

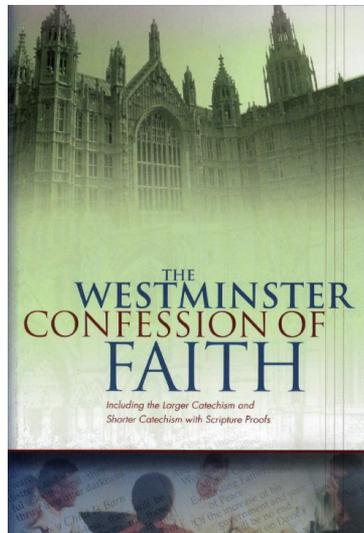
# *February 2018 Bible Reading Plan*

## *Hebrews and James of the General Epistles*

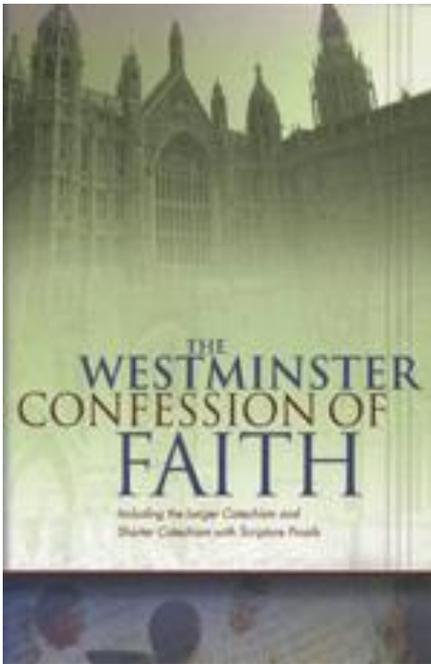
### *And the Westminster Standards*

**Hebrews 1:1** Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

**James 1:2** Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.







**The Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms are perhaps the finest confessional statements of Biblical Teaching available to us. They were developed by some of the godliest men who lived at that time. Yet they remain unfamiliar to many of us even though they are in most of our homes. My hope is that over the next number of months, that will change, and each of us will realize the rich resource we have in our Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger & Shorter Catechisms.**

From the Pastor:

This month we launch into the Book of Hebrews and what are often called the General Epistles: James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1 & 2 & 3 John and Jude. We will deal with Hebrews and James this month, continuing to reference passages to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger Catechism to various passages along the way.

My intent has been to encourage us to take our Westminster Confession/Catechisms off the shelf, and actually use them in our daily Bible reading. They are very rich and doctrinally solid statements. In a day when doctrine is not greatly appreciated by many, and when precision is considered unnecessary, we are deeply in need of a concise and accurate statement of doctrine that is rooted solidly in that revelation that God has given by his Spirit to the Church to be the only infallible rule of faith (what we believe) and practice (how we are to live).

Our great Enemy and the destroyer of souls, the one who has brought us under a curse through his temptations and lies, would like nothing better than to keep us from the truth God has given us in the Scriptures. And because he holds sway over “the sons of disobedience,” whose thinking and ways have such incredible influence over “the course of this world” (Ephesians 2:1-3), we desperately need a word from our Creator! And we have it in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for

correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (*Timothy 3:16-17*)

However, although we possess this treasure freely, it is not given us in a manner to spoon feed us. It is given in a manner that challenges us to dig and labor to bring together its teachings in a coherent manner that satisfies the demands of our finite minds for clear and fairly comprehensive systematic statements, rather than scattered fragments that do not allow us – or most of us – to gain an adequate understanding to undermine the subtleties of our Enemy and of the world through which he works.

For that reason, we are most privileged that some of the godliest and most Biblically astute men of a great era have given to us -- through long hours and days over several years – the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms to aid us in understanding the whole counsel of God.

We have been so influenced by our culture, that we have often neglected these treasures and fallen prey to the fuzziness of head that enables the forces of evil to prevail all too much in our minds and hearts. We are exhorted by the apostle Paul to “not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of our minds” (Romans 12:2) by that “truth [that] is in Jesus” (Ephesians 4:21).

I know of no better way to help you do that than to encourage you to read the Scriptures, and to stimulate you to use the Westminster Confession and Catechisms to aid you in understand the teachings scattered over the pages of those Scriptures.

That is a legacy I would like to leave behind!

*Bill Tyson, pastor*

## PRAYING FOR OUR MISSIONARIES

1. Apologetics Resource Center (ARC) Cult Awareness; Partners in Asian Ministries (PAM/India). Rev Clete Hux. Diligence, protection from discouragement, overcoming persecution. Debt. For 20-child orphanage with no support. Lease ends in December; need funds to move to smaller location.
2. Ronda Coon Women's Home, Family Life Ministries, FWB. Long-term faithfulness, assistance and support for women in crisis, protection of unborn and newborn babies.
3. Good News Jail & Prison Ministry. Chaplains John Lennon & Josiah Allredge. Praise for new chaplain position. Pray for inmates, open eyes and hearts to the Good News of Jesus Christ.
4. Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF), Cyprus. Service, teaching, mentoring for those from surrounding countries to become better Christian pastors in their home villages. Safety for new believers.
5. Presbyterian & Reformed Commission on Chaplains (PRCC). Pray for fruitful Spiritual counseling, support for all military deployed and their families, prisons, hospitals, nursing homes.
6. Brenda Carter, MTW, San Yi, Taiwan. Home leave thru November. Church planting, ministry in prisons, schools; Hakka seminary teacher. Ministry support throughout Asia. Decision on return to Taiwan.
7. Chuck & Wyema, MTW church planting in Europe. Church growth in the region, new church plants, travel safety, improved Farsi language skills; using concert violin skills to meet refugees.
8. Rev Clay and Darlene Quarterman, MTW/Kiev, Ukraine. President, Evangelical Reformed Seminary. Improved language skills. Acquisition of building to house seminary, dormitory and library. Protection from Russia.
9. David & Jan, Enterprise/MTW/Europe. Support for new church plants across the Atlantic. Pray for travel mercies.
10. David and Jill Martin, MTW/Odessa, Ukraine. Teaches mish kids. Praise for productive HMA, safe arrival back in Odessa, home for school & apartment. Restrain Russian aggression.

11. David & Marcia, MTW/Europe. On Home Leave in Nashville. Going to Ivory Coast to teach Muslim evangelism.
12. Manila, Philippines, Pastoral support to many church plants and slums. Grace, humility, friendship, warm relations; teachable hearts.
13. OneChild Ministry, Ang Bahay Parola (The Lighthouse), Manila, Philippines. Two adopted children, Leah Rose Andaya and Marvin Evangelista in the care of the Home. Pray for sensitive house parents and safety for children.
14. Kiev, Ukraine Seminary/MTW. Seminary students' support . Pray for the purchase of a seminary & dormitory, that the next one they choose that the government sells it to the Seminary.
15. Perry & Betty, MTW/Mediterranean area. Praise for great visit in July. Reformed teaching ministry in strong Roman Catholic nation. Pray for hearts to turn from culture to Christ.
16. Robert & Lisa Stewart, MTW/church planting, Tokyo, Japan. Praise for larger church site, for growing congregation and new seekers, and for new Youth Group growth.
17. Joel & Stephanie Swanson/MTW/France. Church planting. Standing on the Word of God in love and obedience. Pray for Joel's emersion language study. Pray for good health and their son, Pascal.
18. Dr. Tom and Connie Edwards. Hope Health Center, Fairfield (Birmingham area), praise for medical trip to Ivory Coast. Vibrant and consistent prayer for the clinic staff, volunteers, and patients. Protection against pride.  
[www.focusonfairfield.com](http://www.focusonfairfield.com)
19. Verne & Alina Marshall, MTW, San Tiago, Chili and Cuba church plants. Pray for Cuba and the ongoing persecution of Christians and those who oppose the Communist regime.
20. Franklin & Beth, MTW/Europe/Enterprise. IPC Media Production. Videographers. Sensitive ministry. Pray for continued contacts, good health, church plants and growing ministry.
21. Reformed University Fellowship (RUF)/Univ. of Florida. New RUF Rev. Brian and Jessica Thomas, and children Noah

and Evelyn have *severe financial shortage, entering with RUF/UF in the RED!*

22. RUF/Florida State University. Pray for the new RUF/FSU Rev Kelly and Caroline Jackson and their family as they step into their new role. Good stewardship of resources to reach students for Christ.
23. Dr. Barrett and Bryanne Jones and children. Praise for Chisomo (Grace) pending her adoption, which delayed their return home.
24. Pastor John and Sarah Ellen Carson. Retired from World Witness staff, continue as volunteers at Uganda Bible College, Africa.
25. Rev. Scott and Katie Moore and five children. Trinity Family Ministries, Mobile, AL. Faithful and effective prayer in a dangerous, depressed community experiencing violence and deaths.
26. Matt Elder/Arizona State University - Hope4ASU.org. is a fruitful evangelism. Pray for faithful in friendships, and student training to share the good news of Jesus.
27. SALAMA, ministry to underserved children/George Crook, Nashville, TN. Pray for spiritual and physical nurturing, and protection for the ministry. New school year begins!
28. Dr. Lloyd Kim, Coordinator of Mission To the World (MTW). Pray for an effective prayer movement in each region, team and country for budding churches and teams.
29. Pray for Kay Burklin, MTW Director, European Refugee ministry, to effectively network, resource and equip the Church to love and serve those in need. Pray for needed support. Pray for massive support and attendance at MTW Global Missions Conference in Dallas in November.
30. Pray for the Missions Ministry Team and Gordon as they begin work on developing a new strategic plan for support decisions.

