

HOLY HELP FOR THE HOPELESS THROUGH A WORSHIPPING CONGREGATION Hebrews 10: 19-25

Be sure to review this week's catechism.

INTRODUCTION

Describe a time when another person's word of encouragement helped you to continue a difficult task, work at a hard relationship or continue in a challenging situation. How did the person's encouragement help you to persist?

The Bible describes the Christian life as a war (Eph. 6: 10-18), a race (Heb. 12: 1) and a fight (1 Cor 9: 26), among others. In short it uses images of struggle and suffering when it describes the life of the one who follows Christ. It tells us that our enemies are fierce and relentless. Our enemies are: the world system that is opposed to Christ and those who follow him (John 7:7, 15:18-19, 1 John 2: 15-16); Satan (1 Peter 5:8-9); and our own sinful nature (Romans 7: 14-20, Gal. 5:17). The Bible teaches that every true Christian will persevere in faith until the end of their life and so inherit eternal life (Romans 8:29-30) but it also says that we must persevere (Matt. 24: 12-13, Hebrews 3:14). The only faith that saves, is the faith that persists in fighting the fight of faith to the end of life (2 Timothy 4:6-8). The entire book of Hebrews is written to professing Christians who, because of sin and suffering, are asking if being a Christian is worth it. This paragraph shows how necessary participation in the life of a worshipping congregation is for us to persevere in our faith.

We will use the following translation, which is more awkward in English but draws out the logical connections between the primary clauses and the subordinate clauses.

¹⁹Therefore brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by a new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, by means of his body. ²¹And since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near to God with a true heart, in full assurance of faith. Since our hearts have been sprinkled to cleanse us from a conscience of evil and since

our bodies have been washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast the hope we profess without wavering because faithful is the one who promised. ²⁴And let us carefully consider one another for the purpose of provoking love and good deeds; ²⁵not forsaking the gathering together of ourselves, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the approaching day.”

STUDY

1. In verses 19-25 there are three commands. What are they?

1. *Draw near to God (v. 22)*
2. *Hold unswervingly to the hope we profess (v. 23)*
3. *Consider one another for the purpose of provoking love and good deeds (v. 25)*

2. What does it mean to draw near to God? What does the use of the pronoun “us” contribute to our understanding of this command? See 3 of the other uses of the verb in Hebrews (NIV) 4:16 (approach), 10:1 (draw near), and 11:6 (comes).

In 4:16 we are commanded to draw near to God in corporate prayer in order to find the resources we need to persevere in faith when we are in trouble. Then in Hebrews 11:6 drawing near to God is synonymous with earnestly seeking him in order to be rewarded by him. What does that mean? When a young man is earnestly seeking a young woman, what is the reward he seeks, if he is an honorable young man? The reward is her presence, her love, her attention. If a person is earnestly seeking employment what is the reward being sought? Obviously, a job is the reward. All who earnestly seek God aim to be rewarded with God's presence. Finally, in 10:1 we were most recently told, “For this reason it (the law) can never... make perfect those who draw near to worship.” When we remember that most of the previous chapters were based upon the “drawing near” of the priests to God in the tabernacle we can see that drawing near to God in this context means that we have as our chief ambition to joyfully and spontaneously join with all of God's people in displaying and declaring his great worth. Worship is the goal of the gospel. So God views as the outcome of the work of Christ a group of people, a church, gathered together out of their mutual affection for him. The church is to be organized around a shared theology, not a shared sociology. We are together as his people not because we share the same

politics or the same ethnic background or the same educational philosophy or because we like the same music. We are together only because he is the object of our trust and delight. We gather together in order to express our need of him, our confidence in him, and our admiration for him. The evidence that Christ has given himself for our sins is that we have an irresistible urge to join with God's people in drawing near to him. This isn't a private experience but a corporate experience. You cannot obey this command by yourself. It does not say, let each one of you individually draw near to God. It says, let us draw near to God. It is a command to join a local church in worshipping God.

3. What does the clause, "with a true (sincere) heart" mean? Hint: What would be an example of drawing near to a person with an insincere heart?

He is commanding us to come to him because we love him and desire to live with him, not because we want to use him to get what we really love. An example of an insincere heart is the person who marries for money. The man who draws near to a woman with words of desire and love and longing not because he loves her but because he loves her money has an insincere heart. So God commands that we draw near to him because we love him, not because we love what he can give us.

4. What does the clause, "in full assurance of faith" mean? (see 11:6)

Drawing near in full assurance of faith means that we draw near to God expecting to find him, expecting him to be and to do all that he promises. It means that we come to God exclusively, abandoning all other loves and all other hopes. All of our hopes for happiness are tied to him. We don't have any other "fish on the line." It's like getting married. I forsake all others and pursue my happiness in my wife alone. I believe that she is all I need. I depend upon her favor alone to be content. I do not trust in the affection of any other person, just my wife.

