

DISCUSSION GUIDE :: EPISODE 9

JESUS; GOD'S FINAL WORD
LIVING OUT THE FAITH
HEBREWS 13:1-8
11/12/2017



MAIN POINT

Our faith in God will be demonstrated in the most practical ways we relate to the world around us.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Is there someone in your life who who treats you better than anyone else? What's one example you can remember of them doing so?

What does their treatment of you show about their character?

How do you think the way we relate to God influences the way we treat other people?

Our convictions shape our conduct. Understanding this reality gives us a handle on the difference that saving faith in Christ should make on the believer's attitudes and actions. Without a relationship with Christ, a person cultivates self-serving convictions that encourage self-indulgent behavior. However, people who genuinely trust in Christ as Lord nurture convictions that center on Him. As a result, the Holy Spirit guides believers to behave in ways that reflect the character of Christ. His ways become the believer's blueprint for life.

In the final chapter of the Book of Hebrews, the writer showed believers how they could live out their faith in Jesus Christ. He pointed to the standards of conduct that were consistent with faith in Christ and with His holy character. To love the Lord with all of one's heart, mind, and strength means to treat one's neighbor with the same love, grace, and integrity with which the Lord treats us. We as Christians are to live transformed, holy lives, because the Lord Jesus is holy. We are to live out this kind of faith particularly in our relationships with one another.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ HEBREWS 13:1-3.

How does a person's social standing affect the way others treat him or her?

How does this passage encourage you to love people as God does?

There are two ways of showing hospitality in this passage: meeting the needs of Christian workers as they traveled (v. 2) and helping those who are suffering because of their commitment to Christ (v. 3). Believers are encouraged to serve regardless of the identity of the person being helped. Verse 2 refers to Genesis 18-19, where Abraham entertained strangers who were actually angels.

What would your reputation be if you treated others the way you treat your family?

Believers are to show hospitality to all, treating them like honored family members. We need to evaluate the way we care for each other to make sure our relationships accurately reflect the way God has treated us in Christ.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ HEBREWS 13:4.

Based on verse 4, what challenges were the Hebrews facing in regard to Christian marriage? How do these challenges compare with ones believers today face?

During New Testament times, immorality and carelessness characterized both Jewish and pagan marriages. Christian marriage, in contrast, is to be based on trust in God and purity. Believers are expected to honor and protect the sanctity of marriage. Today's culture diminishes the importance of commitment and makes immorality seem acceptable.

How does God respond when people do not honor marriage?

God will hold us accountable for not abiding by the standards He established for marriage. God—not humans—determines issues of right and wrong. He has established marriage standards and will judge those who practice sexual immorality (Eph.5:5-6).

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ HEBREWS 13:5-6.

What guidelines for security and contentment in God does this passage present? What are believers' responsibilities? What does God promise believers?

Why is God's presence an antidote to materialism?

Believers are to trust God in all circumstances. We can depend on Him to supply what we need materially. Believers are to avoid materialism. Contentment comes through an ongoing relationship with God through faith in Christ. This contentment is fueled by God's promises to be present with every believer. Believers can be free from anxiety and fear of abandonment.

Refer to verse 6: "What can man do to me?" What do you most fear from other humans or the world?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ HEBREWS 13:7-8.

How can human leaders help us live out our faith? What does this say about believers' responsibilities as Christ's representatives?

Who is someone who has been in leadership over you that has influenced you? What was it about their character that made you want to follow them?

Believers are to examine the lives of former leaders, especially those who had been faithful until death. We also need to be aware that others will examine their lives in an effort to find a worthy life model.

If someone examined your life, what qualities would they want to model? How does your life reflect a commitment to God's standards?

How does Jesus compare to earthly leaders? How is Jesus superior?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Are you committed to showing hospitality? What are some practical ways you can be?

Does submission to authority mean you have to agree with them about everything? What are some ways you can still honor your leaders even if you disagree with them?

PRAY

Pray that your group will demonstrate their faith in practical ways towards others. Pray that your church would be known for its love expressed in tangible ways to others.

COMMENTARY

HEBREWS 13:1-8

13:1. In many ways verse 1 acts as a theme verse for this section of Hebrews. It is no accident that the writer of Hebrews begins with the exhortation for believers to love one another. In keeping with Jesus' expression of the second "Great Commandment" (see Mark 10:31; compare Lev. 19:18), the writer urged his readers twice prior to this verse to love and encourage one another (see Heb. 3:13; 10:24).

The command to love other believers is a call to action, a call to meet one another's needs and to look out for others' well-being (see Phil 2:4). In short, love acts. This is a summons to meet one another's needs and to show one another—and a watching world—what the love of Jesus looks like. Believers are to care for one another.

The focus of brotherly love is toward other brothers and sisters in Christ. We are a family. Jesus is the firstborn Son who brings believers to glory. In Christ, believers are children of God, brothers and sisters to one another in the Spirit, and the church of the firstborn. God's people are a family. We are God's household, and as such we are to love for and care for one another in practical ways.

Many of us as believers can give testimony of having been part of a loving church congregation in which someone helped us in a significant way. We can show love for one another by praying for someone, by getting to know a new family, and by helping when possible to meet a physical or spiritual need of someone. Often God uses us to meet the needs of others in ways that we did not think possible.

13:2. Whereas verse 1 focused on demonstrating love for other believers, verse 2 focuses on demonstrating loving hospitality to strangers. The idea of God's people showing hospitality to strangers has roots in the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 10:19, the Lord commanded the Israelites to show love to foreigners, or sojourners, out of a remembrance that they too once lived as strangers in a foreign land.

