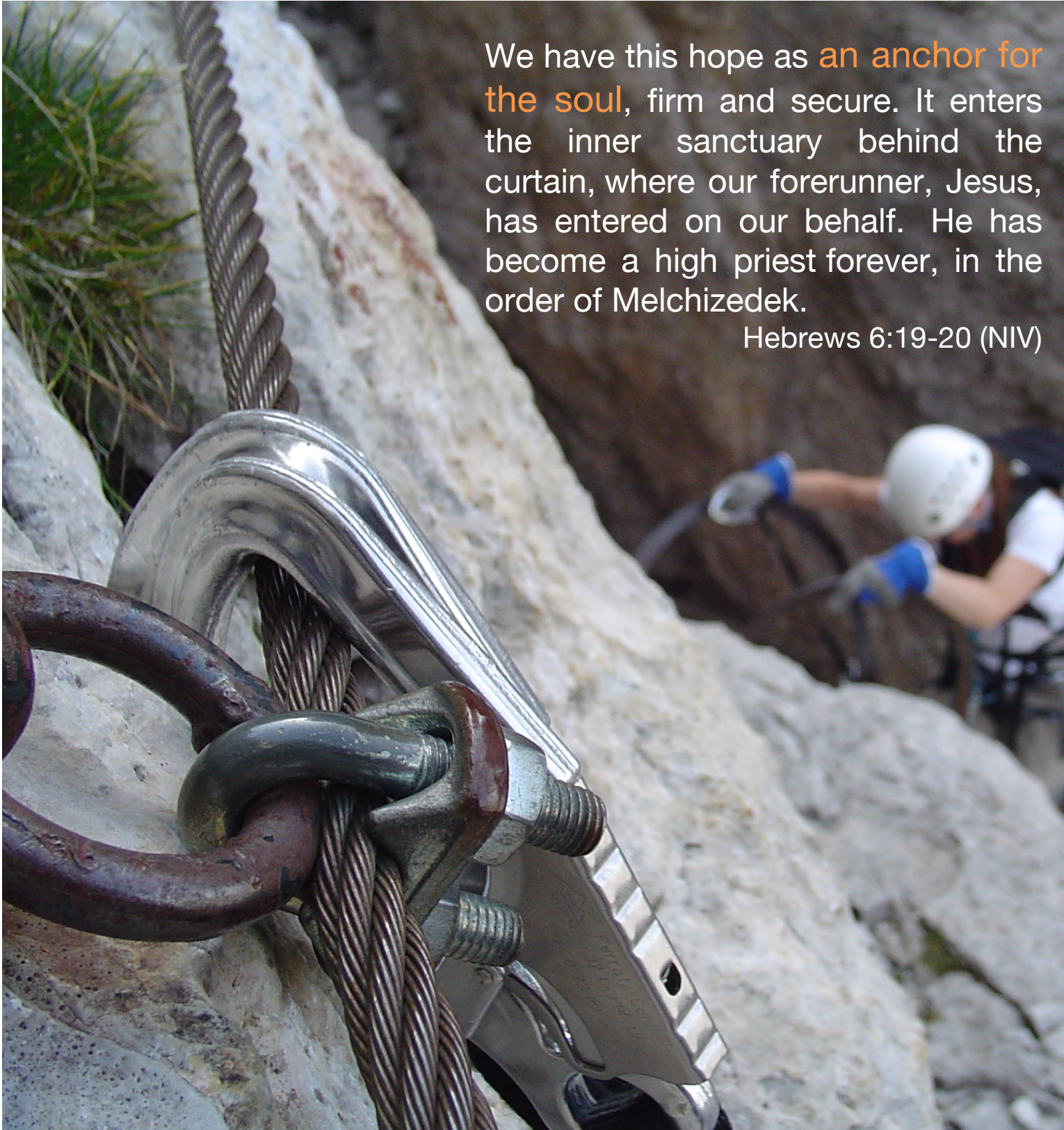


HEBREWS



We have this hope as **an anchor for the soul**, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 6:19-20 (NIV)

AN ANCHOR FOR THE SOUL

GROWTH GROUP

Growth Group is more than just a **Bible Study** – we also **pray**, and **share our lives** together. But it is time spent studying the Bible that ought to shape everything else we do. In our Bible Studies we will be looking at the New Testament book of Hebrews.

