriptures say are in the crowd. Read aloud Hebrews 11:37. Help them to understand that there are many in the grandstands of heaven who were martyred for their commitment to God who are now cheering us on. That should really cause us to examine our lives and what it is we are attempting to accomplish for Christ.

## › What do you think it means to lay aside the weight of sin that entangles us? What image does that language create in your mind?

Moving into the directive of Scripture, stress that because we have this great group of saints to encourage us, we should do something about it! The first thing that we are instructed to do is to lay aside the weight and the sin that weigh us down. Point out that the writer's race illustration is in its fullest use here. Help students understand that to live the Christian life, we have to put off everything that would slow us down. Talk together about what that might be. Help students see that this is not referring to the "big" sins that we tend to avoid, but the small ones that we do not pay much attention to, like lying, cursing, and slander, just to name a few. These may not be sins that would keep us from running, but they will definitely slow us down.

## › The Scripture compares the Christian life to running a race. How does the writer say we are supposed to run?

Challenge students to identify how we are to run the race before us, according to verse 1 (Answer: with endurance). The writer used some Greek words that give us the emotion that he was trying to convey. The word "run" here means to exert one's self or to strive hard. The word "endurance" describes a man who does not swerve from his deliberate purpose or his loyalty to faith, even in the greatest trials and sufferings. Help students to see this picture of a person on a mission. He knows where he is going, and there is no option but to complete the task. This person is aware that it will not be easy, but that does not deter him. He is committed; he is resolute. He will run, and he will run hard. He will not give up in the face of adversity, and regardless of what may get in his way, he will never give up. He will throw off anything that hinders his progress and keep his eyes on the prize. Ask: Does this describe you? Point out that this is a lofty goal, but achievable through the grace of Jesus Christ!

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➤➤ **ITEM 10 LEADER PACK:** Point out the 4 different types of venues listed on the **Athletic Venues** poster. Briefly discuss some of the events from the Greco-Roman world and what each of the venue's purposes were.

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# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 12:1

If you have ever trained for an athletic event or known someone who has, then you know that competing well does not happen by accident. No one wins a marathon by accident. Those who win such endurance races do so because they have trained diligently. They know what to expect and understand what their bodies need to compete well. Along the marathon route, it is common for those who are cheering on the runners to hand them water, energy drinks, bananas to keep their muscles from cramping, and protein bars to keep them running well. While this happens, the runners never stop. They take the banana, energy gel, power bar, or water and keep running at race pace.

The believer's life in Christ is like that. It is a long race like a marathon, and though it takes much longer than a few hours to run. As Christians, we are all marathon runners and winning that spiritual race means finishing. That was the passion of the writer of Hebrews and that is the passion of God. As believers, our competition is the sin that so easily entangles our feet. We also war against the Devil, a great Enemy of our faith who seeks to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). It is naïve to think otherwise! This race is real, and so are the dangers!

Verse 1 tells us that we have a great crowd of witnesses surrounding us as we run the race of the Christian life. It is as if those who have died in faith before us now cheer us on as we run. The picture is akin to the crowds in the sporting arenas of ancient times who cheered on the runners. Given their testimonies in chapter 11, these faithful ones are described as witnesses who "testify" to us by their own examples of faith. The writer of Hebrews used such figurative, imaginative language here to exhort us to live lives of faithfulness. We are further challenged and encouraged by the faith of those who have already run the race.

Practically speaking, just like those who line a marathon course to provide encouragement and sustenance to the runners, we can also help one another run the spiritual marathon. We can do this by praying for a friend who might be struggling along. Sometimes, we may even need to carry one another. We are meant to run this race together. We remind one another of the goal, of the risks of quitting, and of the vast blessings of finishing well.



One interpretation of the writer's illustration in Hebrews 12:1 is that the witnesses were looking down from heaven and observing believers' efforts in the Christian race. An alternate view is that the records of God's faithful people remained as powerful testimony that the race of faith could be run victoriously.



The phrase "every weight" referred to anything that would keep Christians from living the Christian life successfully, such as lack of faith, pride, or effort.

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In Greek times, the runners would use weights when they were training to build up their endurance and stamina. As the writer penned this illustration he was sure that the readers would be able to relate to the application. See **Pack Item 9** for more explanation.



# Conversation

The truths have been profound and applicable for our lives so far, and the writer wasn't finished. Hebrews 12:2 ends with the one factor that will keep us on track and give us the motivation we need to finish the race strong. Direct attention to the questions for these verses.

## › Where are we to keep our eyes focused? Why is this so important?

To pursue something, you have to know what the goal is. Guide students to think through and discuss the goals of things they might pursue. For example, if you are going to college, then it is helpful to know what you will need to graduate. Going to college isn't the goal, but graduation is. Stress that so many people live the Christian life and never know what the goal is. The sad thing is that most people think that heaven is the ultimate goal of the Christian life, but that is not the case! The writer of Hebrews never said that we were to keep our eyes on heaven. He instructed believers to keep their eyes on Jesus. Jesus is and has always been and will always be our goal. We are to run with our eyes focused on Jesus!

## › Write down two words that are used to describe roles that Jesus plays when it comes to our faith. Identify and attempt to explain these two words.

Point out that Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus is the source and perfecter of our faith. This wording may be a little different, depending on what translation you are using. Help students understand that having faith is not the goal of faith. Stress that you cannot just have faith in your ability to believe in something, but your faith should be in Jesus alone. Explain that Jesus is not only the source of our faith, but He is also the ultimate example of faith for us. His life perfected faith for us.

