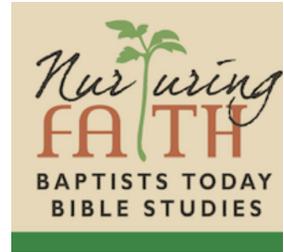


Adult Teaching Resources

August 28, 2016



Faith Matters: Lessons From Hebrews (August 7-28)

You're Not the First — Hebrews 11:1-16

You're Not Alone — Hebrews 11:29-12:2

All Shook Up — Hebrews 12:14-29

Remember - and Do — Hebrews 13:1-16

www.nurturingfaith.net

Subscribe to *Nurturing Faith* to access the core Bible content for this lesson. Find links and videos related to this lesson.

Remember—and Do

Hebrews 13:1-16

FIT Teaching Guide

by Rick Jordan

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Before the Lesson: Cut out strips of the resource page “Stories Inspired by Hebrews 13” to be given out in the Information Session. Make a copy of the story (originally found in the online resource “Digging Deeper: As though you were in prison with them”) to be given to the class member who has drawn the passage of Hebrews 13:3.

Fellowship Question

(Use *one* of these to break the ice, to begin some discussion and lead into the study):

Would you rather hear a story, read a story, or watch a story?

Would you rather hear a sermon that is A. a bullet point list of rules, or B. points illustrated by stories, or C. an extended passionate plea for purity?

Information

Hebrews 13, the last chapter of this book, suddenly shifts from heavy theology to simple “rules to live by.” The change in format is so sudden, some Biblical scholars wonder if this was written by a different person at a later time and tacked on to the end of the book. However, Tom Long says,

“There is too much similarity – linguistically, thematically, theologically – to doubt a unified authorship. What makes sense of the stylistic shift, though, is to recognize that the formal part of the Preacher’s sermon is over. . . The sermon is being followed by the announcements and the ‘joys and concerns.’” [Thomas G. Long. *Hebrews. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: John Knox Press. 1997. p. 142.]

There is a technical term for this type of writing. It is “parenesis.”

[Write the word “Parenesis” on the board.]

According to our printed lesson, “It derives from the Greek verb meaning ‘to exhort,’ and refers to instructions that encourage people to do good. It can include various types of advice, proverbs, exhortations, comparisons, and commands, all employed for the purpose of inspiring positive behaviors.”

The book of Hebrews is a long sermon (by most of our standards). Since most of us would rather hear stories than “announcements” or “parenesis”, we have an opportunity for

Information *continued*

storytime today. We are going to have teams of one to two persons per team. You will draw a slip of paper. It has one of the “announcements” or “rules to live by.” Then you have a choice of how to interpret that verse for us. You can do a role play to tell a short story related to that verse’s theme. Or, you can tell us a story related to that theme. The story could come from a life (yours or someone else’s) or a book or a drama, etc. For one of the verses, I do have a written story that you can read or tell us. Each of these slips of paper has the verse and a few prompts to help get the story ideas started. At some time (before, during, or after the story telling) tell us what your verse says.

[Note to teacher: Another way to do this would be a large group activity. You could read verses 1-3, then ask for stories that relate to those verses. Then, read verses 4-6, and do the same. Then, verses 7, 15-17. For today’s lesson, I have not gone into the theological detour that the Hebrews author offers regarding food and sacrifices in verses 9-14.]

[Distribute the slips of paper. There are 10 different verses, so there may be need for each group to have more than one verse. Allow a few minutes for thinking and planning. Suggest that stories have character(s), a crisis, and a resolution. If a person/team does not come up with a story, do not shame them, but invite others to share a story on that theme. After each story, invite feedback – questions, comments, etc. – from the class members. Below are the contents of the slips of paper, with additional questions you may ask.]

Hebrews 13:1 “Let mutual love continue.” The Greek word for “mutual love” is “*philadelphia*” – “brotherly love.” (Thus Philadelphia, PA is known as “the city of brotherly love.”) Share a story of one Christian’s love/support for another that was like the love/support a close family member offers.

Hebrews 13:2 “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” What would demonstrate hospitality to a stranger?

Hebrews 13:3 “Remember those who are in prison, as if you are in prison with them; those who are being tortured as if you are being tortured with them.” How might these persons be “remembered”? The teacher has a story you could read or tell to the class, if you do not have one to share.

Hebrews 13:4 “Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled: for God will judge fornicators and adulterers.” Share a story of a faithful couple. Did they weather crises that could have driven them apart and to another person?