Pray for those WPC members willing to go on the Missions Team, in part-time or full-time missions.

### **Prayer for Bill and Mary Ann**

- Thanksgiving for Bill and Mary Ann and their ministry to us
- For hope and excitement during this transition phase as they await what the Lord has in store for them
- For Bill to be fulfilled in his work and effective in his ministry as he completes his time of being our Senior Pastor
- For the wisdom of the Lord in making decisions about what to do next in ministry and in life
- For God's timely provisions to be supplied in a way that will build faith in him for all their needs

### **Prayer for the Congregation**

- Unity around the truth of God's Word
- Devoted to seeking the will of God through the Word and prayer
- Protection from discouragement, impatience, and division

### **Prayer for the Pulpit Committee**

- That the PC would have the mind of Christ
- That the PC would recognize the pastor God has called
- For the PC to be dedicated to doing their work prayerfully, with thoroughness and thoughtfulness

### **Prayer for Knox and Mary and Their Family**

- That God would continue to strengthen the gifts he has given Knox during our pastoral transition and under the ministry of a new pastor
- That Knox and Mary would be a great help to our future pastor and his wife in both fellowship and ministry
- For the White family to be nurtured and blessed under the ministry and shepherding of our future pastor

### **Prayer for Future Pastor**

- That God would increase his passion for preaching the Word of God
- That he would sense a clear calling to WPC from the Lord
- That God would give him a love for our church
- For new relationships to form at our church in meaningful ways during the search process
- For God to prepare him to shepherd our flock more effectively through the trials and blessings he has faced or currently faces
- For his family (wife, children, & closest friends) to be encouraging and to be at peace, as they consider a call to WPC. Pray for their comfort and strength in the Lord as they consider leaving their current setting and going to a different church.

We don't know the author of Hebrews, or its specific destination, but it is an incredible book, richly portraying the fulfillment of Old Testament anticipations of Christ and his redemptive work. It bears the marks of a pastoral exhortation to a specific congregation or location of followers of Christ who have initially suffered for their faith in Christ, but some of whom have become dull and weary, and are in need of strong warnings lest they fall away.

The portrayal of Christ, although perfectly consistent with the Old and New Testament teachings, is nevertheless utterly unique. Nowhere is Christ's High Priestly ministry set forth as here. Hebrews was attributed to Paul by some early on, and although Paul was certainly capable of writing a book like Hebrews, it is rather broadly agreed among good, solid Bible-believing scholars that Paul was not the author. Although Paul alludes to Christ's High Priestly ministry, especially his intercession on our behalf, he does not spell it out like Hebrews. But the high view of Christ, and the centrality of Christ, characterize both this author and Paul's letters, and the writer of Hebrews makes that evident immediately.

We worked through Hebrews back in 2016, I believe, and did so in some detail as I preached through the book. We will move more quickly this time, and then press on with the epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude.

**Read Hebrews 1:1-2:4**, taking note of the "Therefore" of 2:1. Remember the principle: "When you see the word 'therefore,' always look to see what it is there for." We will concentrate on vss 1-4 today.

1. Verses 1-4 set forth Christ in his three offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. Where do you see those three offices, and so far as you can tell, what was their function? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. When we hear someone say, "I think we are in the 'last days,'" what do they usually mean? \_\_\_\_\_

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What did the writer to the Hebrews mean by "the last days"? \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. Compare Hebrews 1:1-3 with John 1:1-3. What parallel concepts do you see between these two writers, even if expressed in somewhat of a different manner?

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4. In light of what is said about Jesus as the “Son” in Heb 1:1-4, ought we to expect any further and superior revelation beyond Jesus and his apostles as would be claimed by Jehovah’s Witnesses or the Mormons, both of whom have documents supposedly given to their founders long after Jesus? Explain: \_\_\_\_\_

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It is important that we keep in mind what Jesus said to his disciples on the night of his arrest, recording in John 16:12-15 -- *I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.* <sup>13</sup> *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.* <sup>14</sup> *He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.* <sup>15</sup> *All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.* Some people think that somehow the red letters in the Gospels (for those Bibles that use them for the words of Jesus) carry more weight than the epistles of Paul or James and Peter and John. But what are those epistles? Are they not Jesus’ continued teaching of those through whom he chose to communicate his Word?

**For your Meditation and Prayer:** In light of what is said of the Son here in Heb 1:1-3, what ought to be our response to him as Prophet, Priest, and King? Keeping in mind that *Prophet* doesn’t focus on *fore-telling* the future, so much as *forth-telling* the Word of God, how ought one to respond to the Son as the ultimate Prophet? How ought we to respond to him as the High Priest who made purification for our sins? How ought we to respond to the Son who as King sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high? Reflect on those questions, and make them a matter of prayer as to whether you respond appropriately. And as you do so, keep in mind the nature of the one with whom we have to do – 1:3.

**Re-read Hebrews 1:1-2:4.**

1. How does the writer apply the significance of 1:4 in his exhortation in 2:1-4? What is his point? And how does that apply to you? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Hebrews 1:5 contains two Old Testament quotations, the first from Psalm 2:7, and the latter from 2 Samuel 7:14. The one from 2 Samuel 7:14 initially referred to Solomon, David’s son, who as king would build a house for the Lord. It has a greater fulfillment in Jesus, born in the line of David, who is also building a magnificent house for the Lord. What is the house he is building? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Read Psalm 2 and Acts 4:23-31. How did the early Christians understand Psalm 2? Of whom did it speak, and what was it describing? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. Hebrews 1:10-12 is a quote from Psalm 102:25-27. Psalm 102 is addressed to Yahweh, as evidenced in the English by small caps – **LORD**. Here the writer applies it directly to the Son. What does that, and Heb 1:3, imply about the Son? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. Hebrews 2:1-4 is an application of the truth about who the Son is. What are the practical implications of these verses for your life, and for your handling the Word of God, not only here at the first of the year, but throughout? \_\_\_\_\_

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**For your Meditation and Prayer:** Reflect on what has been said of the Son and how that ought to relate to you, and to our WPC Vision Statement regarding our seeking to develop in ourselves and others a passion for the preeminence of Christ in all of life, and make that a basis for your prayers today. Praise him. Bow before him in worship. Ask him to rule in your life, and to subdue your sin.

Today I want you to do something different than I usually have you do. I have not referred to the Westminster Confession (WCF) or Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC) in the past two days' readings, but because this letter focuses so strongly on Christ's service as Mediator, I want you to read the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which deals with "Christ the Mediator." I hope you have a copy, because it would be well worth noting the Scripture references given in support of the statements in the Confession. So if you have a copy, please read chapter 8 from it, and try to read a number of the Scripture references. If you do not have a copy, or are doing this where you don't have access to your copy, I am going to print it out below (without Scripture references, though). Read carefully. This is a great statement of Biblical doctrine that is critical for our understanding God's purposes, and also our own salvation.

WCF 8.1 It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man; the Prophet, Priest, and King; the Head and Savior of His Church; the Heir of all things; and Judge of the world; unto whom He did from all eternity give a people, to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.

WCF 8.2 The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fulness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance. So that **two whole, perfect, and distinct natures**, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in **one person**, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.

WCF 8.3 The Lord Jesus, in His human nature thus united to the divine, was sanctified and anointed with the Holy Spirit above measure; having in Him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; in whom it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell: to the end, that being holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and truth, He might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a Mediator and Surety. Which office He took not unto Himself, but was thereunto called by His Father; who put all power and judgment into His hand, and gave Him commandment to execute the same.