## › What was the finish line that motivated Jesus and allowed Him to endure the race that was set before Him?

Explain that many commentators point to two things that this verse is referring to. One is the joy Jesus found in fulfilling the will of His Father. Everything that Jesus did while on earth was about the glory of God. His joy was found in the Father. The other thought comes from the definition of joy. It means the occasion or persons who are one's joy. That's you and me—we were His joy and still are!

## › What did Jesus go through for us as He ran the race that the Father put before Him?

Scripture says that Jesus was willing to endure the pain of the cross and the shame that came with it for the salvation of those who were and are His joy. Ask a few students to share their responses about what Jesus went through for us on the cross.

# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 12:2

There are many great parallels between the a physical race and spiritual race, but there is one major difference between the tow (Heb. 12:1-2). In a physical race or marathon you compete for the best time against other individuals. But in the Christian race, we run the race together.

In our running, we must run well. Verses 1-2 give us several instructions and applies a spiritual meaning to a well-known ancient sport. In the ancient world, runners would remove anything that added weight and often ran practically naked. Every encumbrance was laid aside, so that there was no possibility of falling. These athletes were rigorous and demonstrated great discipline in their training. All of this was done for a single purpose: to run well and win the race. How much more important is the spiritual race that is set before us? Every spiritual weight must be cast off, and every sin that continues to plague our hearts must be laid aside.

God is committed to our endurance, and He is also committed to our training and discipline. He always keeps the ultimate goal in mind, even though we can lose sight of it. Let us lay all of these things aside by daily confessing our sins, turning from them and turning to Christ. The race we run and the battles we fight will end only when Jesus summons us home to heaven, or He returns to consummate His kingdom. Until then, let us diligently obey this exhortation, knowing that we do not run alone.

Think about all that God has provided for us as we live out the Christian life. First, we have the testimony of those in the past to encourage us (Heb. 11:4-40). Second, we have one another to pick us up when we are weak—we run as a team and a family, not forgetting to meet and be together (Heb. 10:25). Third, we have been given access to the throne of heaven and have been encouraged to draw near to God, where we find grace and mercy in any time of need (Heb. 4:14-16). Fourth, we have Jesus, our great High Priest who ever lives to intercede for us (Heb. 7:25). He is the perfecter of our faith who has set the greatest of all examples for us to follow. So, let us fix our eyes on Him, who ran with the utmost endurance (v. 2). He saw the joy and glory set before Him, as well as the lofty and exalted position of the right hand of God the Father. He endured the cross with all of its humiliation and shame. Think about that: He looked through the physical and spiritual agony of the cross because of joy! Therefore let us consider too the indescribable joy that awaits each of us who runs with endurance and finishes the course!



Persevering in the Christian life demands focus. The writer of Hebrews urged Christians to join him in concentrating on Jesus. They were to consider past heroes of the faith, but they were to look primarily and steadily to Jesus.



The Greek phrase translated “keeping...eyes on” (“looking unto,” KJV; “fix ... eyes on,” NIV; “looking to,” ESV) means giving undivided attention by looking away from every other object.



The writer presented Jesus as the supreme example of faithful perseverance in God’s purpose. The Pioneer and Perfecter of believers’ faith looked beyond crucifixion to the joy that lay before Him (“set before him,” KJV; NIV; ESV) resurrection, ascension, and exaltation.



# Application

## CENTRAL TRUTH

*Jesus is the strength we need to persevere.*

Give your students some time to discuss the application of the **Central Truth**. The whole session revolved around the image of running the race of the Christian life. As they think about and discuss how Jesus is our strength, focus the discussion on the major reasons why He is our strength. Point out that we have a great example set before us in the witnesses that chapter 11 discusses. Second, we have great finish line to focus on—Jesus! Third, we have the example in Jesus Himself who bore the shame of the cross because we were on His mind.

## NOW WHAT?

Lead your students through the **Now What?** questions to help them begin to apply the truths that they have learned.

- › Think again about those who encourage you. Write down the names of your great cloud of witnesses.
- › What sins ensnare you and keep you from running the race for Jesus? Confess those sins and strive to run in God's freedom.
- › Up to this point, what has been your finish line?
- › What do you need to do to change your finish line and begin running after Jesus?

Help your students to focus on their spiritual race during the **Now What?** section. The reality of the Scripture comes alive as they begin to think about who encourages them, what sins they need to let go of, and who their eyes are to be fixed on throughout their lives.

## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Finish your group time with these thoughts and encourage your students to memorize the verse listed this week. Also, encourage your group to take advantage of the **Keep on Digging** section in their Personal Study Guide.

- › **Dwell:** The writer uses a great illustration that creates a powerful word picture as we think about laying aside sin that entangles us. Think about something that you have gotten tangled up in when you were walking or running. It could be a cord or a piece of clothing but it gets entangled in your feet and keeps you from running at your full capacity. The picture is not of something that stops us but slow us down. As you think about the Scripture this week think about those areas of your life where you are allowing “small sins” to slow you down. They are not the giant sins that we seem to avoid but the small ones that will slow us down and eventually render us ineffective. What will it take to lay those aside?
- › **Memorize:** Hebrews 12:1-2
- › **Pray:** Let your prayer today revolve around the verses that you memorized. It is a great discipline to learn how to pray Scripture. Thank Jesus for the great cloud of witnesses that reside in heaven and are there to cheer us on in our faith. Also thank Him for your great cloud that is present with you that encourages you in your faith. Ask Jesus to give you the strength to run with endurance, to keep your eyes on Jesus, and to run hard toward the finish line.
- › **Keep on Digging:** There is a connection between verses 1-2 and verses 3-7. Sometimes this connection is not always obvious, but God wants each of us to run with endurance and to finish the race. He desires for us to run well. However, we still struggle at times with sin, and with hearts that do not want to submit to God’s Word. As our loving and wise heavenly Father, God knows this, and He will train us through sufferings and trials, disciplining us for our good.