AN INTRODUCTION TO HEBREWS

The New Testament book of Hebrews is unique. We are told neither who the human author is, nor who the intended readers are. The final words make it seem like a letter, but it opens without a greeting and reads more like a well crafted sermon. The writer himself refers to their work as a 'short word of exhortation' (13:22).

In structure Hebrews alternates between teaching and warning. The writer compares the past with the present explaining how the Old Covenant is only a shadow of the reality that is ours in Christ. **Jesus is better!** There are warnings not to have a hard heart, or become unresponsive to God's word or drift back to Old Covenant ways.

Reading Hebrews provides enormous encouragement to persevere as followers of Jesus. We are told to fix our eyes on Jesus, and fix our thoughts on him. In Jesus we have hope like **an anchor for the soul**.

We come away from reading Hebrews with a much richer understanding of Jesus' sacrifice for sin. And we gain a better appreciation of how Jesus fulfils the Old Testament. There are implications for the way we read the Old Testament, the way we worship, and the way that we encourage one another to keep living for Jesus.

Our Bible Studies will not cover every chapter and verse – but we hope to have touched on most by the time we have studied Hebrews in sermons at church too.

STUDY ONE : JESUS IS BETTER

HEBREWS 1:1-2:4

PRAYER

Pray for things you have discussed since arriving at Growth Group. Also pray for other Growth Groups meeting this term as well as Youth Group and KPC Kids.

AN INTRODUCTION TO HEBREWS

Read Hebrews 13:22-25

1. What do these few verses reveal about the:
 - i. author,
 - ii. recipients/original readers,
 - iii. purpose of this book/letter?

Keep those observations in mind as we turn to the beginning of this brief word of exhortation. The writer opens with a comparison between the way God spoke in the past, and the way God has spoken in His Son.

Read Hebrews 1:1-4

1. What is the writer talking about in verse 1 - how has God spoken in the past?
2. What do these verses tell us about:
 - i. Jesus,
 - ii. what Jesus has done?
3. How would you describe the way God has spoken 'by His Son' compared with the way God spoke 'in the past'?

Hebrews 1:4 declares that Jesus is superior to the angels. The remainder of the chapter supports the claim that **Jesus is better**. Jump ahead to see where this is headed.

Read Hebrews 2:1-4

4. Can you piece together what "we have now heard" - from these verses along with Hebrews 1:1-4?
5. Any ideas what the writer is referring to as "the message spoken by angels?" (consider Acts 7:53 and Gal 3:19 too).
6. In the light of your answers to the previous two questions - how would you summarise the warning in these verses?

The writer has been building to this warning. Along the way he mentions angels - Jesus is superior to angels (1:4), and his message is better (2:2-3).

Keep that context in mind as we return to chapter one.

Read Hebrews 1:5-14

A glance at the footnotes in your Bible shows the writer is using the Old Testament to support the claim that **Jesus is better**.

7. List some ways Jesus is superior to angels?
8. Why might it be important to show Jesus is greater than angels?

Angels?

Take care to allow the Bible to correct and shape our preconceived ideas of what angels are. Angels are mentioned here, in chapter 2 then in Hebrews 12:22 and finally in Hebrews 13:2 – where some have entertained angels without even knowing it!

The Greek word translated *angel* might equally be translated *messenger* (e.g. Mark 1:2). It can refer to humans (e.g. the spies sent ahead into Jericho in James 2:25) or to an object or experience (e.g. the *thorn in my flesh* in 2 Corinthians 12:7 is an *angel of Satan*). When we see the word *angel* we should really default to thinking *messenger*.

God has His angels or messengers. The Gospels speak of *heavenly angels* (e.g. Mark 13:32) and refer to some by name (e.g. Luke 1:26). Angels like this are mentioned throughout the New Testament. They sound like beings which are part of God's creation, but not human.

There are many ways we can become distracted from the gospel of Jesus. For example it sounds like first century Jews were distracted by signs and miracles. In 1 Corinthians the apostle Paul declares that the gospel is foolishness to the world. He says Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:22). Later Paul says if he speaks in tongues of men or angels but has not love he is just a noisy gong (1 Corinthians 13:1). Could it be that the original recipients of this word of exhortation in Hebrews were, like the Jews in Corinth, chasing signs and distracted by miracles? Perhaps distracted by claims of messages from angels? Or could it be that they consider the message about Jesus to be less special than the Law - which was originally delivered by angels?

