

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

# Everyone Is Welcome

**Goal for the Session** Children will explore this message to the Hebrews as they plan how to be a loving and welcoming community.

## ■ 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

The months of August and September bring many new experiences to children at school: new teachers, new students, maybe new schools. They are used to talking about group life and how to maintain it together. This conversation is helpful in church school too. And the focus scripture provides a way to promote that discussion for your group with the addition of helping them understand that the church seeks to be a welcoming and caring environment because of God’s love. If there are new children in the group, this hospitality will be put to use immediately.

*Welcoming God, as I feel your gracious hospitality may I show that same loving welcome to each child in my group. Amen.*

**YOU WILL NEED**

- green cloth
- Bible
- offering basket
- battery-powered candle
- Singing the Feast*, 2019–2020; CD player
- Color Pack 1, 2, 3, 4, 27, 28
- envelope
- Resource Sheet 1
- tape, scissors

For Responding

- option 1: Resource Sheet 1, newsprint, marker, (optional) poster board
- option 2: copies of Resource Sheet 2
- option 3: Resource Sheet 1, poster board, curling ribbon, scissors, markers, sequins, glue, tape or thumb tacks, construction paper
- option 4: Color Pack 27, *Singing the Feast*, 2019–2020; CD player

## LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

*Before the session*, for option 2 in Responding, cut apart the scenarios on Resource Sheet 2 (Act It Out). For option 3 in Responding, get permission to post welcome signs throughout the church building. For Closing, cut out the word gems on Color Pack 3 and 4. Store them in an envelope to be added to treasure chest on Color Pack 2 at each session.

Greet the children as they arrive. Invite the early arrivals to help set up the worship table. Place a green cloth on the table. On it place a Bible, an offering basket, and a candle, real or battery operated.

When everything is ready, gather at the worship table. Point to the green cloth. Explain that it indicates that the church year season is Ordinary Time (also called Season after Pentecost). Tell about this season, using the information on Color Pack 1.

Light the candle. Sing together “Glory to God” (Color Pack 27; track 7 on *Singing the Feast*, 2019–2020).

Pray, inviting the children to echo each phrase after you:

*Dear God / be our guide / as we seek / to learn more about you / and how to follow / in the ways of Jesus. / Amen.*

**All: Amen!** (Clap twice.)

Ask everyone present, leaders and children to say their name to the group. After each one, have the group say, “Welcome, *(person’s name)*.” Ask:

✠ How have you been welcomed to other groups—such as classes at school, sports teams, or scout troops—in the last two or three weeks?

### Glory to God

Glory to God,  
Glory to God,  
Glory to God in the highest!

*Repeat three times*

Building a story around the focus scripture helps the children hear it in a context. This is more lively than telling them about the times when it was probably written.

Their answers will tell you about their activities as well as what being welcomed means to them. Move to Exploring by commenting that the Bible story for today is about being a welcoming community of faith or church.

### Exploring

Ask a child to get the Bible from the worship table. Help the child find the Letter to the Hebrews, using the Table of Contents. This models good Bible skills for all the children. Then have the child or another volunteer turn to chapter 13. Keep the Bible open to Hebrews 13 as you tell the story on Resource Sheet 1 (Loving Each Other). After the story, ask:

✧ What words from this sermon-letter sounded important to Samuel?

In the story, it was indicated that it was not always easy to be a Christian in the early years of the church. Ask:

✧ What could this letter have meant to someone who might get in trouble for meeting with other Christians?

Pretend you are Samuel's friends. As the adults talk about these words, you and Samuel talk about how you should live based on these words. Ask:

✧ What are you saying to each other? About how you care for each other? About how you care for people who aren't in your group? About people who are treated badly? About what good you can do? About what you have to share?

To prepare to move to the Responding options, have the group come back together. Ask:

✧ What do those words suggest to you about how you should live today?

Conclude Exploring with a summary of their answers, ending with those that are direct lead-ins to the options in Responding that you have selected.

### Responding

Offer at least two options so the children have a choice. One might be more challenging to interest children who can work on their own.