Think of biblical examples of God’s loving discipline and training:

- › Moses who spent 40 years on the “backside of the desert” (Ex. 3:1).
- › Joseph who was sold into slavery (Ex. 37:25-28; 39:19-23).
- › David was disciplined when he had Uriah killed after stealing his wife Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11-20)



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# 12

# Headed to the Mountain

Hebrews 12:18-24

**18** For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest **19** and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. **20** For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” **21** Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” **22** But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, **23** and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, **24** and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.



# Exploration

## CONTEXT

Begin your session by setting the context for Hebrews 12:18-24. Read through the material below and use what you think will help your students best understand the background of the passages.

In the first 17 verses of Hebrews 12, we see that every child of God should expect to encounter various struggles. This is the discipline and training from the Lord that He works in us “so that we may share His holiness ... without which no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:10,14). As sons and daughters of God, we can rest assured that such struggles come from the hand of the loving heavenly Father for His glory and our good. In fact, there is a measure of confidence and assurance of our salvation when God disciplines us—He only disciplines and trains those who are His (v. 8). This process of discipline and training marks all of God’s sons and daughters. The Christian life is a race—a marathon and not a sprint—that must be run with endurance. As we run, we should constantly focus our gaze ahead on Christ, the Pioneer and Champion of our faith, who has gone on before us.

The coming of Jesus Christ has changed everything. The differences between Mount Zion and Mount Sinai are radical and deep. Of course, the biblical writer is not referring to literal mountains, but the mountains spiritually represent the old and new covenants. The contrast is between Moses (the old covenant), and Jesus (the new covenant).

These verses help us to better understand the whole book of Hebrews. In chapter 11, we are given a lengthy list of Old Testament brothers and sisters whose faith serves as examples for us to emulate. We want to be like Abraham, Moses, David, Sarah, Rahab, and the rest, in that they believed and trusted God’s Word. They did not waver and believed until the end. In other words, their faith was an enduring, persevering faith. This is how all new covenant believers should strive to live (Heb. 10:36)! These Old Testament saints looked ahead to their heavenly homeland by faith. They trusted the God who had spoken and revealed Himself to them.

## TRANSITION TO INDIVIDUAL STUDY

After you have set the context, move your students into the Exploration time in their Personal Study Guides. There are several different ways that you can lead your students to explore the Scripture.

1. Lead your students to work through all of the Scripture and questions, then discuss their responses together as a group.
2. Guide your students to work through the Scripture and questions one question at a time. Pause for group discussion after each question.

Whichever method you choose, make sure that the students have an opportunity to explore the Scripture for themselves.



# Conversation

Invite one of your students to read the passages that they looked at as a group. Allow your students to share some of their thoughts about the passage they recorded in their Personal Study Guides. Their quick response questions were:

› **Go back and read Exodus 19:9-21. This will give you a good background to understand what the writer is referring to.**

› **What would your view of God be if all you had to reference was the Mt. Sinai experience in the Book of Exodus?**

In their individual study, your students were asked to read a passage in the Book of Exodus. The passage provided the background information they will need to begin digging into today's Hebrews passage. The Exodus passage focuses on the experience that Moses and the Israelites had with God on Mt. Sinai. Even though it will only be half of the discussion for this session, it will still give your students great information as they begin to compare that experience to the Mt. Zion experience described in Hebrews 12.

## HEBREWS 12:18-19

Invite a student to explain Hebrews 12:18-19 in his or her own words. The first several discussion questions deal with the Israelite experience with Mt. Sinai. Remember the writer of Hebrew set up a compare-and-contrast model of teaching through these verses.

› **List the words or phrases that are used to describe the Israelite's experience at Mt. Sinai.**

Allow time for your students to share their answers. The goal of this discussion is to help your students to begin painting the picture of what it must have been like to approach God's presence. The writer used phrases and words like "darkness" and "blazing fire," that are very descriptive and powerful. He was definitely not trying to create the image of a cool walk in the park.

› **What did the Israelites hear while at the foot of the mountain? How did they respond to what they heard?**

In the passage in Exodus, Moses wrote that the people could hear both the trumpet and the voice. Point out that the people begged that the voice would stop. The voice of God reference was a big deal to the writer of Hebrews, as referenced in verse 25. They begged for the voice to stop, then they were encouraged to reject the one who had spoken.

# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 12:18-19

Mt. Sinai is not our goal. As believers, it can be easy for us to lose sight of the big picture. If we lose sight of the goal, then we almost certainly go off course. Yet, this is not God's purpose for us, and these verses in Hebrews 12 help us to keep our eyes on the prize, as the saying goes. It is interesting to note that we are commanded in the opening verses of chapter 12 to "fix our eyes on Jesus." In verse 2, He is called the founder and perfecter of our faith. He is the beginning and end of our faith. As the founder and perfecter, He has gone before us, and prepared the way for us to follow in obedient faith. Verses 22-24 give us the vision of the end of our running. The end of our race is heaven itself. Therefore, how can we do anything but continue in faith? We must keep our eyes on Him, and we will never stray off course.

Verses 18-21 refer back to the time of Moses, just after he had led the people out of captivity in Egypt. After the miraculous 10 plagues of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, and the drowning of Pharaoh's army as he attempted to capture God's people, God told Moses to lead the people to Mt. Sinai. There, He called Moses up to the mountain where He gave him the Ten Commandments for the people. Exodus 19-20 records what happened when God descended onto the mountain. It is both a terrifying and powerful description (See also Deut. 4-5).

