

“Learning about Caring for One Another from Hebrews”**

Series: “*A People to Live with in the Crucible of Suffering*”

Main Idea: How do we help people who are discouraged? According to the book of Hebrews, we need to get them fulfilling two responsibilities.

- I. Get them thinking about the supremacy of Jesus.
 - A. We see it in His titles.
 - B. We see it in His comparisons.
 - C. We see it in His accomplishments.
- II. Get them functioning in light of the supremacy of Jesus.
 - A. We’re called to encourage one another (3:13; 10:25).
 1. We’re to do it daily.
 2. We’re to do it to protect our brothers against becoming hardened.
 3. We’re to do it to promote church involvement.
 4. We’re to do it as we see the Day approaching.
 - B. We’re called to think about provoking one another (10:24).
 1. This requires being intentional.
 2. This requires getting involved.
 3. This requires not just doing, but motivating others to do.
 - C. We’re called to love each another as brothers (13:1).
 1. Since we have the same Father, we are brothers.
 2. In order to please our Father, we must keep showing we value our brothers.

Take It to Heart: Let’s ask ourselves three important questions...

1. What discouraged brother does the Lord want me to encourage this week?
2. Who sidelined brother does the Lord want me to provoke this week?
3. What brother have I loved in the past that the Lord wants me to love again this week?

Weary. Discouraged. Hurting. Disillusioned. Fearful. Ready to quit.

Do those words describe anybody you know? Do you know anybody who is weary of life, who’s discouraged, hurting, disillusioned with how things are going, fearful, and ready to throw in the towel?

For most of us, there are some people coming to mind right now. And perhaps some in this room would say, “Those words describe how I’m feeling right now.”

How do you help such people? That’s the question we want to ponder this morning as we open our Bibles together and wrap up our series, “*A People to Live With in the Crucible of Suffering*.”

The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews had some weary and discouraged people in mind, and I find it interesting how he sought to help them. He basically did two things. Keep in mind that the book of Hebrews was originally a sermon. The writer calls it “a word of exhortation” in 13:22. You can read it aloud in about 50 minutes, and as you do you’ll be confronted with the author’s twofold agenda over and over.

This preacher’s message is top shelf theologically, but his aim is motivational, not merely informational. Again, Hebrews is *a word of exhortation*. That’s the purpose of a good sermon, not simply to learn a bunch of facts and information, but to challenge a congregation to do something with and for the person of Jesus Christ, no matter what the cost.

The preacher has two aims in this sermon, two agendas meant to keep his brothers in the game, so to speak.

One, he wants to get them *thinking* about the supremacy of Jesus.

Two, he wants to get them *functioning* in light of the supremacy of Jesus.

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

Those are the areas where weary and discouraged people need to help, in their *thinking* and *functioning*. And the subject that needs to dominate their thinking and motivate their functioning is one and the same, namely, the supremacy of Jesus.

Think rightly about Jesus. And function rightly in light of Jesus. That's what is needed. In that order. Then and now.

In AD 49 the Roman emperor, Claudius, expelled from Rome a group of Jewish Christians. That meant that the early church was less than 20 years old and already taking it on the chin. The book of Hebrews was written about 15 years after this Roman edict (some time in the 60s), and it was addressed to these disillusioned Jewish Christians. They were considered traitors by their fellow Jews and social outcasts by the Gentiles because of their belief in Jesus. And all it would take to end the opposition was to just give up and go back to their old ways.

And that's what some of them were thinking about doing. Do Christians ever feeling like quitting? When you scan the book of Hebrews you see clues that indicate these Christians did. The writer exhorts them not to drift away (2:1), to hold on to courage (3:6), not to turn away (3:12), to hold firmly to faith (4:14, 16), to go on to maturity (6:1), not to fall away (6:6), to be diligent to the end (6:11), to remember earlier days when you stood your ground (10:32), to run the race with perseverance (12:1), to endure hardship (12:7), to strengthen feeble arms and weak knees (12:12), and to make every effort to live in peace and be holy (12:14).

If you want one verse that sums up the charge, it's 10:36, "You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised."

Persevere. That's what you need to do, says the writer. Hang in there. Keep going. And then you'll receive the promise.

Robert Moffat, Scottish missionary to South Africa under the London Missionary Society and father-in-law to David Livingstone, said, "We will have all of eternity to enjoy our victories but only one short life in which to win them."