In the first century A.D., showing hospitality to traveling strangers was common among Christians. A first-century inn was not always a safe place to stay the night. It is likely that in Hebrews 13:2, the reference applied particularly to other believers who may have been traveling—or fleeing—within the Roman Empire. For example, in 3 John 5 we read of some itinerant Christians who had been taken in and cared for other believers as they journeyed for the sake of the Lord's name. Quite often, such acts of hospitality also had a missional purpose. Traveling missionaries would be able to stay in believers' homes while preaching the gospel in their area.

In his reference to believers unknowingly welcoming angels, the writer of Hebrews alluded to Genesis 18–19, a passage in which Abraham showed hospitality to three strangers. One of the visitors turned out to be an appearance of the Lord

Himself (see Gen. 18:2,9-10)! The other two were angels. They traveled on to the city of Sodom, where they were shown hospitality by Abraham's nephew, Lot (see Gen. 19:1-2). Neither Abraham nor Lot knew at first that the strangers were angels.

13:3. Another application of Hebrews 13:1 is the care of prisoners. Evidently, the first readers of Hebrews knew of and had cared for some Christians who were in prison because of their faith in Christ (see 10:32-34). The first readers also would have known the story of a Christian leader such as Paul, who was imprisoned multiple times for the sake of the gospel. The basics of life such as food, water, and clothing were not always provided when one was in prison, so it was especially important for believers to meet the physical needs of those who were imprisoned for the sake of Christ.

Believers in some parts of the world even today suffer imprisonment (and worse!) for the sake of Christ. One example is that of an Iranian pastor who recently was arrested for preaching the gospel of Christ and confined to one of Iran's worst prisons. Credible reports tell of the pastor being tortured but also of his leading dozens of fellow prisoners to Christ.

13:4. Verse 4 begins a section (13:4-6) that focuses on personal behavior. The section centers on matters that are inward and less public—in that the writer dealt with the believer's attitudes about sexual behavior and money.

In verse 4, the writer of Hebrews places marriage in its rightful place of honor. In Christianity, marriage is highly valued. The marriage bond must be honored, and spouses are to love one another. Verse 4 reflects the importance of purity in marriage in the earliest teachings of Christianity.

Marriage is a mystery that is now revealed (see Eph. 5:22-33); the husband-wife relationship is to be a reflection of the pure, loving relationship between Christ and His bride, the church. Therefore, the marriage relationship should be adorned with purity and faithfulness.

The pure marriage bed is a reference to the husband and wife remaining sexually faithful to each other. Adultery and other forms of sexual promiscuity were all too common in the Roman Empire. A Christian marriage that reflected purity, faithfulness, and sacrificial love stood out against the culture like a diamond in a vein of coal.

So it is in our day too. Sexual immorality is epidemic in our culture and too often among churchgoing families. In contrast, a godly marriage that is honored by both husband and wife showcases a grand and beautiful truth to our culture. Marriage glorifies Christ and reveals the impact of the gospel in a Christian home.

13:5-6. Verses 5-6 focus on our character as Christians, specifically in the area of money. The Scriptures clearly warn against the love of money. Proverbs 23:4-5 says, "Don't wear yourself out to get rich; stop giving your attention to it. As soon as your eyes fly to it, it disappears, for it makes wings for itself and flies like an eagle to the sky." Money itself is not evil. Rather, it is the love of money that is the root of all kinds of evil (see 1 Tim. 6:10). So first, we are to be free from the love of money. We can only do three things with money: save it, spend it, and give it away in helping others. A balanced life seeks to do all three.

Second, we are to be content with what we have. The apostle Paul taught the same principle in Philippians 4:10-12. Paul had learned to trust Jesus Christ to provide for his needs; thus he learned to be content whether he had little or much. Being content is a spiritual watermark, and is proof of the believer's trust in God.

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, from preaching in the services to visiting those in the hospital and counseling members who are facing difficulties.

The focus in verse 7 is specifically on the act of teaching. There are many things that pastoral leaders do, but teaching church members the Word of God is of special importance. Every generation since the church first began has seen its share of false teachers who lead believers' hearts away from their first love, Jesus (see 13:9).

Those who lead faithfully in local Christian congregations need to be respected and followed, with specific regard for how they live and what they teach (see 13:7-14). Leaders are to be obeyed (see 13:17) and prayed for (see 13:18). To be a faithful pastor is a noble thing (see 1 Tim. 3:1), but the meaning here in Hebrews 13:7 is broader and refers to any teacher of God's Word in the church. There are many necessary ministries in our churches, but none is so critical as the rightly understood and effectively preached Word of God. It should be the high point of the church's gathered worship and the apex of our week as believers to gather and hear the Word of God proclaimed with power and relevant application.

Verse 8 might seem to be out of place at first, despite how wonderful a verse it is. The verse declares that Jesus never changes! But in context, the point is that the message that is preached today—if God's Word is preached faithfully—is the same message that was preached at first. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Since Jesus is the same, the message about Him that was first preached must be the same message that is preached today. Those who preach and teach the true Word of God declare the message of Jesus Christ. He never changes. Neither does His truth. Jesus is the changeless High Priest who is always interceding for us. Since He does not change, we can look back on all the Lord has done for believers in the past and trust Him with our present. Moreover, we can look to the future in hope and with faith that He will guide us all the way to the end He has prepared for us. He is our Great Shepherd (see Heb. 13:20)!