The writer of Hebrews lists seven things that mark the giving of the Old Covenant and the events at Mt. Sinai. The description comes from Exodus 19-20 and Deuteronomy 4-5. These seven are followed by another seven things that describe Mt. Zion in verses 22-24. He wants us to see a very clear contrast between the Old and the New Covenants. We have not come to 1) a mountain that could be touched, 2) a blazing fire, 3) darkness, 4) gloom, 5) whirlwind, 6) the blast of a trumpet, and 7) the terrifying voice that spoke. Visual and audible signs of the very presence of God marked the giving of the Old Covenant Law. Mt. Sinai became a holy place, a place of fear and awe as the Creator of that mountain came to dwell upon it. The mountain shook and burned with fire; this is truly an awe-inspiring scene! The people of Israel responded with great fear at what they saw and heard.



Following the tenth and final plague on Egypt, the Israelites were set free and began a long and difficult journey to Mt. Sinai. Scholars have debated the mountain's location, but the traditional site is in the south-central part of the Sinai Peninsula in the northwestern end of Arabia.



The first covenant's inauguration was marked by fear verging on terror. Evidently, the elements of God's revelation were designed to impress His sovereignty and majesty and the importance of His communication with them.



# Conversation

## HEBREWS 12:20-21

In verse 20, the writer continued the commentary on why the people wanted the voice to stop speaking. Help students to see that the peoples' issue was with what was being commanded!

› **What level of access did the Israelites have to Mt. Sinai? What would happen if anyone or anything went up the mountain?**

Verse 20 said that even if an animal touched the mountain, it must be stoned. The Israelites' concern was not so much for the animal as much as it was for themselves! If an animal did not have a chance, where did that leave them in the midst of their sinfulness? Help students to recognize the enormity of God's holiness shown in this passage. The people knew God was holy, but also knew their sinfulness created a barrier. The old covenant created an intentional distance between a holy God and His sinful people.

› **How did Moses feel about approaching God?**

It is hard to imagine how Moses must have felt when he prepared himself to not only approach the mountain, but also to climb it and stand in God's presence. The Scripture says that he was terrified and trembling. Guide students to remember that Moses was human just like we are, and based on the description in Scripture, we can only imagine how he felt. Guide your students to see and discuss Moses' humanity, reiterating that he was afraid to enter the presence of God at that time.

## HEBREWS 12:22-24

Read Hebrews 12:22-24 aloud and point out that the writer had now turned his attention to a new mountain. This mountain would represent what was to come for the believers reading this letter. Explain that Mt. Zion occupied an important place in the hearts of God's people. The nation of Israel gathered there regularly to worship Him. According to Psalm 110:2, the coming Messiah would reign from Mt. Zion. The Christians who read the letter obviously knew the significance of Mt. Zion. Point out that the writer of Hebrews used this significant place to describe the difference between the old and the new Covenant, and that it's a very real location we can look forward to for eternity.

› **What do you think the Scripture means when it refers to Mt. Zion? List out the words or phrases that are used to describe our coming experience at Mt. Zion.**

# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 12:20-21

There was also a heavenly voice that broke through with the audible and frightening word of warning, the “sound of words” in verse 19. Hebrews quotes Exodus 19:12, which states that not even an animal was to approach the mountain, or death would be required. The implied command that terrified the people was that if “even an animal” could not touch it, then a sinful human had better not either. It is important to see that the people begged the voice of God to be silent.

That was significant for the writer of Hebrews. This serves as a warning to all of us in verse 25, "See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven." The reason for the warning was because the people refused the Word of the Lord. Remember that this was the same group of people who ignored the Word of the Lord and worshiped the golden calf, tested God, and tried Him (Heb. 3:7-19; 4:2,6).

This marks one of the greatest distinctions between the majority of the old covenant people (who we studied in Hebrews 3-4) and the new covenant people. Rather than refusing His Word, God has written it on our hearts and minds in the new covenant (8:10-12).

In short, verses 18-21 summarize what happened when God gave the old covenant to the people of Israel. God commanded them to stay at a distance in order to demonstrate His holiness so that they would know that there is a distance between the holy God and the sinful people. Later in history, that distance would be completely removed when God would send His Son in the flesh to be the Perfecter of our faith. We are His new covenant people, summoned not to Mt. Sinai, but to Mt. Zion. Hallelujah! God with us! He has come!



The Greek term rendered “sight” (literally *the thing being made visible, being caused to appear*) could have the sense of a spectacle.

[illegible]



# Conversation

Your students may not know that Mt. Zion is an actual place in Jerusalem, so this would be a great time for a short geography lesson. Help them understand the importance of the physical location of the mountain because of its importance to Israel and the old covenant. But stress that the writer was also referring to the eternal home for Christians. Guide your students to examine the verses and identify the powerful language the writer used to describe the city of the living God! Lead your students to contrast the setting of Mt. Sinai and Mt. Zion.

## › The writer begins listing groups of people who will be in Mt. Zion. List the groups of people and your best understanding of those groups.

As the writer continued, he began to describe the groups of people who will be there. The focus of this exercise is not to get students hung up on who the groups are, but rather to help them understand that there are different groups that will be in heaven. Point out that we are listed separate from the angels. Many students probably believe that we become angels when we die and go to heaven. Although this is not the main point of this verse, it is a good time to help your students see who and what will be in heaven.

1. Myriads of angels.
  - a. Angelic servants that surround and celebrate the glory of God.
2. Assembly of the firstborn
  - a. In the Old Testament, the firstborn son received the inheritance that was due to him through the birthright. We all will stand before God as the firstborn of His Son.
3. God the judge
  - a. The writer refers to God as the Judge of all. God is here standing in the place of Judge over all creation.
4. Spirits of the righteous believers
  - a. This is another reference to the believers that are there that have been made perfect through the blood of Jesus Christ.
5. Jesus Christ
  - a. Jesus stands in His place as the mediator of the new covenant.