**1. Group Covenant** As the group begins a new church school year, the messages from Hebrews 13 provide a basis for a covenant for its life as a church school group. Read Samuel's mutterings at the end of the story on Resource Sheet 1 (Loving Each Other) to the group. Ask:

✧ What in those words would be good for our group to remember each week when we are together?

Print their ideas on newsprint. Help them form their ideas into a covenant for everyone to sign. Display it where it can be seen whenever the group meets.

For a more permanent document, copy the covenant on a sheet of poster board. After reviewing it in the next session, have the children sign it.

**EASY  
PREP**

Consider having the children present their ideas for welcoming others to the appropriate congregational committees.

2. **Scenarios** Acting out what the messages in Hebrews 13 means for them today will help them apply these words to their lives. Form groups of three. Have each group draw a scenario from Resource Sheet 2 (Act It Out) and prepare a skit showing the response it chose. Each group will read the brief setting and present its skit to the others. After the final skit, ask:

- ✧ How did Hebrews 13 help you decide what to do?
- ✧ How might it help you this week at home? At school? On the playground?

3. **Welcome Sign** A way for the group to implement the teaching in Hebrews 13:2 about hospitality is to make welcome signs to display around the church building or one for their class space. Read aloud Hebrews 13:2 from Resource Sheet 1 (Loving Each Other) to the group. Ask:

- ✧ How can we let people know that our church/class welcomes them?

Appreciate their several ideas and suggest that something they can do right now is to make welcome signs. Print *WELCOME* on a large sheet of poster board. Have the children curl gift-wrap ribbon to tape or staple to the sign. Add other eye-catching trim, such as sequins or metallic ribbon, if you wish. Display the large sign by the entrance to the learning space. Make smaller signs to post around the church building where visitors will see them.

Jot down the other ideas the children had for being welcoming to use at other times during the year or to suggest to the appropriate committee in your congregation.

4. **Praise God** Singing “Glory to God” in Gathering is a way that the group will praise God whenever they meet. The lyrics are simple so they will learn them quickly. To add some interest to the song, teach the children the signs for *glory*, *God*, and *highest* on Color Pack 27. If time is short, teach the sign for *glory* in this session and add a new sign in the next two sessions during Gathering.

**This Is My Commandment**

This is my commandment  
 that you love one  
 another,  
 That your joy may be full.

This is my commandment  
 that you love one  
 another,  
 That your joy may be full.

That your joy may be full,  
 That your joy may be full.

This is my commandment  
 that you love one  
 another,  
 That your joy may be full.

*Repeat*

**Closing**

Gather at the worship table. Encourage the children to join in singing “This Is My Commandment” (Color Pack 28; track 20 on *Singing the Feast*, 2019–2020).

Tape the gem with *welcome* written on it ( from Color Pack 3 or 4) to the treasure box on Color Pack 2. Invite learners to tell something they learned about welcome in this session.

Close by speaking this benediction:

*This week, welcome all you meet in school and at play as God wants you to do. Go in God's peace.*

Tell the children you hope to see them next week.

## Loving Each Other

including selected verses from Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

Many years after the resurrection of Jesus, a group of believers, Christians, lived in Rome. Some were Jews who believed in Jesus. Others were Gentiles, which means they were not Jewish. Life was not easy for the Christians in Rome. They thought Jesus would return in their lifetime, but there had been no sign of this. When they first came together, they met every week to eat together, study God's Word, and worship God with praise and songs. They helped each other through tough times.

Now some people had stopped coming to the meal and worship. Others came only once in a while. When a friend, another Christian, was in need, some of the group paid no attention. Others were afraid that the Roman emperor was angry about these groups of Christians who met together. Were they plotting against him? These people feared the emperor would try to destroy them.

The group had been discussing a sermon sent to them from another group of followers of Jesus. This was not unusual. Letters were sent from congregation to congregation to help people remember what Jesus taught and who Jesus Christ is.

This parchment scroll had come to the house where they met a few weeks ago. Samuel's family was at the meal and worship every week. Samuel, who was 11 years old, often fell asleep in the warm room as the grown-ups read and talked.

