

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS MATERIAL

The purpose of this material is to help you spend time, meeting God through his word to you as recorded in the Book of Hebrews. There aren't a lot of hard and fast rules and it's much more important that you take your time and listen and talk to God than that you "get through all the material."

For most weeks there are 3 days worth of questions or activities. These questions and activities are all related to the passage listed at the top of their page and are meant to be done before we handle that passage in class. Some passages will require more teaching than others so if you run across a passage listed twice that's why. Also for some weeks, if the exercise is a bit longer or more detailed, I've combined days, so there will only be one exercise for days 1 and 2 or even 1, 2 and 3.

I've also included a handout called "The Method for Scriptureprayer." This outlines the ancient practice of "holy reading" which is a way of reading scripture with a heightened spiritual awareness. The handout will walk you through the basic technique and then offer some tips to make your time more enjoyable.

I would recommend that you try to spend some time each week practicing the Lectio Divina. This isn't a quick thing, and it is very different than the sort of inductive bible study methods that most of us are used to. I think it will complement well our time spent studying the text.

QUESTIONS FOR HEBREWS 1:1-2:4

Day 1

The formerly Jewish Christians in Rome were facing intense persecution for their faith and undergoing a time of trial. Where are you most likely to face opposition and rejection because of your faith?

How have these sorts of experiences shaped your relationship with God?

Day 2

In light of the fact that the recipients of this “sermon” (i.e. the Hebrews) were facing intense persecution, do you think it is unusual that the author begins by addressing Christology (doctrines relating to and describing Christ)? Why or why not?

What do you think his purpose is in doing so? Why is he starting with this topic?

One could paraphrase the pastoral thrust of these open verses like this, “Are you under trial, persecution and duress? (Yes!) Are you feeling like God isn’t paying attention to your situation or has forgotten about you? (A bit, yes.) Then your first response should be to look to Christ and all he is and all he has done for you.”

Would you, or have you, found such an approach helpful in these times in your own life?
How so?

Day 3

Verses 1 and 2 speak of the ways in which God has spoken to us in the time before Christ came. Off the top of your head, how many different ways, would you guess, has God directly spoken to humans?

Look up the following passages and record how God has revealed himself to us in each passage:
Genesis 1:24 and Psalm 33:6

Genesis 2:16-17

Exodus 20:1-3

Exodus 3:1-6

Job 38:1-3

I Kings 19:11-13

Jeremiah 1:7-10 and II Peter 1:19-21

I Kings 3:5

Exodus 32:15-16 and II Timothy 3:14-17

How do these passages develop your appreciation for Hebrews 1:2 “...but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe...”?

Day 4

It was a common assumption in 1st century Judaism that angels were God's divine messengers and appointed protectors for his people. In light of this assumption what point is our author trying to make in 1:4-14?

Why do you think this matters so much to the author?

Day 5

The answer to the previous question is given in 2:1-4. What is it?

In light of your work in *Idolatry 101*, where do you sense that you may need to pay more careful attention to what you have heard regarding Christ so that you aren't pulled away from him by your idols?

QUESTIONS FOR HEBREWS 2:5-3:6

Day 1

In Hebrews 2:5 and 3:1-6 the author makes a number of claims about Jesus. What are some of them?

Which of these jumps out at you the most? Why?

Moses was considered the central figure of the Old Testament. For people who were tempted to slip back into their Judaism, why do you think this comparison of Christ with Moses is so important?

Day 2

In 2:10-18 Jesus is described very specifically as being our “brother” and as having “shared our humanity” and being “made like us in every way.” What are some of the implications of this doctrine of Christ being “fully human”?

Day 3

The original audience was facing persecution and isolation. They were being handed over to the most powerful government on earth by their friends and neighbors for the express purpose of being exterminated. In light of this, what additional significance do the claims of 2:10-18 take on?

Where do you currently need to draw greater comfort in your own life from Jesus being your brother?

Starter Questions

- perhaps you are feeling ashamed about your sin and continuing idols?
- perhaps you are feeling alone and abandoned by God due to current circumstances?
- perhaps you sense that God “loves you” but doesn’t “like you?”

QUESTIONS FOR HEBREWS 3:7-4:13

Days 1-3

Take some time this week to read the story that is being referred to Hebrews 3:7-19.