## › What identifier is used to describe Jesus in verse 24 and how is Jesus' blood different from the blood of Abel?

Direct attention to Hebrews 12:24 and the statement that Abel's blood cries out from the grave. His blood was shed and cries for justice while the blood of Jesus cries out for justification. Jesus' blood was shed for the sins of all humanity and would pave the way for all of us to have access to the heavenly city.

# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 12:22-24

Just as there were seven things that marked the scene of verses 18-21, there are also seven in verses 22-24. First, we have come to Mt. Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. These phrases describe the same place—the presence of God. Second, myriads of angelic hosts in festive gathering. God is surrounded by His angelic servants who gather around to worship and celebrate. Third, verse 23 states that we’ve come to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn. In the Old Covenant, the firstborn son received the greatest portion of blessing, but now we all receive such family blessings. We are enrolled in heaven—our names have already been written there (Luke 10:20). Fourth, we come to “God, the judge of all.” God knows all things, and all things are subject to His examination. For those whose names are enrolled in heaven, there is no fear of condemnation, since Christ has removed all condemnation. For the believer, the throne of eternal judgment and fear has now become the throne of grace and confidence which they can draw near (Heb. 4:14-16).

Fifth, we come to the “spirits of the righteous believers who have been made perfect” and complete. Believers are just and righteous because of what Christ has accomplished with His once-for-all sacrifice! He has made us righteous and has brought us to completion. Believers from all times and all locations will spend eternity together as one family in one place because of the one sacrifice of the one Savior of all.

Sixth, we come to Jesus, the mediator of a New Covenant. Hebrews so abounds with this theme that the book cannot be understood apart from it. Moses mediated the Old Covenant on the fearful mountain. Jesus mediates the eternal covenant (Heb. 8:6, 9:15, 13:20) on Mt. Zion in the presence of God, the angels, and the general assembly of the firstborn.

Lastly, it was Jesus’ blood that was spilled. Because of His offering, He is able to be the covenant mediator. His “sprinkled blood” was offered for our purification in the heavenly tabernacle (Heb. 9:15-22). It “speaks better than the blood of Abel.” When Cain killed Abel in Genesis 4, God said that Abel’s blood was “crying out to Him from the ground” (Gen. 4:10-11). What did it say? It cried out for justice and judgment, bearing witness against his brother, Cain, and his guilt. The blood of Jesus cries out, to be sure! But His blood cries out that His people have been forgiven and cleansed. Abel’s blood brought the curse upon Cain while Jesus’ brings the New Covenant blessings. Abel’s blood cried out for justice to be carried out; Jesus’ blood cries out that justice has been met, granting mercy and pardon! Hallelujah!



The Greek term rendered “festive gathering” was used in the culture of the writer’s time for great national assemblies and the Greeks’ sacred games.



One popular definition of the church is “the called-out ones.” In a sense, this is a valid expression, for Christians are people who have responded positively to God’s call to salvation and service.



Entering God’s immediate presence is joyous but involves a reminder of the costliness of that access. The phrase “the sprinkled blood” (“the blood of sprinkling,” KJV) refers to Jesus’ voluntary death on people’s behalf.



# Application

## CENTRAL TRUTH

*Heaven is waiting for those who trust in Jesus as mediator of the new covenant.*

Read the **Central Truth** and allow time for your students to meditate on it. The focus of the session has been comparing the experience that the Israelites had with God at Mt. Sinai to the experience we will have when we meet Jesus in Mt. Zion. There is a big difference between the two experiences, so make sure that your students understand that all of this has been made possible only through Jesus' sacrifice. He stands as our mediator of the new covenant.

## NOW WHAT?

Lead your students through the **Now What?** questions to help them begin to apply the truth that they have learned. At this point, it is crucial to help them apply knowledge so it will turn into wisdom in their lives.

› What's the coolest city you have ever been to?

› What is special about that city that makes you want to go back?

› What's the most exciting thing you learned today about the heavenly city?

› What are you willing to do to get to that city? What do you have to do?

The focus of the **Now What?** section today is the heavenly city. Your students will be led through a series of questions that will lead them to consider heaven and what is required to ensure that they may one day spend eternity there. This can become an evangelistic opportunity for your students. Help them to understand that everything that needs to be done for their salvation and eternity with Christ has already been accomplished through Jesus' blood and righteousness. been done through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Conclude your group time with these thoughts and encourage your students to memorize the verse listed this week. Also, encourage your group to take advantage of the **Keep on Digging** section.

- › **Dwell:** The new covenant creates a new kind of community. It's a community that isn't marked by dread or fear of God. Instead, we live in joyful fellowship with Him and each other. Also, we celebrate together what Christ has done to set us free from sin and share the good news about Him everywhere we go. In the fellowship framed by the new covenant, we live in the shadow of Mount Zion. Believers can joyfully approach the Father, putting aside fear.
- › **Memorize:** Hebrews 12:28
- › **Pray:** Lord, thank you that you have provided a place for me to reside with you forever. Thank you that I will be able to enjoy the glory of heaven because of your sacrifice for my sin. Thank you that we do not have to approach your holy mountain with fear and trembling, but we have the privilege of coming directly to you because of your grace.
- › **Keep on Digging:** As we have seen, there are many themes that run throughout Hebrews. Since Hebrews was written in order to encourage God's people to persevere until the end, it comes as no surprise that one of the prominent themes of the book is the journey that believers are on together.

Dig into the Scripture and then compare and contrast them to Hebrews 12:18-21 and 22-24. We are on a journey that we must finish because what awaits us is glorious beyond description.