WCF 8.4 This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake, which that He may discharge, He was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfil it; endured most grievous torments immediately in His soul, and most painful sufferings in His body; was crucified, and died; was buried, and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption. On the third day He arose from the dead, with the same body in which He suffered; with which also He ascended into heaven, and there sitteth at the right hand of His Father, making intercession; and shall return to judge men and angels at the end of the world.

WCF 8.5 The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience and sacrifice of Himself, which He, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him.

WCF 8.6 Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after His incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof, were communicated unto the elect in all ages successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices, wherein He was revealed and signified to be the Seed of the woman, which should bruise the serpent's head, and the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world being yesterday and today the same, and for ever.

WCF 8.7 Christ, in the work of mediation, acteth according to both natures, by each nature doing that which is proper to itself: yet, by reason of the unity of the person, that which is proper to one nature is sometimes in Scripture attributed to the person denominated by the other nature.

WCF 8.8 To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, He doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same; making intercession for them; and revealing unto them, in and by the Word, the mysteries of salvation; effectually persuading them by His Spirit to believe and obey; and governing their hearts by His Word and Spirit; overcoming all their enemies by His almighty power and wisdom, in such manner and ways as are most consonant to His wonderful and unsearchable dispensation.

***For your Meditation and Prayer:*** There is much in the above to thank God for, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so focus on thanksgiving today.

**Read Hebrews 2:5-18.**

Keep in mind that the writer’s mention of “angels” in vs 5 is not his first mention of them. He had done so in 1:4-5 where he affirmed that the exalted Son had inherited a name superior to the angels, and continues that line of thought in vss 6-7 and 13-14, and then had warned the congregation and us of the danger of neglecting such a great salvation as declared by the Lord (as over against the message declared by angels in the Old Testament). In our passage for today, he continues to show the superiority of the Lord as he makes clear that the “Lord” mentioned in 2:3 – speaking of Jesus who had brought the message of salvation, and who had been the eternal Son through whom God (the Father) had created the world (1:2) – had been made lower than the angels for a little while (2:9) in order to die to bring many humans to glory (2:10). So we see the eternal Son become man in order to make purification for sins (1:2-3) by his death (2:9), and then be exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high (1:3b) and crowned with glory and honor as the risen and exalted Son (2:9). There are a lot of interconnections in this whole passage from 1:1-2:18! In large part he is explaining the greatness of “the Lord” who had walked as a man during his ministry, and the greatness of the salvation he accomplished as a man through his death, by demonstrating that this man was more than a man. He was the Son who had created the world, and who was the perfect image of the Father (1:3). So how we respond to him is no little thing! God has gone to great lengths to save us from our sin through his Son, to bring many sons to glory. It required that the Son who created the world would share in our “flesh and blood” (2:14).

1. From what did we need to be delivered (2:14-18)? Answer that carefully.

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2. And why did he have to take to himself a human nature (2:14-18)?

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3. What encouragement is there here for us (2:5-18)?

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**For your Meditation and Prayer:** A priest is one through whom one draws near to God. Look ahead from 2:17-18 to 4:14-16 and reflect on these verses, and then pray in light of them.

Before you read this passage, let me give you an idea of what to look for. The writer has demonstrated the superiority of Jesus as the Son over angels. In 3:1-6 he demonstrates the superiority of Jesus over Moses, and then exhorts these mostly Jewish Christians to hold fast their confidence in the gospel and the **hope** held out to them in it (3:6) and the **confession** they have made (4:14). So chapters 3 & 4 are urging them to not fall away from the hope of the gospel which they have embraced and confessed, in contrast to the Israelites in the time of Moses who fell in the wilderness because of their disbelief and failure to hold fast and obey the Lord. *Turn to Heb 10:19-25 and read that*, noting that vs 23 brings together the “hope” of 3:6 and the “confession” of 4:14, and in 10:24-25 encourages us to help and stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together – we need fellowship with other Christians!

*Now read Hebrews 3:1-4:16 in light of those themes.*

1. Why is fellowship with other brothers and sisters in Christ so important in light of 3:7-19? You can list several reasons from this passage, so don't look for just one answer: \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What do you learn in 3:6-19 about the difference between “making a confession of faith” and “genuine faith,” and how does that apply to us? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Is there such a thing as a healthy “fear” in the Christian life (4:1-13)? Explain: \_\_\_\_\_

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4. After 40 years and the loss of an entire unbelieving generation, Joshua led the people of Israel to conquer and possess the land of Canaan. It was a picture of a greater inheritance and “rest” still held out to us. What must we do to enter that rest? \_\_\_\_\_

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**For your Meditation and Prayer:** These two chapters give great reason for us to pray. Reflect on what you have read, and let it stir you to prayer.

**Read Hebrews 4:11-16.**

We sometimes speak of the “means of grace,” by which we mean those things which God has ordained as ways that he ministers grace to us. Two of those are mentioned in these verses.

1. What are the two means of grace mentioned in vss 11-16? \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Read Westminster Larger Catechism (hereafter WLC) 154-160.**

2. Concentrating on WLC 157 and 160, along with Heb 4:12-13, what practical applications can you make for your own life? \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Now read WLC 178-186, and if you can take a few extra minutes (it won't take long), read on through 196.** These questions and answers cover the 2<sup>nd</sup> means of grace found in Hebrews 4:16, and there is a tremendous amount of helpful guidance regarding prayer.

3. What are some take-aways from this reading of the WLC on prayer? \_\_\_\_\_  
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**For your Meditation and Prayer:** One of the great doctrines of the New Testament pertains to our being adopted in Christ as children of God. J. I. Packer speaks of that as “the highest privilege that the Gospel offers,” even higher than justification. It is a tremendous thing for God as Judge to pardon and acquit us on the basis of Christ’s death on our behalf, and his perfect life lived in our stead. But it is a greater privilege still to then be taken into his family and regarded as his child. The latter gives us boldness and confidence that we may enter into the presence of God freely, as a child might have access to his father, even if no one else does. So reflect on these matters, on your devotion to the Word of God and to Prayer, and pray!

**Read Hebrews 5:1-14.**

The writer had introduced the idea of Christ being our high priest back in 2:17, and mentioned it in 3:1 and 4:14-16. In both 2:17-18 and 4:14-16 he emphasizes how the Son of God, taking to himself a human nature, was equipped experientially to serve as our great high priest. Here in chap 5 he speaks of how the Old Testament priests were able to deal with others gently because of their own weaknesses and sins. Jesus did not sin, but he was prepared to serve as our High Priest.

1. How did the Father prepare Jesus to serve in that capacity (Heb 2:17f, 4:15, and 5:7-8)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. Unless we took several days, we couldn't even attempt to explore all of the temptations Jesus faced, and actually don't have a record of most of his life to cover those years. But during his ministry he faced quite a few leading up to his death on the Cross. Can you think of some temptations he might have experienced? \_\_\_\_\_  
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“Being made perfect” in Heb 5:9 means something like being fully and experientially equipped to be our High Priest. It doesn't imply sin – the writer has already made that clear (4:15).

3. What do you think he means by “he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him...”? \_\_\_\_\_  
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(if you need a hint for the above, go back to 3:12 & 18-19)

4. What is the image the writer portrays in 5:11-14, and how does it apply to your life? \_\_\_\_\_  
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**For your Meditation and Prayer:** It is worth reflecting on the incompatibility of all that Jesus endured to be our Savior, and the attitude and spirit he addresses in 5:11-14. Make that a matter of prayer for yourself, and for others in the congregation.

**Read Hebrews 6:1-12.**

This is a passage that has been hotly debated. Does it teach that a person can lose his salvation? In my opinion, this is a place where one’s view of Scripture will play a significant role in his interpretation. If one believes that the Scriptures are the very Word of God, he will not allow this passage to overrule passages like John 6:37-40, 44-45; 10:27-30; and 17:8-17, or Romans 8:28-39, etc. Nevertheless, one cannot dismiss the seriousness of what is said, keeping in mind that the “Therefore” of 6:1 is looking back to 5:11-14 from yesterday.

Look ahead to Hebrews 10:35-39. Taken with Hebrews 5:11-6:12, it is clear that the writer believes one must persevere in faith to be saved. So what might he be addressing in 6:1-12?