Whatever was going on, the writer is determined these Christians understand the very real danger of drifting away from the message of salvation delivered in the person of Jesus. Jesus who is in very nature God. Jesus who has finished his work of providing purification for sins. Jesus who is seated at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

As we read on the writer will persuade us of the completeness of Jesus' finished work and urge us not to let go of the hope we have in Jesus. Hope that is like and anchor for the soul.

Re-read Hebrews 1:3-4 and 2:1-3

9. How might someone "drift away?"

10. How can you tell if the "drift" has begun?

11. What should we do if/when we or someone else begins to drift?

THINGS TO PRAY FOR

Pray for each member of your Growth Group – that you would be encouraging one another to persevere in trusting Jesus and living for him.

STUDY TWO: JESUS IS THE AUTHOR OF SALVATION

HEBREWS 2:5-18

PRAYER

Pray for things you have discussed since arriving at Growth Group. Also pray for plans for Kids Club, Carols and mission week in December.

RE-CAP AND INTRODUCTION

The book of Hebrews has five cycles of *teaching* followed by *warning* – last week we saw the first. The teaching section (1:1-14) compares the way God spoke in the past with the way God has spoken in these last days, in Jesus. Then the warning (2:1-4) exhorts us not to drift from the message of salvation God has spoken through His Son.

The rest of Hebrews repeats that same pattern. But the teaching sections get longer and more detailed as Jesus – the reality - is compared with the shadow of the old covenant, the earthly tabernacle, the Levitical priesthood, etc. **Jesus is better.**

We are looking at teaching which builds toward a warning - in Hebrews 3:12ff. The writer tells us more about Jesus, and you'll notice that angels are still on view. There are a number of themes intertwined, so let's see if we can keep the big picture clear.

Read Hebrews 2:5-8a

1. Under whose authority did God place His creation?
2. The writer is quoting Psalm 8 – read it (*it's only short*). Who does the Psalmist say God has placed over all creation?

Read Hebrews 2:8b-10

3. Hebrews 2:8b says 'Yet at present we do not see everything subject to **him**'.¹ Who is the writer talking about? How permanent does this situation sound?

¹ some translations have taken the original out of our hands by translating 'them' instead of 'him'.

4. In contrast we see Jesus – crowned with glory and honour. Presumably that means we see Jesus with everything placed under *his* feet. What did Jesus go through to gain this position?

5. What hope is there for the rest of mankind in these verses?

Hebrews 2:10 says Jesus was made *perfect* through suffering. Wasn't Jesus *always* perfect? A better translation might be that Jesus was made *complete*, or as the NASB says "...to perfect the author of their salvation..". Jesus was made our perfect/complete saviour, through suffering.

That is amazing. And what's just as amazing is the beginning of verse ten which assumes Jesus is going to make *us* like him too. It just gets better as we read on.

Read Hebrews 2:11-18

6. If you stop and think about Jesus as our brother – that is mind-blowing. Many ideas come to mind. But what particular point is the writer making?

- i. Why did Jesus have to be made like his brothers in every way?
- ii. What benefit does that give us?

Not only are we headed toward the fulfilment of Psalm 8 – being with Jesus, having everything under us. But along the way we have Jesus as our merciful high priest – who understands *everything* we go through.

Read Hebrews 3:1-6

7. How is Jesus compared to Moses?

8. What are we encouraged to do?

We're stopping there for now. But read ahead yourself and see how the argument progresses as the writer continues towards the second major warning in 3:12ff.

Reflecting back over what we have looked at;

9. What hope do we share as Christians?

10. When we find things hard – how can these verses encourage us?

THINGS TO PRAY FOR

Give thanks to God for Jesus, and the hope we share.

STUDY THREE: A BETTER PRIEST

HEBREWS 4:14-5:10, 7:1-28

PRAYER

Pray for things you have discussed since arriving at Growth Group. Also pray for the Djamaludins in Thailand.

AN INTRODUCTION TO PRIESTS

Understanding Hebrews requires familiarity with the Old Testament because the writer compares what Jesus has achieved, with how Israel were to approach God under the Old Covenant. One of the key comparisons is between Jesus' priesthood and the Levitical priesthood.