However, tonight was different. It didn't just sound like adult talk. The words meant something for Samuel and his friends too. This is what they heard:

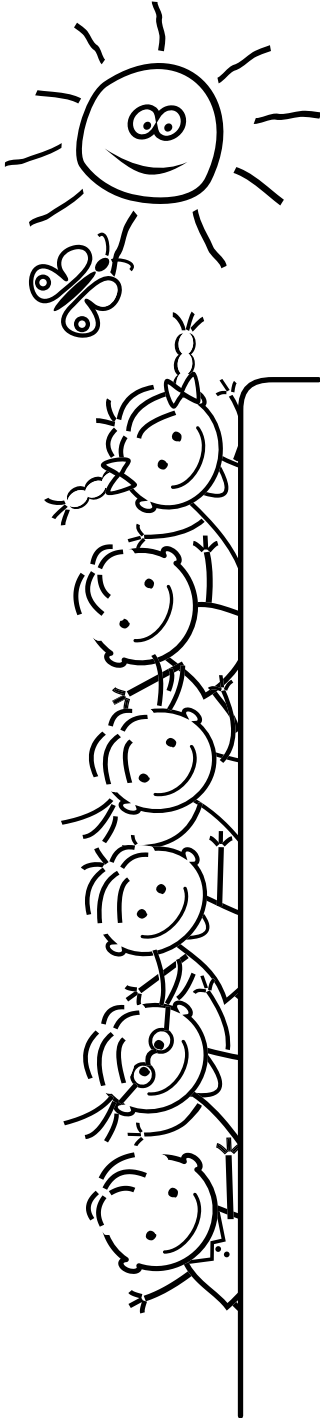
*<sup>1</sup>Keep loving each other like family. <sup>2</sup>Don't neglect to open up your homes to guests, because by doing this some have been hosts to angels without knowing it. <sup>3</sup>Remember prisoners as if you were in prison with them, and people who are mistreated as if you were in their place.*

*<sup>5</sup>Your way of life should be free from the love of money, and you should be content with what you have. After all, he has said, I will never leave you or abandon you. <sup>6</sup>This is why we can confidently say,  
The Lord is my helper,  
and I won't be afraid.  
What can people do to me?*

*<sup>15</sup>So let's continually offer up a sacrifice of praise through him, which is the fruit of our lips that confess his name. <sup>16</sup>Don't forget to do good and to share what you have because God is pleased with these kinds of sacrifices.\**

"Love each other like family. Open your home to guests. Remember people who are mistreated. Do good. Praise God. Share what you have," Samuel muttered to himself. "That is how God wants us to live."

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## Act It Out

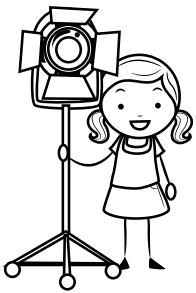


ACT IT OUT



Two members of our church school group had a fight at school on Friday. You are talking to one of them in the hall at church on the following Sunday when the other one comes along.

1. How does the teaching from Hebrews 13 help you decide what you might do?
2. Prepare to act out this situation and how your group has chosen to respond.



ACT IT OUT

School is over for the day. You see a new girl in your class, the one everyone says is “weird,” walking alone to the bus stop.

1. How does the teaching from Hebrews 13 help you decide what you might do?
2. Prepare to act out this situation and how your group has chosen to respond.



ACT IT OUT

You walk up to a group at the mall. They are saying terrible things about your friend’s dad, who was arrested for drunk driving.

1. How does the teaching from Hebrews 13 help you decide what you might do?
2. Prepare to act out this situation and how your group has chosen to respond.



ACT IT OUT

You have sung in the children’s choir at church forever. The choir is singing next Sunday. You want to go to the beach with a friend from school who doesn’t go to church.

1. How does the teaching from Hebrews 13 help you decide what you might do?
2. Prepare to act out this situation and how your group has chosen to respond.



ACT IT OUT

Your parents say you can have a smartphone for your birthday. You want an expensive model, but they say they won’t buy that one.

1. How does the teaching from Hebrews 13 help you decide what you might do?
2. Prepare to act out this situation and how your group has chosen to respond.