1. Do you think the parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-9 & 18-23) might suggest an answer? or Matthew 7:21-23? What do you think? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Or think of Judas, who betrayed Jesus. Did he experience a number of the things mentioned Heb 6:1-8? Explain: \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Compare 6:9-12 and 10:32-36. How does the writer conclude that what he fears *could be* true of them, in fact, is not? \_\_\_\_\_

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**For your Meditation and Prayer:** There is much here to encourage us to do some self-assessment with regard to our own lives. There are at least two issues here. One is making sure of one’s salvation altogether, and not allowing gospel privileges – such as growing up in a Christian home or church – to lead one to presume he is saved if there is little desire to know and live God’s word. The other is that if one does conclude that he is saved, but that he has become sluggish and dull of hearing, he ought to be stirred by this passage to repent and devote himself to growing in Christ. Make all of these matters a the focus of your prayers today, not only for yourself, but for others in the congregation, and especially for covenant children, who can very easily assume they are genuine believers because they have been taught well and are “good kids.”

Read Hebrews 6:11-20.

1. What are the connections between vss 11-12 and vss 13ff? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Heb 6:15 indicates that Abraham ... obtained the promise. 11:13 indicates that he and others did not receive the things promised, but greeted them from afar. Was that a contradiction on the part of the author? What would you assume, and why? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Are all things possible with God? Explain your answer: \_\_\_\_\_

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There is old hymn entitled "My Anchor Holds." Two stanzas are below:

Though the angry surges roll on my tempest-driven soul,  
I am peaceful, for I know, wildly though the winds may blow,  
I've an anchor safe and sure, that can evermore endure.

*And it holds, my anchor holds;  
Blow your wildest, then, O gale,  
On my bark\* so small and frail: by his grace I shall not fail,  
For my anchor holds, it firmly holds, my anchor holds.*

Troubles almost 'whelm the soul; griefs like billows o'er me roll;  
Tempters seek to lure astray, storms obscure the light of day:  
But in Christ I can be bold, I've an anchor that shall hold.

*Refrain*

\* "bark" is an old term for a small sailing vessel

There are also a number of hymns that use the imagery of a "refuge." "A Shelter in the Time of Storm" is one that comes to mind. I share these to emphasize the great comfort that God's people have found in these images, which is also evident in the Psalms. Here in Hebrews 6, Jesus is spoken of in conjunction with the anchor of the soul, which is identified as the "hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain."

That latter reference is to the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Tabernacle, and the imagery is of Jesus entering into the heavenly "holy places ... by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Heb 9:11-12). We'll come to that shortly, but for now, note that these truths speak of the "sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, hav-

ing become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (6:19-20).

Now let’s pull a few things together as we conclude today’s reading. The author quotes Genesis 22:17 in vs 14 of Heb 6, that indicates that God took an oath, swearing by his own name, since there was no greater name by which to swear, that he would bless Abraham and multiply him as he had promised. As we noted earlier in # 2 above, the writer comments: “thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise.” I had asked: “Was that a contradiction on the part of the author?” in light of 11:13. We confess the Scriptures to be the very Word of God. So we should not assume a contradiction in what may appear that way at first. It often means we need to dig deeper, or look at something from a different perspective. In this case, the quotation in vs 14 from Genesis 22:17 comes shortly after Abraham has demonstrated his willingness to offer up Isaac according to the command of God. All of the promises about multiplying Abraham’s descendants and all the nations of the earth being blessed through his seed, were centered in Isaac. So offering up his son appeared to contradict God’s promise to him through Isaac. But when Abraham obeyed, willing to offer up Isaac, through whom God had promised to bless the nations, God spared Isaac, and provided a ram to be offered in his place. All of which anticipated the day when God would send his own Son into the world, born in the line of Abraham (and David), that through his sacrifice all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

So the writer’s saying that Abraham “obtained the promise,” seems to mean that because he trusted God and was willing to offer up Isaac, dashing God’s promises to the ground, God spared Isaac, and so fulfilled the promise to Abraham that through Isaac his offspring would be named (Gen 21:12). It was not that Abraham saw the whole promise fulfilled, but that sparing Isaac anticipated the future fulfillment of the promise through Jesus, a descendant of Abraham and Isaac with respect to his human nature.

Lastly, the picture I have in my mind is of Jesus as the anchor of the soul, who has entered heaven on our behalf, so that though we live on earth, our anchor is not one cast into the sea, but cast upward into heaven itself, so that we are secured above by the one who is our great High Priest, a priest after the order of Melchizedek. What does that mean? That’s where we’ll go tomorrow.

***For your Meditation and Prayer:*** I asked in # 3, “Are all things possible with God?” and the answer is “no.” God cannot lie; he cannot violate his nature, which is both good news for those who take him at his Word and flee for refuge to Jesus, and bad news for those who do not. But for those who have fled to Jesus as their refuge from the devastating flood of judgment that will come upon the world, it is incredibly good news, because God will be true to his promise to save all who take refuge in his Son Jesus. But for those who do not turn to Christ, it will be an utterly terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God, who will not spare a man in his sins. I assume you have fled to Christ, and if so, the promise of God will be sure.

The writer concludes Chapter 6 with a reference to the order of Melchizedek. In chapter 7 he will explain more of the significance of that.

**Read Hebrews 6:19-7:28.**

Melchizedek appears briefly in a scene in Genesis 14:17-20, and then his name is mentioned once again in Psalm 110, and nowhere else in Scripture save here in Hebrews, where the writer speaks of him as a type, or prefiguring of Christ.

1. What three characteristics are highlighted about Melchizedek in Hebrews 7:1-3? \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. What is the main thing he is emphasizing about Melchizedek in 7:4-9? \_\_\_\_\_  
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Note: Did you notice that Abraham’s honoring this man included giving him a tithe? Many make the point that the New Testament doesn’t emphasize tithing. I wonder if it is significant that a tithe is paid here by Abraham to one who prefigures Christ. Does that have implications about honoring Christ as our High Priest after the order of Melchizedek? What do you think?

It is not likely that the writer is saying that Melchizedek was without beginning or end. Rather, such is not recorded for us, and in presenting him in that manner he “resembles the Son of God” who has no beginning or end.

Heb 7:4-10 establishes the superiority of Melchizedek over Abraham, and therefore over Levi, the priestly line that will descend from Abraham. He is setting up his argument for the transfer of the priestly ministry from Levi’s descendants to Jesus who is appointed a priest after the order of Melchizedek .

3. So what qualifies Jesus to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek? (7:15ff)  
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The writer quotes Psalm 110 and the oath appointing one to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek, and applies that directly to Christ as the Son of God who has the power of an indestructible life. He has already quoted Psalm 110 back in 1:13 and 5:6 of Jesus as the Son of God, and perhaps alluded to it in 1:3.

4. What distinguishes Jesus as our High Priest as over against the Levitical priests of the Old Testament, and how does that relate to us? (Heb 7:20-28) \_\_\_\_\_  
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**For your Meditation and Prayer:** Read WLC 44, 45 and 53-55, and reflecting on those questions/answers, pray with praise and thanksgiving.

**Read Hebrews 8:1-13.**

1. Compare 8:1-7 and 1:1-3 & 13. What parallels do you see? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Our author quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34 in Hebrews 8:8-12, a very extensive quote, in which Jeremiah spoke of a “new covenant” that would be established. What distinguishes this covenant from the “old covenant” according to this quotation? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. At the same time, there is a continuity of promise seen in the last of verse 10 – compare Genesis 17:8; Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:11-12 (which is quoted in 2 Corinthians 6:16), and finally, Revelation 21:3, the ultimate fulfillment. What insights do you gain reading these verses and perhaps observing their contexts?

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**For your Meditation and Prayer:** As you pray today, reflect on the progression from the promise to Abraham in # 3 above, to his deliverance of his people from their slavery in Egypt (Exodus 6:7), dwelling in their midst in the Tabernacle built by Moses, which was but a copy of the heavenly reality (Hebrews 8:5), and then dwelling in the church as his temple by his Spirit (2 Cor 6:16), and finally in the ultimate fulfillment in the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21 & 22), where God dwells with his people and where the temple IS the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb (21:22). If we have a part of this fulfillment, we have much to give thanks for.

**Before you read:**

The writer is not concerned to deal with all the covenants set forth in the Scripture. He is here dealing with two, the Mosaic Covenant, which he speaks of as the first of two, and the New Covenant that was inaugurated in and by Christ.

R. C. Sproul told of visiting a college or university where the “department of theology” had been renamed the “department of religion.” That deeply concerned him, because it evidenced a huge change in perspective. Rather than treating the Christian Faith as the unfolding of God’s eternal plan, and undergirded by God’s *revelation* of truth, it marked a shift to seeing it as growing out of the evolutionary development of human thought, alongside of other religions.

