

Semicontinuous

Jer. 2:4–13

Ps. 81:1, 10–16

Complementary

Sir. 10:12–18

Ps. 112

Heb. 13:1–8, 15–16

Luke 14:1, 7–14

Welcome!

Goal for the Session

Based on the description of mutual love in Hebrews 13, adults will plan ways to model it.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Hebrews 13:1–8, 15–16

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by David R. Adams

Hospitality (v. 2) is one way, obviously enough, in which this love becomes concrete. The author strengthens the injunction that hospitality not be neglected by grounding it in biblical precedent: in providing for strangers “some” have entertained angels (divine emissaries) unknowingly. The allusion is presumably to Abraham and Sarah, who entertained three “men” who turned out to have supernatural qualities (Gen. 18:1–15), though Lot, Gideon, and Manoah may also be in view (Gen. 19:1–14; Judg. 6:11–24 and 13:3–23). How does this precedent function? It seems to promise more encounters of this kind and perhaps to warn that their significance is easily overlooked.

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Gray Temple

Suppose your congregation, or any other, were to face into and lay claim to the energies with which we have voiced contentious discontent, asking God’s forgiveness only for its target, not for its voltage and amperage? Suppose we were to direct that same energy into passionately adoring Jesus Christ in church? Suppose we applied the judgment that formerly shaped our gossip into appreciating the excellence of potential friends in the congregation? Suppose those energies made us brave in the face of the world’s many needs? Just imagine it. There would be no institution quite like *that* church anywhere in the world—not even in America.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Lanny Peters

The writer goes on to mention another unlikely place to entertain angels without knowing it (echoing Jesus’ words in Matthew 25), with those in prison. It is a challenging word to remember those in prison, “as though you were in prison with them,” and even more demanding to remember “those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.” If we took this passage seriously, we would all be joining organizations that would help us identify in an empathic way with victims of torture, whether in Guantánamo Bay or Beijing. The pastoral word may have to be a prophetic word today.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by Frederick Borsch

Being able to offer hospitality to strangers comes from a new kind of reaching out in love. This is empathetic love that also enables one to put oneself in the shoes of those in prison and to *feel in one’s own body* what it is like for another to be tortured (v. 3). Today, when torture can be rationalized and nearly two million American brothers and sisters are shut away in our grim penal system, one realizes painfully what an adventure of love it is to try to participate fully in the good life—to participate in eternal life and to act as the Good Samaritan and Jesus did.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

*Hebrews 13:1–8,
15–16*

Focus on Your Teaching

While most Christians would agree that mutual love is a characteristic of the community of faith, many are only too aware that daily life in the family and in the congregation often includes contentiousness, backbiting, envy, gossip, and broken relationships. Lack of understanding and sometimes hostility may characterize relations between young and old. Yet many adults will be glad to have the opportunity to reflect on the Scriptures' explicit expectation that the life of faith results in loving relationships and to commit to practical ways of living out that expectation.

O Christ, thank you for the love you showed in your life, death, and resurrection. Teach me to love, especially those with whom I teach and learn. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- ❑ simple beverage and snack (optional)
- ❑ whiteboard or newsprint
- ❑ markers
- ❑ copies of Resource Sheets 1, 2
- ❑ pens and paper
- ❑ Bibles
- ❑ copies of Resource Sheet 1 for September 8, 2019

For Responding

- ❑ option 1: whiteboard or newsprint and marker
- ❑ option 2: pens and paper, whiteboard or newsprint and marker
- ❑ option 3: pens, paper, envelopes, Bibles

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, decide whether you wish to serve a simple beverage and snack for participants to enjoy at the beginning; if so, set out the refreshments. Print on a whiteboard or newsprint the following statements:

- ✿ Love means never having to say you're sorry.
- ✿ Love means putting yourself last.
- ✿ Love means giving someone a second chance.

For option 2 in Responding, print the questions listed under option 2 on a whiteboard or newsprint. For option 3 in Responding, obtain from the church office the names and addresses of people from the age group you choose.

Welcome participants and introduce visitors. If the group has not met over the summer, give a few extra minutes for participants to chat and to renew acquaintances. Invite them to enjoy the simple beverage and snack if available.

Post the three statements where everyone can see. Form pairs and have participants discuss briefly whether and to what extent they agree with the statements. Suggest they rate them on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 signifying "strongly disagree" and 5 signifying "strongly agree." Tell participants that today's session will explore what a first-century author said about Christians' love for one another.