Hebrews 13:5 “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have; for he has said, ‘I will never leave you or forsake you.’” Although we think often of “the love of money” as based on greed, here the love of money seems to be based on not trusting that God will provide. Share a story of someone who trusts that God will provide for their needs.

Hebrews 13:7 “Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.” Share a story of a spiritual leader who has modeled a life of faithfulness to God.

Information *continued*

Hebrews 13:15 “Through [Jesus], then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of lips that confess his name.” Share a story of someone who has a grateful heart or someone whose prayers/songs lift you to be grateful and to praise God.

Hebrews 13:16 “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” Share a story of a generous person.

Hebrews 13:17 “Obey your leaders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls and must give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing – for that would be harmful to you.” Share a story of a spiritual leader who was wise in their leadership.

[After the stories have been told...]

One verse that we have not read yet is one of the most popular verses of the Bible, Hebrews 13:8: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.” Why do you think the author would put this theological statement in the middle of a list of moral rules? (God/Jesus is the same, although our perceptions change from Mount Sinai to Mount Zion; the love that Jesus commanded us to have and that signifies Jesus’ presence in the world is to be demonstrated, although Jesus is not physically present; Jesus is eternal, etc.)

Transformational Exercise

The author of Hebrews concludes the sermon and announcements with a benediction. In this last chapter, the author has urged us to be loving and hospitable and compassionate and faithful and pure and supportive and grateful and generous and good. Is that too much to ask?

Actually, it is too much to ask if all this depends on us. So the benediction emphasizes that it is God who makes us whole persons, complete persons. These are all characteristics of the God who dwells in Mount Zion – and within us. God can transform us, so that one day, maybe people will be sitting around telling stories about us.

I invite you to relax in a prayerful attitude as I read for us this benediction, slightly edited. I will read it three times. As I do, accept this “good word” as a gift of grace from God.

“May the God of peace
who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus ...
make you complete in everything good
so that you may do God’s will,
doing whatever is pleasing in God’s sight,
through Jesus Christ,
to whom be glory forever and ever.”

[After the third reading, add “Amen.”]

Comments or Questions for Rick Jordan? You may send comments to the lesson plan author at rjordan@cbfnc.org. Rick is also available to lead workshops and conferences on Christian Education, with particular emphasis on how best to use the FIT Faith model.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

A bit more — The Revised Common Lectionary reading is Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16; but looking at it that way disrupts the structure and flow of the passage. We can gain a better understanding of the author’s purpose if we consider all of the first 17 verses.

The book of Hebrews is a long, sermon-like letter directed to a group of Christians who were struggling to maintain their faith. The author is anonymous and its addressees are unnamed, though some clues suggest they may have been Jewish believers living in Rome. Chapter 13 concludes the letter with a parenthetical string of instructions (vv. 1-19) before closing with a few personal words, greetings, and wishes (vv. 20-15).

Brotherly love — In the second half of the second century a satirist known as Lucian of Samosata observed that Christians were unusual in their regard for one another as “brothers.” Describing them to someone named Cronius, he said “Moreover, their original lawgiver persuaded them that they should be like brothers to one another. . . . Therefore, they despise all things equally, and view them as common property, accepting such teachings by tradition and without any precise belief” (*Peregrinus* 13).

William L. Lane notes that Lucian’s remarks show that educated Romans of the second century found the notion of brotherly love surprising, and “The expansion of the term to include men and women beyond the immediate family was considered ludicrous. Ironically, Lucian’s choice of the Christian attitude toward personal property to illustrate Jesus’ teaching is insightful. It is precisely a willingness to share possessions unselfishly that is characteristic of the relationship among members of the same family.” (*Hebrews 9–13*, vol. 47B of *Word Biblical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991], 510).

The challenge to love one another was firmly grounded in the teachings of Jesus, who had left his disciples a “new commandment” that they should “love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:31-15; 15:12, 17). Paul and others stressed the importance of brotherly love in their own writings (Rom. 12:10, 1 Thess. 4:9, 1 Pet. 1:22, 2 Pet. 1:7)

Strangers — The Greek word *xenos*, or stranger, finds its way into English in words like “xenophobia” (fear of strangers) and “xenograft,” which involves grafting a cutting from one plant into another.

Real hospitality — Perceptive readers may note some similarity between vv. 1-3 and Jesus’ words from Matthew 25, where he blessed those who had come into the kingdom because “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me” (Matt. 25:35-36). His puzzled followers asked when they had done such things, and Jesus responded “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40).