The writer to the Hebrews doesn’t describe an evolutionary development. His perspective is rooted in the eternal purpose of God. Moses receives revelation from God, and is told in Exodus 25:40 to make everything described here in Heb 9:1-10 “according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain” (Heb 8:5, quoting Exodus 25:40). These things are described as “copies of the heavenly things,” and therefore provisional or temporary “imposed until the time of reformation” (Heb 9:10), when Christ would appear to bring in the “good things that have come” (9:11). The “good things” that came with Christ were the real deal. What came through Moses was but a copy and prefiguring of what was purposed to come in time. So the future was read backwards, you might say, like a shadow cast behind a person by the sun in front of him. The sun and the person are the realities. The shadow is but a copy.

**Read Hebrews 9:1-28.**

1. What does 9:8’s mention of the Holy Spirit tell you about the writer’s perspective about the regulations and instructions laid down in the Mosaic instructions regarding the tabernacle and the worship connected with it?

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2. Why do you think the blood of goats and calves could not ultimately atone for sin?

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3. Why could the blood of Christ accomplish what those other sacrifices could not?

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**For your Meditation and Prayer:** Reflect back on 9:11-12 & 14, and give thanks to each of the persons of the Trinity, which you can see in these verses, for this great redemptive plan that has unfolded, and is unfolding, throughout history.

**Read Hebrews 10:1-18.**

This passage actually addresses questions 2 and 3 that I asked yesterday, although there are still things not stated explicitly, which I'll suggest.

1. Heb 10:1-4 makes a similar point as 9:6-10 in some ways, and 10:2-3 gets to the heart of it, which is \_\_\_\_\_.

2. The writer puts the words of Psalm 40:6-8 in Christ's mouth. What stands out to you from Heb 10:5-9 about Christ's sacrifice? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Heb 10:11-14 is one of my favorite passages, and one I often read during the Lord's Supper. What does the contrast between the Levitical priests who stand daily offering sacrifices, and the fact that Christ sat down, signify? \_\_\_\_\_

4. How could the self-offering of one person provide forgiveness for many? \_\_\_\_\_

Some people say that all sin is equal in God's sight. That is not true. The Old Testament makes that clear in the punishments required for various different crimes or punishable offenses. The principle was sometimes stated "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," etc.

5. Stated in other terms, what did that principle mean? \_\_\_\_\_

6. It would be wrong to put a man to death for killing someone's pet cat, or dog, but it would also be wrong to fine a man \$10 for raping a young girl. Why? \_\_\_\_\_

All sin is serious, but not all sin is equally serious. We should not make light of any sin, for all sin would bring one under condemnation, subject to the wrath of God. But Paul can speak of people "storing up wrath" for themselves on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed (Romans 2:5), which ought to be a frightening fact to anyone outside of Christ. There will be different degrees of punishment in Hell, just as there will be different rewards for obedience and service in the new heaven and earth.

But all of that leads to a point I want to reaffirm as I have many times from the pulpit, that the enormity of our sin is not merely in the particular nature of the

sin itself, it is in who we sin against. It is no light thing to sin against the infinite dignity of the “Majesty on high,” as our writer calls God in 1:3. Little incidents like the death of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 point to this reality. Peter speaks to Ananias prior to God’s striking him dead, and says: “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit? ... You have not lied to man but to God,” Peter clearly makes a distinction in the seriousness of what Ananias has done.

So, I want to conclude this day’s reading by stating the same basic principle in two different applications. One is that “it is the infinite dignity of the one we sin against that gives infinite demerit to what we have done.” There may perhaps be a qualification that ought to be made to that statement. That does not mean that all punishments will be the same in severity, but it does mean that *all* sin against God is sufficient to consign one to Hell for eternity, even though the severity of the punishment of different sinners may be dependent upon a number of factors.

The other application addresses how Jesus’ death on the Cross could atone for the sins of so many. How could what he suffered in a period of hours atone for the immensity of the sin of all for whom he died? And I think it works on the principle that “the infinite dignity of the one who came gave infinite worth to what he did in the Cross.”

The Westminster Larger Catechism asks the question: “Why was it requisite that the Mediator should be God?” and answers: “It was requisite that the Mediator should be God, **that he might sustain and keep the human nature from sinking under the infinite wrath of God, and the power of death; give worth and efficacy to his sufferings, obedience, and intercession, and to satisfy God’s justice, procure his favour, purchase a peculiar people, give his Spirit to them, conquer all their enemies, and bring them to everlasting salvation.**” (WLC 38)

***For your Meditation and Prayer:*** Reflect on the infinite dignity of the Son. He created the world (1:2) and is the “radiance of the glory of God [the Father] and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power (1:3). And then think about what it meant for him to take to himself a human nature to suffer what he did on our behalf. Why would he come to do what he did for us, when we have so disregarded the worship and love and obedience that ought to spring forth from our hearts so readily towards him, and then get mad at God when he doesn’t do for us what we think he ought. It is absolutely appalling that we can get irritated at God, or outright mad and angry with him, if something really bad happens to us or one we love, as though he ought to make all go well for us sinners!!! The love of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – for us is absolutely incredible!!! I know that mentally, but my affections are so sluggish comparatively! What about yours? Do we have good reason to bow before him in humble confession and sorrow, and plead that we might grasp more deeply his love, and that it might transform our lives and stir our love for him?

**Read Hebrews 10:16-31.**

We concluded yesterday with reflections that show why Jesus’ death was effective for the forgiveness of our sin, so that there need be no more offering for sin.

Therefore the “Therefore” of 10:19 is huge! and what follows in vss 19-21 summarizes much of what he has discussed throughout the letter, but especially in these last several chapters. So the exhortations in vss 22-25 have a strong foundation.

1. The author has addressed “holding fast” throughout – see 3:6 & 3:14, for example. Why do you think he adds “for he who promised is faithful” in vs 23, after all he has said, and all that the “therefore” looks back to,? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. But he is not content to just make sure we have it right as individuals, is he? What do verses 24-25 teach us about what it means to be a follower of Christ?

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3. Look back at chp 3, vss 12-14, 4:1, 11 – how do these play into the picture of our interactions with one another? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. Heb 10:26-31 is another strong warning, which probably relates to the same thing as 3:12-14 and 4:11. He is not talking about just any sin, he is especially concerned about the deceitfulness of sin that would lead them to deliberately turn away from their confession in Christ, and their service of him (as in 10:24). How serious is it to not endure and hold fast? What does this teach us about God? and is what it teaches the same as what people in our culture, and even many of our churches, want to hear and are willing to believe? \_\_\_\_\_

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**For your Meditation and Prayer:** Just review what is above and pray about it! These are serious issues throughout 10:19-31, so spend some time reviewing.

*Read Hebrews 10:26-11:2.*

I want us to return to 10:26-31 today as well, because I think it is a very important passage. It is not for men to pick and choose what they want to take from the Scriptures about God. To do so is idolatry; it is making a god in our own preferred image. The writer has spent a huge amount of time developing rich truths of the Gospel as they relate especially to the High Priestly ministry and work of Jesus. No other writer develops that theme so thoroughly.

But interspersed have been serious warnings! His concern seems to have been that some are tempted to return to Jewish practices or simply to become sluggish and give evidence that their faith was not genuine.

1. The writer has made clear that Jesus' sacrifice is the only sacrifice that will effectively remove sin. The Old Testament animal sacrifices prefigured what he would do, but could never remove sin (10:4). What does that suggest about the nature of the sin mentioned in 10:26? What type of sin is in view, and has been in view in many of his warnings? \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. Do you see from time to time the hostility expressed to the idea of there being only one way of salvation, namely, faith in Jesus Christ alone? How does this passage – 10:26-31 – relate to that issue? \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. The writer makes it all the more clear that he is talking about their turning away from their confession of Christ as he recounts the early days after their response to the Gospel in 10:32-34. In light of their experience and faithfulness then, would you have thought they might be at risk now? But . . . what does that suggest to us? \_\_\_\_\_  
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4. What does the "Therefore" of 10:35 suggest about what the author means when he exhorts that they not throw away their confidence? Have you not seen a number of people who don't intellectually reject the Christian Faith, but who just drop out of church and any particular service to the Lord, and, though perhaps remaining moral, otherwise are not much different from others who are not connected with the church and make no profession to follow Christ? Would the author be okay with that as long as they didn't intellectually reject? What do you think he means by not throwing away their confidence? \_\_\_\_\_  
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5. How great is their risk if they do not endure as they had? (10:35-39) \_\_\_\_\_

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6. What do 10:39-11:2 suggest about the nature of saving faith? \_\_\_\_\_

***For your Meditation and Prayer:*** This passage makes clear that there is a cost to standing true to one’s confession of Christ as Lord and Savior, and that it will face challenges from various directions. It may involve mockery, persecution, marginalization, false accusations and misrepresentation, etc. Jesus said: “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. <sup>21</sup> But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me” (John 15:18-21). Read that passage again, and then reflect on it, and pray about it.