Pray the following or a prayer of your choosing:

O God, thank you for people who taught and wrote long ago. Help us discover your will through studying your Word together. In Jesus' name. Amen.

As Resource Sheet 2 suggests, scholars are of mixed opinion about whether Hebrews is a letter or a sermon, or both. For purposes of this study it is called a sermon or book.

EXPLORING

Explain that today's focus text comes toward the end of a lengthy treatise. A brief background from Resource Sheet 2 will give the setting of the passage. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Hebrews) and have participants read it silently. Invite brief comments. Some may recall that two recent sessions were also spent on the book of Hebrews.

Have a volunteer read aloud today's focus text, Hebrews 13:1–8, 15–16.

Form four groups to examine in detail how the author of Hebrews describes the life of the Christian community. Assign to each group verses as follows: verses 1–3; verses 4–6; verses 7–8; verses 15–16. Ask each group to summarize their verses in one sentence. If your total group is fewer than eight, form two groups and combine verses to summarize.

After a few minutes, gather the whole group together and ask each subgroup to report their sentence.

Distribute Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Hebrews 13:1–8, 15–16). Have a volunteer read the "What?" excerpt. To understand the biblical references in the excerpt, ask the four groups to form again and have each group read one of the references (Genesis 18:1–15; Genesis 19:1–14; Judges 6:11–24; and Judges 13:3–23). After a brief period, gather back as a total group and have each of the four subgroups explain how their passage illustrates the importance of hospitality that Hebrews 13:2 discusses. Ask: How would remembering the tradition of hospitality encourage listeners of Hebrews facing persecution?

Return to small groups and have them imagine they are the initial community hearing this sermon and pick which one of the suggestions would be most important to hear. Have them rewrite this in their own words and then return as a large group and have each group explain their position.

Have everyone read the "So What?" excerpt silently. Invite a brief discussion on what participants understand by "the pastoral word may have to be a prophetic word today."

As a transition to Responding, explain that in the New Testament, mutual love has little to do with feeling and everything to do with action. Mutual love means that we will do what is beneficial for all people, whether we like them or not. Discuss:

☞ How can we live in this mutual love today?

RESPONDING

- 1. Mutual Love in the Congregation** In writing Hebrews, the author had the recipients' congregation in mind. This activity enables adults to identify ways mutual love is practiced in their own congregation. Form pairs and have each pair identify two ways mutual love is practiced in their congregation. Some examples might be home visitation, a food bank, or a prayer group. Encourage participants to keep the discussion positive—focus on ways to increase fledgling loving practices or to help congregants

EASY
PREP

If your group chooses an activity that is already the responsibility of a committee in your church, discuss the need to communicate your plan with that committee and decide who will communicate and coordinate activities with them.

become better acquainted or to deepen or heal relationships.

Regroup as a whole and have each pair describe their two ways. Then have the whole group select a “top choice” for action—the way that seems most practical and that fills a need in the congregation. Have the group make plans to support this practice of mutual love. If needed, assign tasks. If the group identifies a need that is not already being met, decide how and with whom to raise the idea.

- 2. Mutual Love in the Family** The author of Hebrews held the strength of marriage and family as a high priority. This activity will enable each participant to plan ways to practice mutual love in the family. (If a participant has no living family members, encourage them to choose people they consider closest to them.)

Distribute pens and paper. Call attention to the following questions written on a whiteboard or newsprint prior to class:

- ✧ In what ways is mutual love already practiced in my family?
- ✧ Where is mutual love lacking in my family?
- ✧ How can I improve showing mutual love to my family?

Have each person meditate briefly and silently on the three questions. Then have them write a heading, “My Plan for Love in My Family,” followed by three ways they plan to practice mutual love in their family in the coming weeks.

- 3. Mutual Love Across Age Levels** There is often a gap, and sometimes suspicion, between generations. This activity gives the opportunity to practice mutual love between people of different age levels.

Provide pens, paper, envelopes, and a list of names and addresses of people in the chosen age level. Choose an age level different from that of most of the adults in your group. Have each member write a letter to a particular person of the age level, promising to pray for the person daily in the coming week and describing one item of interest about the writer. Include a favorite Bible verse. If desired, make plans to deliver the letters in person. Otherwise, mail them to the recipients.