So how do you help people who are discouraged, perhaps ready to throw in the towel? Again, according to the book of Hebrews, we need to get them fulfilling two responsibilities.

I. Get them thinking about the supremacy of Jesus.

We've studied Hebrews before, and this morning we're going to focus on the "one another" commands in Hebrews, which come in point two. But since right functioning grows out of right thinking, I do want to call to remembrance three ways in which Hebrews demonstrates the supremacy of Jesus.

A. We see it in His titles. Again, we won't take time to look at each of these, but I do want to mention them. The writer identifies at least nine titles for Jesus in this letter.

1. He is the Son (1:2).
2. He is the Heir of all things (1:2).
3. He is the King (1:8).
4. He is the Lord (2:3).
5. He is the Author of salvation (2:10).
6. He is the High Priest (2:17; 4:14; 5:10).
7. He is the Apostle (3:1).
8. He is the Christ (3:14).
9. He is the Son of God (4:14).

Why is the writer telling us this? What's his reason for giving us Jesus' titles? It's because some of his readers are wavering in their faith. They're considering walking away from the One in whom they professed faith. So the writer is reminding them just who this One is. He is the Son, the Heir of all things, the King, the Lord, the Author of salvation, the High Priest, the Apostle, the Christ, and the Son of God. And if that's who He is, then it's unthinkable to turn back and leave Him.

By the way, it's also unthinkable to marginalize Him, to give Sunday lip-service to Him, to tack Him on to a cluttered, self-absorbed life. He who is supreme deserves to be supreme in our lives.

But it's not just His titles that demonstrate Jesus' supremacy. Secondly...

B. We see it in His comparisons. Again, we won't take time to develop these comparisons, but I do want to highlight them. The writer demonstrates Jesus' supremacy by putting Him side by side with three very respected individuals, especially in the minds of a Jewish audience.

1. He's superior to angels (1:4ff).

"For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father'? Or again, 'I will be his Father, and he will be my Son'?" Answer? No angel ever heard God say that to him. But Jesus did!

2. He's superior to Moses (3:3).

The writer says in 3:3, "Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself."

3. He's superior to human priests (4:14-7:28).

"You don't have a priest," said hostile family members to these Jewish Christians who no longer came to the temple. "How do you expect God to hear you without a priest?"

But we do have a priest, says the writer of Hebrews. "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (4:14-16)."

Yet there's more. In addition to His titles and comparisons...

C. We see it in His accomplishments. Jesus has done things that no other person has ever done, whether in Judaism or any other religion. In chapters 8-10 the writer highlights three of Jesus' accomplishments.

1. He established a better covenant (ch 8).

A new covenant. Not a covenant of externals, but one that results in God writing His law upon the regenerated hearts of His people.

2. He entered a better sanctuary (ch 9).

Not a man-made sanctuary in Jerusalem, but a sanctuary in heaven located in the very presence of God Himself. That's where Jesus is now. And how did He get there?

3. He offered a better sacrifice (ch 10).

Not the blood of goats and calves, but His own blood (12). That's what Jesus sacrificed, *His own blood*. And that made it a far *better* sacrifice. It's better because by it He took away sins (10:12), He made sinners holy (10:10, 14), and He opened the way for us to enter the presence of God (10:19-22).

And how does a person benefit from His better sacrifice? By doing good things? No. By putting one's total faith in the supreme good thing He did for us.

Do you want your sins forgiven, my friend? Then look to Jesus, and put your trust in Him and in His better sacrifice.

Brothers and sisters, the first readers of this letter were considering turning back from Jesus and returning to Judaism. That's not where we typically struggle. Most of us are not thinking of going back to Judaism, or any other religion, for that matter. We struggle with something far more subtle, but just as dangerous.

What's that? It's turning our backs on the true Jesus and settling for a domesticated Jesus.

It's true. In the American church, we don't typically abandon Jesus. We just sort of redefine Him and then reposition Him. And before long, He's no longer the Supreme One for whom we exist, but rather, the Domesticated One who exists for us.

And if He doesn't perform as asked, we get upset with Him, perhaps disillusioned, possibly bitter at Him. If asked, we still say we believe in Him. And we may pray to Him from time to time. If we need something. But for all practical purposes, He's no longer the Savior we cherish and the Lord in whose will we delight.