5. The author gives 4 reasons in vv. 19-22 for why we should draw near to God. What are they? HINT: Look for the word "since".

1. *Since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood and body of Jesus*
2. *Since we have a great priest*
3. *Since our hearts have been sprinkled clean from a conscience of evil*
4. *Since our bodies have been washed with pure water*

6. What are the first two reasons in vv. 19-21 talking about?

The only person who could enter into the presence of God in the Most Holy Place was the high priest. He is the only one who had the boldness, the authority to enter into the Most Holy Place. Notice that because Christ shed his blood, because his body was sacrificed for us, we now have that same authority to pass through the curtain and enter into the Most Holy Place. The author isn't just talking about the earthly tabernacle but about heaven itself. We were repeatedly told that Jesus has entered the Most Holy Place, now we are told that we can enter there with him. Next, Jesus is the great high priest over the house of God. In Hebrews, this phrase, "house of God" always refers to the church (cf. 3:1-6). Just like the Jewish high priest was over Israel as their representative head, so Jesus is over us, the church as our representative head. He always lives to intercede for us. Therefore, we should draw near. Since Jesus shed his blood on the cross and gave his body as a sacrifice for sins to gain access to God for you and since he now lives in the presence of God as your faithful high priest, draw near to God. That's why he came.

7. What are the second two reasons (end of v. 22) talking about? What is the significance of the tense of the verbs, (perfect passive)? See Ezekiel 36: 25-27.

Christ's death has not only made it possible for us to enter into God's very presence but it also caused us to want to enter into his presence. Every Christian, at the moment of conversion, by the sovereign work of Christ is given a new heart that wants to draw near to God. The Holy Spirit washes the sin and guilt out of our hearts and we are made clean in our desires. We now want to draw near. Our conscience no longer condemns us and so we are free to enjoy God as our loving Father and not cower in fear before him as our Judge. The logic is since you have been given new, clean hearts and bodies that have been washed clean of guilt and sin, draw near to God because that's why Jesus did this for you.

8. How would you summarize the purpose of the Christian life based on vv. 19-22?

Christ came for no greater purpose than this, that we might draw near to God in love and worship and trust in the company of other believers in a local church. In this drawing near, God is glorified as the all-satisfying

fountain and we are made infinitely happy. God is most glorified by us when we are most satisfied with him.

9. Is this your main ambition in life, to draw near to God with other believers?

10. What is the “hope we profess”, v. 23?

Hope never means “wish”, as in “I hope it doesn’t rain today.” Rather biblical hope is a confident expectation that a promised future good is going to one day be mine. It is both an objective reality and a subjective experience. The objective reality is that one day Jesus is coming back and when he does all who have died as Christians, trusting in him alone for their salvation, will be raised from the dead. Their currently disembodied spirits will be reunited with their resurrected, immortal bodies. Every Christian who is alive at that time, in the twinkling of an eye will be changed. Our mortal bodies will be immediately transformed to be like his glorious, immortal body. Then our Lord Christ will subdue all his enemies under his feet and he will make a new heavens and a new earth where we will dwell with him forever. No more sickness or accidents or death. No more sin. No more anger or fighting or sadness or lust. No more meaningless work. It will be a world of love where we will perfectly love God and one another forever. This is our hope. But our hope is not only an objective reality but also a subjective experience. Our hope is also that joyful confidence that we have in our hearts because we are expecting this reality. We are secure, joyful, stable people because we know where the story of our lives is going. We know what the end will be.

11. What does it mean to unswervingly hold fast to this hope?

To hold fast to the hope we profess means that we are to continually remind ourselves of the glorious future that awaits us and then not deviate from the path that will take us there. This is the Olympic athlete who often thinks of how it will feel to win the race and stand on the podium while she runs sprints over and over again in preparation. This is the mother who thinks of the joy she will feel when her baby is born while she is going through labor. This is the thought of how happy my daughter would be when I gave her the dollhouse I was building when I wanted to quit because nothing seemed to be working. This is the marathon runner who thinks of the relief and the joy he will feel when he crosses the finish line instead of thinking about the pain he is in at the moment.

12. What reason are we given as to why we should hold fast? How does knowing this cause us to hold fast?

God has made promises and he will be faithful to fulfill those promises. We should hold fast to hope because God cannot lie and he will certainly do what he has promised. God will not only fulfill the promise of giving us heaven but he will fulfill his promise to bring us safely to heaven. In other words we should hold fast our hope because God is enabling us to hold fast our hope. We should not let go of God because he will never let go of us. See Ephesians 1: 3-14 or Romans 8: 28-39 or 1 Thess. 5: 23-24 or Phil. 1: 6 & 2: 12-13.