Context: God had set the nation of Israel free from slavery in Egypt by sending Moses and Aaron as his spokesmen, bringing down the 10 plagues on Egypt, providing the Passover Feast so that Israel's eldest children would be saved during the 10th plague, leading them across the Red Sea and then crushing Pharaoh's army. When he had done all of this he then brought them to Mt. Sinai where he gave to them the Law (even though the nation was busy making an idol, the golden calf, at the time). He then brought them right to the edge of the land that he intended to give them and had promised to them.

Passage: Numbers 13:17-14:45

Observations:

About Israel's Behavior

About Israel's Trust in God

About How Israel's Story Might Apply to the Audience of Hebrews

QUESTIONS FOR HEBREWS 3:7-4:13

Day 1

In light of the story of Numbers 13-14 and the content of Hebrews 3:7-19, how would you summarize in your own words the warning that the author is giving to his audience?

How does 4:1-2 shed further light on the central issue being addressed?

Day 2

Because of our sin, we are all prone to making the gospel “of no value” to ourselves. This can happen for example through our orphan tendencies, our near and far idols, and the way we misuse the Law in attempts to gain favor with God.

Where are you currently most prone to making the gospel “of no value” to yourself?

Cite a specific example of this from the last week.

Day 3

Since we are prone to do the same thing that the Hebrew believers were tempted to do (i.e. trying to relate to God based on some standard other than the gospel), we also need to hear the same message that they were hearing.

Looking back over Hebrews 1-3, what are some specific promises about Jesus that you need to hang onto more tightly right now?

Spend a few minutes writing a short note to Jesus telling him about where you have been struggling this week and how you need him to fill your heart with the truths from chapters 1-3 that you just named above.

QUESTIONS FOR HEBREWS 4:14-5:10

Days 1-2

Because the audience of Hebrews was so well acquainted with the Old Testament and its mandates, our author often uses institutions, passages and people from the Old Testament in making his point. We have already seen the topics of angels, Moses, and Israel's rebellion at Kadish-Barnea referenced. Starting in 4:14 we have an explicit discussion of the Old Testament priesthood.

Read Exodus 40 (and maybe peek at Chapter 39 once or twice) and notice all of the regulations that are set forth for the priests. Based just on what is in this text what would you conclude about:

God

The Nature and Need for Offerings

Sin

God's Relationship With You as a Sinful Person

Day 3

Now take a look at Hebrews 4:14-5:10. How does this passage change (by completion, not contradiction) your perception about:

God

The Nature and Need for Offerings

Sin

God's Relationship With You as a Sinful Person

In light of everything that God has done for us through Jesus as our high priest, especially compared with the priesthood of the Old Covenant, how do you feel about his plan for your salvation now?

QUESTIONS FOR HEBREWS 5:11-6:20

Day 1

Hebrews 5:11-14 discusses the need for believers to move beyond “elementary truths of God’s word.” If you honestly assessed your Christian walk, where have you not moved beyond elementary truths? (cf. 6:1-3 for examples of these)

What do you think has been the reason for this?

If you are a spouse, or a parent, how do you think these issues have hampered your ability to serve your spouse and family well?

Day 2

Hebrews 6:4-6 are some of the most controversial verses in the New Testament. Based on your first reading of them, what do you think that they are teaching about salvation?

Does this agree or disagree with what you have been taught about salvation? How specifically does it agree or disagree?

Day 3

It is important to look at the entire body of scripture to know what the bible teaches. What are some other passages that you think are relevant to this discussion about the nature of salvation?

“If you can’t readily point to the major places in scripture that discuss salvation, what does this tell you about the maturity of your faith?”

Do these make 6:4-6 easier or harder to understand? Why?

Do you personally think that you can lose your salvation? Why or why not?

QUESTIONS FOR HEBREWS 5:11-6:20

Day 1

Hebrews 6:7-8 is very important for understanding 6:4-6. What point do you think that the following things might stand for in the author's metaphor?

Rain

Land producing a crop that is useful

Land producing thorns and thistles

How do vv. 7-8 shed light on vv. 4-6? (Don't worry if you think this is a really hard question. It is!! A lot of NT scholars think so too. :-)

Day 2

In vv. 9-11 the author makes several statements about the spiritual condition of his audience. What are they?

Based on this description do you think he was thinking of his audience as having "fallen away"? Why or why not?