We could spend several days on this passage, but we'll just pick up a few areas and leave it to you if you like to explore other characters and aspects of their faith.

**Read Hebrews 11:1-31, keeping in mind that the context is established in 10:35-39, as our author exhorts them to not throw away their confidence, but to endure so they may receive what is promised by God, lest they shrink back and are destroyed. Instead, they need to have faith to preserve their souls.**

1. So, 11:1-3 and 6 point to the nature of the faith he is speaking about, and which he will illustrate with many characters, some of those who according to vs 2 received their commendation. Taking these verses into view, describe what is fundamental to this sort of enduring faith: \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What characterized the perspective of these that he describes in light of 11:10 & 13-16, and how might that apply to us? \_\_\_\_\_

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Abraham's faith had its struggles and ups and downs, but 11:17-19 recounts a high point of his faith, which incorporates even the possibility of resurrection from the dead. Abraham's faith produced obedience.

3. If you were to compare Moses' faith from 11:24-28 with Paul's in Philippians 3:7-11, you would see two men who relinquished a lot because of their faith, and also suffered a lot because of it. What were some of the ways Moses suffered because of the choices he made *because of his faith*? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Now Read Hebrews 11:32-12:2.**

To me, this is a very important part of Hebrews 11. One could get the impression all the way down through vs 35a, that faith always leads to positive results, almost playing into the hands of those who stress the health, wealth, and prosperity perspective, which is radically unbiblical!

4. It is clear up through vs 35a that God used common men and women to do and accomplish many great things. He still does. 2 Chronicles 16:9a says: “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him.” What sorts of things or thoughts tend to keep us from being willing to step out and risk failure when we are not confident that we *can do* something we really feel we *ought to do*? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. Why do you think the writer included vs 35b-38? \_\_\_\_\_

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6. Would you have expected the Lord to not let those things happen to people that entrusted themselves to him? Explain: \_\_\_\_\_

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7. How were these people of faith able to keep on keeping on in light of vs 39-40? \_\_\_\_\_

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***For your Meditation and Prayer:*** Reflect back on these examples and the models they present to encourage us to trust the Lord. Pray for such faith, and for the deep conviction expressed in 11:1, and the endurance of 10:39. Note that the “Therefore” of 12:1 leads to an application to us. Reflect on 12:1-3 by writing out your thoughts to complete the statement: “In light of chapter 11:1-12:2, I ought to, and need to, \_\_\_\_\_

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and then pray about those matters that you have listed.

*Read Hebrews 12:3-17.*

The author directs them to look in two directions, one backwards springing off of 12:1-2, and the other looking downward to the pages of Scripture, specifically to Proverbs 3:11-12, which he quotes in vss 5-6. Christ sets before us a model which will characterize many of his followers in some measure.

1. In light of his exhortation in 12:3, how do I need to go about walking by faith with endurance in good times and bad, in times of great blessing and times of trial and testing? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. In light of the quotation from Proverbs in vss 5-6, and then the verses that follow: Ask: How do I need to look at God's providential ordering of my life, all that I face? How am I to view God, and what should I ask as I face different situations in life? What is God trying to do in my life? What are his highest goals for my life? \_\_\_\_\_

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We should keep in mind that not all discipline is in response to sin. Everything we do to lead our children in the right directions and develop in them those disciplines and values they need for living life well is discipline. It includes positive teaching, correction of mistakes made or ways of doing things that are not helpful, learning how to interact with other people, showing respect, a good work ethic, etc. An athletic coach may put an athlete through particular exercises to develop muscles needed for a given sport. So God may put us through various situations that prepare us for ministry that may be years ahead, possibly a ministry of mercy or counsel or comfort that requires that a person walk in those shoes themselves. There are so many different aspects to discipline, besides the correction or punishment for wrongdoing, which is often necessary to make us aware that behaviors have consequences.

3. How should thoughts like those above, and others you might have thought of, feed into how we handle God's providential ordering of our life experiences?

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4. Is it true that God wants me to be happy? Answer that from the perspective of whether that should be used to make decisions, especially ethical decisions. Explain: \_\_\_\_\_

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12:12 is a quotation from Isaiah 35:3, which is in a context promising renewal and blessing to the faithful remnant following a time when Judah is threatened with a disciplinary judgment because of her sins. They are told God will come with vengeance to save them, meaning vengeance on their enemies. And in light of God’s promise, they are to “Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, ‘Be strong; fear not!’”

Now, returning to Hebrews 12, he has alluded to their experience of hostility from others, so he quotes Isaiah 35:3 from a similar context, encouraging them to “lift up your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees....” Then he tells them to “strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” In Isaiah 35:8, shortly after the portion quoted in Heb 12, it says: “And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way...the redeemed shall walk there.” That fits very well with the exhortation to “Strive for .. the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” It also ties in with Heb 12:15ff that warns of allowing people practicing sinful things to remain in their midst.

***For your Meditation and Prayer:*** This is an important passage for understanding the nature of the Christian life. When we get to James, we will immediately see reference to how we handle trials in a manner that we benefit from them, because they are ordered from the Lord. God takes his people through all kinds of experiences in life, but it is important to remember – even when we don’t understand, and have not a clue as to what God is doing in our lives – that “he disciplines us for our good.” You may face, or be facing, some difficult situations and experiences in your life. Trust that God is about something he wants to accomplish in you, or, perhaps in someone else. “Lift up your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees” (Heb 12:12).

Read Hebrews 12:18-29.

1. Many people think God was strict and wrathful in the Old Testament, but not in the New. Does this text bear out that the stakes were higher in the Old or the New Testament? Explain: \_\_\_\_\_

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Earlier the writer has quoted Psalm 2:7 twice – in 1:5 and again in 5:5. **Turn to Psalm 2 and read vs 1-8.** We noted on February 2, page 3 above, that the early church understood Psalm 2 as fulfilled supremely in Christ. Acts 4:25f quoted the opening 2 verses of Psalm 2, and interpreted them thusly: 4:24 “... they lifted their voices together to God and said, ‘Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them,’<sup>25</sup> who through the mouth of **our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, ‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain?’**<sup>26</sup> *The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed* –<sup>27</sup> for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,<sup>28</sup> to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.”

But the Psalm continued, affirming that “He who sits in the heavens laughs at those who tried to break free of his authority, and that of his anointed one.” Instead he declares: “As for me, **I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill,**” which speaks of the exaltation of Christ to the right hand of God the Father.

Now – returning to Hebrews 12, note that vs 22 speaks of our coming to **Mount Zion** ... the heavenly Jerusalem. Paul, too, spoke of the “**Jerusalem above**” who is our mother (Galatians 4:26). The writer of Hebrews then describes the heavenly assembly and those to whom we spiritually gather.

2. Verses 25-29 then apply the reality that we come to Mount Zion rather than to Mount Sinai as the Israelites had, and in light of the superiority of what we come to, issues another warning in vs 25-29. Are the stakes less serious than when Israel was at Sinai?

3. Instead of refusing him who is speaking, we are told what to do in vs 28f. What are we to do? \_\_\_\_\_

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**For your Meditation and Prayer:** Turn to Deuteronomy 4:24, and then to 9:3, and read the other two references to God as a consuming fire in their context. Reflect on how they are used in those two passages – quite opposite one another, one a terror, and one a comfort. Pray that we will take God seriously, and with deep appreciation for his giving us “a kingdom, that cannot be shaken.”

**Read Hebrews 13:1-25.**

1. Verses 1-6 contain varied exhortations, vs 3 may well refer back to 10:32-36, and be referring to fellow Christians who have been imprisoned. Vss 5-6 are tremendously encouraging promises.

There are two exhortations regarding their response to their pastoral leadership – vss 7 and 17. The first seems to refer to past leadership, the latter to their present leadership. The initial leaders were solid, and therefore they are not to be led astray by false teachings that differ because: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” The present threat appears to be what he has been addressing throughout the letter, which would turn them back to Old Testament or Jewish practices, things that are now set aside with the coming of Christ to which they had pointed. He then alludes to the bodies of the animals offered on the day of atonement being carried outside the camp (Leviticus 16:27), by saying that in similar manner Jesus suffered outside the gate, and we should go out to him, bearing the reproach he endured. He concludes saying that “here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come” (13:14), as did Abraham and others (11:10 & 16; note 11:39-40). So he urges us to offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, rather than animal sacrifices that have been set aside, and also offer sacrifices of good done to others.