13. Are you holding fast to the hope you profess? Does the knowledge that God has promised you heaven give you hope?

14. In v. 24, who is commanded to “carefully consider” and in v. 25, “to encourage”?

Every Christian is commanded to thoughtfully consider other Christians. Every believer is to think about the needs of other believers and take action in order to provoke other believers to love and good deeds.

15. In vv. 24-25 the verb “encourage” is synonymous with the phrase, “carefully consider for the purpose of provoking”. What is the goal of our encouragement? Compare Hebrews 3: 12-14 to see the goal stated negatively.

Stated negatively, the goal of encouragement is to keep people from having hearts that are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (3:13). All of us are daily battling with whether we are going to believe and act on the promises of God or believe and act on the promises of sin. This is the central battle in each of our lives and so when I aim to encourage you, I’m thinking about how to help you believe there is greater happiness in trusting God’s promises than in believing the promises of sin. In 10:24 it is to provoke people into having hearts full of love for God and people that motivates a life of good works on behalf of others. When I seek to encourage you I am aiming at getting you to believe the promises of God so that you have a heart full of love for God and people and a life full of serving others. The goal isn’t to help you feel good about yourself but to help you feel good about God and then delight to serve others.

16. Based on Hebrews 10: 24-25 and 3:12-13, what does it mean to encourage another person? How are we to encourage? See Hebrews 13: 22. (“urge” and “exhortation” are the same word translated “encourage” in 3:12 & 10: 25)

Encouragement is not trying to bolster someone’s self esteem but it is words and actions aimed at stimulating others to hold fast to Christ and to draw near to God and to actively live out their love for God by doing good to others. It is very informative to note what this author says in 13:22. “Brothers I encourage you to bear with my word of encouragement, for I have written you only a short letter.” If you want to know how to provoke other Christians to love and good deeds, how to encourage them, then study this book for that is what it is written for. Based on the book of Hebrews, Dr. John Piper defines encouragement this way, “The God centered, Christ exalting, Scripture saturated, emotionally in touch use of language that aims to produce God-besotted, self-forgetting, lovers of people.”

Encouragement is intentional. The command here isn’t, “Sit around expecting others to encourage you and then if they do you encourage them but if they don’t get mad and leave the church.” Christians are people who are looking for ways to encourage others, not looking for ways to get others to encourage them. If you are feeling disappointed and angry that no one is calling you, then you are not thinking straight. All of us are to be intentionally initiating relationships with other Christians for the sake of their spiritual well being. Everyone is included in this command. If you are a Christian, you are commanded to carefully think about other Christians and then to get together with them on a regular basis in order to provoke them into love and good works.

Encouragement is thoughtful and based upon personal knowledge. We are to carefully consider one another. This means we must be interested in one another. We have to take the time to listen and to learn about others. We have to spend time with one another in settings where we get to know each other. This is one of the reasons we think being involved in a small group is so important. This is one place where we get to know each other so that we can thoughtfully consider how to encourage. I know the reason people are not in small groups or don’t faithfully attend them is because they don’t get anything out of being there. Let me suggest that if you go to a small group for the purpose of “getting something out of it” you’re not going for the right reason. This verse says you go to the small group for the purpose

of giving, not getting. You go, thinking about how you are going to encourage the other members of the group. It isn’t just the small group leader’s job to make sure the group goes well. Everyone must come with the attitude of giving, not getting. Can you imagine what would happen in your small group if everyone came to the group having carefully thought about how they were going to encourage others in the group?

17. Why does the author say, “and all the more as you see the day approaching”? Again, compare with 3:14 and note the content of 10: 26-31.

We know that the only people who are going to make it to heaven are those who persevere in faith to the end of their lives. Therefore, our ultimate goal is not simply people live good Christian lives on planet earth. We want them to live Christian lives because the only people who are going to heaven are those who live Christian lives to the end. We are like people who are outside when the tornado siren blows and we can see the approaching tornado and we are urging one another to flee into the basement while watching the approaching tornado. If our neighbor is out raking his lawn we’ll do all we can to encourage him to join us in the basement. We won’t run to the basement and leave our child playing in the sandbox, will we?

19. What is the greatest barrier to you being involved in encouraging other Christians?

20. How is our small group doing in this ministry of encouragement? Are we provoking one another to love and good deeds?

21. What is one thing we could do different or better to make our group more encouraging?

22. What is one thing God wants you to do this week to encourage another Christian?