If we are going to appreciate the benefits of having Jesus as our high priest – we need to have another look back into the Old Testament to remind us what a priest is.

THE TWO PRIESTLY ORDERS

1. Draw a family tree from Abraham to Moses and Aaron. Only include as much detail as you are able to.

(Genesis 21:1-5; 25:7-11, 19-20, 24-26; 35:23-26; Exodus 2:1; 4:14)

2. Mark on this family tree;
 - i. the tribe the **priests** came from
 - ii. the tribe the **kings** are descended from
 - iii. the tribe Jesus is descended from

Read Hebrews 5:8-10, 7:1-10

3. What does Melchizedek's name mean? (Hebrews 7:2)
4. How is Melchizedek's priesthood compared to Levi's? (Hebrews 7:4-10)
5. Try adding Jesus' priesthood to the family tree in question one.

Read Hebrews 7:11-28.

6. Make a list of the similarities and differences between Jesus' priesthood and the Aaronic priesthood.

Similarities

Differences

7. What signs were there that the Aaronic priesthood was inadequate?
8. What makes Jesus better as a priest?

Think about it

9. In what ways do you think Christians may tend to fall back to the Levitical way of doing things, rather than holding onto the benefits that are ours in Jesus?

SOME MORE BACKGROUND

We've got the big picture – now for some more background. I'm not an artist or photographer but I know that the right background in a picture will make the foreground stand out. Similarly, understanding the Levitical priesthood gives the background for seeing Jesus more clearly. So let's take a look at the role of priests in the Old Covenant.

10. Open your Bible to Exodus 20 – the ten commandments at Mt Sinai. Read the 'section headings' in your bible to the end of chapter 27. What sorts of things are covered?

Read Exodus 28:1-5

11. Who were to be made priests? (also Exodus 29:29-30)
12. For the fun of it - look back over Exodus 28:1-5 and draw a rough sketch of Aaron the priest.²

2 The rest of the chapter gives the detail for how to make the priestly garments. Then if you flip ahead to chapter 39 you find a record of what they made – same as chapter 28.

There are a lot of instructions in Exodus regarding the priests and the tabernacle. We find the completed picture in chapter 40. Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy also include loads of instructions for the priests (Numbers 3-4, 8-9, 18 are good places to look). Here's a very brief list of some of the things we find. Have a read of as many of the passages as you have time to.

- one of the **offerings** that were prescribed - Read Leviticus 6:24-30.
- the **standards** they had to keep – Read Leviticus 21:1ff
- their job involved **more than offering sacrifices** – Read Numbers 3:1-10 (Numbers chapters 3-5 will give you a better picture)
- the Priests also **needed sacrifices offered for them** to make them holy – read Numbers 8:5ff
- they were not to **have their own inheritance** – Read Deuteronomy 18:1ff / Joshua 21:1ff

That will do for now – we can't do everything in one Growth Group.

RETURN TO HEBREWS

We have spent a lot of time considering the Old Testament background which the writer of Hebrews considers 'assumed knowledge'. Let's finish by returning to Hebrews and allowing the truth we find there to shape our prayers.

Read Hebrews 4:14-5:10 slowly and then pray.

THINGS TO PRAY FOR

Thank God for making Jesus our high priest!

STUDY FOUR: A BETTER TABERNACLE

HEBREWS 8-10

PRAYER

Pray for things you have discussed since arriving at Growth Group. Also pray for the other Churches that make up Brisbane Presbytery.

HOLDING HEBREWS TOGETHER

Hebrews is a long letter/book but if we are going to make proper sense of it all – we need to read it as a whole. That means being able to cover large sections like we will tonight. It is all one argument. Chapter 8:1 is a reminder that the writer is still talking about the same person as he was in chapter 1:3 – Jesus, who is sitting at the right hand of the majesty in heaven and crowned with glory and honour (2:9). He is still talking about Jesus as our high priest, as he began to do in chapter 2:17.

Last week we considered how Jesus' priesthood is of a completely different order to the Levitical priesthood. Now we see the tabernacle he serves in is better too, and the covenant that sits behind everything is better.