- › Hebrews 3:6
- › Hebrews 3:7-14
- › Hebrews 4:1-11
- › Hebrews 6:1, 11-12
- › Hebrews 6:19-20 with 12:1-2
- › Hebrews 10:19-25
- › Hebrews 10:36-39



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# 13

# Living Out the New Covenant

Hebrews 13:1–8

**1** Let brotherly love continue. **2** Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. **3** Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. **4** Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. **5** Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” **6** So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” **7** Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. **8** Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.



# Exploration

## CONTEXT

Begin your session by setting the context for Hebrews 13:1-8. Read through the material below and use what you think will help your students best understand the background of the passages.

In Hebrews 13, the writer introduced a wide range of ways that Christians could live out the standard set by their relationship with Christ. As they put their faith in Him to work, He directed them to show God's love for people by being kind to travelers and prisoners. From there, He instructed them to hold fast to God's standard of faithfulness in marriage. As they lived out their faith, they were to follow in the footsteps of their Christians leaders and remain faithful to the end. The writer stressed that believers had even more security They could rest assured that the Lord would never change (Heb. 13:1-8).

But the writer didn't stop there. He urged his audience to give more complete attention to the place of Christ in their lives. Apparently, they had been approached by some false teachers who tried to lure them away from Jesus. The writer of Hebrews cautioned them to react to what they had heard by focusing their attention on God's grace and not losing sight of the sacrifice that Christ had made for them. The bodies of animals sacrificed on the Day of Atonement were taken outside the Israelite camp to be burned. In the same way, Jesus was taken outside the walls of Jerusalem to be crucified. That's belonged, serving together in a community formed by their common faith in Christ (Heb. 13:9-17).

The ministry of intercessory prayer provided believers with a rewarding opportunity to put their faith in Christ to work. The writer demonstrated his confidence in prayer in these verses. He pointed out that as he prayed for him, his fellow believers would be able to see that he had a clear conscience as he shared his convictions about faith in Christ with them. Also, he promised to return to them so their fellowship could be renewed (Heb. 13:18-19).

## TRANSITION TO INDIVIDUAL STUDY

After you have set the context, move your students into the Exploration time in their Personal Study Guides. There are several different ways that you can lead your students to explore the Scripture.

1. Lead your students to work through all of the Scripture and questions, then discuss their responses together as a group.
2. Guide your students to work through the Scripture and questions one question at a time. Pause for group discussion after each question.

Whichever method you choose, make sure that the students have an opportunity to explore the Scripture for themselves.



# Conversation

Enlist one of your students to read aloud the passage that they looked at as a group. Allow your students time to share some of their thoughts about the passage. Their quick response questions were:

› **How does this passage in Hebrews differ from all of the other passages you have studied in Hebrews?**

› **Why do you think the shift was made in chapter 13 from theology to issues about our lifestyles?**

Point out that as the writer of Hebrews began his conclusion in chapter 13, he took a dramatic shift from theology to lifestyle issues. The quick response questions today are geared toward guiding your students to think about why the writer would now make the shift to talking about our Christian life. Help your students see that the shift is a normal movement as the writer concludes his letter to believers. He was writing to help them see that good theology should manifest itself in a believer's lifestyle.

## HEBREWS 13:1-2

Invite a student to read aloud Hebrews 13:1-2. Point out that the writer shifts his emphasis to relationships and how we should treat others—including other Christians and even strangers.

› **What is the practical application and instruction for believers in verses 1-2?**

Guide the students in a discussion of this question, but stress that the writer is urging them to continue on with brotherly love. Help students to define and discuss that phrase. Point out that community is an important part of our faith, and we must love others as Christ has loved us.

› **What does it mean to show hospitality? Why do you think we would have the opportunity to entertain angels?**

Christians in those days would have been familiar with the custom of hospitality. The custom involved offering travelers some food to eat and a place to spend the night. Travelers depended on the custom. Abraham served as an example of hospitality toward strangers. One day, he took care of three strangers who visited his home. One of the three visitors was the Lord Himself (Gen. 19:1-10). The writer of Hebrews encouraged Christians to welcome travelers into their homes and to treat them like honored family members.

# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 13:1-2

The writer of Hebrews begins with the exhortation to love one another. In keeping with the second great commandment, Hebrews has already twice urged us to love one another and encourage one another (Heb. 3:13; 10:22-25). The command to love is a call to action, a call to meet one another's needs and to look out for the needs of others (Phil. 2:1-4). In short, love acts.

This is also a summons to show one another, and a watching world, what the love of Jesus looks like. Believers are to care for one another's needs. The focus of one's love is other Christians. We are a family. Jesus is the "firstborn" (Heb. 1:6) Son (Heb. 7:28) who "brings many sons to glory" (Heb. 2:10); believers are "children" (Heb. 2:14; 12:4-11), and "church of the firstborn" (Heb. 12:23). God's people are a family. We are God's "house" (Heb. 3:6), and as such we are to love for and care for one another in practical ways.

Many of us have been a part of a loving local church family where needs were met, sometimes in secret, and often at great cost to the person meeting them. We love other Christians by praying for and getting to know them and their families, as well as caring for their physical and spiritual needs. Often, God uses us to meet one another's needs in ways we did not think possible or even consider.

Verse 1 is the command; verse 2 shows us how to live it out practically. Verse 1 focused on "brotherly love," while verse 2 focused on loving strangers, which has the idea of hospitality. Showing hospitality to strangers has its root in the Old Testament, where Jews would house fellow Jews. In the first century, hospitality was common among Christians, simply because a first-century inn was not always safe. "Strangers" here specifically refers to other believers who may have been traveling (or fleeing) within the Roman empire. Acts of kindness also had a missional purpose. Traveling missionaries would be able to stay in another believer's home while preaching the gospel in that city.

