

Hebrews: be intentional

“The epistle of Hebrews is a book we need today. It was written at a time when the ages were colliding and when everything in society seemed to be shaken. It was written to Christians who were wondering what was going on and what they could do about it. The stability of the old was passing away, and their faith was wavering.

One of the major messages of Hebrews is *Be Confident!* God is shaking things so that you may learn to live by faith and not by sight. He wants you to build your life on the permanence of the eternal and not on the instability of the temporal... Look to Jesus Christ and – *Be Confident.*”

[Warren Wiersbe, *Be Confident*, 1982, 13].

“Because he honoured God, God answered him, though he was God’s Son he learned trusting obedience by what he suffered - just as we do. Then having arrived at the full stature of his maturity and having been announced by God as High Priest in the order of Melchizedek* he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him”

[Hebrews 5, MSG]

Hebrews shows us just how intentional God was in saving us. We too are called to be intentional in following him - fuelled by an attitude of gratitude. Hebrews shows God’s plan through the Old Testament scriptures and how they point to Jesus. When everything is shaken (as it was for the first hearers of this book) we can still be confident in Him. No matter what comes our way we are called to keep being intentionally obedient just like Jesus was as he headed to the cross once and for all to make a sacrifice of himself for us.

It would be good to take time over the coming weeks to read or listen to the whole of Hebrews over and over again. You can hear it read for free on the YouVersion app, or by downloading Hebrews as an audio book. We are going to be focusing in on seven key passages that give us instructions on how to live, but the background teaching will be really important for this.

As you read Hebrews you’ll get a sense of the momentum of this amazing letter. The claims about Jesus stand out again and again. Chapters 1-6 show that Jesus is a superior person to anyone who came before – prophets, angels, and even religious heroes like Moses and Aaron. Chapters 7-10 show that what he came to do by making a sacrifice for sin once for all on the cross is far superior to any other religious system. Chapters 11-13 conclude by showing us a superior faith – shown to us by Jesus.

We don’t know who wrote Hebrews but she/he wanted us to know that it is a serious book making a deliberate argument that this Jesus deserves our full intentional attitude of gratitude and lived out obedience in following him.

10 Jan	Attitude of Gratitude: Intentionally Focused	Hebrews 1.8-2.4
17 Jan	Attitude of Gratitude: Intentionally Obedient	Hebrews 3.12-19
24 Jan	Attitude of Gratitude: Intentionally 'in'	Hebrews 10.19-25
31 Jan	Attitude of Gratitude: Intentionally Confident	Hebrews 10.32-39
07 Feb	Attitude of Gratitude: Intentionally Sympathetic	Hebrews 4.14-5.3
14 Feb	Attitude of Gratitude: Intentionally Hospitable & Prayerful	Hebrews 13.1-21
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Attitude of Gratitude – Lessons from Hebrews

10 January: Intentionally Focused

Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:1-4

Text of the day:

We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? [Hebrews 2:1-3a]

We need to read this key text in the light of Chapters 1-2.

1. Have a look at the introduction (1:1-4)

The writer starts with a description of Jesus as the one who God now speaks through, who will inherit all things, who created all things, who reflects God's glory, who 'is the exact imprint of God's being' and who sustains all things by his powerful word.

Why do you think they start with such a powerful description?

How close is this summary to your mental image of Jesus when you pray?

2. The Son is Superior to Angels (1:5-14)

In the Bible when Angels become visible to humans they can be overwhelmingly glorious. They are like 'winds' and flames of fire' (Hebrews 1:7). But in Hebrews 1:6 God says all angels should worship his Son. The passage finishes by saying that angels are there to serve God by ministering to us who are being saved.

How many different descriptions of Jesus are there in this passage?

How does 'the Son' compare to angels?

3. KEY TEXT: Don't Drift. (2:1-4)

In Deuteronomy 33:2 Moses tells how the law was given to him on Mt Sinai through the Lord with 'myriad of his holy ones' (angels).

What 2 things does Hebrews 2:2 say about that law?