CLOSING

Have each person say one thing they have learned about mutual love among Christians. Pray the following or a prayer of your choosing:

Thank you, O God, for the honor and blessing of belonging to your church, the community of mutual love. Empower us by your Spirit to practice love in the congregation and in our families, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for September 8, 2019, or e-mail it to the participants. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and Resource Sheet 1 before the next session.

Focus on Hebrews 13:1–8, 15–16

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by David R. Adams

Hospitality (v. 2) is one way, obviously enough, in which this love becomes concrete. The author strengthens the injunction that hospitality not be neglected by grounding it in biblical precedent: in providing for strangers “some” have entertained angels (divine emissaries) unknowingly. The allusion is presumably to Abraham and Sarah, who entertained three “men” who turned out to have supernatural qualities (Gen. 18:1–15), though Lot, Gideon, and Manoah may also be in view (Gen. 19:1–14; Judg. 6:11–24 and 13:3–23). How does this precedent function? It seems to promise more encounters of this kind and perhaps to warn that their significance is easily overlooked.

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Gray Temple

Suppose your congregation, or any other, were to face into and lay claim to the energies with which we have voiced contentious discontent, asking God’s forgiveness only for its target, not for its voltage and amperage? Suppose we were to direct that same energy into passionately adoring Jesus Christ in church? Suppose we applied the judgment that formerly shaped our gossip into appreciating the excellence of potential friends in the congregation? Suppose those energies made us brave in the face of the world’s many needs? Just imagine it. There would be no institution quite like *that* church anywhere in the world—not even in America.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Lanny Peters

The writer goes on to mention another unlikely place to entertain angels without knowing it (echoing Jesus’ words in Matthew 25), with those in prison. It is a challenging word to remember those in prison, “as though you were in prison with them,” and even more demanding to remember “those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.” If we took this passage seriously, we would all be joining organizations that would help us identify in an empathic way with victims of torture, whether in Guantánamo Bay or Beijing. The pastoral word may have to be a prophetic word today.

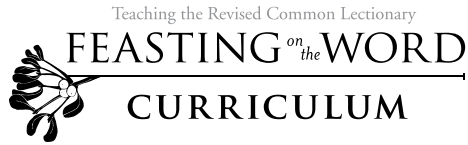
NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective”

by Frederick Borsch

Being able to offer hospitality to strangers comes from a new kind of reaching out in love. This is empathetic love that also enables one to put oneself in the shoes of those in prison and to *feel in one’s own body* what it is like for another to be tortured (v. 3). Today, when torture can be rationalized and nearly two million American brothers and sisters are shut away in our grim penal system, one realizes painfully what an adventure of love it is to try to participate fully in the good life—to participate in eternal life and to act as the Good Samaritan and Jesus did.

September 1, 2019
Welcome!



Adult
Resource Sheet 2

Hebrews



Today's focus text is from the 13th chapter of Hebrews. Before examining the text, it is helpful to consider whom the author had in mind, and what the previous chapters were about. Scholars believe that, despite its ending, Hebrews is not really a letter but rather is probably a written sermon. The author was likely a second-generation Jewish Christian, familiar with Greek culture and language, who wrote the sermon somewhere between 60 and 90 CE in the period prior to the persecution of Nero or before that of Domitian. The recipients had earlier been persecuted and were again facing the risk of persecution. They had recently suffered ill treatment because of their faith, and were in danger of abandoning their allegiance to Christ because of the threat of persecution or because of strange, erroneous teachings that had been introduced into their community. They seemed to know and respect the Old Testament, and were probably conservative Jewish Christians. Some scholars hold that the recipients may have lived near Rome, since Hebrews 13:24 implies that people from Italy knew the recipients. Other scholars have argued that the recipients may have lived in Jerusalem, Alexandria, Ephesus, Caesarea, or Antioch. Wherever their location, the author wrote to encourage them to remain true to the faith.

Hebrews begins with the finality of God's revelation in Christ, the superiority of the gospel over the law, and Christ as the exalted and merciful high priest whose perfect sacrifice forever gives us free access to God. The author indicates the coming end of the old sacrificial system yet the certainty of God's promises and the trustworthiness of Christ. The author calls on the recipients to persevere in the faith without wavering and to follow the examples of Old Testament heroes of stalwart faith, as well as Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

With the blessedness of Christian hope before them, and surrounded by so many faithful witnesses, the Christians are called to live in the present. This leads the author to describe what life in the Christian community should look like in the here and now. The ethical life of the faithful is a life of mutual love.