What is the author's main concern for his audience (cf. v. 11)? How does this fit with 5:11-6:3)?

Day 3

In 6:13-20, the author offers further assurance of salvation for his audience. According to the author, what is their (and our!) basis for a secure faith?

Where do you sense that you need to be encouraged in your salvation?

For example, you may not really think that God is able to forgive you for your sins, or that he isn't really loving enough to eagerly do so. Or you may be relying on being "a good person" more than on his grace. Or you might have been trying to live with a "two worlds" approach to your faith in which what you say and do on Sunday doesn't really mesh with your everyday life.

If you are having a hard time answering this, take a look at your *Idolatry 101* material. All of our idols promise us something that only God's salvation can deliver.

QUESTIONS FOR HEBREWS 5:11-6:20

Days 1-2

Take some time to read the story of God making his covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15. Try to answer some of these questions as you do:

Who initiated the covenant?

Who made the promises of the covenant?

Who insured the outcome of the covenant by passing between the pieces of the sacrificed animal?

What was Abraham's part in this process (cf. v. 6, Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6)?

What does this passage tell you about our role in salvation? What does it tell you about God's role in salvation?

Day 3

Assuming that one was very familiar with the story of Abraham, as the audience of Hebrews would have been, why do you think that the author is citing the story of Abraham in 6:13ff? What is he trying to remind/encourage them about?

How does the story of Abraham from Genesis, and the way the author is referring to it in 6:13ff fit with his earlier statements in 6:4-6? (Again, this is a pretty difficult passage, so wrestle with it even if you can't answer it.)

QUESTIONS FOR HEBREWS 7:1-10

Days 1-2

Take some time to read the story of Melchizedek in Genesis 14:11-24.

Based on this story what do we really know about Melchizedek?

Day 3

Looking at Hebrews 7:1-10, what else do we learn about Melchizedek?

Based on vv. 4-10 who has the greatest stature before God...

Abraham?

Melchizedek?

The Priests of Levi?

What from the text specifically supports your answer?

Based on vv. 4-10 who has the least stature before God...
Abraham? Melchizedek?

The Priests of Levi?

What from the text specifically supports your answer?

QUESTIONS FOR HEBREWS 7:11-28

Day 1-2

Jesus is a priest like Melchizedek instead of like the Levitical priests. According to this passage, how is Jesus' priesthood different than the Levitical priesthood? Try to cite specific phrases or concepts as you answer the questions.

How he was appointed (v.16ff)

Jesus vs. The Levitical Priest

What his priesthood could accomplish (v.18)

Jesus vs. The Levitical Priest

What his priesthood was a guarantee of (vv. 20-22)

Jesus vs. The Levitical Priest

The length of his priestly reign (vv. 23-25)

Jesus vs. The Levitical Priest

His need to make offerings for himself (vv. 26-28)

Jesus vs. The Levitical Priest

Based on this comparison, who offered the better priesthood, Jesus or the Levites? Why would this be such a crucial point to make to the audience of Hebrews?

(Hint: Recall the situation that the church found itself in and the temptation that some of them were facing which would allow them to escape persecution.)

Day 3

Most of us are not tempted to “slide back into Judaism” to avoid persecution. However, we are prone to relate to God and to others based on law instead of grace. Use the following tool to see

Using the Law “Unlawfully”

Do you often find it “necessary” to point out to others when you have done something good or “above and beyond” what was expected?

Never Sometimes Regularly Always

Do you often find yourself bristling when someone implies, suspects or states that something which is important to you (your spiritual life, your morals, your family) doesn’t measure up?

Never Sometimes Regularly Always

Do you find it almost impossible to accept “criticism” from anyone whom you perceive as “worse” than you?

Never Sometimes Regularly Always

Do you blunt the conviction that the Law brings by comparing your life with others? (“I know I’m not perfect but take a look at so and so...”)

Never Sometimes Regularly Always

Do you tend to feel smug or good about how some parts of your life are better than “some people” (“who I could mention, but will not because not mentioning them just goes to show how much better I am than them anyway.”)?

Never Sometimes Regularly Always

Do you try to overcome your “signature sins” by resolving/vowing to “never do that again” and think that as long as you don’t actually do the action you’ve improved spiritually?

Never Sometimes Regularly Always

Are you more concerned/upset about getting “caught” sinning than about the fact that you have offended the infinite, holy God of the universe?