If that message (law) came through angels, how did the message of salvation come, and what showed that it was true? (Hebrews 2:3,4)

Given what we know about 'the Son' from Chapter one why is it no surprise that the writer warns us to 'pay close attention' and 'not drift away'?

What is s/he concerned will happen if we 'neglect so great a salvation'?

4. Jesus our brother (2:5-18)

How does the rest of Chapter 2 encourage us that Jesus can identify with us and help us in our struggles?

5. Summary

Jesus is both the glorious Son of Chapter 1 and the suffering high priest/brother of Chapter 2. He is greater than any angel and religious system. Thinking about your own life today and those of fellow believers around you:

How might knowing this help us not to drift away?

How can it help us to be intentionally focused and 'pay close attention' to him?

Space to reflect

One thing to think on...

One thing I still want to understand...

One thing I should change now...

One thing I should share...

Attitude of Gratitude – Lessons from Hebrews

17 January: Intentionally Obedient

Hebrews 3: 12-19

Text of the day:

See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end [Hebrews 3:12-14]

We need to read this key text in the light of Chapters 3-6

1. Who is Jesus? 3:1-6 (refrain)

Building on Chapters 1-2 the writer continues to contrast the great Old Testament figure of the faithful servant Moses with the greater glory of Christ - God’s own Son.

How does he say we know we are in the house that Christ is building?

2. An Old Testament comparison

One of the most famous stories in the Old Testament is the rescue of the Israelites from Egypt in the Exodus – led by servant Moses. But tragically after their initial rescue God’s people were not quick to trust God and enter into the promised land. Instead they preferred to stay in a wilderness than face their fears and gain their inheritance. Psalm 95 recalls the story and is quoted here at length. Read Hebrews 3:7-11

From your own experience why do you think the writer of this sermon/letter was drawn to quote this?

Who has the potential to ‘harden their hearts’ according to this Psalm?

Think of a time when you have given out clear instructions and seen them ignored. Where the instructions important and fair? Given in love? How did it feel to be ignored?

3. The key text

The writer then makes it clear that the Christian believers in the first century church were in very real danger of behaving like the Israelites in the desert.

What causes people to turn away from the living God – according to v.12?

How does sin compound this – v 13?

What is the link between unbelief and disobedience (cf. v.19)?

4. Looking ahead

In Chapters 4-6 we see some things that might help us with that obedience and some stern warnings against disobedience. We also get the idea that there is a rest for us to enter into, we have to hold fast to our faith and receive mercy boldly – by

coming to Jesus's throne of grace. We learnt how Jesus suffers through his obedience as he becomes our perfect sacrifice. We are reminded that we have a sure and steadfast hope because God's promises are certain. And yet we are also warned repeatedly not to fall away – although 'God is not unjust' not overlooking our love and the love we have shown to his saints...

Looking at Chapters 4-6 what hope do we have of not turning away from God?
How does 4:12-13 explain how even doing this study might make a difference?

Space to reflect

One thing to think on...

One thing I still want to understand...

One thing I should change now...

One thing I should share...

Attitude of Gratitude – Lessons from Hebrews

24 January: Intentionally ‘In’

Hebrews 10: 19-25

Text of the day:

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
[Hebrews 10:19-25]

We need to read this key text in the light of Chapters 7-10

1. What has Jesus done?

In chapters 7-10 the writer shows that Jesus is the high priest that we need. He fulfils the Old Testament rituals perfectly in himself and becomes a once for all sacrifice that we truly need.

Why do these chapters keep affirming the uniqueness of Jesus and the completeness of his ‘once for all’ sacrifice?

How would these chapters impact you if you had grown up making yearly pilgrimages to Jerusalem to see the Temple sacrifices and worship?

2. The key text – Hebrews 10:19-25

In this passage we are invited deep ‘in’... deeper into the life of God and, as a result, deeper into the family of God... the community of faith.

How does v.19-21 summarise the previous chapters?

What does his sacrifice give us access to?

How does his ‘priestly’ role give us confidence?

What are we encouraged to do in response to this?

a) Let us...

b) Let us...

c) Let us...