2. The second exhortation pertaining to leaders is in vs 17. What is the duty of the leaders to the congregation? \_\_\_\_\_

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What are the duties of the congregation to the leaders, and why? \_\_\_\_\_

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Heb 13:20-21 is a Benediction, and one I most often use at the end of the Lord’s Supper service. I always change one word of the English translation, and read “Now may the God of peace ‘who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, *with* the blood of the eternal covenant.” I do that because it seems to pick up the imagery of the High Priest carrying the blood into the Holy of Holies (as in 9:25).

3. What does the writer want God to do in their lives according to the benediction? \_\_\_\_\_

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**For your Meditation and Prayer:** Pray for your leadership, and if you are in WPC, pray for the pastor who will be coming to serve as the next senior pastor, and that he may serve faithfully and with great joy as you support and encourage him.

The author, James, was likely a half-brother of Jesus. It is striking that though John tells us in John 7:5 that “not even his brothers believed in him,” James now acknowledges himself to be a servant or slave of God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1). He was to become a very prominent leader in the Jerusalem church.

**Read James 1:1-27.**

1. In this chapter, through what two ways do we see God working to transform our lives? \_\_\_\_\_

2. James 1:2 is an extraordinary exhortation, and one that I imagine many of us find very difficult to do. This is not the “on-top-of-the-world” sort of joy or happiness. It is far more deep-seated than that. How can one possibly “count it all joy...when you meet trials of various kinds”? \_\_\_\_\_

One of the favorite hymns in my youth group when I was a high school student was “Like a River Glorious.” The third stanza says:

Ev’ry joy or trial Falleth from above,  
Traced upon our dial By the sun of love;  
We may trust Him fully All for us to do –  
They who trust Him wholly Find Him wholly true.  
*Stayed upon Jehovah, Hearts are fully blest –  
Finding as He promised, Perfect peace and rest.*

3. What does that mean? \_\_\_\_\_

4. When trials come your way, what is your initial response? How ought we to respond? What must we do if we have not a clue as to why? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Think about the connection between 1:9, 12, and 2:5. Does it make 1.9 clearer to see that connection? Explain: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Compare Romans 8:28-29 and James 1:12. What do these two texts share in common? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Describe to yourself a time when you have seen the progression of vs 14 working its way out in your heart? \_\_\_\_\_

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8. What encouragement is there in knowing that with God the Father there is “no variation or shadow due to change”? (1:17)

“Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,  
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not;  
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.  
Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided –  
Great is Thy Faithfulness, Lord unto me”

At verse 18 James turns to the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the two ways we see God working to transform our lives: the Word of God. In light of vs 18, it appears to me that the exhortation of vs 19 is not talking about us being quick to hear other people, and slow to speak or become angry. It seems in the context that vs 19f addresses how we respond to the Word of God. We are not to be angered at it when it addresses us in our sin, for example, but to receive it with meekness, i.e., without defensiveness.

9. But we need to be careful how we receive it, beyond not being angered. How are we to receive it (1:22-27)? \_\_\_\_\_

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10. Finally, when you listen to a sermon on Sunday morning, how can you keep from it being like the experience described in 1:23-24? **Read WLC 160 to help you think through that question:** \_\_\_\_\_

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***For your Meditation and Prayer:*** God works in our lives by two particular paths: his providence that works all things together for our good in order to mold us into the likeness of Christ (Romans 8:28-30) as we learn obedience through the things we suffer, as did Jesus (though not without sin like him!) and through his Word that directs our footsteps as we become “doers” of the Word and not hearers only. Thank the Lord for his Word, and also for governing the trials of our lives that we might grow thereby.

**Read James 2:1-13.**

1. What is the main point of this passage, and how is it applicable to us – to you – today? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Look back at the introductory statement in yesterday’s reading regarding James. What do you think took place that James would now call Jesus “the Lord of glory”? (2:1) \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Compare 2:5 with 1 Corinthians 1:26-31, and then look back to James 1:9-10. For the most part James refers to the “rich” as those who are oppressing the poor as in 2:6 and 5:1-6. In James 1:10, however, the “rich” may refer to fellow believers. The lowly poor have been spiritually exalted (1:9) by God choosing them “to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him (2:5). If in 1:10 the “rich” are brothers, what would it mean that they should boast in their humiliation? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. Comparing 2:5 and 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 as above, what is God about in his choosing the poor to be rich in faith? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. Explain in your own words what James is saying in 2:8-13. \_\_\_\_\_

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**For your Meditation and Prayer:** Give thought to 2:8 and its application to “partiality.” Ask the Lord to show you any areas where you might show partiality in violation of Leviticus 19:18 that is quoted in James 2:8. Partiality does not involve acceptance of other peoples beliefs if contrary to the gospel and Scripture, but it does relate to how we interact with such people.

This is an important passage, and one that we must be careful to understand well. It has often been considered in conflict with Paul. So, before reading the entire passage, read 2:24 and then Romans 3:28. Are these contradictory? Let's explore that. Keep in mind that one of the most important principles of interpretation is context, context, context! You always interpret within a context, not merely by a bare statement.

**Read James 2:14-26, and note the context established by James's question in 2:14.**

1. What is James's concern in light of 2:14 and 19? \_\_\_\_\_  
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Verse 23 quotes Genesis 15:6, the very verse Paul uses to demonstrate that Abraham was justified apart from works (see Romans 4:1-5). But read Romans 4:16-25. Paul is speaking of the birth of Isaac when Abraham was about 100 years old. James is talking about Abraham's obedience to offer up Isaac on the altar years later, which, although God stopped him, Abraham was going to do. Genesis 15:6, which both James and Paul quoted, took place years before either of those events. Paul quotes Gen 15:6 in Romans 4:3, and if you read the context, it is clear that he recognizes that Abraham's justification took place years before he was circumcised (4:9-10), the latter of which was when he was 99 years of age. He quotes Gen 15:6 again in 4:9 and 22. In 4:22 he is saying that Abraham's faith did not waver, but grew strong as he considered God would fulfill his promise and give him the son God promised him, the one through whom God would multiply his descendants, and that is why his faith had been counted to him as righteousness." So, Paul is demonstrating the fruit of Abraham's faith.

Is that not what James is doing in 2:21-24? But whereas Paul is demonstrating the fruit of Abraham's faith, James is contrasting Abraham's faith, which also bore fruit in his willingness to offer up Isaac, with the faith of demons or of others who say they have faith, but have no works (James 2:14 & 19-20).

2. So, what is the difference in what James is doing and what Paul was doing? Paul was contending for justification by faith in Jesus Christ over against justification by works. What was James doing according to this context in James 2:14ff? What was his concern? \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. Read WCF 11.1-3 "Of Justification." Paragraphs 1 & 3 are especially Paul's concern in Romans 3:21-28. Compare James 2:14 with paragraph 2 – When a person "says he has faith," what is the concern that James addresses in our reading for the day? \_\_\_\_\_  
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The key to understanding the consistency of Paul's and James's teaching is in the context. When one reads Romans 3:21 thru chapter 5, one sees that Paul is not teaching that we are saved by faith alone. He is teaching that we are saved by Christ alone by faith alone. Christ, by his perfect obedience and atoning death saves all who trust in him alone for salvation. Faith does not merit salvation. Faith looks away from itself to Christ that he may save us by virtue of his saving work. Faith is the transfer of our trust from anything *we might do*, to receive freely what *he has done* on behalf of sinners. So when Paul speaks of "faith," he is usually, if not always, speaking of genuine faith that is placed in Christ alone, and he constantly battles those who would add to that faith something we must "do" to be saved, rather than resting wholly upon what Christ has done.

James is dealing with a different issue: is the faith one "says" he has, genuine saving faith, or mere mental assent that is no better than the "faith" of demons? After all, who was it that first recognized who Jesus really was during his ministry? It was the demons, and Satan himself. But theirs was not a saving faith, and led to no obedience of life. So James establishes the context of his comments in James 2:14. Consequently, he is concerned to show that Abraham's "faith" showed itself to be genuine by works (note vs 19). But Paul did the same in Romans 4:22 when he pointed out that Abraham's faith grew strong, "fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was counted to him as righteousness," says Paul. Why? Because it was genuine, and showed itself as such by trusting God to fulfill his promise regarding the gift of a son to be born of Sarah.