Never Sometimes Regularly Always

where you might be prone to doing this.

What trends do you see in your life where you are willing to give up the promises of a “better covenant” in order to go back to the provisions of a “lesser covenant”?

QUESTIONS FOR HEBREWS 8:1-13

Day 1

According to this passage, why was it so essential that all of the sacrificial rituals in the Old Testament took place precisely as God commanded?

How does the idea of the “true tabernacle” shed light on the importance of the law and sacrificial system? What was their true function?

God knew from the very beginning what ultimate sacrifice would be necessary in order to conquer sin. He also was keenly aware that every sacrifice that was offered was looking ahead to the time when he made the ultimate sacrifice of his Son. How does this understanding give a richer meaning to passages like Malachi 1:6-14?

Day 2

Vv. 8-12 lay out the basic provisions of the new covenant that was inaugurated by Jesus' life, death and resurrection. What are major provisions of the new covenant?

How do these compare with the provisions of the Law, the old covenant?

How does your view of God and affection for him deepen as you see what he has given you in the new covenant?

Day 3

Spend a few minutes now, and write a short prayer to God thanking him for the better promises of this new covenant. It may be good to be looking at vv. 8-12 as well.

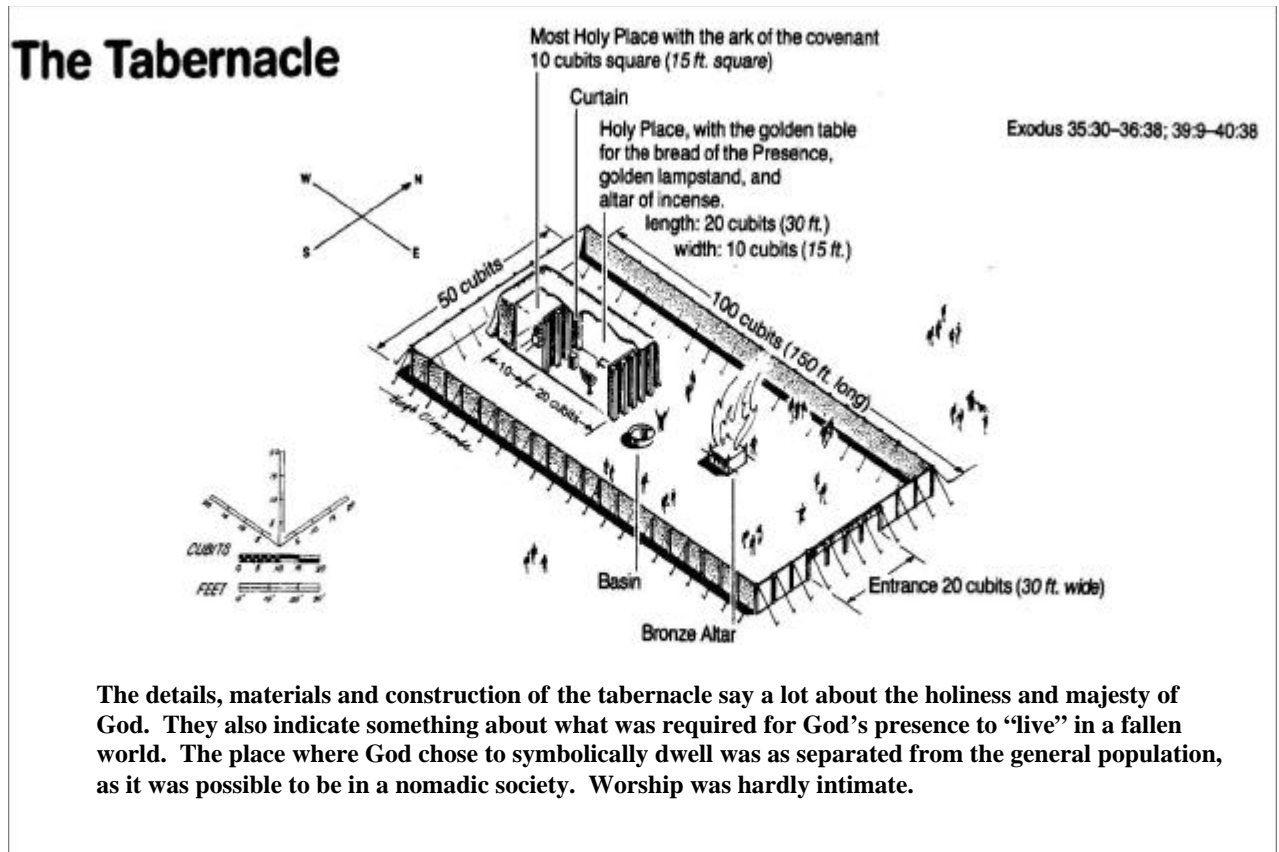
You may want to include some of the following ideas:

- **Contrition for the ways in which you have treated God's sacrifice lightly the way the nation was doing in Malachi.**
- **Rejoicing in how much better the new covenant is.**
- **Thanking God for his lavish love, which made the new covenant possible.**
- **Thanking God for making you a part of the new covenant.**
- **Expressing your longing for the future when the new covenant will not just be inaugurated but completely fulfilled as well.**

QUESTIONS FOR HEBREWS 9:1-10

Day 1

Exodus 25-27 details the construction of the tabernacle. Spend a few minutes skimming through all of the details that are given. The following diagram may help you visualize.



How does that compare with the privileges that we have as daughters and sons?

(You may want to glance at John 1:1-18 to see the contrast between God's presence with his people under the old covenant versus his presence with them in the new covenant. V. 14 is especially telling since the phrase "made his dwelling among us" is literally "tabernacled among us.")

Days 2-3

The background for Chapters 8-10 is the Old Testament sacrificial system, specifically the Day of Atonement ceremony and the construction and arrangement of the tabernacle.

Take some time to read Leviticus 16. As you do, try to answer the following questions.

What does this passage tell us about the seriousness of sin?

What does this passage tell us about the holiness of God?

What does this passage tell us about the nature of what needs to happen for forgiveness?

How would you describe the effectiveness of this old covenant mode of worship compared with what is available to you now as a member of the new covenant regarding...

What was necessary for worship to occur?

Your access to God in worship?

How does this aspect of Christ's work personally deepen your appreciation for what he has done for you?

Day 3

Over the course of our time in class, we have regularly spoken of the need to develop a deeper understanding of the gospel. This passage speaks to all of the major areas of the gospel: sin, cross, and redemption.

Spend some time meditating on a specific situation or area of your life where you sense that the gospel needs to grow. Keep the passage open before you as you try work through the following exercise.

Sin: *Jesus, I freely confess that _____ (this idol?, this orphan tendency?, this misuse of the law?, this distrust that you are truly good? etc.) is sin in my life. I need your powerful work on my behalf to be applied to my life here through the forgiveness you offer in this passage, specifically...*

Cross: *Jesus, I want to recount now specifically what your death on the cross has done for me...*

Redemption: *Jesus, in light of my sin and your ultimate sacrifice as my high priest, done to not just make me outwardly clean, but to cleanse my conscience, I want to seek your glory more deeply. Show me how you desire to work in the situation I named above by...*

Giving me a deeper appreciation of what it means to be a daughter or son of the king...

Showing me how I no longer need to try to earn my own righteousness in this situation because your sacrifice is sufficient...

Reminding me that since I have been set free from my sins, I am to forgive others in the same way, which means that in this situation I need to ...

QUESTIONS FOR HEBREWS 10:1-18

Day 1

According to this passage, there were many limitations to the Law. What are they?

Which of these limitations surprises you the most? Why?

Day 2-3

Most of us still have a tendency to try to relate to God based on our “law sacrifices.” For example, we may reason with God that if he will give us x, y, z, then we will do a, b, c for him. Or we may relate to God on a “pass/fail” system of how well we are keeping his law instead of based on Christ’s eternal, once for all sacrifice. If you didn’t take the “Using the Law ‘Unlawfully’” quiz included in Day 3 for 7:11-28, be sure you do that now.

Look at vv. 5-7. According to these verses what does not please God in and of itself?

What does please God in and of itself? Do you most often relate to God based on the pattern of these verses?

Where are you most prone to trying to relate to God based on the law (i.e. your external performance) in order to “perfect you” (cf. v. 1-2)?

What is most often the result in your relationship with God when you do this?

In light of the fact that trying to relate to God based on our performance rather than Christ’s sacrifice is something we are prone to do, try paraphrasing some of this passage so that it speaks directly to your situation.