Unthinkable, says the book of Hebrews. The Supreme One is worthy of our all and all, and if we're not joyfully giving Him our all and all, it's an indication that we're not *thinking rightly*.

John Newton, the well known hymn-writer of *Amazing Grace*, used a little illustration to expose the folly of this sort of thinking. He says, "Suppose a man was going to New York to take possession of a large estate, and his [carriage] should break down a mile before he got to the city, which obliged him to walk the rest of the way; what a fool we should think him, if we saw him ringing his hands, and blubbering out all the remaining mile, "My [carriage] is broken! My [carriage] is broken!"¹

We'd say that fellow isn't thinking rightly, wouldn't we? "Come on, buddy. You're almost to the big prize! Look ahead and keep walking!"

Friends, if we've put our trust in Jesus, we *are* on our way to an amazing city, and when we get there we *are* going to see Jesus and receive an eternal inheritance that He obtained for us. So here's the question. Will *that truth* affect the way we respond when our carriage breaks down along the way and we have to endure a temporary inconvenience to get to our destination? It will *if* we engage our minds and *think* about it rather than just thinking about the broken down carriage.

So how do you help a person who's grown weary in the walk? According to Hebrews, you start here. Help them change their thinking. Get them thinking, not about the hardness of their current situation, but about the supremacy of Jesus.

Then comes a second task...

II. Get them functioning in light of the supremacy of Jesus.

And that functioning happens in community, which is what our current series is all about. We're called to be a caring community, and to grow in our ability to be that, we've been looking book by book at the "one another" texts in the New Testament.

We've looked at the one another commands in **Romans** ("Be devoted to one another," "Honor one another," "live in harmony with one another," "stop passing judgment on one another," "pursue what edifies one another," "accept one another," "admonish one another," and "greet one another").

¹ Richard Cecil, *Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton*, p. 108. [quote taken from John Piper's biographical sketch, "*John Newton: The Tough Roots of His Habitual Tenderness*," www.desiringgod.org]

We've looked at **Galatians** ("serve one another," "do not bite and devour one another," "do not provoke and envy one another," and "bear one another's burdens").

We investigated **Ephesians** ("bear with one another," remember "we are members of one another," "be kind, compassionate, and forgiving to one another," "speak to one another with God-honoring songs," and "submit to one another").

Then came **James** ("do not slander one another," "do not grumble against one another," "confess your sins to one another," and "pray for one another").

Last time we examined **1 Peter** ("love one another," "live in harmony with one another," "offer hospitality to one another," "clothe yourselves with humility toward one another," and "greet one another"). We learned that when we fulfill our one another responsibilities, we are actually putting the gospel on display, for the gospel both motivates us and enables us to fulfill these responsibilities.

But there's one more New Testament epistle that gives us "one another" assignments. Hebrews. Three assignments, to be precise.

A. We're called to encourage one another (3:13; 10:25). The writer gives this command twice, first in chapter 3, then in chapter 10. Let's look at the first, in 3:12-13, "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."

We see the problem at hand in verse 12. If a follower of Jesus develops a sinful heart, an unbelieving heart, he can turn away from the living God. That's a very bad thing. And to prevent it, in His kindness, the Lord has given His church a backflow prevention device.

Do you know what that is? Every so often a backflow inspector comes to our church facility. Why? In layman's terms, there are pipes in our church building that are intended to carry water one direction. The city doesn't want contaminated water backflowing into its good water supply. So the inspector comes. He's here to verify that our backflow prevention device is working.

We actually have *two* backflow prevention devices. One is downstairs in the basement. We learn about the other right here in Hebrews 3. In His grace, the Lord has installed a spiritual backflow protection system in His church because He doesn't want His Living Water backflowing, but moving in one direction, *forward*. And so, sinners drink it and enjoy the refreshing power of Christ and leave their life of sin and begin a journey. They get baptized and enter the church. That's a good thing. But this isn't. When a sinner who's tasted the Living Water enters the church, but then backflows and retreats into the world.

I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back, says the song.

So where is this spiritual backflow prevention system that God has installed? It's not in the basement. It's actually portable. Presently it's right here in the auditorium. In a few moments it will move. You're looking at it. It's us, God's people.

See to it, says the writer, *that none of you turns away.*

That's our task in the negative. Don't let a brother retreat. Here's the positive. This is what will help that brother not want to retreat. *Encourage one another.* And notice three things about this command to encourage.

