

Conversations on
Heb. 13:1–8, 15–16

Discuss this passage in light of the commentary below.

Idea! View the scene “Trust Each Other” from *Les Misérables* (2012, PG-13; available at www.wingclips.com). Discuss the similarities you see between the Hebrews 13 passage and the characters’ behavior in the scene.

WHAT is important to know?

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.

(David R. Adams)

- ✧ Look up the Old Testament texts cited in the excerpt. How are they precedents for this passage?
- ✧ What other Bible stories about hospitality do you recall?
- ✧ What is the connection between praise (of God) and hospitality (to others)?

WHERE is God in these words?

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. (Gray Temple)

- ✧ What is the result of radical hospitality?
- ✧ Why would radical hospitality be difficult?
- ✧ How would radical hospitality change your faith community?

*Dear God, give us new vision this day, so that we might see the life you have in mind for us.
 Help us believe, trust, and live. Through Jesus Christ. Amen.*

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

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. (Lanny Peters)

- ✧ What is true empathy? How does one achieve it?
- ✧ How does the phrase “walking a mile in someone else’s shoes” apply here?
- ✧ What prophetic word or call do you hear in this passage?

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

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. (Frederick Borsch)

- ✧ In what way does the Good Samaritan story help marry the sacrifice of praise and the concept of hospitality?
- ✧ How does the reference to jail and torture help make this Scripture relevant? What can we do to provide hospitality in such places?