For example, you might write something like this...

Father, when I fail to trust you and rely on the approval of others to determine my worth I’m neglecting the fact that Christ has offered the one time, never to be repeated sacrifice for all of my sins. When he did this he freed me forever from having to try to justify myself by getting others to approve of me through my outer actions. At times I even try to use your Law, which could never cleanse me, to make myself right in your eyes, instead of surrendering myself to you and your will, etc.

QUESTIONS FOR HEBREWS 10:19-39

Day 1

The author gives us four commands in vv. 19-25. What are they?

Hint: The last command has 2 parts, and all of them begin with the same phrase in the NIV.

The author gives us two reasons that are the basis for these commands in vv. 19-21. What are they?

Hint: They both start with the same phrase in the NIV.

Try coming up with a little chart or diagram that shows the essential structure of vv. 19-25.

Example:

Since we...

Since we...

Then let us...

Then let us...

Then let us...

Then let us... (a)

(b)

Day 2

The author is making a very powerful statement in vv. 19-25. Based on what you now know about the Day of Atonement (cf. Leviticus 16), what things would have stood out as “stunning truths” to those who had been raised as Jews to follow the law?

Which of those is personally meaningful to you? Why?

Day 3

Notice in v. 24-25 that community is an essential part of the Christian experience. How have you been doing lately with regard to being involved in authentic Christian community? What are some of the reasons (good or bad) for your answer?

Take some time right now to ask God to give you a sense of who you need to “spur on to good deeds” at the moment. When God has put someone on your heart, spend a few minutes right now to write them a short note, e-mail or better yet give them a short call. It doesn’t have to be a big thing, but be sure you encourage them as a spiritual friend.

QUESTIONS FOR HEBREWS 10:19-39

Day 1

Based on what is said vv. 19-25, the author gives his audience several warnings and encouragements in vv. 26-39. List as many as you can find.

Which of these are warnings or encouragements that you too need to hear in your life right now?

What is it that makes them so relevant to you at the moment?

Day 2

Verses 32-34 gives us a list of examples of what Christians should be willing to undergo for their faith. Have you ever experienced any of these things? If so, what was it like?

How do you think you might respond if you were faced with the same difficulties in your life right now due to your relationship with Christ?

Your response to the previous question might give you some insight into how healthy your relationship with Christ is at the moment. Where do your idols hold you back from eagerly following Christ with regard to...

Enduring suffering for the sake of the gospel

Being insulted or persecuted for your allegiance to Christ and his kingdom

Publicly standing beside those who are suffering for their faith

Being willing to give up your possessions and lifestyle in order to serve Christ better

Day 3

A regular theme in Hebrews, and the rest of scripture, is that we must continue in our journey of faith. What promises does our author cite to encourage us in vv. 35-39?

Where do you sense you are most prone to neglecting your relationship with God and not persevering? What causes this to be so hard for you?

Take some time now to read through Revelation 21:1-4 or 20:1-6. Chose one or two of the promises listed here and spend some time thinking about how good they will be to experience. You may even want to write a short note to Jesus telling him about how eager you are to experience these things and asking for continued strength to finish your race here on earth well.

QUESTIONS FOR HEBREWS 11:1-12:3

Day 1

Chapter 11 is the most famous chapter in all of Hebrews. Spend some time reading through it slowly. Mark any of the people who are referred to whose story you don't know or can't remember as you go along.

When you have finished, choose one or two and go back to the Old Testament and reread their story.

Hint: Most bibles will have cross-references in the margins, or a concordance in the back so you can find passages where the main character is mentioned. If you can't find the story easily, go to "BibleGateway.com" and use their scripture search, putting in the name of the person's story you are trying to locate.

Day 2

Chapter 11 has many things to say about the nature of faith. Try locating 4 or 5 of these statements about faith and putting them in your own words.

For example, if the passage says...

These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. (Hebrews 11:39-40)

Then the statement about faith is...

Faith means continuing to believe in the promise even when it has not yet been fulfilled.

Passage:

Statement: Faith means...

Passage:

Statement: Faith means...

Passage:

Statement: Faith means...

Passage:

Statement: Faith means...

Day 3

The rhetorical point of Chapter 11 really concludes in 12:1-3. In light of 12:1-3 what response do you think the author was trying to elicit from his audience through citing all of the examples he did in Chapter 11?