As though you were in prison with them – The writer’s challenge for Christians to care for imprisoned persons “as though you were in prison with them” calls for a deep and true sense of compassion, the kind that was demonstrated by North Carolina District Court Judge Lou Olivera. A veteran of the Gulf War as well as the bench, Olivera presides over a treatment court for veterans with mental health issues in Cumberland County, NC. When Sgt. Joseph Serna came before the bench for violating a condition of parole that requires him to abstain from alcohol, he was no stranger to Olivera. The judge knew that Serna had served four tours in Afghanistan, nearly dying several times, collecting three Purple Hearts and other accolades, and seeing many of his friends die. Like many veterans, Serna has had difficulty leaving the war behind, and struggles with alcoholism. Olivera sentenced Serna to a night in prison, but concerned that the experience might trigger Serna’s PTSD, he drove his fellow veteran to a jail in Lumberton and persuaded the jailer – a fellow veteran and friend – to let him serve the sentence with him.

The two men spent most of the evening sitting on a bunk in the single cell, talking about their experiences in the war. Afterward, Serna said “I cannot even put into words how I feel about him . . . I’ve seen a lot of things, and this by far is the most compassionate thing I’ve ever seen anyone give to anybody. I will never let him down again.”

(From the *Fayetteville Observer* Online, April 19, 2016. http://www.fayobserver.com/opinion/bill_kirby/bill-kirby-jr-judge-s-unbelievable-compassion-for-a-veteran/article_420b2c8b-489a-511b-87a5-b361502750c2.html)

Two loves and one not — A more literal translation of v. 5a (“Keep your lives free from the love of money”) would be “Not loving wealth should your conduct be.” As readers were encouraged to have brotherly love (*philadelphía*) and hospitable love for strangers (*philaxenía*), they were told to have no love for wealth (*aphilarguros*) – all three words are built on the verbal root *phileo*, “to love.” In the latter instance the *a-* prefix is a negative particle, changing “love” to “not love.” In Luke 16:14, the Pharisees who criticized Jesus were called *philárguroi*, or “lovers of money,” but Christians were to be *aphilárguros*: not lovers of money.

Money is not evil in itself, but the Bible describes the love of money as the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10). Jesus told his followers not to worry about material goods (Matt. 6:19-34, Luke 10:22-34). Paul reflected the same thought when he spoke of learning to be content in whatever state he found himself (Phil. 4:11).

Sex and money — On the tendency of ancient writers to connect immorality and greed, consider these citations. A Jewish writing called the Damascus Document describes “the cardinal sins as ‘the three nets of Babel’ used to capture the morally careless. The first net is ‘sexual offense’ and the second and third are ‘greed for profit’ and ‘defilement of sacred things’” (6QD 4:17-19; cited by Edgar V. McKnight in “Hebrews,” from *Hebrews and James*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary [Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2004], 309).

Digging Deeper *continued*

William Lane cites Philo and Lucian in his commentary for the Word Bible Commentary series: “Philo, *On the Posterity and Exile of Cain* 34: “all the worst quarrels, both public and private, are due to greed for either a well-formed woman or possessions”; cf Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 3.7.21). The pattern reflects an awareness that selfishness lies behind both sexual immorality and greed (eg, Lucian, *Nigrinus* 16: “[The love of pleasure] brings in adultery and the love of money” (*Hebrews* 9–13, vol. 47B of Word Biblical Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991], 517).

For similar connections in the New Testament, consider 1 Cor. 5:11, Eph. 5:3-5, and Col. 3:5.

Accountable leaders — We know that not all “Christian” leaders are worthy of emulation. Some are charlatans, interested mainly in their own gain. Some are insecure, seeking personal significance through exercising power over others. Some believe and/or teach misguided theologies such as the popular “prosperity gospel,” flaunting their wealth as a supposed sign of their faith. Others may be talented, but have no real depth of personal faith. Others may lack the maturity or discipline to lead with integrity or maintain their own moral rectitude. While leaders are ultimately accountable to God, potential followers should “consider the outcome of their lives” before following their lead.

Sacrifice — Christian believers are not called to forsake the idea of sacrifice – but to recognize that true sacrifice is not found in rituals, but in earnest praise to God and heartfelt service to others. Through such actions we become, as Paul described it, “a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom. 12:1).