Why can we be ‘confident to draw near to God’?

Why can we ‘hold on unswervingly’?

Why does s/he make such an emphasis on spurring each other on?

3. Warning

There are 5 'solemn exhortations' in Hebrews. Hebrews 10:26-31 is the fourth.

- 1) Believers who begin to *drift* from the Word (Hebrews 2:1-4)
- 2) Will begin to *doubt* the Word (Hebrews 3:7-4:13)
- 3) This will lead them to become *dull* towards the Word and lazy in their spiritual life (Hebrews 5:11-6:20)
- 4) This will result in *despising* the Word (Hebrews 10:26-31)
- 5) Eventually this will lead to the doom of *defying* the Word (Hebrews 12: 14-29)

[Wiersbe, *Be Confident*, 136]

The trajectory is from drift-doubt-dullness-despising-defying, but the anecdote is divine discipline. If your conscience is pricked reading a passage like this and repentance comes, then, even at stage 4, there is always hope.

Why might not experiencing the Father's discipline actually be a worse state for us than from time to time being deeply convicted of sin and led to repent?

4. Take Home

Is it possible to do the Christian life on your own?

What does it mean for you this week to be intentional in 'considering how to spur each other on'?

What does it mean for you this week to be intentional in 'entering the Holy Place'?

Space to reflect

One thing to think on...

One thing I still want to understand...

One thing I should change now...

One thing I should share...

Attitude of Gratitude – Lessons from Hebrews

31 January: Intentionally Confident

Hebrews 10: 32-39

Text of the day:

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised [Hebrews 10:35-36]

We need to read this key text in the light of the whole book, but particularly Hebrews 10.

1. Saved by the gospel (10:19-25)

In Chapter 10 we are reminded that where rules and regulations failed Jesus succeeded. Sins and lawless acts will be remembered no more because of his sacrifice. And where these have been forgiven no sacrifice is necessary. We are reminded of our incredible access into his presence ‘the Most Holy Place’ no longer hidden behind a temple curtain, but available to all who draw near. We are reminded that we need each other to spur us on in love and good deeds. But we are also sternly warned not to slip back into sin...

Hebrews 10:22 says we can draw near to God knowing we have been given:

- a) A sincere heart,
- b) full assurance of faith,
- c) cleansing from our guilty conscience,
- d) our bodies washed with pure water

In your story which of these has been:

- 1) the biggest relief to you, 2) hardest to believe that God has given you?

2. Warned not to despise this gift (10:26-31)

Hebrews 10 brings up 2 dangers to continuing to have an intentional, confident faith. The focus of this week’s key passage is on the danger of persecution. But first the writer deals with a more subtle problem... love of sin.

Why is it always important to watch out for slipping in the drift-doubt-dullness-despising-defying trajectory we talked about last week?

Has this stark passage made any difference in your life over this past week?

Why can a warning sometimes be the kindest thing someone can give us?

3. Key Text: Be intentionally confident! 10:32-39

What sort of history did the people who first read this sermon/letter have? v.22-34

What does it seem that they might be about to face now? (v.36-38)

Why is it sometimes harder to keep going and stay faithful to God later on in our journey than in the initial few weeks or months?
How does the writer quote Scripture to encourage/comfort/exhort/rebuke them?
Why might this message be necessary?

4. Rally call:

“But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.” v.39

Despite all the rebukes and exhortations the writer remains confident in his and his hearer’s ultimate destination...

What do you think is the basis for this confidence?
What inspires you to trust that God will keep you faithful?

Space to reflect

One thing to think on...

One thing I still want to understand...

One thing I should change now...

One thing I should share...

Attitude of Gratitude – Lessons from Hebrews

7 February: Intentionally Sympathetic

Hebrews 4: 14-5:10

Text of the day:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven,¹⁴ Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

[Hebrews 4:14-16]

There are two things that this passage instructs us to do:

- a) We must hold firm to the faith we profess,
- b) We can approach the throne of grace with confidence

But there is also a hint at how we should behave one to another in what it teaches us about the high priests God's people used to rely on, and the high priest we now totally rely on:

1. The former high priests... read Hebrews 5:1-4

The high priests were carefully selected – not just by their peers but by God Himself.