Read Hebrews 8:1-5

1. How is the tabernacle Jesus serves in different to the Old Covenant sanctuary?
2. If Jesus' priesthood is of another order to the Levitical priesthood. And if Jesus serves in another tabernacle/sanctuary, not the earthly one. Then why was the earthly tabernacle important?

Not only is the **tabernacle** better, but Jesus is the mediator of a better **covenant** too.

Read Hebrews 8:6-13

3. What was 'wrong' with the first covenant?

4. How is the new covenant different?

5. Now that there is a new covenant, what happens with the old?

In chapter 9, the writer compares the use of the *old* tabernacle with the *true* tabernacle. The key points in the argument come at verses 8-9 and verses 14-15. So let's jump in there.

Read Hebrews 9:8-9

6. what does the writer say the Holy Spirit was teaching and illustrating through the ceremony that took place in the Tabernacle each year?

Read Hebrews 9:14 -15

7. How does this compare with what Jesus has achieved?

There's more said. But the gist of it should be pretty clear. So let's jump ahead.

Read Hebrews 10:19-25

8. How does the writer summarise the benefits that are ours in Christ?

9. And so what are we encouraged to do in the light of that?³

³ 'as we see the day approaching' v25 cf 9:28 – Jesus' second coming

Think about it

- i. what does it mean to 'enter the Most Holy Place'?
- ii. what does it mean to 'draw near to God'? (v22) Has it got anything to do with 'meeting together'? (v25)
- iii. what should it feel like to have a conscience that is not guilty?
- iv. how can we spur each other on to love and good deeds?
- v. are there any sacrifices left for us to offer God?
- vi. how does 'worship' work/happen under the new covenant when we don't have any sacrifices to offer?

THINGS TO PRAY FOR

Pray that we would continue to grow in our appreciation of all God has achieved through His son Jesus. Pray that we would persevere with our eyes fixed on Jesus till he returns.

STUDY FIVE: TRUST THAT PERSEVERES

HEBREWS 11:1-12:3

PRAYER

Pray for things you have discussed since arriving at Growth Group. Also pray for Religious Instruction in local schools and Chaplains who serve in those schools.

POSITIVE ENCOURAGEMENT

We we have highlighted the **warnings** in Hebrews. The warning not to drift. The warning not to become hard-hearted. The warning not to be sluggish of hearing and responding to God's word. This week we focus on the **positive encouragement** to keep-on keeping-on. In our passage (11:1-12:3) we have a heap of people held up as examples for us, and we are encouraged to join them in persevering.

SETTING THE SCENE – ENCOURAGEMENT TO PERSEVERE

Read Hebrews 2:5-10 and 4:1

1. What do we have to look forward to as Christians?

Read Hebrews 6:11-12

2. It is important not to become “sluggish of hearing” and responding to God's word (Heb. 5:11). Rather, who are we to imitate?

Read Hebrews 12:1-3

3. How do these verses at the start of chapter 12 shape how we read about all the people mentioned in chapter 11?

5. What do these people have in common?

6. Discuss these statements:

a. "These people received the shadow, but continued to hope for the 'reality'"

i. How well does this statement express verses 13-16

ii. And what about verses 39-40

b. "Hebrews 11:1 is not so much a 'definition' of faith, as a 'description'"

Re-read Hebrews 11:39-12:3

7. How is what we hope for the same as what these Old Covenant people hoped for?

8. Is it easier or harder for us to have the same kind of trust as these Old Covenant people had?

All of the people we have looked at had an 'active' faith in God. Their trust (faith) in God's promises and their dependence (faith) on God's faithfulness meant they endured great hardship without giving up. Each of them only saw part of the fulfilment of what God had promised – yet they longed for more. Not only are we encouraged to have the same sort of active faith they had – but we have our hope in the same thing, the forgiveness of sin and the prospect of eternal 'rest' and 'rule'. We have our hope in Jesus.

9. How do you think God wants us to trust him in our context?

10. How might our faith in God be more 'active'?

THINGS TO PRAY FOR

Thank God for allowing us to see so much more of His plans and purposes than the Old Covenant Israelites could. Ask God to help us persevere with our faith fixed on Jesus.

STUDY SIX: WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

HEBREWS 12:1-17

PRAYER

Pray for things you have discussed since arriving at Growth Group. Also pray for: friends and family who do not know Jesus.