A blessing to remember — Although our text for the day stopped at v. 17, it’s worth noting that the writer continued by asking his readers to pray for him and his companions (vv. 18-19), and reciprocated in advance by offering to them a beautiful blessing in vv. 20-21:

Now may the God of peace who by the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep, our Lord Jesus Christ, equip you with every good thing to do his will, working in us what is pleasing before him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen. (NET)

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Where did God say “I will never leave you or forsake you?”

The writer’s admonition to avoid avarice and be content concludes with what appears to be a scriptural citation of God’s assurance: “. . . for he has said, ‘I will never leave you or forsake you.’”

As in many other cases with New Testament writers, the author has cited scripture very loosely, with little regard for context. The words “for he has said . . .” lead one to think the writer is about to cite an oracle through which God spoke directly to tell the faithful “I will never leave you or forsake you,” but such a text is not known.

Rather, the writer seems to be quoting from the Greek translation of a variety of Old Testament texts that reflect similar sentiments. In renewing the Abrahamic promise to Jacob, God said “Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you” (Gen. 28:15).

As Moses prepared Joshua to lead the Israelites across the Jordan to take land from the people of Canaan, he said “Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the LORD your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you” (Deut. 31:6).

Later, according to the book of Joshua, God spoke directly to Joshua in similar words: “No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you” (Josh 1:5).

The writer apparently took these promises to Jacob and Joshua as representative of God’s faithfulness not only to all Israel, but to New Testament believers as well. Thus, he felt bold in asserting that God had said “I will never leave you or forsake you.”

Handout

Stories inspired by Hebrews 13

Hebrews 13:1 “Let mutual love continue.” The Greek word for “mutual love” is “philadelphia” – “brotherly love.” (Thus Philadelphia, PA is known as “the city of brotherly love.”) Share a story of one Christian’s love/support for another that was like the love/support a close family member offers.

Hebrews 13:2 “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” What would demonstrate hospitality to a stranger?

Hebrews 13:3 “Remember those who are in prison, as if you are in prison with them; those who are being tortured as if you are being tortured with them.” How might these persons be “remembered”? The teacher has a story you could read or tell to the class, if you do not have one to share.

Hebrews 13:4 “Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled: for God will judge fornicators and adulterers.” Share a story of a faithful couple. Did they weather crises that could have driven them apart and to another person?

Hebrews 13:5 “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have; for he has said, ‘I will never leave you or forsake you.’” Although we think often of “the love of money” as based on greed, here the love of money seems to be based on not trusting that God will provide. Share a story of someone who trusts that God will provide for their needs.

Handout *continued*

Hebrews 13:7 “Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.” Share a story of a spiritual leader who has modeled a life of faithfulness to God.

Hebrews 13:15 “Through [Jesus], then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of lips that confess his name.” Share a story of someone who has a grateful heart or someone whose prayers/songs lift you to be grateful and to praise God.

Hebrews 13:16 “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” Share a story of a generous person.

Hebrews 13:17 “Obey your leaders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls and must give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing – for that would be harmful to you.” Share a story of a spiritual leader who was wise in their leadership.

Handout

From “Digging Deeper”

As though you were in prison with them – The writer’s challenge for Christians to care for imprisoned persons “as though you were in prison with them” calls for a deep and true sense of compassion, the kind that was demonstrated by North Carolina District Court Judge Lou Olivera. A veteran of the Gulf War as well as the bench, Olivera presides over a treatment court for veterans with mental health issues in Cumberland County, NC. When Sgt. Joseph Serna came before the bench for violating a condition of parole that requires him to abstain from alcohol, he was no stranger to Olivera. The judge knew that Serna had served four tours in Afghanistan, nearly dying several times, collecting three Purple Hearts and other accolades, and seeing many of his friends die. Like many veterans, Serna has had difficulty leaving the war behind, and struggles with alcoholism. Olivera sentenced Serna to a night in prison, but concerned that the experience might trigger Serna’s PTSD, he drove his fellow veteran to a jail in Lumberton and persuaded the jailer – a fellow veteran and friend – to let him serve the sentence with him.

The two men spent most of the evening sitting on a bunk in the single cell, talking about their experiences in the war. Afterward, Serna said “I cannot even put into words how I feel about him . . . I’ve seen a lot of things, and this by far is the most compassionate thing I’ve ever seen anyone give to anybody. I will never let him down again.”

(From the *Fayetteville Observer* Online, April 19, 2016. http://www.fayobserver.com/opinion/bill_kirby/bill-kirby-jr-judge-s-unbelievable-compassion-for-a-veteran/article_420b2c8b-489a-511b-87a5-b361502750c2.html)