Why? Because in doing so we might entertain angels without knowing it. This verse alludes to the story of Genesis 18-19 where Abraham showed hospitality to three strangers, one being the Lord and the other two were angels. After being warmly received by Abraham, the two angels went on to Sodom where they entered the city and were shown hospitality by Abraham's nephew, Lot. At first, neither Abraham nor Lot knew that the strangers were angels.



The Greek term rendered "brotherly love" (*philadelphia*) conveys the idea of warm friendship love.



The second vital quality of the new covenant community is extending hospitality. The Greek word is a compound term that literally means *love to strangers*.



# Conversation

## VERSES 3-4

Direct students' attention to Hebrews 13:3-4. Point out that the writer continues to discuss relationships, moving on to talk about prisoners and marriage. Your students may feel like these topics don't relate to them, but the principles taught in these verses will apply to their lives.

### › Why would the writer encourage us to live as though we were in prison?

Help your students understand the original context issues of these verses. Explain that believers were being thrown into prison for their faith in Jesus Christ. If the church didn't take care of these prisoners, they would be left to their own care. It was crucial for the church to remember and care for those in prison. Ask students if that is still applicable for us today. Allow time for discussion, but point out that without Jesus, we would all be in prison with no way out. Jesus paid our ransom, served our sentence, and died for our freedom. That should motivate us to care for those who find themselves in difficult situations.

### › Why does the writer mention marriage in the context of this conversation?

As students answer this question, stress that the writer mentioned marriage because of the importance of that relationship not only in the church, but also as a witness to the world. When a husband and wife people make vows to each other, the expectation is that they will remain true to those vows. We live in a world that no longer takes those vows seriously. Help students understand that even though they may be a long way from marriage, it is never too late to take seriously the commitments they make in relationships.

## VERSES 5-6

### › How does the promise given in verse 5 allow us to live free from the love of money?

Call attention to verses 5-6. Help students to understand that they don't have to entirely avoid money, but that they are to guard themselves from the love of money. The exhortation in these verses is to keep your life free from the love of money. Stress that this is really an issue of what we allow to consume our lives. We should be free to serve the Lord and go where He tells us to go, instead of getting caught up in the pursuit of money. We can do this because of His promise that is stated in verse 5. Jesus promised to never leave us, nor forsake us. Because of Jesus' commitment to us, we can remain committed to Him. We can live free from the love of money because the King of the Universe has promised to never leave us. He knows what we need, and He has the ability to provide for our needs!

# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 13:3-6

In verse 4, the writer of Hebrews placed marriage in its rightful place of honor. The marriage bond must be honored, and spouses are to love one another as verse 1 commands. Verse 4 reflects the importance of marriage, which became a common teaching of early Christianity. Marriage is a mystery that is now revealed (Eph. 5:22-33); husbands and wives reflect Christ and His bride, the church. Therefore it should be honored with purity and sexual monogamy within marriage. Marriage glorifies Christ and reveals the gospel when a husband loves and leads his bride like Christ, and a wife lovingly follows the leadership of her husband. God's Word commands that they both remain faithful and pure concerning their sexual relationship. As a result, a godly marriage ultimately brings joy, delight, and glory to Christ.

Verses 5-6 focus on our character, specifically in the area of money. In addition to the issue of sexual sin (v. 4), one must also be warned against the love of money. Proverbs 23:4-5 speaks directly to this. Money itself is not evil. Rather, it is the love of money that is the root of all kinds of evil. The love of money even causes some to wander away from the faith (1 Tim. 6:10). So first, we are to be free from the love of money. There are only three things that we can do with the money God has entrusted to us here on earth. We can save it, spend it, or give it away. A balanced life seeks to do all three.

Second, we are to be content with what we have. Paul teaches us the same thing in Philippians 4:10-12. In and out of prison, Paul had learned to be content whether he had little or whether he had much. Being content is a spiritual watermark, and is proof of our trust in God since He "will never leave you or forsake you" (Josh. 1:5; Deut. 31:6, 8). He is our "helper" (Psa. 118:6), so we need not be fearful. Just as God promised Joshua that He would take care of him in his critical hour (Josh. 1:5), so also we can trust in the Lord for His divine help. Since He created everything, and upholds it all by His powerful Word, then surely He can be trusted to provide for all of our needs.



An intriguing suggestion is that the writer had in mind offering hospitality as a means of establishing friendships. To offer a meal was to offer relationship.



The writer of Hebrews and the apostle Paul were on the same page in their concern that believers have a healthy view of money. Paul wrote, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. 6:10).



Christians are to trust God in all circumstances. Contentment is found only through an ongoing relationship with God through faith in Christ. God promises to be present with us to provide the resources we need.



# Conversation

## › How does keeping oneself from the love of money lead to living the proclamation made in verse 6?

There is a witness to the world that we can proclaim with boldness when we learn to live free from the love of money. There is a comfort level that we can learn to live in because we know that the Lord is our helper. We do not answer to a boss or a place of work, we answer to the King of glory. That doesn't mean that we do not respect those people or those places of work, but they do not become our masters. There is a great level of freedom we can have when we learn to live as Jesus as our Provider. It is hard to proclaim, "what can man do to me" when we are afraid of losing a job. This may seem too mature for your students, but they can never learn too early how important it is to rely on Jesus as their Helper and not the world.

Guide your students to think about situation in their lives in which they need or have trusted God as Helper.

## VERSES 7-8

The conversation now turns from how we are to relate in our relationships to how we are to treat those who lead us in our churches. This is an important lesson for students to learn as they deal with not only their student pastor, but with the rest of the church staff as well.