1. *We're to do it daily.* And more specifically, do it *today*. "But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today." Daily. Today. Why everyday? Because somebody in the Body needs it every day.

So if someone asks, "When are your church services?" The answer should be, "Well, our corporate services happen on Sundays and Wednesday evenings, but we're

engaged in the one on one ministry of encouragement on Mondays, Tuesdays, and every other day of the week.”

“Exhort one another,” says the ESV and AV. The Greek is *parakaleo*, literally “to call to or for.” It’s typically involves verbal activity. Put courage into one another by using constructive, hope-giving words, and appropriate actions. That’s what *encourage* means.

You say, “What does it sound like?” Well, it sounds like what we hear in Hebrews. What the writer calls for in 3:13 he says he gives in this letter, which he calls “a word of encouragement/exhortation” in 13:22.

And why specifically are we to do it? What’s our aim? This text says...

2. *We’re to do it to protect our brothers against becoming hardened.*

“Encourage one another...so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” Sin is so deceptive. And when I’m all by myself, I am exponentially more vulnerable to its deceptive, hardening power.

So when we see a brother who’s losing his edge for spiritual things, what should we do? Just wait until he commits some really big sin, and then go after him? No. Encourage him. Perhaps exhort him. Look for ways to put into his mind the truth about the supremacy of Christ and the privilege of serving Him.

And there’s a specific kind of encouragement that the writer calls for in 10:25, “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

So here’s a special focus of the encouragement that we should be giving...

3. *We’re to do it to promote church involvement.* Missing church is a habit. Did you catch that? “As some are in the *habit* of doing.” And to prevent this habit, the writer says we should encourage one another.

“Hey, Bob, missed you last week! Your smile always brightens my day when I see it in Sunday School. Hope to see you Sunday.”

Just a little card like that, or a text, or a word in the grocery store on Thursday, goes a long way. Encourage one another, says Hebrews. And here’s an important incentive...

4. *We’re to do it as we see the Day approaching.* That’s what 10:25 says, “Encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” What day? The Day that we should live every day and do everything in light of, the Day Paul describes in 2 Thessalonians 1:10, “the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.” Jesus is coming again, beloved, and we will see Him face to face, and knowing *that* Day is coming is all the incentive we need to engage in the ministry of encouragement on *this* day.

We find our second “one another” text in the preceding verse, verse 24, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.” Let us *consider*, says the Spirit of God through this writer. The Greek verb is *katanoeo*, from the root word *noos*, “mind.” So this is a call to use our minds and think about something. What’s that?

B. We’re called to think about provoking one another (10:24). The NIV says, “Consider how we may spur one another on.” Literally, “consider one another to provoke.” The Greek word is *paroxmos*. We get our English word *peroxide* from it.

Know what that is? As a little boy, I hated it. It’s what my mother retrieved when I fell and scraped my knee, the bottle of peroxide. And when she poured it right on the sore, what happened? It started bubbling up and hissing at me, which it was doing, as I later found out, to fight off infection.

The same word appears in Acts 15:39 where we're told that the "contention" was so strong between Paul and Barnabas that they parted company. But here in Hebrews we're told to *provoke* one another in a positive manner, "unto love and to good works" (AV).

Let's unpack that thought. What's it take to fulfill this task? Three things.

1. *This requires being intentional.* "Consider," says the writer. Be concerned about. Notice. Think about. And do this *with one another*. Again, literally, "consider one another to provoke." To do that I must get intentional about how my brothers and sisters in the church are doing. If I don't devote time to it, it won't happen.

Let me offer a practical suggestion. Use your church directory to pray for one another, a couple of pages a day. When you come across the name of a person you haven't seen in a while, or someone with a special need that burdens you, then pray for them *and* think of how the Lord might want to use you to spur on that person.

2. *This requires getting involved.* Peroxide doesn't help when it's in the bottle. It needs to be poured on the wound. Once there's contact, then the healing begins. Likewise, we're to get involved. Specifically, we're "to spur one another on" (NIV), "to stimulate one another" (NASB), "to stir up one another" (ESV).

To what ends?

3. *This requires not just doing, but motivating others to do.* We're to spur one another on "toward love and good deeds." What's that mean? It means that, while it's good if you're exhibiting love and good deeds, by God's grace, it's not enough. If your brother isn't, then you have another assignment. Ask the Lord to use you to get your brother exhibiting love and good deeds.