Excuse me for commenting rather than asking questions, but it is so critical that we get this right, so I have felt compelled to try to explain it.

There are two practical issues for us: 1) Have we placed our trust in Jesus Christ and him alone to save us by his atoning death and perfectly righteous life? and, 2) Does our professed "faith" give evidence that it is genuine by a life that is bearing fruit in good works done unto Christ and the Father, as set forth in the Scriptures?

***For your Mediation and Prayer:*** We don't rest on our works to save us at all; we rest upon Christ alone, entrusting ourselves to him that he might save us graciously. BUT, if we are genuine believers, we don't merely give assent to the fact that he must save, without committing ourselves to follow him as our Lord. Our Westminster Confession rightly reflects the nature of saving faith when it says: *WCF 14.2 By this faith, a Christian believes to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God Himself speaking therein; and acts differently upon that which each particular passage thereof contains; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.* We ought to examine ourselves to see if our "faith" is of this sort. That ought to be a matter of prayer. And where it is of that sort, we ought to thank God, for faith is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-10).

**Read James 3:1-12.**

1. Look back at 1:22-26. In light of those verses, how critical is it that we consider the use of our own tongues? Explain: \_\_\_\_\_

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It appears some wanted to become teachers, and James begins this passage in chapter 3 there, but seems to immediately move on to address the broader body of professing believers. Besides, if teachers and leaders are held to a high standard, it is not because the rest of the congregation can live at a lower one, but that the leaders would model for them living at the higher standard all should pursue.

2. James uses some powerful images to reflect the power of the tongue, for good or bad! But mid-verse in verse 5 he shifts to the bad side. Can you think of examples that illustrate what James describes here in vss 5b-6? \_\_\_\_\_

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Proverbs has a great deal to say about the use of the tongue, both for good and bad, and would make for a very profitable study in and of itself.

**Read Ephesians 4:15-16, 21 and 5:2.**

James 3:5b-12 especially addresses the bad side of the use of our tongues. The above verses of Ephesians primarily address the positive, although with some reference to things that often inspire the bad use of the tongue.

3. Write out some guidelines from these passages in James and Ephesians for the use of our tongues. Spend some time on this: \_\_\_\_\_

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**For your Meditation and Prayer:** Now reflect back over what you just wrote and pray about the use of your own tongue, confessing sins of the tongues specifically, perhaps determining to apologize sincerely to someone you have spoken wrongly to, thinking through things you could say that would build up other people, etc.

This passage is rightly connected with 3:1-12, even though I have separated them for our reading purposes. But remember that 3:1 began talking about those who would be teachers. Now in 3:13-18, James addresses the subject of who is wise and understanding, and in 4:1ff of what is causing fights and quarrels within the congregation. These are all interrelated. For years I have read James 3:13-18 to each newly constituted group of elders on the Session, because it is vital to the proper functioning of that leadership team, as well as to the church at large.

***Read James 3:13-4:12, keeping in mind the context of 3:1-12 dealing with the tongue.***

1. James 3:13 speaks of the “meekness of wisdom.” “Meekness” is not “weakness.” It involves great strength of character to not be defensive and strike back when attacked or when one’s ideas are challenged by another. Read 2 Timothy 2:24-26 for a good illustration of this, and then write out your thoughts about what this is. \_\_\_\_\_  
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In contrast are those characterized in 3:14-16, and particularly “jealousy and selfish ambition,” from which come a number of bad things, much of which you see unfold in 4:1-12.

2. If you look at 3:14-16 and 4:1-12, and then contrast with 3:13, 17-18, what general difference do you see about the orientation of the persons represented in these two groups? Who is their primary focus? Take some time to think about that before you answer. Explain: \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. I imagine most of us don’t think of ourselves as being “jealous” or having “selfish ambition,” but those are actually far more common than we might think. Read the following passages where the word occurs, and particularly note the context or the other words associated with it. Make a couple of observations:

1 Corinthians 3:3 – read 3:1-4 \_\_\_\_\_  
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2 Corinthians 12:20 – \_\_\_\_\_  
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Galatians 5:19-21 -- \_\_\_\_\_  
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It is also used of Joseph’s brothers’ jealousy toward him in Genesis 37:11.

“Selfish ambition” occurs a number of times, translated “strife,” “quarreling,” “rivalry,” and “dissensions.” But one of the best places to get the sense, and to realize that it does not primarily characterize people trying to reach the top in leadership or business or whatever, is Philippians 2:3f. There Paul says to regular congregation members: “<sup>2</sup> complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing from **selfish ambition** or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> **Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.** <sup>5</sup> Have this mind [in you which was also] in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

4. The bold print is Paul’s contrast with “selfish ambition.” Is that not what you see in James 3:13 & 17-18 in those who are wise and understanding? Where is their focus? Explain \_\_\_\_\_

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5. How does Christ model that for us? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Comment:** The persons described in 3:13 & 17-18 are the kind of people you want in leadership! They work together well as a team, in spite of the different personalities and temperaments. They are pure of hidden motives and agendas, deeply concerned to maintain good, healthy godly relationships (peace), gentle, open to reason and ready to be convinced if another’s ideas are better, impartial and sincere, sowing a harvest of righteousness in peace with their brothers. And we have just such a great group of elders at the time of this Bible Reading Plan, men with whom it is a privilege to serve.

**For your Meditation and Prayer:** Pray that the Lord will more and more give you the mind of Christ as seen in Philippians 2, and as represented here in those who are wise and understanding. Pray for your leaders, and reflect on the things in these verses, using them as a basis for your prayers for growth.

**Read James 4:1-12 again.**

1. As you read back over this passage, what stands out to you about the focus of the life being described in vss 1-12? Who is center-stage? And what impact does that have, in contrast to 3:13, 17-18? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Why does James say that to judge one’s brother (keeping in mind the focus of the person in view above) is to speak evil of the law and to judge the law, and therefore in essence to usurp the place of God as the only lawgiver and judge? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Read James 4:13-5:20.**

3. Again a self-centered orientation governs the way of life in 4:13-5:6. What are the consequences of such a life as over against the consequences of one who recognizes and responds to the exhortations in 4:4,6-10? \_\_\_\_\_

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Remember the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19ff. . .

4. If vss 1-6 speak of exploitation of the poor, or of wage-earners, vss 7ff focus on how the exploited are to respond. How so? \_\_\_\_\_

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James addresses oaths in a very similar manner as had Jesus (5:12; Matthew 15:33-35). Although it sounds absolute, it most likely is in contrast to certain ways the Pharisees qualified their obligation by the manner in which they took the oaths, so that what seemed “yes” might not really be so, or the same with “no.” (See WCF 22 “Of Lawful Oaths and Vows”)

5. After a general exhortation in 5:13 regarding response to suffering or perhaps to a time of blessing, the last verses of chapter 5 deal with a rather controversial matter, so far as understanding precisely what is in view. It is clear from the rest of the New Testament that it is not a prescription for universal healing of those who are sick. It may be that a person who is too sick to come to the elders, calls for them to come and pray. In some cases they may come to a conviction that it is God’s will to heal, and on that basis pray. In others, it may be that the sickness is due to sin, and confession may lead to healing. An encouragement is given in

light of Elijah’s effectiveness in prayer. But I have to admit, that I am not precisely sure what is in view, and I’m not sure anyone else is absolutely sure what James had in mind. There are times when those living in a given context might have understood what we don’t have access to now.

The last two verses encourage us to watch for those who wander from the truth, in order to try to bring them back. This makes it clear that we do make judgments about whether others are living in accord with God’s word, but not with the critical attitude that 4:11-12 has in view, or that Jesus addressed in Matthew 7:1ff, but rather with a compassionate and merciful spirit, that is concerned about the other person enough to be willing to risk addressing them about their waywardness. That doesn’t always go well. Proverbs talks a good deal about certain persons who are very resistant to correction of any sort, and of the risk involved in addressing them and incurring their wrath or rebuke.

6. Who is the great model of one who has practiced James 5:19-20 on our behalf? \_\_\_\_\_

7. What preparation do you think ought to be made if one is going to approach another with 5:19-20 in view? \_\_\_\_\_

***For your Meditation and Prayer:*** At the heart of this entire section is the principle of 4:6 and the exhortations of vss 7-8 & 10. That may apply broadly to our response to the entire book, beginning with the exhortation about trials, where we must humble ourselves under the hand of God in order to seek the blessing he has in store through them, painful as they may be. Review the book and pray over those things that are impressed upon your heart as areas you need to address.