## › How are you to relate to the leaders that serve in your church?

The instruction is to remember those leaders who have spoken God's Word to us. The word *remember* means *to make mention, to be mindful, or to call to mind*. Our leaders should be on our minds! We should pray for them every day as they lead God's church. We are also to imitate their faith. The word *imitate* is the same Greek word that the English words *mime* or *mimic* come from. We are literally to mimic the lives of our leaders. Now you may be thinking that you have seen some lives that you would not want to mimic. The writer was not encouraging us to carefully observe the outcome of their lives. We are not to walk into a blind fellowship of someone just because they teach God's Word. The instruction is to carefully observe the outcome of that person's life. While we are not to judge, we are to observe peoples' lives and make sure that they live what they teach.

## › Why is the statement about Jesus in verse 8 so important to you as a Christian?

This verse is one of those cornerstone promises in the Christian life. Jesus is the same all of the time. He will never change! So, why is that important to your students? We never have to wonder if Jesus still loves us. We never have to wonder if Jesus remembers our sins. We never have to wonder if God has prepared a place for us in heaven. The promise is that if Jesus said it, He will never change His mind. We never have to worry about Jesus changing because He promised that He wouldn't.

# Leader Prep

## HEBREWS 13:7-8

Verses 7-8 describe how the believing community should relate to its pastors and leaders. Leaders in our churches do many things, such as preaching, visiting, or counseling the wayward. The focus in verse 7 is specifically on the act of teaching. There are many things that leaders do, but teaching us the Word of God, either publicly or privately, is of special importance since there are always false teachers attempting to carry us away and sway our hearts from our first love (Heb. 13:9).

Those who lead in local churches need to be remembered and imitated, with specific regard for how they lived and especially what they taught (vv. 7-14). They are to be obeyed (v. 17) and prayed for (v. 18) as well. To be a pastor is a noble thing (1 Tim. 3:1), but the meaning here is more broad and refers to anyone in the church who teaches the Word of God. There are many necessary ministries in our local churches, but none is as critical as the preached Word. It should be the high point of the church's gathered worship and the apex of our week to get to come and hear the Word of God preached with power and relevant application.

Verse 8 might at first seem to be out of place, despite how wonderful a verse it is. Jesus never changes! But in the context, the point is that the same message that is preached today is the message that was preached at first—that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Since Jesus is the same, the message about Him that was first preached is the same message that is preached today. Those who preach and teach the true, biblical gospel today declare the message of Jesus Christ, who never changes. Neither does His truth. Jesus is the changeless High Priest who is always interceding for us. Since He cannot change, we can look back on all the Lord has done in the past, and trust Him with our present as we look to the future in hope and with faith that He will guide us all the way until the end. He is our Great Shepherd (Heb. 13:20).



Today, believers are to examine former leaders' lives, especially those who were faithful until death. At the same time, we need to be aware that others will examine our lives in an effort to find a worthy model of faithfulness.

[illegible]



# Application

## CENTRAL TRUTH

*A new covenant demands a new life.*

Allow your students some time to discuss the application of the **Central Truth**. You have spent the last 12 sessions teaching theology around the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant, ending with a very practical central truth. All that your students have learned about the new covenant should translate into a new life. Just as Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17, if any man be found in Christ, he is a new creation. We, as the recipients of the new covenant, should be living a new life—a life that is rooted in the gospel and reflective of those leaders who follow Christ.

## NOW WHAT?

Lead your students through these questions to help them begin to apply the truth that they have learned. At this point what your students have learned is simply knowledge, and we want to help them apply that knowledge so it will turn into wisdom in their lives.

- › What could you do this week to be more hospitable?
- › Think of a few people who cannot help themselves. List their names and how you could help them this week.
- › What could you do this week to show respect and honor to the pastors at your church?
- › How can your life show the world that Jesus is all you need? What are some ways your actions and words can reflect your satisfaction in Jesus?

The **Now What?** questions for today's session all focused around something the students can do. Allow your students to share some of their responses. You will not have time for all of your students to share, but let them hear how their peers are going to live out the new covenant. They may need some help on some of the application, but make sure they are making the connection between the new covenant and the new life.

## PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Conclude your group time with these thoughts and encourage your students to memorize the verse listed for this session. Also, encourage your group to take advantage of the **Keep on Digging** section.

› **Dwell:** Jesus was asked by an expert in the law what He thought the greatest commandment was. This was obviously an attempt to trick Jesus and get Him to say something that would contradict the law. Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love God with all of your heart and soul and mind. He went on to say that the second is like the first, love your neighbor as yourself. The Christian life is about loving Jesus and letting that love affect how we treat others. It is not just what we say we believe that matters. If our theology is right, then our actions and lives should reflect that.

› **Memorize:** Hebrews 13:8

› **Pray:** Let your prayer today focus on how you treat others. Think about your greatest challenges when it comes to relationships and lift those up to Jesus. Ask Jesus to give you the strength to live out what you say you believe. Ask Him to help you remember what He has done for you so that you can treat others as you have been treated.

› **Keep on Digging:** Hebrews 13:1-8 covers several topics of great practical relevance. Spend some time this week looking up and reading the following passages and dig a bit deeper into what these verses of Hebrews are teaching us. The following passages will help and give each of us greater insight into our passage today.

› Love of the brethren:  
Matthew 22:36-40, and  
1 John 2:7- 11; 4:7- 14.

› Kindness to strangers:  
Genesis 18-19.

› The honor of a Christ-centered marriage:  
Ephesians 5:22-33.

› Trusting God with all of our needs:  
Matthew 6:25-34.



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