What was their role?

How should a good high priest deal with those who were 'ignorant and going astray'?

Why could they sympathise?

2. The great high priest – Hebrews 4:14-16

Where is our great high priest based?

Why does that give us confidence to hold firmly to the faith we profess?

Why can this high priest sympathise with us?

Why is this great high priest able to give us perfect access to the throne of grace?

3. Melchizedek

Melchizedek was a priest who met with Abram (Abraham), long before the time of Moses and the Leviticus priests and long before the temple or tabernacle was even dreamed about. He seems to have been made a priest by God himself. He didn't owe his position to parents or to patronage. In a similar way the writer of Hebrews is saying Jesus is a priest because God says he is, but notice how hard that calling was and how much it cost him:

What are the signs that Jesus was ministering from a place of deep humble sympathy?

What role did suffering and obedience play for him?

What does it mean to say that an already flawless person was made perfect through suffering?

Have you ever been through a time of trial and known that you have come out more holy as a result – even if you might not wish that time on anyone?

4. Take Home

The high priests were able to deal gently with others because they knew what it was like to sin. Jesus was able to sympathise with us because he understands what it is like to be tempted in every way.

How can we be intentionally sympathetic to those around us who need help to approach the throne of grace with confidence?

Perhaps as hard, how can we be intentionally sympathetic to ourselves when we need help to approach the throne of grace with confidence?

Space to reflect

One thing to think on...

One thing I still want to understand...

One thing I should change now...

One thing I should share...

Attitude of Gratitude – Lessons from Hebrews

14 February: Intentionally Hospitable and Prayerful Hebrews 13

Text of the day:

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, ²¹ equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. ²² Brothers and sisters, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for in fact I have written to you quite briefly. [Hebrews 13: 20-22]

This needs to be read in the light of the whole book, particularly the exhortations not to fall away from Christ due to sin or suffering, and the consistent reminder of who Jesus really is – both the mighty Son of God and the suffering high priest/ brother.

5 'solemn exhortations' in Hebrews.

- 1) Believers who begin to *drift* from the Word (Hebrews 2:1-4)
- 2) Will begin to *doubt* the Word (Hebrews 3:7-4:13)
- 3) This will lead them to become *dull* towards the Word and lazy in their spiritual life (Hebrews 5:11-6:20)
- 4) This will result in *despising* the Word (Hebrews 10:26-31)
- 5) Eventually this will lead to the doom of *defying* the Word (Hebrews 12: 14-29)

[Wiersbe, *Be Confident*, 136]

After the five exhortations not to fall away the writer finishes the book with a string of instructions that show what a lived out relationship with God will look like.

There are instructions on sex, money, care for the needy, imitating leaders, avoiding heresy, prayer and hospitality.

1. Read the general 'benediction' prayer in Hebrews 13: 20-21

What does he pray that the God of peace will do in you through Jesus Christ:

- a) by equipping you...
- b) by working in you...

What historical event does he remember in the prayer that suggests the God of peace has more than enough power to both equip and work in you in this way!?

How does it feel to know he can enable you to live a pleasing life and give you everything good you need to do his will?

2. Read the specific instructions about doing God's will, and what a pleasing life looks like in practice in Hebrews 13: 1-19

Try listing the instructions in this passage

<u>Instruction</u>	verse
1. Love as...	(1)
2. Do not neglect to...	(2)
3. Remember those in...	(3)
4. Remember those who...	(3)
5. Let marriage be...	(4)
6. Let the marriage bed be...	(4)
7. Keep your lives free from the love of...	(5)
8. Be content with...	(5)
9. Remember your...	(7)
10. Do not be carried away by...	(9)
11. Let us bear the disgrace...	(13)
12. Let us continually offer...	(15)
13. Do not forget to...	(16)
14. Do not forget to share with...	(16)
15. Have confidence in ... and submit to...	(17)
16. Pray for us	(18)
17. Pray for me	(19)
18. Bear with my word of exhortation...	(22)
19. Greet your... and...	(24)

How does it feel to know he can enable you to live a pleasing life and give you everything good you need to do his will – if it means this list of instructions are part of that?