Name a few areas in your life where you feel like you need to receive encouragement from the “great cloud of witnesses” who are surrounding you. Are there any examples cited in Chapter 11 that speak to these areas in your life?

In addition to the example of others, 12:2-3 commands us to fix our eyes upon Jesus and gives us reasons for doing so. How might you need to do this with the areas in your life that you listed above?

For example, if you are feeling discouraged by a lack of joy in your life, then fixing your eyes on Jesus might mean praying a statement like this:

Jesus, right now I'm having a hard time really believing that following you is the best of all possible ways to live my life. Help me understand more deeply what it was that you were willing to sacrifice to overcome my sin so that you could be my friend instead of my enemy.

QUESTIONS FOR HEBREWS 12:4-29

Day 1

12:4 through 13:21 form the concluding section of Hebrews that has to do with our journey of faith. In this concluding section there are four subsections. The first one deals with the broad topic of God's discipline in our lives. Discipline here has a broader meaning than "punishment" and carries with it the idea of "training to be fit for a specific purpose" although correction is a legitimate part of this process.

What are the benefits listed in 12:4-14 of having God involved in bringing discipline into our lives?

We often forget that one of the privileges of being God's child is that he trains us in the same way we raise and train our children. How does this parental image deepen your understanding of how God works in your life?

Day 2

Where do you sense that God has been working with regard to discipline in your life recently? It may be helpful to think about "hardships" in your life (cf. v 7) as you try to answer this question.

What do you think he wants you to learn in this process? Are you?

Seeing the end result is a crucial part of receiving training and correcting in a positive way. What do you think that God, as your loving Father, would want to see as the end result in your life in the areas you listed above.

Day 3

Part of being on a spiritual journey is knowing where you are headed and 12:18-29 describes our destination as pilgrims.

First read verses 18-21 and then verses 21-27. These verses help us understand our final destination by way of a negative example. We are not headed to Mt. Sinai the way the nation of Israel was. Take a few minutes to read Exodus 19, which is the passage these verses are referring to.

What would have been your impression of God if Exodus 19 were your only experience with him?

Now read verses 12:22-24 and 12:28-29. These verses help us understand our final destination by telling us what it is like. How is our final destination of Mt. Zion different than Israel's experience at Mt. Sinai?

How does this change your perception of God?

QUESTIONS FOR HEBREWS 13:1-25

Day 1

There are certain things that pilgrims need to do in order to travel well. What are several of them?

Are these the sorts of things you would think of as preparing you well for the journey? Why or why not?

Based on what you've read in vv.1-19, what are a few things that you are either not doing and so must start doing or need to stop doing in order to travel better?

Day 2

Think back over the last year at NPC.

Remember that in the fall we took a long look at stewardship as a part of discipleship, you may have participated in our Idolatry 101 series, Sonship or another small group or bible study such as the Purpose Driven Life, and for the last several months we have been reading Hebrews, praying for spiritual renewal and learning about the persecuted church.

How has God worked in your life to bring you a greater understanding of:
your sin, brokenness and need for him?

the glory and the majesty of his work on your behalf on the cross?

the tremendous joy and privileges of being his child?

Day 3

Take some time now to look at the closing benediction in vv. 20-21. Theologically this is a very rich pair of verses. Spend some time thanking God for how he has been working in your life this year and how he continues to desire to work in your life (as expressed in vv. 20-21).

THE METHOD FOR SCRIPTURE PRAYER: LECTIO DIVINA (HOLY READING)

Eugene Peterson gives a wonderful description of how prayer and scripture relate to each other in *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. He begins by noting that as a pastor, he often found his “good advice” causing problems...

More often than not I found myself getting in the way of what the Holy Spirit had been doing long before I arrived on the scene, so I would go back, feeling a bit chastised, to my proper work: Scripture and prayer; prayer and Scripture. But the *and* is misleading. Scripture and prayer are not two separate entities. My pastoral work was to fuse them into a single act: scriptureprayer, or prayer scripture. It is this fusion of God speaking to us (Scripture) and our speaking to him (prayer) that the Holy Spirit uses to form the life of Christ in us. And it is this fusion that I was trying to get onto the pages of *A Long Obedience*.

Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, p. 202

Peterson later goes on to explain how becoming more like Christ centers around Scripture and prayer...