RECAP AND INTRODUCTION

Talk about this statement. Do you agree or disagree, why?

“Indifference is worse than punishment”

Last week we were exhorted to 'actively persevere in trusting God'. As we read on into chapter twelve you might add 'even when things are hard'. At the beginning of chapter 12 Jesus is held up as an example for us to follow – in our struggle against sin.

Read Hebrews 12:1-13

1. How does God discipline? Does the passage say? Is it referring back to some of the things in chapter 11? Or are we being disciplined every time something goes wrong in our life? What do you think?
2. How does God's discipline demonstrate his love?

What might it be like if God were 'indifferent' towards us?

3. Why does this passage say God disciplines those he loves?

Read Hebrews 12:14 in the light of v4 and v10

4. How does verse 14 continue in the same vein as the exhortation to strive against sin?
5. Does verse 14 imply we need to be good enough (by our own merit) to see God'?

Read Hebrews 12:15-17

6. In our struggle for peace with others and for holiness before God – we are told to make sure no-one falls short of the grace of God. How could someone do that?
7. We are warned against particular pitfalls that might cause us to fall short of the grace of God.

how might a person's bitterness *defile many*?

why do you think sexual immorality is mentioned in this context?

How was Esau 'godless' in dealing with God's promises (his birth right)?

By now you would have recognised an echo of the warnings in Hebrews 2:1, 3:12, 6:4-6 and 10:26. We are **still** being encouraged not to drift away from the salvation which we have in Jesus. Previously we have been told not to be 'sluggish' in hearing God's word. This time we are being encouraged that God loves us enough to 'discipline' us. So keep trusting God even when things get tough. You may also have recognised an echo of 10:24-25 and the necessity of looking out for each other.

THINGS TO PRAY FOR

Ask God to help us help each other to persevere with our trust in Jesus – even when things get tough.

STUDY SEVEN: ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP

HEBREWS 12:18-13:21

PRAYER

Pray for things you have discussed since arriving at Growth Group. Also pray for Morning Church and NightChurch.

MORE REASONS TO KEEP LIVING FOR JESUS

Along the way through Hebrews we have been encouraged to persevere in trusting Jesus, even through trials. As we read further into Hebrews 12 we are given still more reason to keep trusting Jesus and living for him.

Read Hebrews 12:18-27

1. Fill-in this table comparing the 'shadow' and 'reality' we find in these verses.

	Shadow	Reality
Mountains (v18-24)		
Warnings (v25)		
'shakings' (v26-27)		

Read Hebrews 12:28-29

2. How does the writer use all he has said (v18-27) as motivation to godly worship?

Chapter and verse numbers were inserted in the text of the Bible as an after-thought and an aid in referencing. This particular chapter break is unfortunate in the way that it artificially separates the call to worship (vs 28-29) from specific instruction on what such worship will look like. As we read this next section please do so with chapter 12 in mind.

Read Hebrews 13:1-19

3. What do these verses say about how we should treat people?
4. What should our attitude be towards money?
5. What sort of sacrifices should we be offering to God?
6. What do we learn about the role of leaders and our attitude to them?

Think it through

7. Talk about how all these things are fitting for people who worship God with reverence and awe.
8. How do these verses shape your understanding of what worship is?

Hebrews chapter one began with the declaration that God has spoken by His Son. The heir of all things and maker of the universe, the radiance of God's glory... who has provided purification for sins and is seated at the right hand of the majesty in heaven. Along the way through Hebrews we have seen how God has spoken a word of salvation. Jesus has offered the once-for-all sacrifice for sin, and continues to serve as high priest interceding for us. Jesus, the author of salvation is working to 'bring many sons to glory'.

We are called on to fix our eyes on Jesus and to persevere with our trust in him. In Jesus we have forgiveness, life and a sure hope – like an anchor for the soul.

Here at the other end of Hebrews we see some of the practical implications of this message of salvation. We are called on to worship God with our lives – offering the only sacrifice that remains to be offered – a sacrifice of praise and thanks.

Look back over these Growth Group studies and share things which you have gained from our time studying Hebrews together.

THINGS TO PRAY FOR

Thank God for all that you have learned and been reminded of as you have studied Hebrews in Growth Group and at Church.