Do you believe he will give you the grace for that adventure?

Are there any of these 19 instructions that you need to check you heart on ‘lest you fall?’

3. Take Home: Hospitality and Prayer

In this season it seems good to highlight the need for being a people who are intentionally hospitable and prayerful.

What is the kindest hospitality you have received? What made it precious to you?

Who might you be hospitable to without ever realizing it? (see v.2)

How can we keep being hospitable when our lives get restricted?

How might we learn from the prayer in verse 20-21 in the things we pray for?

What can we learn from the prayer request in verses 18-19 for the things we ask prayer for?

Space to reflect

One thing to think on...

One thing I still want to understand...

One thing I should change now...

One thing I should share...

Attitude of Gratitude – Lessons from Hebrews

21 February: Intentionally Thankful Hebrews 12:14-28

Text of the day:

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, ²⁹for our ‘God is a consuming fire.’^u [Hebrews 12: 28-29]

This needs to be read in the light of Chapters 10-12 especially. From 10:19 onwards the writer continues to urge us to persevere, not get caught in sin, and definitely not to fall into the hands of the living God (by persistent deliberate disobedience leading to judgment).

The difference between us and those who shrink back and get lost is that we are to have faith, like the heroes of the Old Testament whose CV highlights s/he then recites. Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance of what we do not yet see. Like the ancients we can be commended for it, and because we have these heroes of the faith already cheering us on from glory we must run the race marked out for us untangled by sin, shame or opposition.

Despite this glorious crowd of witnesses and the invitation to fix our eyes on Jesus trials and temptations will come our way. But even persecution leading to us losing blood, and perhaps dying, while not ‘pleasant or pleasing’ will be used by God to discipline us and ‘produce a harvest of righteousness in us’ later on.

With this image in mind the writer turns us again to two stories in the Old Testament.

- 1) Esau – who couldn’t control his appetites.
- 2) Mount Sinai – where Moses received the 10 commandments

1. Lust and bitterness: Read Hebrews 12:14-17

Why do we need to be holy

What do we need to do in relationship to others if we want to be holy?

Why is holiness not just some private affair?

What happens if bitterness gets into a community?

Consider the story of Jacob and Esau: (see Genesis 25: 29f). Esau is so caught up in what he wants now that he sells something incredibly valuable for a meal that was here today gone tomorrow.

Why does the writer relate that story to the general sin of sexual immorality?

How is Esau’s lust after food similar to how other lusts operate?

What is Esau unable to undo despite his regrets?

2. Mount Sinai

The writer takes us back to Mount Sinai where we have earlier discovered that God gave Moses the law through angels, and this law was binding.

How does the writer contrast Mount Sinai and Mount Zion? (18-21 and 22-24)
After this glorious image of Mount Zion how is Hebrews 12:25 a shock for anyone who has swallowed the lie that the Old Testament God is tough and stern but the New Testament God doesn't really mind what we do?

3. Unshakeable Kingdom

Off the top of your head list your top 10 reasons for being intentionally thankful to God.

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 5. |
| 2. | 7. |
| 3. | 8. |
| 4. | 9. |
| 5. | 10. |

Did any of these reasons include: 'because our God is a consuming fire'?

Did any of your reasons include looking forward to his purifying judgment day - when his unshakeable Kingdom is fully come 'on earth as in heaven'?

The people that Hebrews was written to were most probably about to face severe persecution and witness (or very recently have witnessed) the destruction by the Romans of the magnificent earthly temple in Jerusalem.

Why do you think the writer of the Hebrews pulls these two reasons out as reasons to be thankful?

4. Take Home

How might thinking again of God's judgment to come be fuel for our own thankfulness and help us to be truly grateful for our undeserved salvation?

Space to reflect

One thing to think on...

One thing I still want to understand...

One thing I should change now...

One thing I should share...