Love. Making Christlike sacrifices for the good of others. And *good deeds.* Christlike actions that benefit others to the glory of God. That's your aim for your brother, to see love and good deeds flowing from his life.

So don't just play the game. Be a coach. Look for ways to inspire your brother to get in the game and play it for the glory of God!

When I was about 12, a Sunday School teacher challenged me to start reading my Bible every day and read through the New Testament. The Lord used her simple challenge to spur me on to a life changing practice.

I was 18 when another life-changing conversation took place, this one with my pastor. I was heading off to college to major in medicine, and he said, "I think God wants you to be a pastor," he told me. I'd never thought of it before, and frankly, I resisted it initially. But the Lord used those timely words of encouragement to spur me on to love and good deeds.

And now that's my calling, and yours too, if you're a Jesus-follower. Don't just *do* the Christian life, but motivate others to do it with you. Get them thinking *and functioning* in light of Jesus' supremacy.

If a few moments, I'm going to give you an assignment to put this into practice. But first, there's one more "one another" text, and it brings it all together...

C. We're called to love each other as brothers (13:1). Notice 13:1, "Keep on loving each other as brothers." Technically, this isn't a "one another" reference, for the Greek term *allelon* isn't there. But the sense of it certainly is.

The text literally reads, "The brotherly love let it remain." The writer uses the Greek word *philadelphia*, from *philos*, which speaks of family affection and devotion.

My non-Christians friends, I'm so glad you're here, but I want to say something at this point that's directed to my Christian friends (which of course, by God's grace could include *you* today, through faith in Christ).

My Christian friends, I want you to let this sink in...

1. *Since we have the same Father, we are brothers.* I'll say it another way. Since God is my Father, and since God is your Father, then we are children of the same Father, and that makes us forever *brothers*.

The implications are huge, and in essence, it boils down to this...

2. *In order to please our Father, we must keep showing we value our brothers.* The ESV and AV say, "Let brotherly love continue." The NAS, "Let love of the brethren continue."

It's not enough to *say* we're brothers and sisters. We must *show* we're brothers and sisters. And not just past tense, but in the present. Let brotherly love *continue*. *Keep on* loving each other as brothers.

The fact that the writer of Hebrews concludes his letter with that command indicates it doesn't automatically happen. We're prone to settle for past demonstrations of brotherly love and miss the present opportunities, so he says, keep on doing it, let it continue.

So I want us to take this to heart by asking ourselves some very pointed questions. We've been talking about how to help someone who's grown weary in the walk of faith. We've learned from Hebrews that we need to get them *thinking* about the supremacy of Jesus, and then *functioning* in light of the supremacy of Jesus.

But that's still too general. So I want us to think about three specific kinds of brothers in our spheres of influence—the discouraged brother, the sidelined brother, and the forgotten brother. And concerning each, a question.

Take It to Heart: Let's ask ourselves three important questions...

1. *What discouraged brother does the Lord want me to encourage this week?* Ask Him. He'll lay someone on your heart. It's probably someone that you're thinking of right now. Send some encouragement their way this week. Send a card. Share a Bible verse. Spend some extra time in prayer for them. Invite to your home. Watch their kids. Do something intentional to *encourage* them.

2. *Who sidelined brother does the Lord want me to provoke this week?* By sidelined, I mean someone who's not in the game as they once were. And by provoke, I mean, not irritate, but motivate, stimulate to love and good deeds. This takes a little more tact. You don't do it by walking up to the person and blurting out, "What's your problem?! We need your efforts around here! Get back in the game!"

No, you minister to this kind, to borrow from Jesus in another context, "by prayer and fasting." Get alone with the Lord and ask Him for insight as to how to help your sidelined brother. Ask Him to prepare their heart for the words and deeds you're going to send their way. And ask Him to use you (and others) to restore that fallen brother, or wayward brother. And do it in the way you'd want it done with you if the tables were turned, which may well be the case down the road.

3. *What brother have I loved in the past that the Lord wants me to love again this week?* You see, this calling is so *daily*. We're inclined to think, "That brother knows I love them. I've already made that clear." Really? When? Let brotherly love *continue*, says Hebrews. So ask the Lord to put a *forgotten* brother on your heart this week, and let him know you're glad he's your brother.

That's what it means to be a caring community. Let's keep doing it, and all the more as we see the Day approaching!