...There is virtual unanimity among our Christian ancestors that the means [of becoming more like Christ] consists precisely in this fusion of Scripture and prayer. It is not a terribly difficult way of reading and writing, but it does require diligent attentiveness. The fusion is accomplished by reading these Scriptures slowly, imaginatively, prayerfully and obediently.

This is the way the Bible has been read by most Christians for most of the Christian centuries, but it is not commonly read that way today. The reading style employed more often than not by contemporary Christians is fast, reductive, information-gathering and, above all, practical. We read for what we can get out of it, what we can put to use, what we think we can use—and right now. “We...we...we...we...” all the way home.

If we are serious about following Jesus and living out the gift of his life in detail in our bodies and circumstances, we must swim against this whitewater River. We and familiarize ourselves with the world in which Jesus and his gift of life are revealed to us. We do it by reading our Scriptures *slowly, imaginatively, prayerfully and obediently*. Each adverb is important.

Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, p. 203-204

The method for doing this that we are going to use is called the Lectio Divina or “holy reading.” It is a wonderful complement to the very textual, inductive bible study methods that we use primarily at NPC.

Take some time now to read through the process and instructions. Each time you do this you may want pull out the instructions page and just keep it by your bible. We’ve included some extra “Lectio Divina” sheets in case you want to jot down some observations when you are done, but this isn’t a necessity.

The Process of Lectio Divina

SILENCIO: SILENCE

Sit quietly, comfortable and relaxed. Breathe in and out slowly and quiet your heart and mind. In the stillness, become aware of God's presence with you. Open your heart to receive whatever God wants to give you.

LECTIO: READING

What does the text say?

Focus: The text, facts, details.

Read the portion of Scripture listening with your heart. Read expectantly, aloud or in a whisper, letting the words wash over you, savoring them.
Reread the passage several times.

MEDITATIO: MEDITATION

What does the text say to me?

Focus: Personal reading, personal connections with the text.

Think or meditate on what the scripture text says. Listen to hear the text as though it was addressed to you for the first time in the current circumstances of your life. Allow the Spirit to open your heart and mind to what you need to hear. Ask questions like "Where am I in this story? What part seems to be jumping out at me? How would I respond if I were part of the story?" Stay with any words or phrases that especially catch your attention. Become aware of the feelings that arise. Think about the words, feelings, thoughts or ideas that God brings to mind and "chew on" the text.

ORATIO: PRAYER

What does God say to me and what do I say to God through the text?

Focus: Dialog with God, deliberation about what the passage calls you to.

Dialogue with God about the text. Share with God whatever feelings the text has aroused in you – feelings like love, joy, sorrow, anger, repentance, desire, need, conviction, whatever.
What difference does it make for my life as I respond to the message?

ACTIO: LIVING

WHAT DIFFERENCE CAN THIS TEXT MAKE IN HOW I ACT?

WHAT POSSIBILITIES DOES IT OPEN UP? WHAT CHALLENGES DOES IT POSE?

Focus: choices, priorities, insights.

Allow God to work out his transforming power in your daily life. John Wesley said, "Whatever light you then receive should be used to the uttermost, and that immediately. Let there be no delay. Whatever you resolve begin to execute the first moment you can."

Some Helpful Tips

- This isn't a race and you don't need to "complete" everything here, so relax and take your time. It won't work well if you are just trying to "get it done and over with" so that you can check it off your list.
- Work on taking smaller and smaller chunks of scripture when you do this. Large sections can distract you by giving you too much to look at. Think of this in terms of taking one bite (and one bite only!) of steak and then chewing it completely, savoring every morsel of it. Lectio Divina isn't designed to have you eat the whole meal, just a few bites only.
- Remember that the purpose of this time isn't to get you to learn more about Hebrews, but for you to sit with God. Pretend that Jesus has just shown up and got you out of your entire afternoon's worth of responsibilities. You're sitting at Caribou by the fire and he simply says, "So, what's going on in your life."
- Don't give up on the process too easily. This will be unnatural for most of us, so try it 6-7 times before you make any conclusions.
- **HAVE FUN!!!!** God is in control of the entire universe, he is all-powerful and he is coming again to exterminate death and fulfill your deepest desires. This doesn't have to be a "serious thing."

Lectio Divina Observations for _____.

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